At a traffic light, Sharon found time to read Tom's note. "Oh, no. That's what he meant. He has to work Saturday. Well, there go those plans."

What Sharon didn't know was that her boss also had made plans for Sharon's Saturday. And that their emergency Saturday babysitter wouldn't be available. That Michael was coming down with chicken pox. That Brittany would follow next. That . . .

That there isn't enough time to get everything done is a common complaint of most of us. But it is especially true for working parents of young children. They find themselves without the support systems parents used to take for granted: stay-at-home moms who were the center of the neighborhood, a husband whose sole income was enough to support a wife and several children, a safe neighborhood where even small children could play outside, and a grandma who could pitch in during emergencies.

Those days are gone forever. Today, more and more families are like Sharon's and Tom's. They are harried, working more and seemingly making less, and, certainly, having less time for one another—and for their children. In this chapter, we shall try to understand what is happening to the U.S. family, and to families worldwide.

Marriage and Family in Global Perspective

To better understand U.S. patterns of marriage and family, let's first look at how customs differ around the world. This will give us a context for interpreting our own experience in this vital social institution.

What Is a Family?

"What is a family, anyway?" asked William Sayres (1992) at the beginning of an article on this topic. By this question, he meant that although the family is so significant to humanity that it is universal—every human group in the world organizes its members in families—the world's cultures display so much variety that the term *family* is difficult to define. For example, although the Western world regards a family as a husband, wife, and children, other groups have family forms in which men have more than one wife (**polygyny**) or women more than one husband (**polyandry**). How about the obvious? Can we define the family as the approved group into which children are born? This would overlook the Banaro of New Guinea. In this group, a young woman must give birth before she can marry—and she *cannot* marry the father of her child (Murdock 1949).

polygyny a form of marriage in which men have more than one wife

polyandry a form of marriage in which women have more than one husband

family two or more people who consider themselves related by blood, marriage, or adoption

household people who occupy the same housing unit

nuclear family a family consisting of a husband, wife, and child(ren)

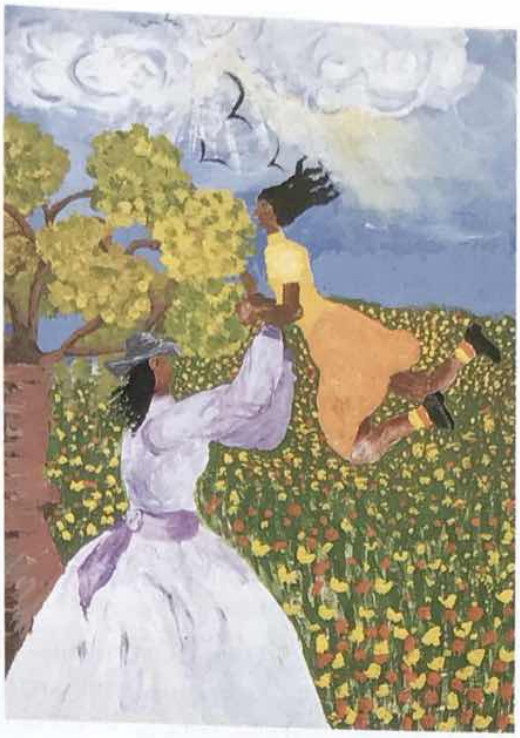
And so it goes. For just about every element you might regard as essential to marriage or family, some group has a different custom. Consider the sex of the bride and groom. Although in almost every instance the bride and groom are female and male, there are exceptions. In some Native American tribes, a man or woman who wanted to be a member of the opposite sex went through a ceremony (*berdache*) and was *declared* a member of the opposite sex. From then on, not only did the "new" man or woman do the tasks associated with his or her new sex, but also the individual was allowed to marry. In this instance, the husband and wife were of the same biological sex. In the 1980s, several European countries legalized same-sex marriages. In 2003, so did the province of Ontario, Canada.

What if we were to say that the family is the unit in which children are disciplined and that parents are responsible for their material needs? This, too, is not universal. Among the Trobriand Islanders, the wife's eldest brother is responsible for making certain that his sister's children have food and for disciplining them when they get out of line (Malinowski 1927). Finally, even sexual relationships don't universally characterize a husband and wife. The Nayar of Malabar never allow a bride and groom to have sex. After a three-

day celebration of the marriage, they send the groom packing—and never allow him to see his bride again (La Barre 1954). (In case you're wondering, the groom comes from another tribe. Nayar women are allowed to have sex, but only with approved lovers—who can never be the husband. This system keeps family property intact—along matrilineal lines.)

Such remarkable variety means that we have to settle for a broad definition. A **family** consists of people who consider themselves related by blood, marriage, or adoption. A **household**, in contrast, consists of people who occupy the same housing unit—a house, apartment, or other living quarters.

We can classify families as **nuclear** (husband, wife, and children) and **extended** (including people such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins in addition to the nuclear unit). Sociologists also refer to the **family of orientation** (the family in which an individual grows up) and the **family of procreation** (the family formed when a couple have their first child). Finally, regardless of its form, **marriage** can be viewed as a group's approved mating arrangements—usually marked by a ritual of some sort (the wedding) to indicate the couple's new public status.



Often one of the strongest family bonds is that of mother–daughter. The young artist, an eleventh grader, wrote: "This painting expresses the way I feel about my future with my child. I want my child to be happy and I want her to love me the same way I love her. In that way we will have a good relationship so that nobody will be able to take us apart. I wanted this picture to be alive; that is why I used a lot of bright colors."

extended family a nuclear family plus other relatives, such as grandparents, uncles, and aunts

family of procreation the family formed when a couple's first child is born

family of orientation the family in which a person grows up

marriage a group's approved mating arrangements, usually marked by a ritual of some sort

Common Cultural Themes

Despite this diversity, several common themes do run through marriage and family. As Table 16.1 illustrates, all societies use marriage and family to establish patterns of mate selection, descent, inheritance, and authority. Let's look at these patterns.

Table 16.1 Common Cultural Themes: Marriage in Traditional and Industrialized Societies

Characteristic	Traditional Societies	Industrialized (and Postindustrial) Societies
What is the structure of marriage?	*Extended* (marriage embeds spouses in a large kinship network of explicit obligations)	*Nuclear* (marriage brings fewer obligations toward the spouse's relatives)
What are the functions of marriage?	Encompassing (see the six functions listed on p. 450)	More limited (many functions are fulfilled by other social institutions)
Who holds authority?	Highly *patriarchal* (authority is held by males)	Although some patriarchal features remain, authority is divided more equally
How many spouses at one time?	Most have one spouse (*monogamy*), while some have several (*polygamy*)	One spouse
Who selects the spouse?	The spouse is selected by the parents, usually the father	Individuals choose their own spouse
Where does the couple live?	Couples usually reside with the groom's family (*patrilocal residence*), less commonly with the bride's family (*matrilocal residence*)	Couples establish a new home (*neolocal residence*)
How is descent figured?	Usually figured from male ancestors (*patrilineal* kinship), less commonly from female ancestors (*matrilineal* kinship)	Figured from male and female ancestors equally (*bilateral kinship*)
How is inheritance figured?	Rigid system of rules; usually patrilineal, but may be matrilineal	Highly individualistic; usually bilateral

endogamy the practice of marrying within one's own group

exogamy the practice of marrying outside one's group

incest taboo the rule that prohibits sex and marriage among designated relatives

system of descent how kinship is traced over the generations

bilateral (system of descent) a system of reckoning descent that counts both the mother's and the father's side

patrilineal (system of descent) a system of reckoning descent that counts only the father's side

matrilineal (system of descent) a system of reckoning descent that counts only the mother's side

patriarchy a society or group in which men dominate women; authority is vested in males

matriarchy a society in which women as a group dominate men as a group

egalitarian authority more or less equally divided between people or groups, in this instance between husband and wife

Mate Selection Each human group establishes norms to govern who marries whom. Norms of **endogamy** specify that people should marry *within* their own group. Groups may prohibit interracial marriage, for example. In contrast, norms of **exogamy** specify that people must marry *outside* their group. The best example of exogamy is the **incest taboo**, which prohibits sex and marriage among designated relatives. In some societies, these norms are written into law, but in most cases they are informal. In the United States most whites marry whites and most African Americans marry African Americans—not because of any laws but because of informal norms.

Descent How are you related to your father's father or to your mother's mother? The explanation is found in your society's **system of descent**, the way people trace kinship over generations. We use a **bilateral system**, for we think of ourselves as related to *both* our mother's and our father's sides of the family. "Doesn't everyone?" you might ask. Interestingly, this is only one logical way to reckon descent. Some groups use a **patrilineal system**, tracing descent only on the father's side; they don't think of children as related to their mother's relatives. Others follow a **matrilineal system**, tracing descent only on the mother's side, and not considering children to be related to their father's relatives. The Naxi of China, for example, don't even have a word for father (Hong 1999).

Inheritance Marriage and family—in whatever form is customary in a society—are also used to compute rights of inheritance. In a bilateral system, property is passed to both males and females, in a patrilineal system only to males, and in a matrilineal system (the rarest form) only to females. No system is natural. Rather, each matches a group of people's ideas of justice and logic.

Authority Historically, some form of **patriarchy**, a social system in which men dominate women, has formed a thread that runs through all societies. Contrary to what many think, there are no historical records of a true **matriarchy**, a social system in which women as a group dominate men as a group. Our marriage and family customs, then, developed within a framework of patriarchy. Although U.S. family patterns are becoming more **egalitarian**, or equal, many of today's customs still reflect their patriarchal origin. One of the most obvious examples is U.S. naming patterns. Despite some changes, the typical bride still takes the groom's last name, and children usually receive the father's last name. For information on a society that systematically promotes equality in marriage, see the Cultural Diversity box on the next page.

Marriage and Family in Theoretical Perspective

A global perspective reveals that human groups have chosen many forms of mate selection, numerous ways to trace descent, and a variety of ways to view parental responsibility to children. Although these patterns are arbitrary, each group sees its own forms of marriage and family as natural. Now let's see what picture emerges when we apply the three sociological perspectives.

The Functionalist Perspective: Functions and Dysfunctions

Functionalists stress that to survive, a society must meet certain basic needs, or functions. When functionalists look at family, they examine how it is related to other parts of society, especially how the family contributes to the well-being of society.

Why the Family Is Universal Functionalists note that although the form of marriage and family varies from one group to another, the family is universal because it fulfills six needs that are basic to the survival of every society. As described on pages 26–28, these needs, or functions, are (1) economic production, (2) socialization of children, (3) care of the sick and aged, (4) recreation, (5) sexual control, and (6) reproduction. To make certain that these functions are performed, every human group adopted some form of the family.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

around the WORLD

Watching Out for Kids: Gender Equality and Family Life in Sweden

Swedish lawmakers hold a strong image of what makes a good family. Their image centers on equality in marriage and on the welfare of children. They bolster this image with laws designed to put women and men on equal footing in marriage, to give mothers and fathers equal responsibility for the home and children, and to protect the financially weaker party in the event of divorce.

At the center of family law is the welfare of children. Health care for children is free, as is all health care for pregnant women. Maternity centers also offer free courses to help couples prepare for childbirth.

When a child is born, the parents are eligible for fifteen months' paid leave of absence from their jobs. The parents decide how they will split the fifteen months between them, because both cannot receive compensation at the same time. For the first twelve months the state pays 90 percent of gross income, and then a generous fixed rate for the remaining three months. The paid leave can be spread over eight years. Because most mothers take all the leave, the law now includes a "father's month," one month that cannot be transferred to the mother.

The government also guarantees other benefits. When a child is born, the father is entitled to ten days leave of absence with full pay. When a child is sick, either parent can care for the child and receive full pay for missed work—up to sixty days a year per child. Moreover, by law local governments must offer child care. If a husband becomes violent or threatens his wife, the woman can have a security alarm installed in their home free of charge.

Swedish divorce laws have also been drawn up with an eye to what is considered best for the child. Local governments are required to provide free counseling to any parent who requests it. If both parties agree and they have no children under the age of 16, the couple is automatically entitled to a divorce. Otherwise the law requires a six-month cooling-off period so parents can more calmly consider what is best for their children. Joint custody of children is automatic, unless one of the parents opposes it. The children may live with only one of the parents. The parent who does not live with the children is required to pay child support in proportion to his or her finances. If the parent fails to do so, the social security system steps in and makes the payments.

For Your CONSIDERATION

How does the Swedish system compare with that of the United States? What "system" for watching out for the welfare of children does the United States have, anyway?

Sources: Based on The Swedish Institute 1992; Froman 1994; Bernhardt and Goldscheider 2001.

Functions of the Incest Taboo Functionalists note that the incest taboo helps families avoid *role confusion*. This, in turn, facilitates the socialization of children. For example, if father-daughter incest were allowed, how should a wife treat her daughter—as a daughter, as a subservient second wife, or even as a rival? Should the daughter consider her mother as a mother, as the first wife, or as a rival? Would her father be a father or a lover? And would the wife be the husband's main wife, a secondary wife—or even the "mother of the other wife" (whatever role that might be)? Maternal incest would also lead to complications every bit as confusing as these.

The incest taboo also forces people to look outside the family for marriage partners. Anthropologists theorize that *exogamy* was especially functional in tribal societies, for it forged alliances between tribes that otherwise might have killed each other off. Today, exogamy extends a bride's and groom's social networks beyond their nuclear family by building relationships with their spouse's family.

Isolation and Emotional Overload Functionalists also analyze dysfunctions that arise from the relative isolation of the nuclear family. Unlike extended families, which are enmeshed in large kinship networks, members of nuclear families can count on fewer people for material and emotional support. This makes nuclear families vulnerable to "emotional overload." That is, the stress that comes with crises such as the loss of a job—or even the routine pressures of a harried life, as depicted in our opening vignette—is spread among fewer people. This places greater strain on each family member. In addition, the relative isolation of the nuclear family makes it vulnerable to a "dark side"—incest and various other forms of abuse, matters we examine later in this chapter.

The Conflict Perspective: Gender and Power

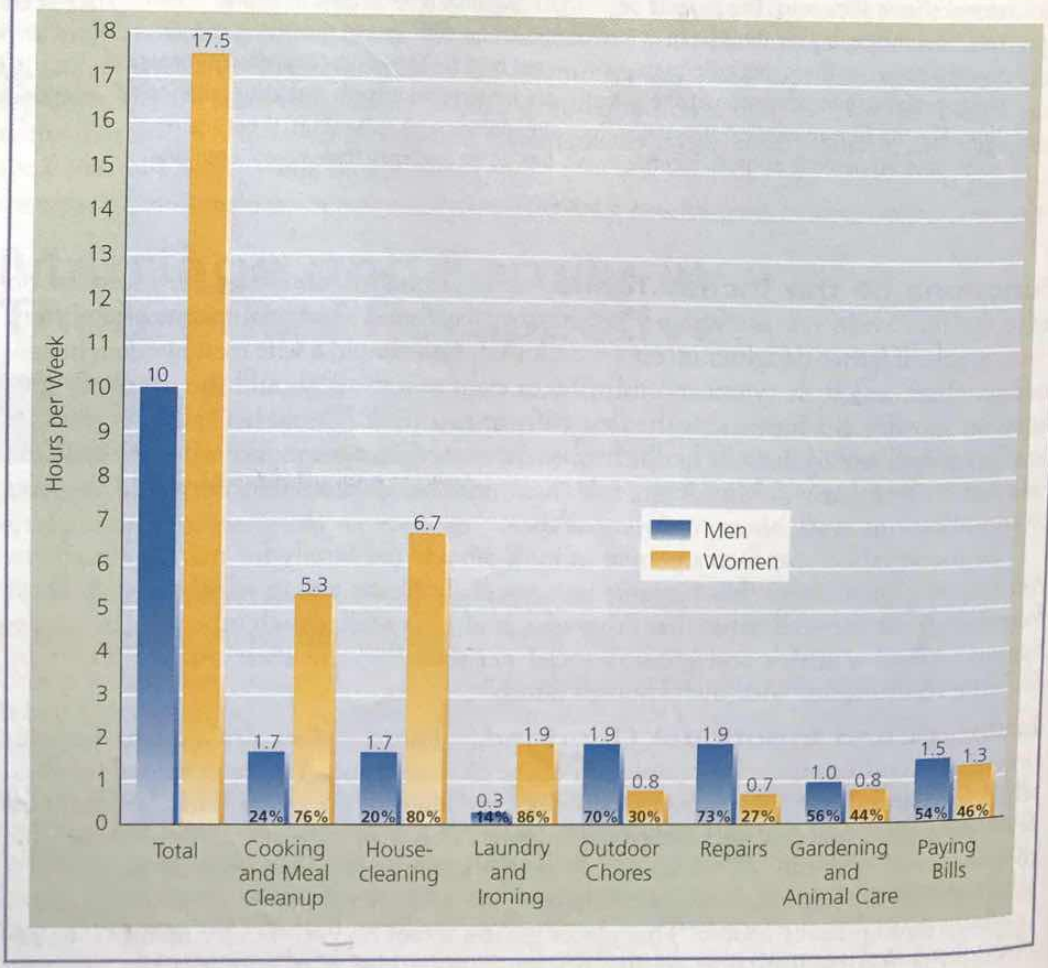
As you recall, central to conflict theory is the struggle over power. In marriage, the power of wives has been increasing. They are contributing more of the income *and* making more of the marital decisions than they used to (Rogers and Amato 2000). In marriage, husbands and wives maneuver for power in many areas, but due to space limitations, let's focus on housework.

The Power Struggle Over Housework Most men resist doing housework. As Figure 16.1 shows, even wives who work outside the home full time end up doing much more housework than their husbands. The lesser effort that husbands make seems such a strain to them, however, that the husband is likely to see himself as splitting the work fifty-fifty even when his wife does almost all the cooking and cleaning (Galinsky et al. 1993). Things are so one-sided that wives are *eight* times more likely than husbands to feel that the division of housework is unfair (Sanchez 1994).

And no wonder. Wives who put in an eight-hour day of working for wages average 7-1/2 hours more housework each week than their husbands do (Bianchi et al. 2000). If we include child care, the total may come closer to eleven hours a week (Bianchi and Spain 1996). *Incredibly, this is the equivalent of twenty-four 24-hour days a year.* Sociologist Arlie Hochschild (1989) calls this the working wife's "second shift." To stress the one-sided nature of the second shift, she quotes this satire by Garry Trudeau in the *Doonesbury* comic strip:

> A "liberated" father is sitting at his word processor writing a book about raising his child. He types: "Today I wake up with a heavy day of work ahead of me. As Joannie gets Jeffry ready for day care, I ask her if I can be relieved of my usual household

Figure 16.1 In Two-Paycheck Marriages, Who Does the Housework?



Note: Based on a national sample. Cooking and meal cleanup are combined from the original data.
Source: By the author. Based on Bianchi et al. 2000:Table 1.

responsibilities for the day. Joannie says, 'Sure, I'll make up the five minutes somewhere.' "

Not surprisingly, the burden of the second shift creates deep discontent among wives. These problems, as well as how wives and husbands cope with them, are discussed in the following Thinking Critically section.

THINKING Critically

The Second Shift—Strains and Strategies

To find out what life is like in two-paycheck marriages, for nine years sociologist Arlie Hochschild (1989) and her research associates interviewed and reinterviewed over fifty families. Hochschild also did participant observation with a dozen of them. She "shopped with them, visited friends, watched television, ate with them, and came along when they took their children to day care."

Although men are doing more housework today than they did just a few years ago (Bianchi et al. 2000), most feel that the *second shift*—the household duties that follow the day's work for pay—is the wife's responsibility. But as the wives cook, clean, and take care of the children after their job at the office or factory, many feel tired and emotionally drained. Some pride themselves on being the "supermom" who can do it all, but most just grit their teeth and bear it, doing the extra work, but resenting it. Not uncommonly, these feelings show up in the bedroom, where the wives show a lack of interest in sex.

The strains from working the second shift affect not only the marital relationship, but also the wife's self-concept. Here is how one woman tried to lift her flagging self-esteem:

> After taking time off for her first baby, Carol Alston felt depressed, "fat," and that she was "just a housewife." For a while she became the supermarket shopper who wanted to call down the aisles, "I'm an MBA! I'm an MBA!"

To pick up more of the burden, some husbands cut down on their commitment to a career. Others cut back on movies, seeing friends, doing hobbies. Most men, however, engage in what Hochschild describes as *strategies of resistance*. She identified the following:

> *Waiting it out.* Many men never volunteer to do housework. Since many wives dislike asking, because it feels like "begging," this strategy often works. Some men make this strategy even more effective by showing irritation or becoming glum when they are asked, which discourages the wife from asking again.
>
> *Playing dumb.* When they do housework, some men become incompetent. They can't cook rice without burning it; when they go to the store, they forget grocery lists; they never can remember where the broiler pan is. Hochschild did not claim that husbands do these things on purpose, but, rather, by withdrawing their mental attention from the task, they "get credit for trying and being a good sport"—but in such a way that they are not chosen next time.
>
> *Needs reduction.* An example of this strategy is the father of two who explained that he never shopped because he didn't "need anything." He didn't need to iron his clothes because he "[didn't] mind wearing a wrinkled shirt." He didn't need to cook because "cereal is fine." As Hochschild observed, "Through his reduction of needs, this man created a great void into which his wife stepped with her 'greater need' to see him

ARLO & JANIS ® by Jimmy Johnson

The cartoonist has beautifully captured the reduction of needs strategy discussed by Hochschild.

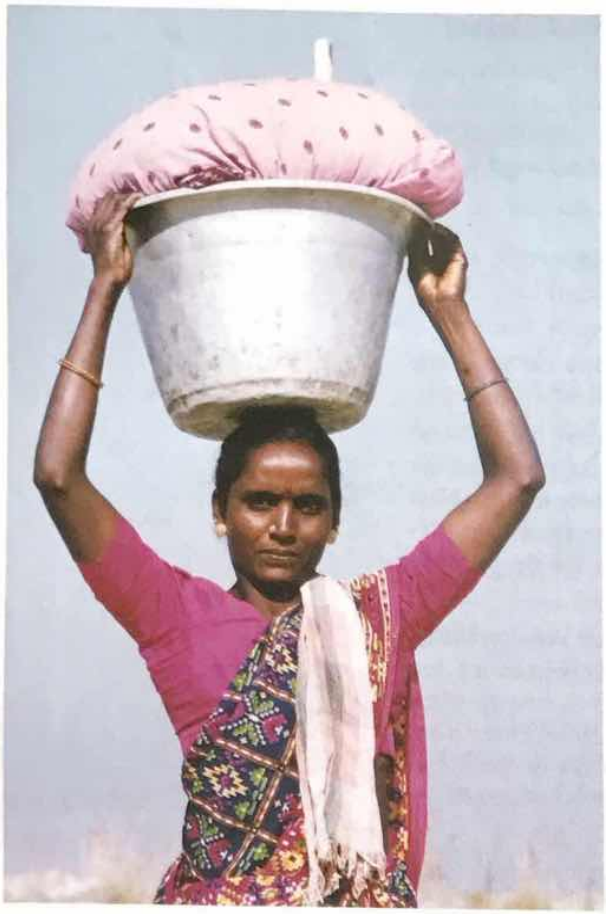
wear an ironed shirt . . . and cook his dinner."

Substitute offerings. Expressing appreciation to the wife for being so organized that she can handle both work for wages and the second shift at home can be a substitute for helping—and a subtle encouragement for her to keep on working the second shift.

For Your CONSIDERATION . . .

Hochschild (1991) is confident that the problem of the second shift can be resolved. Based on the materials just presented

1. Identify the underlying *structural* causes of the problem of the second shift.
2. Based on your answer to number 1, identify *structural* solutions to this problem.
3. Determine how a working wife and husband might best reconcile the issues of the second shift.



In Hindu marriages, the roles of husband and wife are firmly established. Neither this woman, whom I photographed in Chittoor, India, nor her husband question whether she should carry the family wash to the village pump. Women here have done this task for millennia. As India industrializes, as happened in the West, who does the wash will be questioned—and may eventually become a source of strain in marriage.

The Symbolic Interactionist Perspective: Gender and the Meanings of Marriage

As noted in Chapter 1, symbolic interactionists focus on the meanings that people give to their lives. Let's apply this perspective to some surprising findings about husbands and housework.

The first finding is probably what you expect—the closer a husband's and wife's earnings, the more likely they are to share housework. Although husbands in such marriages don't share housework equally, they share more than other husbands. This finding, however, may be surprising: When husbands get laid off, most do *less* housework than before. *And husbands who earn less than their wives do the least housework.*

How can we explain this? It would seem that husbands who get laid off or who earn less than their wives would want to balance things out by doing more around the house, not less. Researchers suggest that the key is *gender role.* If a wife earns more than her husband, it threatens his masculinity—he takes this as a sign that he is failing in his traditional role of provider. To do housework—"women's work" in his eyes—threatens his masculinity even further. By avoiding housework, he "reclaims" his masculinity (Hochschild 1989; Brines 1994).

The Family Life Cycle

We have seen how the forms of marriage and family vary widely, and we have examined marriage and family from the three sociological perspectives. Now let's discuss love, courtship, and the family life cycle.

Love and Courtship in Global Perspective

Until recently, social scientists thought that romantic love originated in western Europe during the medieval period (Mount 1992). When anthropologists William Jankowiak and Edward Fischer (1992) surveyed the data available on 166 societies around the world, however, they found that this was not so. **Romantic love**—people being sexually attracted to one another and idealizing the other—showed up in 88 percent of these groups. The role of love, however, differs sharply from one society to another. As the Cultural Diversity box on the next page details, for example, Indians don't expect love to occur until *after* marriage—if then.

romantic love feelings of erotic attraction accompanied by an idealization of the other

Because love plays such a significant role in Western life—and often is regarded as the *only* proper basis for marriage—social scientists have probed this concept with the tools of the trade: experiments, questionnaires, interviews, and observations. In a fascinating

homogamy the tendency of people with similar characteristics to marry one another

experiment, psychologists Donald Dutton and Arthur Aron discovered that fear breeds love (Rubin 1985). Here's what they did.

> About 230 feet above the Capilano River in North Vancouver, British Columbia, a rickety footbridge sways in the wind. It makes you feel like you won't make it across, that you might fall into the rocky gorge below. A more solid footbridge crosses only ten feet above the shallow stream. The experimenters had an attractive woman approach men who were crossing these bridges. She told them she was studying "the effects of exposure to scenic attractions on creative expression." She showed them a picture, and they wrote down their associations. The sexual imagery in their stories showed that the men on the unsteady, frightening bridge were more sexually aroused than the men on the solid bridge. More of these men also called the young woman afterward—supposedly to get information about the study.

You may have noticed that this research was really about sexual attraction, not love. The point, however, is that romantic love usually begins with sexual attraction. Finding ourselves sexually attracted to someone, we spend time with that person. If we discover mutual interests, we may label our feelings "love." Apparently, then, *romantic love has two components.* The first is emotional, a feeling of sexual attraction. The second is cognitive, a label that we attach to our feelings. If we attach this label, we describe ourselves as being "in love."

Marriage

In the typical case, marriage in the United States is preceded by "love," but, contrary to folklore, whatever love is, it certainly is not blind. That is, love does not hit people willy-nilly, as if Cupid had shot darts blindly into a crowd. If it did, marital patterns would be unpredictable. An examination of who marries whom, however, reveals that love is socially channeled.

The Social Channels of Love and Marriage

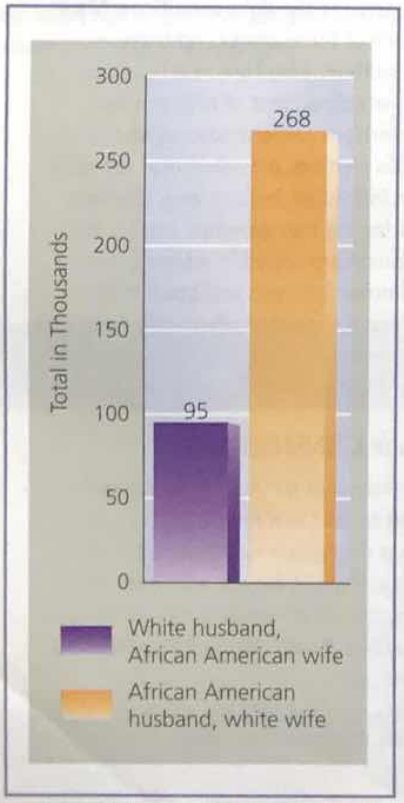
When we marry, we generally think that we have freely chosen our spouse. With few exceptions, however, our choices follow highly predictable social channels, especially those of age, education, social class, and race-ethnicity. For example, a Latina with a college degree whose parents are both physicians is likely to fall in love with and marry a Latino slightly older than herself who has graduated from college. Similarly, a girl who drops out of high school and whose parents are on welfare is likely to fall in love with and marry a man who comes from a background similar to hers.

Sociologists use the term **homogamy** to refer to the tendency of people who have similar characteristics to marry one another. Homogamy occurs largely as a result of *propinquity,* or spatial nearness. That is, we tend to "fall in love" with and marry people who live near us or whom we meet at school, church, or work. The people with whom we associate are far from a random sample of the population, for social filters produce neighborhoods and schools (as well as churches, temples, and mosques) that follow racial-ethnic and social class lines.

As with all social patterns, there are exceptions. Although 94 percent of Americans who marry choose someone of their same racial-ethnic background, 6 percent do not. Because there are 60 million married couples in the United States, those 6 percent add up, totaling three and a half million couples.

One of the more dramatic changes in U.S. marriage is a sharp increase in interracial marriages. We can trace this change back to the norm-shattering 1960s. Among the many changes ushered in during this period was a breaking of the "color line" in courtship. As you can see from Figure 16.2, interracial marriages also show distinct patterns.

Figure 16.2 The Racial Background of Husbands and Wives in Marriages Between Whites and African Americans



Source: By the author. Based on *Statistical Abstract* 2002:Table 47.

Childbirth

Education and income are important in determining how many children women have. Women who graduate from college, for example, are less likely to give birth than those who don't go to college. Even women who drop out of college have fewer children than women who have never taken a college course. It is similar with income. In general, the higher a woman's family income, the fewer children she has (*Statistical Abstract* 2002:Table 82).

What happens when the baby arrives? The popular image is that it makes a couple deliriously happy. The facts are somewhat different.

Marital Satisfaction Sociologists have found that after the birth of a child conflict usually increases while marital satisfaction decreases (Whyte 1992; Bird 1997; Rogers and Amato 2000). To understand why, recall from Chapter 6 that a dyad (just two persons) provides greater intimacy than a triad (after adding a third person, interaction must be shared). In addition, the birth of a child unbalances the roles that the couple have worked out (Knauth 2000). To move from the theoretical to the practical, think about the implications for marriage of coping with a fragile newborn's 24-hour-a-day needs of being fed, soothed, and diapered—while having less sleep and heavier expenses.

Social Class Sociologist Lillian Rubin (1976, 1992b) compared fifty working-class couples with twenty-five middle-class couples. She found that social class made a significant difference in how couples adjust to the arrival of children. For the average working-class couple, the first baby arrived just nine months after marriage. They hardly had time to adjust to being husband and wife before they were thrust into the demanding roles of mother and father. The result was financial problems, bickering, and interference from in-laws. The young husbands weren't ready to "settle down," and they resented getting less attention from their wives. A working-class husband who became a father just five months after getting married made a telling remark to Rubin when he said, "There I was, just a kid myself, and I finally had someone to take care of me. Then suddenly, I had to take care of a kid, and she was too busy with him *to take care of me"* (italics added).

In contrast, the middle-class couples postponed the birth of their first child, which gave them more time to adjust to each other. On average, their first baby arrived three years after marriage. Their greater financial resources also worked in their favor, making life a lot easier and marriage more pleasant.

Child Rearing

Who's minding the kids while the parents are at work? A generation ago such a question would have been ridiculous, for the mother was at home taking care of the children. As with Sharon in our opening vignette, however, that assumption no longer holds. With three of five U.S. mothers working for wages, who is taking care of the children?

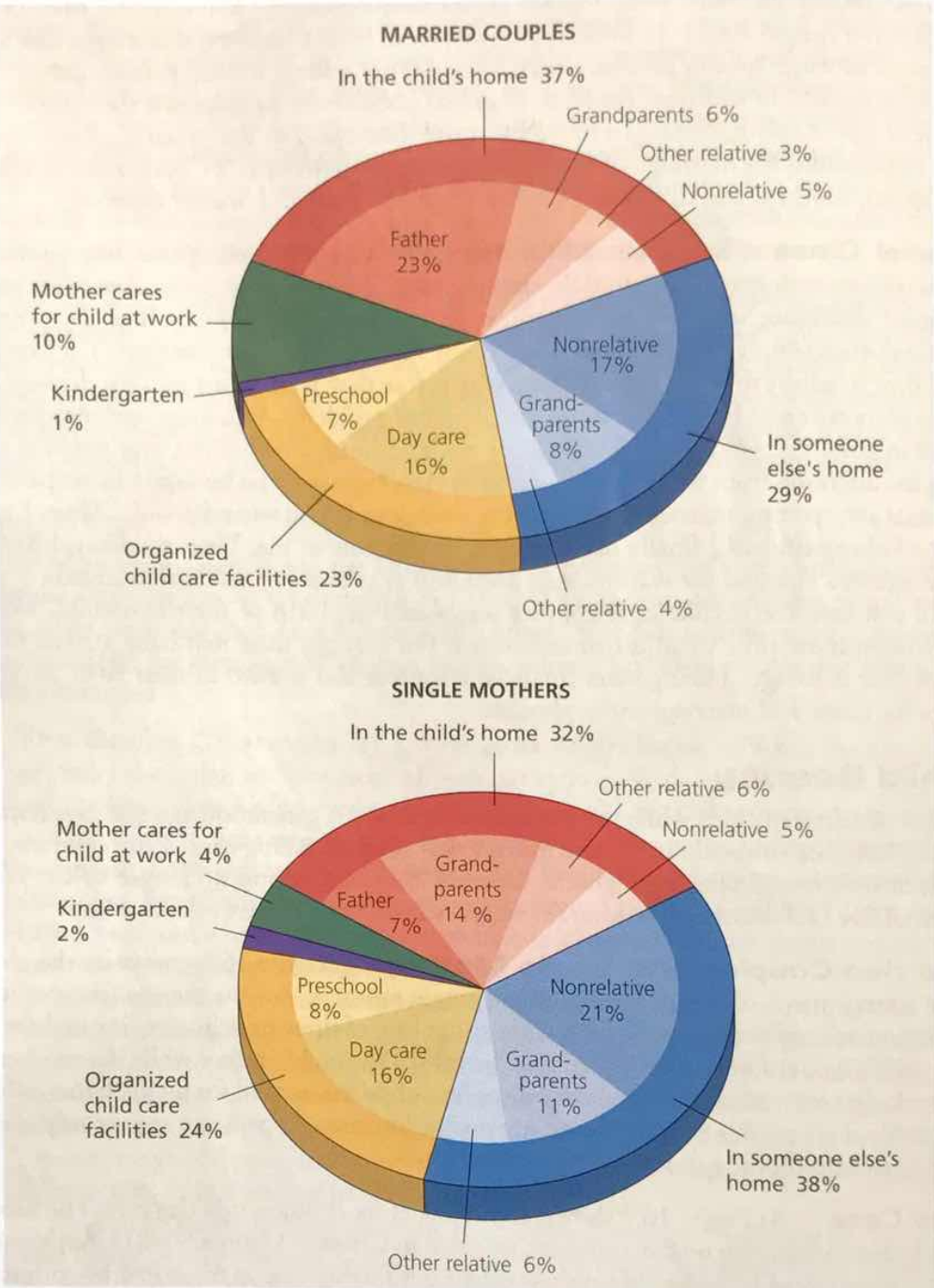
Married Couples and Single Mothers Figure 16.3 compares the child care arrangements of married couples and single mothers. As you can see, their overall arrangements are similar. For each group, about one of three preschoolers is cared for in the child's home. The main difference is the role of the child's father while the mother is at work. For married couples, almost one of four children is cared for by the father, while for single mothers this plummets to only one of fourteen. As you can see, grandparents step in to help fill the gap left by the absent fathers.

Day Care As Figure 16.3 shows, about one of six children is in day care. The broad conclusions of research on day care were reported in Chapter 3 (pages 80–81). Apparently only a minority of U.S. day care centers offer high-quality care as measured by stimulating learning activities, safety, and emotional warmth (Bergmann 1995; Blau 2000). A primary reason for this dismal situation is the low salaries paid to day care workers, who average only about $12,000 a year (*Statistical Abstract* 2002:Tables 546, 547).

It is difficult for parents to judge the quality of day care, since they don't know what takes place when they are not there. If you ever look for day care, however, these two factors best predict that children will receive quality care: staff who have taken courses in early childhood development and a small number of children assigned to each day care worker (Blau 2000). If you have nagging fears that your children might be neglected or even abused, choose a center that pipes streaming images from closed circuit cameras onto the Internet. While at work, you can "visit" each room of the day care center via cyberspace, and monitor your toddler's activities and care (Hall 2001).

Nannies For upper-middle-class parents, nannies have become popular. Parents love the one-on-one care. They also like the convenience of in-home care, which reduces

Figure 16.3 Who Takes Care of Preschoolers While Their Mothers Are at Work?



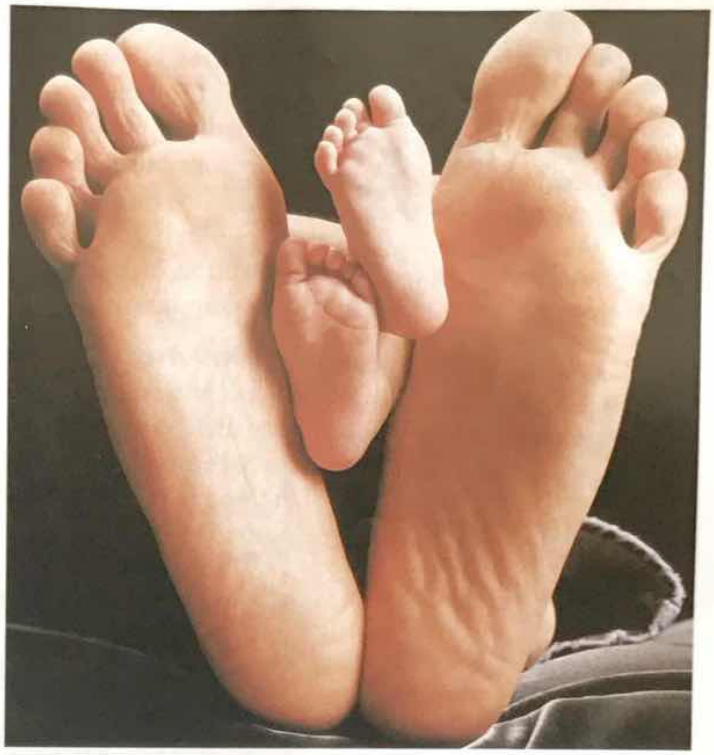
Source: O'Connell 1993.

the chances of their child catching illnesses and eliminates the need to transport the child to an unfamiliar environment. A recurring problem, however, is tensions between the parents and the nanny: jealousy that the nanny may see the first step, hear the first word, or, worse yet, be called mommy. There are also tensions over different discipline styles; disdain on the part of the nanny that the mother isn't staying home with her child; and feelings of guilt or envy as the child cries when the nanny leaves, but not when the mother goes to work.

Social Class Social class makes a huge difference in child rearing. As noted on page 79, sociologist Melvin Kohn found that parents socialize their children into the norms of

their work worlds. Because members of the working class are closely supervised and are expected to follow explicit rules, their concern is less with their children's motivation and more with their outward conformity. Thus they are more apt to use physical punishment. In contrast, middle-class parents, who are expected to take more initiative on the job, are more concerned that their children develop curiosity, self-expression, and self-control. They are also more likely to withdraw privileges or affection than they are to use physical punishment.

Social class also makes a difference in how parents view child development (Lareau 2002). Lower-class parents think of children as developing naturally, while middle-class parents think that children need a lot of guidance if they are to develop correctly. Consequently, lower-class parents set limits on their children and then let them choose their own activities while middle-class parents try to involve their children in leisure activities that develop their thinking and social skills.



No adequate substitute has been found for the family. Although its form and functions vary around the world, the family remains the primary socializer of children.

Birth Order Birth order is also important. Parents tend to discipline their firstborns more than their later children, and to give them more attention. When the second child arrives, the firstborn competes to remain the focus of attention. Researchers suggest that this instills in firstborns a greater drive for success, which is why they are more likely than their siblings to earn higher grades in school, to attend college, and to go further in college. Firstborns are even more likely to become astronauts, to appear on the cover of *Time* magazine, and to become president of the United States. Although subsequent children may not go as far, most are less anxious about being successful, and are more relaxed in their relationships (Snow et al. 1981; Goleman 1985; Storfer 2000). Firstborns are also more likely to defend the status quo and to support conservative causes, with later-borns tending to upset the apple cart and support liberal causes (Sulloway 1997).

Although such tendencies are strong, they are only that—tendencies. *There are no inevitable outcomes of birth order, social class, or any other social characteristic.*

The Family in Later Life

The later stages of family life bring their own pleasures to be savored and problems to be solved. Let's look at the empty nest, retirement, and widowhood.

The Empty Nest When the last child leaves home, the husband and wife are left, as at the beginning of their marriage, "alone together." This situation, sometimes called the **empty nest**, is thought to signal a difficult time of adjustment for women, because they have devoted so much energy to a child-rearing role that is now gone. Sociologist Lillian Rubin (1992a), who interviewed both career women and homemakers, found that this picture is largely a myth. Contrary to the stereotype, she found that women's satisfaction generally *increases* when the last child leaves home. A typical statement was made by a 45-year-old woman, who leaned forward in her chair as though to tell Rubin a secret:

> To tell you the truth, most of the time it's a big relief to be free of them, finally. I suppose that's awful to say. But you know what, most of the women I know feel the same way. It's just that they're uncomfortable saying it because there's all this talk about how sad mothers are supposed to be when the kids leave home.

Similar findings have come from other researchers, who report that most mothers feel relieved at being able to spend more time pursuing their own interests. Many couples also report a renewed sense of intimacy at this time (Mackey and O'Brien 1995). This closeness appears to stem from four causes: The couple is free of the many responsibilities of child rearing, they have more leisure, their income is at its highest, and they have fewer financial obligations.

empty nest a married couple's domestic situation after the last child has left home

"Boomerang Children" and the Not-So-Empty Nest The empty nest is not as empty as it used to be. With prolonged education and the high cost of establishing a household, U.S. children are leaving home later. Many stay home during college, others move back after college, and some who strike out on their own find the cost or responsibility too great and return to the home nest. As a result, 42 percent of all U.S. 24- to 29-year-olds are still living with their parents (*Statistical Abstract* 2000:Tables 12, 70). Called "boomerang children" by some and "adultolescents" by others, they enjoy the protection of home, but have to work out issues of dependence on their parents while they grapple with concerns and fears about establishing independent lives.

Widowhood Women are more likely than men to become widowed and to have to face the wrenching problems this entails. Not only does the average wife live longer than her husband, but also she has married a man older than herself. The death of a spouse tears at the self, clawing at identities that had merged through the years. Now that the one who had become an essential part of the self is gone, the survivor, as in adolescence, is forced once again to wrestle with the perplexing question "Who am I?"

When death is unexpected, the adjustment is more difficult (Hiltz 1989). Survivors who know that death is impending make preparations that smooth the transition—from arranging finances to psychologically preparing themselves for being alone. Saying goodbye and cultivating treasured last memories help them to adjust to the death of an intimate companion.

Diversity in U.S. Families

It is important to note that there is no such thing as *the* American family. Rather, family life varies widely throughout the United States. The significance of social class, noted earlier, will continue to be evident as we examine diversity in U.S. families.

African American Families

Note that the heading reads African American *families,* not *the* African American family. There is no such thing as *the* African American family any more than there is *the* white family or *the* Latino family. The primary distinction is not between African Americans and other groups, but between social classes. Because African Americans who are members of the upper class follow the class interests reviewed in Chapter 10—preservation of privilege and family fortune—they are especially concerned about the family background of those whom their children marry (Gatewood 1990). To them, marriage is viewed as a merger of family lines. Children of this class marry later than children of other classes.

Middle-class African American families focus on achievement and respectability. Both husband and wife are likely to work outside the home. A central concern is that their children go to college, get good jobs, and marry well—that is, marry people like themselves, respectable and hardworking, who want to get ahead in school and pursue a successful career.

African American families in poverty face all the problems that cluster around poverty (Wilson 1987, 1996; Anderson 2001). Because the men are likely to have few skills and to be unemployed, it is difficult for them to fulfill the cultural roles of husband and father. Consequently, these families are likely to be headed by a woman and to have a high rate of births to single women. Divorce and desertion are also more common than among other classes. Sharing scarce resources and "stretching kinship" are primary survival mechanisms. That is, people who have helped out in hard times are considered brothers, sisters, or cousins to whom one owes obligations as though they were blood relatives (Stack 1974). Sociologists use the term *fictive kin* to refer to this stretching of kinship.

From Figure 16.4, you can see that, compared with other groups, African American families are the least likely to be headed by married couples and the most likely to be headed by women. Because of a *marriage squeeze*—an imbalance in the sex ratio, in this instance fewer unmarried men per 1,000 unmarried women—African American women are more likely than other racial-ethnic groups to marry men who are less educated than themselves (South 1991; Eshleman 2000).

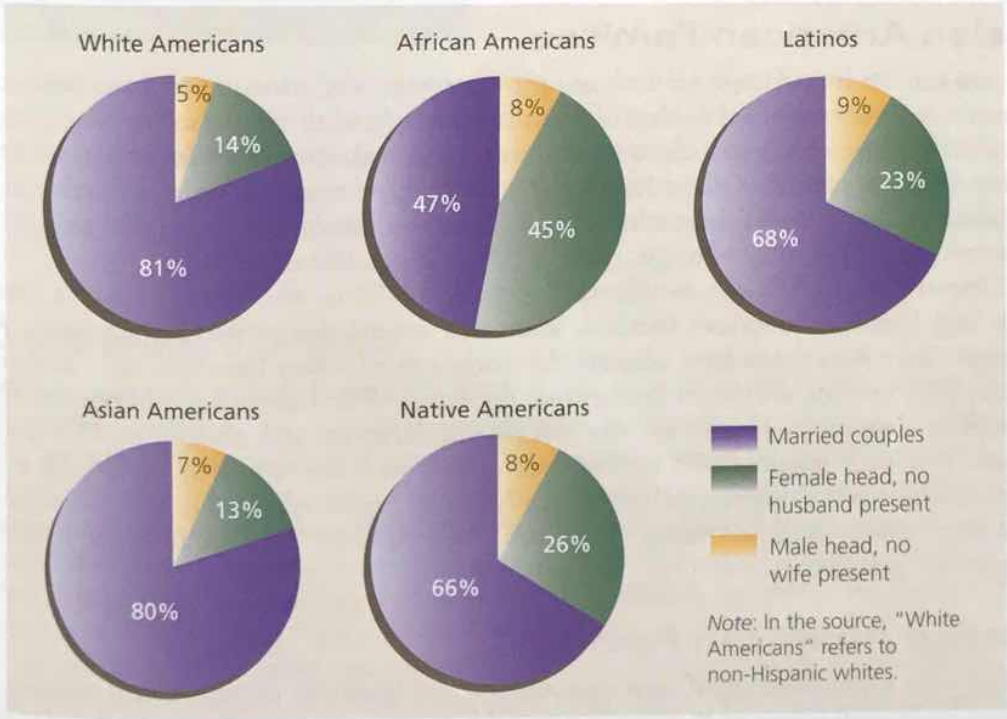
There is no such thing as the African American family, any more than there is the Native American, Asian American, Latino, or Irish American family. Rather, each racial-ethnic group has different types of families, with the primary determinant being social class.

This African American family is observing Kwanzaa, a relatively new festival, that celebrates African heritage. Can you explain how Kwanzaa is an example of ethnic work, a concept introduced in Chapter 9?

Latino Families

As Figure 16.4 shows, the proportion of Latino families headed by married couples and women falls in between that of whites and African Americans. The effects of social class on families, which I just sketched, also apply to Latinos. In addition, families differ by

Figure 16.4 Family Structure: The Percentage of U.S. Households Headed by Men, Women, and Married Couples



Source: By the author. Based on *Statistical Abstract* 2000: Table 44; 2002:Tables 37, 38, 40.

Although there is no such thing as the Latino family, in general, Latinos place high emphasis on extended family relationships.

country of origin. Families from Cuba, for example, are more likely to be headed by a married couple than are families from Puerto Rico (*Statistical Abstract* 2002:Table 40).

What really distinguishes Latino families, however, is culture—especially the Spanish language, the Roman Catholic religion, and a strong family orientation coupled with a disapproval of divorce. Although there is some debate among the experts, another characteristic seems to be ***machismo***—an emphasis on male strength, sexual vigor, and dominance. In Chicano families (those originating from Mexico), the husband-father plays a stronger role than in either white or African American families (Vega 1990). Machismo apparently decreases with each generation in the United States (Hurtado et al. 1992; Wood 2001). The wife-mother is generally in charge of routine matters, making most of the day-to-day decisions for the family and disciplining the children. She is usually more family centered than her husband, displaying more warmth and affection for her children.

Generalizations have limits, of course, and as with other ethnic groups, individual Latino families vary considerably (Baca Zinn 1994; Carrasquillo 1994).

Asian American Families

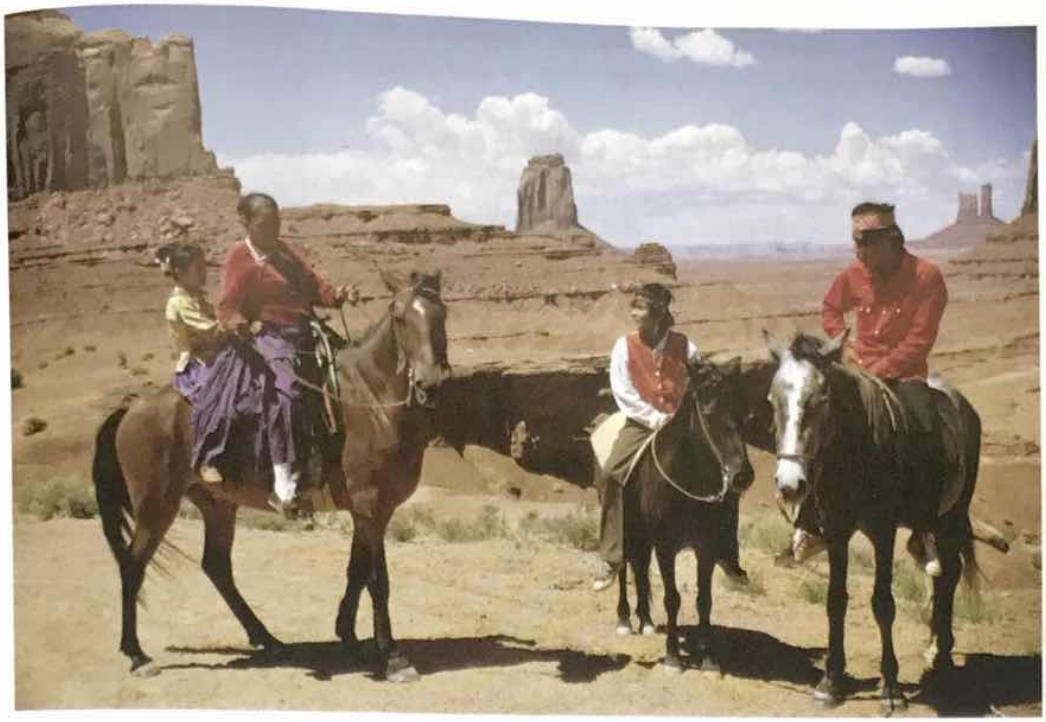
As you can see from Figure 16.4 on the previous page, the structure of Asian American families is almost identical to that of white families. As with other racial-ethnic groups, family life also reflects social class. In addition, because Asian Americans emigrated from many different countries, their family life reflects those many cultures. As with Latino families, the more recent their immigration, the more closely their family life reflects the patterns in their country of origin (Kibria 1993; Glenn 1994).

Despite such differences, sociologist Bob Suzuki (1985), who studied Chinese American and Japanese American families, identified several distinctive characteristics. Although Asian Americans have adopted the nuclear family, they have retained Confucian values that provide a distinct framework for family life: humanism, collectivity, self-discipline, hierarchy, respect for the elderly, moderation, and obligation. Obligation means that each member of a family owes respect to other family members and is responsible to never bring shame on the family. Asian Americans tend to be more permissive than Anglos in child rearing. To control their children, they are more likely to use shame and guilt rather than physical punishment.

Native American Families

machismo an emphasis on male strength and dominance

Perhaps the single most significant issue that Native American families face is whether to follow traditional values or to assimilate into the dominant culture (Yellowbird and Snipp 1994; Garrett 1999). This primary distinction creates vast differences among families.



To search for the Native American family would be fruitless. There are rural, urban, single-parent, extended, nuclear, rich, poor, traditional, and assimilated Native American families, to name just a few. Shown here is a Navaho family in Monument Valley, Arizona.

The traditionals speak native languages and emphasize distinctive Native American values and beliefs. Those who have assimilated into the broader culture do not.

Figure 16.4 depicts the structure of Native American families. You can see how close it is to that of Latinos. In general, Native American parents are permissive with their children and avoid physical punishment. Elders play a much more active role in their children's families than they do in most U.S. families: Elders, especially grandparents, not only provide child care but also teach and discipline children. Like others, Native American families differ by social class.

IN SUM

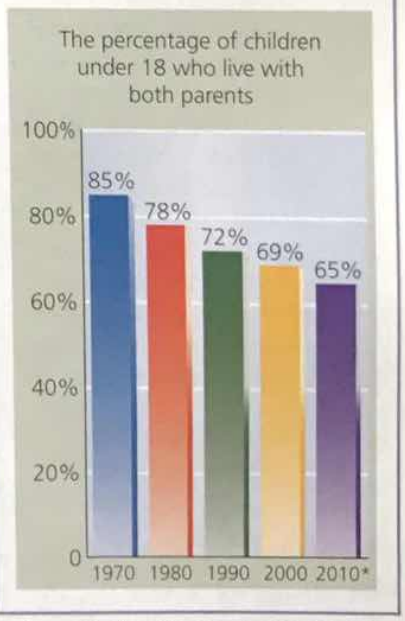
From this brief review, you can see that race-ethnicity signifies little for understanding family life. Rather, social class and culture hold the keys. The more resources a family has, the more it assumes the characteristics of a middle-class nuclear family. Compared with the poor, middle-class families have fewer children and fewer unmarried mothers. They also place greater emphasis on educational achievement and deferred gratification.

One-Parent Families

Another indication of how extensively the U.S. family is changing is the increase in one-parent families. As you can see from Figure 16.5, the percentage of U.S. children who live with two parents (not necessarily their biological parents) has dropped from 85 percent in 1970 to 69 percent today. The concern often expressed about one-parent families may have more to do with their poverty than with children being reared by one parent. Because women head most one-parent families, these families tend to be poor. Most divorced women earn less than their former husbands, yet about 85 percent of children of divorce live with their mothers ("Child Support" 1995; Aulette 2002).

To understand the typical one-parent family, then, we need to view it through the lens of poverty, for that is its primary source of strain. The results are serious, not just for these parents and their children, but for society as a whole. Children from single-parent families are more likely to drop out of school, to get arrested, to have emotional

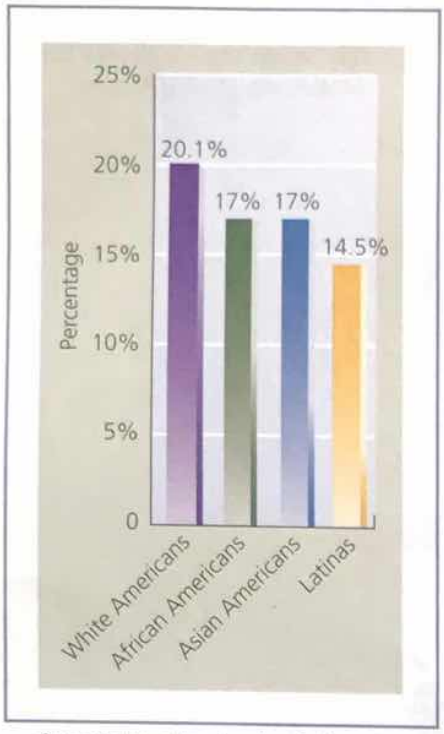
Figure 16.5 The Decline of Two-Parent Families



Source: By the author. Based on *Statistical Abstract* 1995:Table 79; 2002:Table 54.
*author's estimate

problems, and to get divorced (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994; Menaghan et al. 1997). If female, they are more likely to bear children while still unmarried teenagers.

Figure 16.6 What Percentage of U.S. Married Women Never Give Birth?



Source: By the author. Based on Bachu and O'Connell 2000:Table A.

Families Without Children

While most married women give birth, about one of five (19 percent) do not. Childlessness has grown so fast that this percentage is *twice* what it was just 20 years ago (Bachu and O'Connell 2000). As you can see from Figure 16.6, this percentage varies by racial-ethnic group, with Latinas standing out the most from the average. Most childless couples have made a choice to not have children. Why? Some simply do not like children, of course, but a main reason is to attain a sense of freedom—to have less stress, to be able to change jobs, or to be able to relax after work (Lunneborg 1999). Some women perceive their marriage as too fragile to withstand the strains a child would bring. Others believe they would be stuck at home—bored, lonely, and with diminishing career opportunities (Gerson 1985). Perhaps the most common reason, though, is summarized by this statement in a newsletter:

> We are DINKS (Dual Incomes, No Kids). We are happily married. I am 43, my wife is 42. We have been married for almost twenty years. . . . Our investment strategy has a lot to do with our personal philosophy: "You can have kids—or you can have everything else!"

With trends firmly in place—more education and careers for women; legal abortion; advances in contraception; the high cost of rearing children; and an emphasis on possessing more and more materials things—the proportion of women who never bear children is likely to increase.

Many childless couples, however, are not childless by choice. Desperately wanting to have children, some adopt, while a few turn to the solutions featured in the Sociology and the New Technology box on the next page.

Blended Families

An increasingly significant type of family in the United States is the **blended family**, one whose members were once part of other families. Two divorced people who marry and each bring their children into a new family unit become a blended family. With divorce common, millions of children spend some of their childhood in blended families. One result is more complicated family relationships. Consider this description written by one of my students:

> I live with my dad. I should say that I live with my dad, my brother (whose mother and father are also my mother and father), my half sister (whose father is my dad, but whose mother is my father's last wife), and two stepbrothers and stepsisters (children of my father's current wife). My father's wife (my current stepmother, not to be confused with his second wife who, I guess, is no longer my stepmother) is pregnant, and soon we all will have a new brother or sister. Or will it be a half brother or half sister?
>
> If you can't figure this out, I don't blame you. I have trouble myself. It gets very complicated around Christmas. Should we all stay together? Split up and go to several other homes? Who do we buy gifts for, anyway?

blended family a family whose members were once part of other families

Gay and Lesbian Families

In 1989, Denmark became the first country to legalize marriage between people of the same sex. Since then, Holland, Norway, Sweden, and the province of Ontario, Canada, have made same-sex marriages legal. In 2000, Vermont became the first state to legalize what they call "gay unions." Except for the name, "gay unions" are marriages. Partners are treated as married couples for purposes of inheritance, property transfers, medical decisions, insurance, and state income taxes. If they want to split up, they must go through "dissolution" proceedings in Family Court. Then in 2003, the supreme court of Massachusetts ruled that to prohibit same-sex marriages was a violation of the state's constitution.

When same-sex marriages became legal in Canada, additional pressure was placed on U.S. legislators to pass similar laws. In reaction, some groups have proposed a constitutional amendment that would limit marriage to a woman and a man. While this struggle is being resolved, Americans are crossing the border to get married under Canada's new law.

Gay and lesbian families are not evenly distributed throughout the United States. Rather, they are highly urban, with about half concentrated in just 20 cities. The greatest concentrations are in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Atlanta, New York City, and Washington, D.C. About one-fifth of gay and lesbian couples were previously married to heterosexuals. Twenty-two percent of lesbian couples and 5 percent of gay couples have children from their earlier marriages (Bianchi and Casper 2000).

What are gay marriages like? Like everything else in life, same-sex couples cannot be painted with a single brush stroke. As with heterosexual couples, social class is significant, and orientations to life differ with education, occupation, and income. Sociologists Philip Blumstein and Pepper Schwartz (1985) interviewed same-sex couples and found their main struggles to be housework, money, careers, problems with relatives, and sexual adjustment—the same problems that face heterosexual couples. Same-sex couples are more likely to break up, however, and one argument for legalizing gay marriages is that these relationships will become more stable.

Trends in U.S. Families

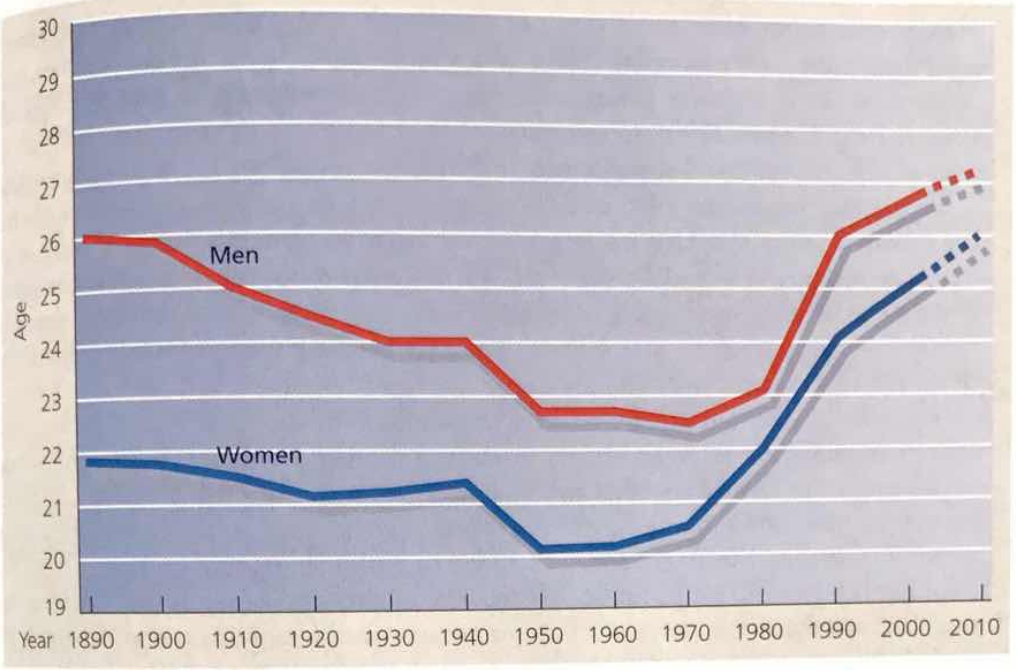
As is apparent from this discussion, marriage and family life in the United States is undergoing a fundamental shift. Let's examine other indicators of this change.

Postponing Marriage

Figure 16.7 illustrates one of the most significant changes in U.S. marriage. As you can see, the average age of first-time brides and grooms declined from 1890 to about 1950. In 1890 the typical first-time bride was 22, but by 1950 she had just left her teens. For about twenty years, there was little change. Then in 1970 the average age started to increase sharply. *Today's average first-time bride and groom are older than at any time in U.S. history.*

Since postponing marriage is today's norm, it may come as a surprise to many readers to learn that *most* U.S. women used to marry by the age of 24. Figure 16.8 illustrates this change. It shows how the percentage of younger Americans who have not married has soared. The current percentage of unmarried women of this age is now *more than double* what it was in 1970.

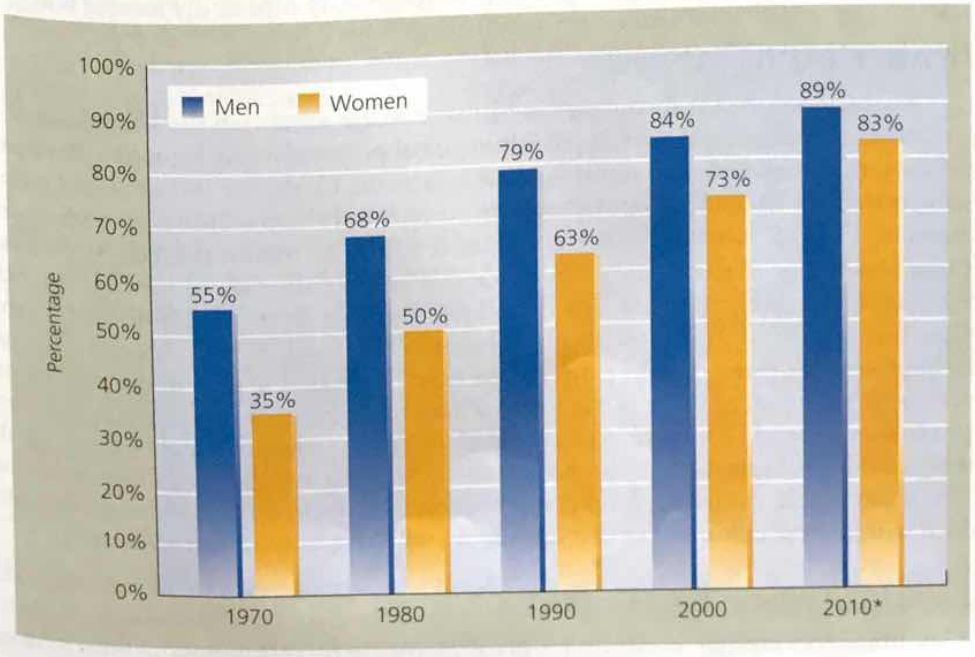
Figure 16.7 The Median Age at Which Americans Marry for the First Time



Note: The broken lines indicate the author's estimate.
Source: By the author. Based on *Statistical Abstract* 1999:Table 158; U.S. Bureau of the Census 2003.

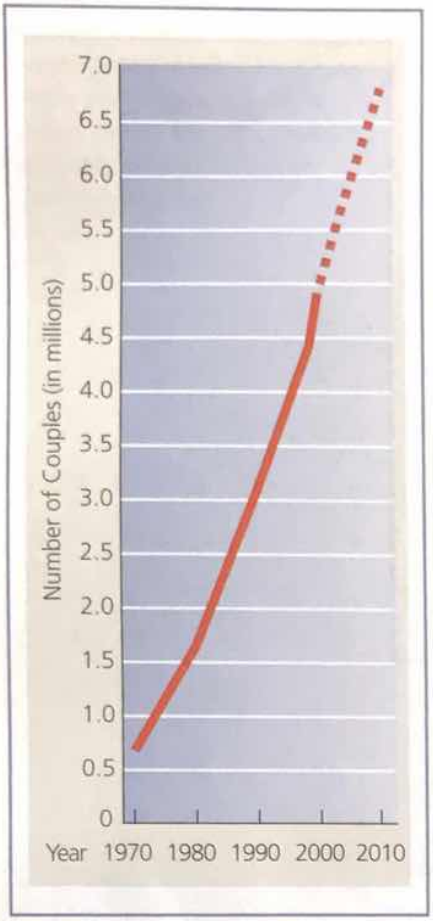
Why did this change occur? The reason is cohabitation (Michael et al. 2004). Although Americans have postponed the age at which they first marry, they have *not* postponed the age at which they first set up housekeeping with someone of the opposite sex. Let's look at this trend in cohabitation.

Figure 16.8 Americans Ages 20–24 Who Have Never Married



*Author's estimate.
Source: By the author. Based on *Statistical Abstract* 1993:Table 60; 2002:Table 48.

Figure 16.9 Cohabitation in the United States



Note: Broken line indicates the author's estimate.

Source: By the author. Based on *Statistical Abstract* 1995:Table 60; 2002:Table 49.

Cohabitation

Figure 16.9 shows the increase in **cohabitation**, adults living together in a sexual relationship without being married. This figure is one of the most remarkable in sociology. Hardly ever do we have totals that rise this steeply and consistently. Cohabitation is *eight times* more common today than it was 30 years ago. Half of the couples who marry today have lived together before marriage. A generation ago, it was just 8 percent (Bianchi and Casper 2000). Cohabitation has become so common that about 40 percent of U.S. children will spend some time in a cohabiting family (Scommegna 2002).

Figure 16.9 represents a significant change in people's attitudes and behavior—from the frowned-upon "shacking up" of a generation ago to a broadly accepted form of premarriage today. From my observations, it is not uncommon for parents to be pleased when a son or daughter begins to cohabit. Some parents help their children move furniture and decorate their apartments. This is a colossal change from the furtiveness that used to surround such relationships.

What is the essential difference between cohabitation and marriage? The single best answer is *commitment.* In marriage, the assumption is permanence; in cohabitation, couples agree to remain together for "as long as it works out." For marriage, individuals make public vows that legally bind them as a couple; for cohabitation, they simply move in together. Marriage requires a judge to authorize its termination; when a cohabiting relationship sours, the couple separate and tell their friends that it didn't work out. Perhaps the single statement that pinpoints the difference in commitment is this: Cohabiting couples are less likely than married couples to have a joint bank account (Brines and Joyner 1999).

Why do some cohabiting couples decide to marry, while others do not? There are many reasons, of course, but sociologists have found that cohabitation means different things to different people, and what it means makes a difference in whether they marry. Let's explore this connection in our Down-to-Earth Sociology box on the next page.

And are the marriages of couples who cohabited stronger than the marriages of couples who did not live together before they married? Have they, perhaps, worked out a lot of problems in advance of marriage? To find out, sociologists compared their divorce rates. They found that couples who cohabited before marriage are *more* likely to divorce. This presented another sociological puzzle. To try to solve it, sociologists Catherine Cohan and Stacy Kleinbaum (2002) videotaped husbands and wives while they worked on marital problems. They found that spouses who had cohabited before marriage were more negative and less supportive of their partners. This certainly nips at the marital bonds.

Unmarried Mothers

Earlier we discussed the steady increase in births to single women in the United States. To better understand this trend, we can place it in global perspective. As Figure 16.10 on page 470 shows, the United States is not alone in this increase. Of the ten industrialized nations for which we have data, all except Japan have experienced sharp increases in births to single women. The U.S. rate is far from the highest; it falls in the middle third of these nations.

From this figure, it seems fair to conclude that industrialization sets in motion social forces that encourage births to unmarried mothers. There are several problems with this conclusion, however. Why was the rate so much lower in 1960 and 1970? Industrialization had been in process for many decades prior to that time. Why are the rates in the bottom four nations only a fraction of those in the top two nations? Why does Japan's rate remain low? Why are Sweden's and Denmark's rates so high? With only a couple of minor exceptions, the ranking of these nations today is the same as it was 40 years ago. By itself, then, industrialization is too simple an answer. A fuller explanation must focus on customs and values embedded within these cultures. For that answer, we will have to await further research.

cohabitation unmarried couples living together in a sexual relationship

Grandparents as Parents

It is becoming increasingly common for grandparents to rear their grandchildren. About 4 percent of white children, 7 percent of Latino children, and 14 percent of African American children are being reared by their grandparents (Waldrop and Weber 2001).

"You Want Us to Live Together? What Do You Mean By That?"

ONE OF THE MOST REMARKABLE STATISTICS in sociology is the rapid increase of cohabitation in the United States. Hardly any statistic shows such a sharp upward curve as that depicted in Figure 16.9. Two fundamental changes in U.S. culture have led to this surge in cohabitation.

The first is changed ideas of sexual morality. It is difficult for today's college students to grasp the sexual morality that prevailed before the 1960s sexual revolution. Almost everyone used to consider sex before marriage to be immoral. Premarital sex existed, to be sure, but furtively, and often with guilt. To live together before marriage was called "shacking up," and the couple was thought to be "living in sin." A double standard operated. It was the woman's responsibility to say no to sex before marriage. Consequently, she was considered to be the especially sinful one in cohabitation.

The second cultural change is the increase in the U.S. divorce rate. Although the rate has declined slightly since 1980, it still remains at almost the highest level in U.S. history. Youth who reach adulthood today are more likely to have seen their parents divorce than any generation that came before them. This makes marriage seem fragile, something that is not likely to last regardless of what you put into it. This is scary. Cohabitation reduces the threat by offering a relationship of intimacy without the long-term commitment of marriage.

From the outside, all cohabitation may look the same, but not to people who are living together. As you can see from Table 16.2, for about 10 percent of couples, cohabitation is a substitute for marriage. These couples consider themselves married, but for some reason don't want a marriage certificate. Some object to marriage on philosophical grounds ("What difference does a piece of paper make?"); others do not yet have a legal divorce from a spouse. Almost half of cohabitants (46 percent) view cohabitation as a step on the path to marriage. For them, cohabitation is more than "going steady," but less than engagement. Another 15 percent of couples are simply "giving it a try." They want to see what marriage to one another might be like. For the least committed, about 29 percent, cohabitation is a form of dating. It provides a dependable source of sex and emotional support.

Do these distinctions make a difference in whether couples marry? Let's look at these couples a half dozen years after they began to live together. As you can see from Table 16.2, couples who view cohabitation as a substitute for marriage are the least likely to marry and the most likely to still be cohabiting a few years later. For couples who see cohabitation as a step toward marriage, the outcome is just the opposite—they are the most likely to marry and the least likely to still be cohabiting. Couples who are the most likely to break up are those who "tried" cohabitation and those for whom cohabitation was a form of dating.

Table 16.2 Commitment in Cohabitation: Does It Make a Difference?

Level of Commitment	Percent of Couples	After 5 to 7 Years			
		Split Up	Still Together	Of Those Still Together	
				Married	Cohabitating
Substitute for Marriage	10%	35%	65%	25%	40%
Step toward Marriage	46%	31%	69%	52%	17%
Trial Marriage	15%	51%	49%	28%	21%
Coresidential Dating	29%	46%	54%	33%	21%

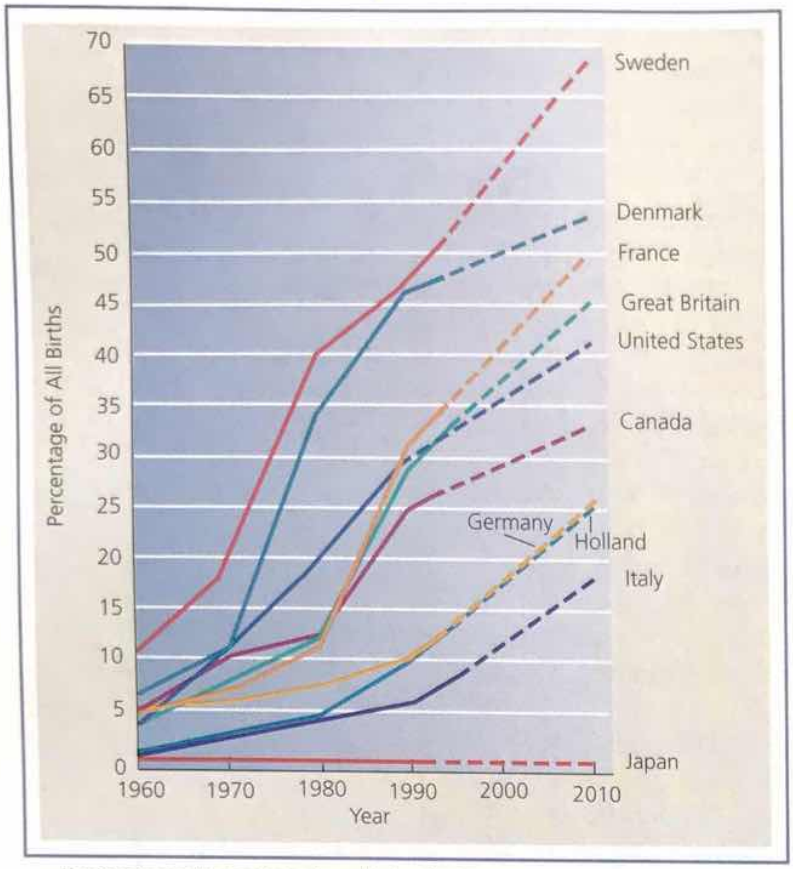
Source: Bianchi and Casper 2000.

For Your CONSIDERATION

Can you explain why the meaning of cohabitation makes a difference in whether couples marry? Can you classify cohabiting couples you know into these four types? Do you think there are other types? If so, what would they be?

The main reason for these *skipped generation families* is that the parents are incapable of caring for their children (Goldberg-Glen et al. 1998). Other than the death of the parent, the most common reasons are that the parents are ill, homeless, addicted to drugs, or in prison. In other instances, they have neglected and abused their children, and the grandparents have taken them in.

Figure 16.10 Births to Unmarried Women in Ten Industrialized Nations



Note: The broken lines indicate the author's estimates.
Source: By the author. Based on *Statistical Abstract* 1993:Table 1380; 1998:Table 1347.

The main stresses faced by the grandparents are additional financial costs, the need to continue working when they expected to be retired, and conflict with the parents of the children (Waldrop and Weber 2001). Their primary satisfactions are knowing that their grandchildren are in loving hands, building strong emotional bonds with the grandchildren, and being able to transmit family values to them.

The "Sandwich Generation" and Elder Care

The *"sandwich generation"* refers to people who find themselves sandwiched between two generations, responsible for both their children and their own aging parents. Typically between the ages of 40 and 55, these people find themselves pulled in two strongly compelling directions. Overwhelmed by two sets of competing responsibilities, they are plagued with guilt and anger because they can only be in one place at a time.

Concerns about elder care have gained the attention of the corporate world, and half of the 1,000 largest U.S. companies offer elder care assistance to their employees (Hewitt Associates 2004). This assistance includes seminars, referral services, and flexible work schedules designed to help employees meet their responsibilities without missing so much work. Why are companies responding more positively to the issue of elder care than to child day care? Most CEOs are older men whose wives stayed home to take care of their children, so they don't understand the stresses of balancing work and child care. In contrast, nearly all have aging parents, and many have faced the turmoil of trying to cope with both their parents' needs and those of work and their own family.

With people living longer, this issue is likely to become increasingly urgent.

Divorce and Remarriage

The topic of family life would not be complete without considering divorce. Let's first try to determine how much divorce there really is.

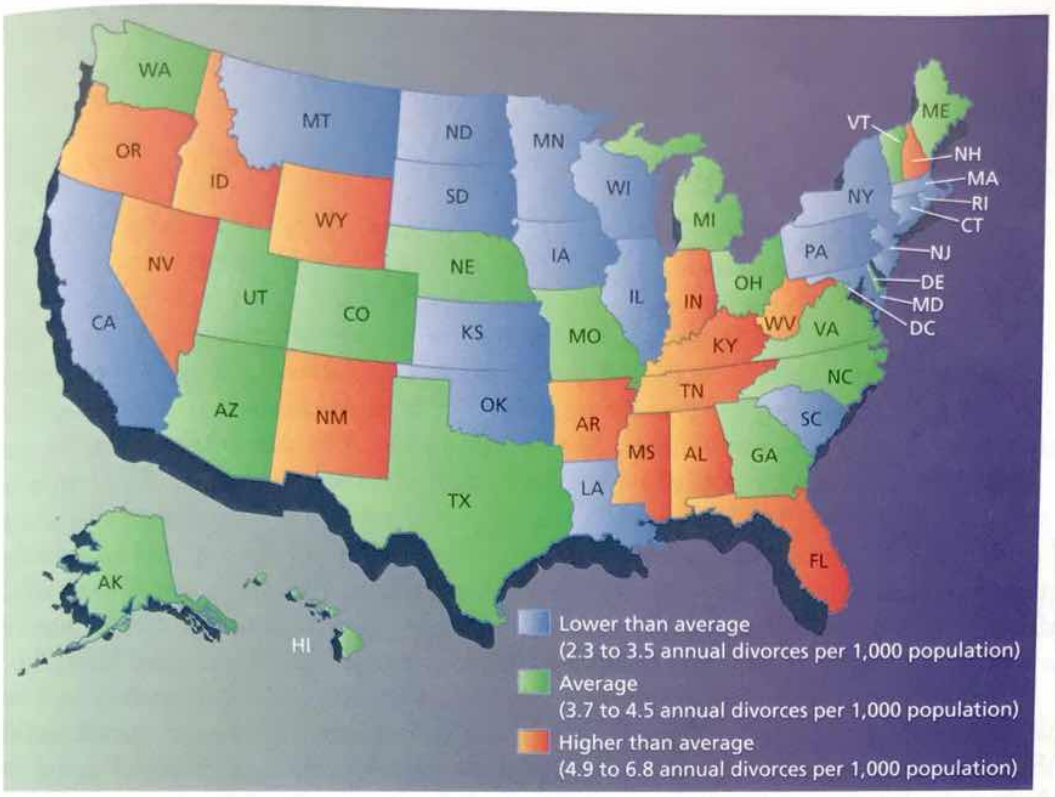
Problems in Measuring Divorce

You probably have heard that the U.S. divorce rate is 50 percent, a figure that is popular with reporters. The statistic is true in the sense that each year about half as many divorces are granted as there are marriages performed. The totals are roughly 2-1/2 million marriages and 1-1/4 million divorces ("Population Today" 2002).

What is wrong, then, with saying that the divorce rate is 50 percent? The real question is why we should compare the number of divorces and marriages that take place during the same year. The couples who divorced do not—with rare exceptions—come from the group that married that year. The one number has *nothing* to do with the other, so these statistics in no way establish the divorce rate.

What figures should we compare, then? Couples who divorce are drawn from the entire group of married people in the country. Since the United States has 60,000,000 married couples, and only about 1-1/4 million of them obtain divorces in a year, the divorce rate is 2 percent, not 50 percent. A couple's chances of still being married at the end of a year are 98 percent—not bad odds—and certainly much better odds than the mass me-

Figure 16.11 The "Where" of U.S. Divorce

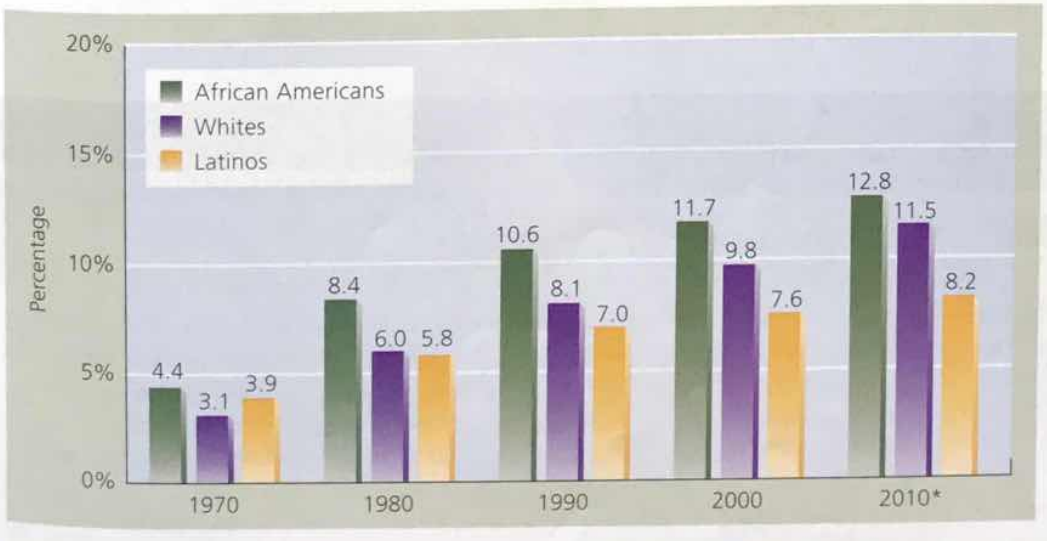


Note: Data for California, Colorado, Indiana, and Louisiana, based on earlier editions, have been decreased by the average decrease in U.S. divorce.
Source: By the author. Based on *Statistical Abstract* 2002:Table 111, and earlier editions.

dia would have us believe. As the Social Map on the next page shows, however, the "odds"—if we want to call them that—change depending on where you live.

Over time, of course, those 2 percent a year add up. A third way of measuring divorce, then, is to ask, "Of all U.S. adults, what percentage are divorced?" Figure 16.12 below answers this question. You can see how divorce has increased over the years. You can also see that people's race-ethnicity makes a difference in the likelihood that they will divorce. In

Figure 16.12 What Percentage of Americans Are Divorced?



Note: Only these racial-ethnic groups are listed in the source. *author's estimate
Source: By the author. Based on *Statistical Abstract* 1995:Table 58; 2002:Table 46.

addition, you can see that the increase in divorce has been highest among whites and lowest among Latinos. If you look closely, you can also see that the rate of divorce among all groups has slowed up.

The Down-to-Earth Sociology box below reports some "curious" findings about divorce, while factors that make marriage successful are summarized at the end of this chapter.

Children of Divorce

Each year, more than 1 million U.S. children learn that their parents are divorcing (Cherlin 2002). These children are more likely than children reared by both parents to experience psychiatric problems, both during childhood and after they grow up (Amato and Sobolewski 2001; Weitoft et al. 2003). They are also more likely to become juvenile delinquents (Wallerstein et al. 2001), and less likely to complete high school, to attend college, and to graduate from college (McLanahan and Schwartz 2002). Finally, these children of divorce are themselves more likely to divorce (Tallman, Rotolo, and Gray 2001) thus perpetuating the cycle.

Is the greater maladjustment of the children of divorce a serious problem? This question has initiated a lively debate between two well-respected researchers, both psychologists. Judith Wallerstein claims that the scars of divorce afflict children with depression, with their insecurities following them into adulthood (Wallerstein, Blakeslee, and Lewis 2001). Mavis Hetherington replies that 75 percent to 80 percent of children of divorce function as well as children who are reared by both of their parents (Hetherington and Kelly 2003).

Without meaning to weigh in on one side of this debate, it doesn't seem to be a simple case of the glass being half empty or half full. If 75 percent to 80 percent of children of divorce don't suffer long-term harm, this leaves one-fourth to one-fifth who do. Any way you look at it, one-fourth or one-fifth of a million children each year is a lot of kids who are having a lot of problems.

On the other hand, we need better studies. Researchers have generally compared children of divorce with children from average homes. The problem is that children whose parents divorce don't come from average homes. They come from conflict-ridden homes. The real question, then, is how children of divorce compare with children whose parents have high conflict but remain married. When sociologist Susan Jekielek (1998) made this comparison, she found that children whose parents divorce actually are slightly better emotionally adjusted than are children who live with their parents' conflict. Other research supports this finding (Stewart et al. 1997).

What helps children adjust to divorce? Children of divorce who feel close to both parents make the best adjustment, those who feel closest to one parent make the next best adjustment, and those who don't feel intimate with either parent make the worst adjustment (Richardson and McCabe 2001). Other studies show that children adjust very well

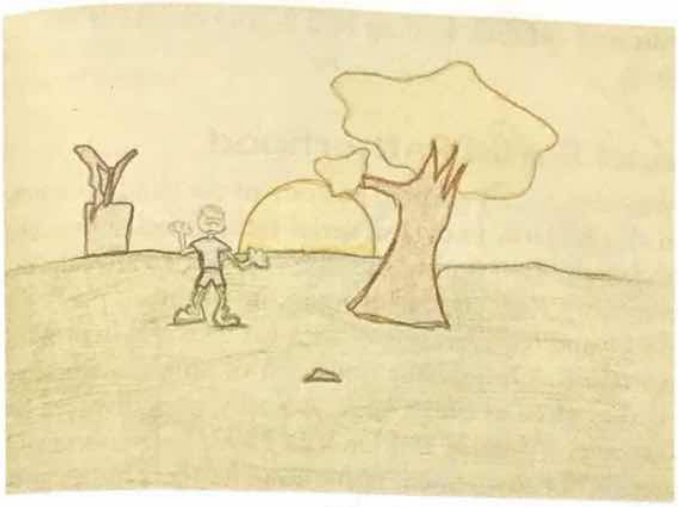
DOWN-TO-EARTH SOCIOLOGY

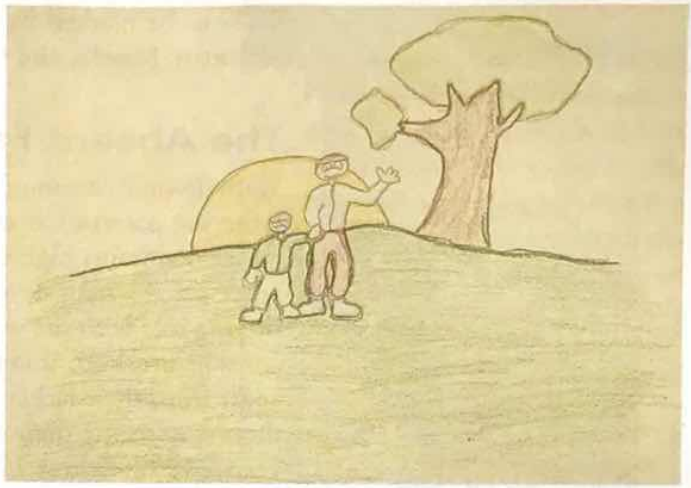
You Be the Sociologist: Curious Divorce Patterns

SOCIOLOGISTS ALEX HECKERT, THOMAS Nowak, and Kay Snyder (1995) did secondary analysis (see page 133) of data gathered from a nationally representative sample of 5,000 U.S. households. Here are three of their findings:

1. If a wife earns more than her husband, the marriage is more likely to break up; if a husband earns more than his wife, divorce is less likely.
2. If the wife's health is poorer than her husband's, the marriage is more likely to break up; if the husband's health is poorer than his wife's, divorce is less likely.
3. The more housework a wife does, the less likely a couple is to divorce.

Can you explain these findings? You be the sociologist. Please develop your own explanations before looking at the answers on the next page.





It is difficult to capture the anguish of the children of divorce, but when I read these lines by the fourth-grader who drew these two pictures, my heart was touched:

Me alone in the park . . .
All alone in the park.
My Dad and Mom are divorced
that's why I'm all alone.

This is me in the picture with my son.
We are taking a walk in the park.
I will never be like my father.
I will never divorce my wife and kid.

if their family has adequate money to meet its needs and they experience little conflict, feel loved, live with a parent who is making a good adjustment, and have consistent routines. Preliminary studies also indicate that adjustment is better if the child lives with the parent of the same sex (Lamb 1977; Clingempeel and Repucci 1982; Peterson and Zill 1986; Wallerstein and Kelly 1992). Children also adjust better if a second adult can be counted on for support (Hayashi and Strickland 1998). Urie Bronfenbrenner (1992) says this person is like the third leg of a stool, giving stability to the smaller family unit. Any adult can be the third leg, he says—a relative, friend, mother-in-law, or even co-worker—but the most powerful stabilizing third leg is the father, the ex-husband.

As mentioned, when the children of divorce grow up and marry, they are more likely to divorce than are adults who grew up in intact families. Have researchers found any factors that increase the likelihood that the marriages of the children of divorce will be successful? Actually, they have. Their chances increase if they marry someone whose parents did not divorce. This increases the level of trust and reduces the level of conflict. If both husband and wife came from broken families, however, it is not good news. Their marriages are

DOWN-TO-EARTH SOCIOLOGY

You Be the Sociologist: Curious Divorce Patterns *(continued)*

What do the findings mean? Heckert, Nowak, and Snyder suggest these explanations:

1. A wife who earns more than her husband has more alternatives to an unsatisfying marriage; a wife who earns less is more dependent.
2. Social pressure is greater for a wife to take care of a husband in poor health than it is for a husband to take care of a wife in poor health.
3. Who does the most housework is an indication of a husband's and wife's relative bargaining power. Wives with the most bargaining power do less housework and are the least likely to put up with unsatisfying marriages.

serial fatherhood a pattern of parenting in which a father, after divorce, reduces contact with his own children, serves as a father to the children of the woman he marries or lives with, then ignores these children, too, after moving in with or marrying another woman

likely to be marked by high distrust and conflict, leading to a higher chance of divorce (Tallman, Rotolo, and Gray 2001).

The Absent Father and Serial Fatherhood

With divorce common and with mothers usually granted custody of the children, a new fathering pattern has emerged. In this pattern, known as **serial fatherhood**, a divorced father maintains high contact with his children during the first year or two after the divorce. As the man develops a relationship with another woman, he begins to play a fathering role with the woman's children and reduces contact with his own children. With another breakup, this pattern may repeat. Only about one-sixth of children who live apart from their fathers see their dad as often as every week. Actually, *most* divorced fathers stop seeing their children altogether (Ahlburg and De Vita 1992; Furstenberg and Harris 1992; Seltzer 1994). Apparently, for many men, fatherhood has become a short-term commitment.

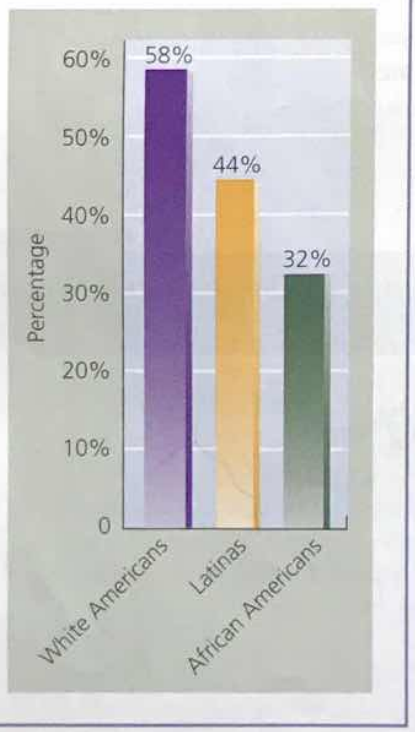
The Ex-Spouses

Anger, depression, and anxiety are common feelings at divorce. But so is relief. Women are more likely than men to feel that the divorce is giving them a "new chance" in life. A few couples manage to remain friends through it all—but they are the exception. The spouse who initiates the divorce usually gets over it sooner (Kelly 1992; Wang and Amato 2000). This spouse also usually remarries sooner (Sweeney 2002).

Divorce does not necessarily mean the end of a couple's relationship. Many divorced couples maintain contact because of their children. For others, the "continuities," as sociologists call them, represent lingering attachments (Vaughan 1985; Masheter 1991). The former husband may help his former wife hang a picture and move furniture, or she may invite him over for a meal. Some couples even continue to make love after their divorce.

After divorce, a couple's cost of living increases—two homes, two utility bills, and so forth. But the financial impact is different for men and for women. Divorce usually brings greater economic hardship for women (Smock et al. 1999; Wang and Amato 2000). This is especially true for mothers of small children, whose standard of living drops about a third (Seltzer 1994). The more education a woman has, the better prepared she is to survive financially after the divorce (Dixon and Rettig 1994).

Figure 16.13 The Probability that Divorced Women Will Remarry in Five Years



Note: Only these groups are listed in the source.
Source: By the author. Based on Bramlett and Mosher 2002.

Remarriage

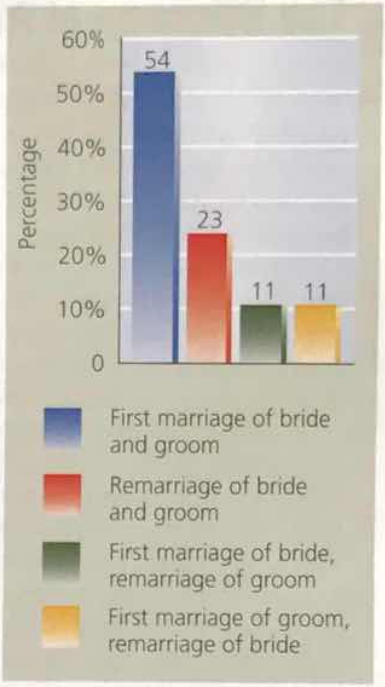
Despite the number of people who emerge from the divorce court swearing "Never again!" many do remarry. The rate at which they remarry, however, has dropped remarkably, and today only half of women who divorce remarry (Bramlett and Mosher 2002). Figure 16.13 shows how significant race-ethnicity is in determining whether women remarry. Comparable data are not available for men.

As Figure 16.14 shows, most divorced people marry other divorced people. You may be surprised that the women most likely to remarry are young mothers and those with less education (Glick and Lin 1986; Schmiege, Richards, and Zvonkovic 2001). Apparently women who are more educated and more independent (no children) can afford to be more selective. Men are more likely than women to remarry, perhaps because they have a larger pool of potential mates.

How do remarriages work out? The divorce rate of remarried people *without* children is the same as that of first marriages. Those who bring children into a new marriage, however, are more likely to divorce again (MacDonald and DeMaris 1995). Certainly these relationships are more complicated and stressful. A lack of clear norms to follow may also play a role (Coleman et al. 2000). As sociologist Andrew Cherlin (1989) noted, we lack satisfactory names for stepmothers, stepfathers, stepbrothers, stepsisters, stepaunts, stepuncles, stepcousins, and stepgrandparents. At the very least, these are awkward terms to use, but they also represent ill-defined relationships.

This fanciful depiction of marital trends may not be too far off the mark.

Figure 16.14 The Marital History of U.S. Brides and Grooms



Source: By the author. Based on *Statistical Abstract* 2000:Table 145.

Two Sides of Family Life

Let's first look at situations in which marriage and family have gone seriously wrong and then try to answer the question of what makes marriage work.

The Dark Side of Family Life: Battering, Child Abuse, Marital Rape, and Incest

The dark side of family life involves events that people would rather keep in the dark. We shall look at battering, child abuse, rape, and incest.

Battering To study spouse abuse, some sociologists have studied just a few victims in depth (Goetting 2001), while others have interviewed nationally representative samples of U.S. couples (Straus and Gelles 1988; Straus 1992). Although not all sociologists agree (Dobash et al. 1992, 1993; Pagelow 1992), Murray Straus concludes that husbands and wives are about equally likely to attack one another. If gender equality exists here, however, it certainly vanishes when it comes to the effects of violence, where 85 percent of the injured are women (Rennison 2003). A good part of the reason, of course, is that most husbands are bigger and stronger than their wives, putting women at a physical disadvantage in this literal battle of the sexes. The Down-to-Earth Sociology box on the next page discusses why some women remain with their abusive husbands.

Violence against women is related to the sexist structure of society, which we reviewed in Chapter 11, and to the socialization we reviewed in Chapter 3. Because they grew up with norms that encourage aggression and the use of violence, some men feel it is their right to control women. When frustrated in a relationship—or even by events outside it—some men turn violent toward their wives and lovers. The basic sociological question is how to socialize males to handle frustration and disagreements without resorting to violence (Rieker et al. 1997). We do not yet have this answer.

"Why Doesn't She Just Leave?" The Dilemma of Abused Women

"WHY WOULD SHE EVER PUT UP WITH violence?" is the question on everyone's mind. From the outside, it looks so easy. Just pack up and leave. "I know I wouldn't put up with anything like that."

And yet this is not what typically happens. Women tend to stay with their men after they are abused. Some stay only a short while, to be sure, but others remain in abusive situations for years. Why?

Sociologist Ann Goetting (2001) asked this question, too. To get the answer, she interviewed women who had made the break. She wanted to find out what it was that set them apart. How were they able to leave, when so many women can't seem to? She found these characteristics in the women who made the break:

1. They had a positive self-concept.

   Simply put, they believed that they deserved better.

2. They broke with traditional values.

   They did not believe that a wife had to stay with her husband no matter what.

3. They found adequate finances.

   For some this was easy, but for others it was not. To accumulate enough money to move out, some of the women saved for years, putting away just a little each week.

4. They had supportive family and friends.

   A support network served as a source of encouragement to help them rescue themselves.

If you take the opposite of these four characteristics, you have the answer to why some women put up with abuse: They don't think they deserve anything better, they believe it is their duty to stay, they don't think they can make it financially, and they lack a supportive network. These four factors are not of equal importance for all women, of course. For some, the lack of finances is the most significant, while for others it is their low self-concept. For all, the supportive network—or the lack of one—plays a significant role.

For Your CONSIDERATION

Based on these findings, what would you say to a woman whose husband or partner is abusing her? How do you think battered women's shelters fit into this explanation? What other parts of this puzzle can you think of—such as the role of love?

Child Abuse

My wife and I answered an ad about a lakeside house in a middle-class neighborhood that was for sale by owner. As the woman showed us through her immaculate house, we were surprised to see a plywood box in the youngest child's bedroom. About 3 feet high, 3 feet wide, and 6 feet long, the box was perforated with holes and had a little door with a padlock. Curious, I asked what it was. The woman replied matter-of-factly that her son had a behavior problem, and this was where they locked him for "time out." She added that other times they would tie him to a float, attach a line to the dock, and put him in the lake.

We left as soon as we could. With thoughts of a terrorized child filling my head, I called the state child abuse hotline.

As you can tell, what I saw upset me. Most of us are bothered by child abuse—helpless children being victimized by their own parents, the very adults who are supposed to love, protect, and nurture them. The most gruesome of these cases make the evening news: The 4-year-old girl who was beaten and raped by her mother's boyfriend, who passed into a coma and then three days later passed out of this life; the 6- to 10-year-old children whose stepfather videotaped them engaging in sex acts. Unlike these cases, which made headlines in my area, most child abuse is never brought to our attention: the children who live in filth, who are neglected—left alone for hours or even days at a time—or who are beaten with extension cords—cases like the little boy I learned about when I went house hunting.

We do know that child abuse is extensive. Each year, about 3 million U.S. children are reported to the authorities as victims of abuse or neglect. About 850,000 of these cases are substantiated (*Statistical Abstract* 2002:Table 321). The excuses that abusive parents make are incredible. Of those I have read, one of the most fantastic is the statement a mother

told a Manhattan judge, "I slipped in a moment of anger and my hands accidentally wrapped around my daughter's windpipe" (LeDuff 2002).

Marital or Intimacy Rape Sociologists have found that marital rape is more common than is usually supposed. For example, between one-third and one-half of women who seek help at shelters for battered women are victims of marital rape (Bergen 1996). Women at shelters, however, are not representative of U.S. women. To get a better answer of how common marital rape is, sociologist Diana Russell (1990) used a sampling technique that allows generalization. She found that 14 percent of married women report that their husbands have raped them. Similarly, 10 percent of a representative sample of Boston women interviewed by sociologists David Finkelhor and Kersti Yllo (1985, 1989) reported that their husbands had used physical force to compel them to have sex. Compared with victims of rape by strangers or acquaintances, victims of marital rape are less likely to report the rape (Mahoney 1999).

With the huge numbers of couples who are cohabiting, the term marital rape needs to include sexual assault in these relationships. Perhaps, then, we should use the term *intimacy rape*. And intimacy rape is not limited to men who sexually assault women. In pathbreaking research, sociologist Lori Girshick (2002) interviewed lesbians who had been sexually assaulted by their partners. In these cases, both the victim and the offender are women. Girshick points out that if the pronoun "he" were substituted for "she" in her interviews, a reader would believe that the events were being told by women who had been battered and raped by their husbands (Bergen 2003). Like wives who have been raped by their husbands, these victims, too, suffered from shock, depression, and self-blame.

Incest Sexual relations between certain relatives (for example, between brothers and sisters or between parents and children) constitute **incest.** Incest is most likely to occur in families that are socially isolated (Smith 1992). As with marital rape, sociological research has destroyed assumptions that incest is not common. Sociologist Diana Russell (n.d.) found that incest victims who experience the greatest trauma are those who were victimized the most often, whose assaults occurred over longer periods of time, and whose incest was "more intrusive," for example, sexual intercourse as opposed to sexual touching.

Who are the offenders? Russell found that uncles are the most common offenders, followed by first cousins, fathers (stepfathers especially), brothers, and, finally, other relatives ranging from brothers-in-law to stepgrandfathers. Other researchers report that brother-sister incest is several times more common than father-daughter incest (Canavan et al. 1992). Incest between mothers and sons is rare.

The Bright Side of Family Life: Successful Marriages

Successful Marriages After examining divorce and family abuse, one could easily conclude that marriages seldom work out. This would be far from the truth, however, for about two of every three married Americans report that they are "very happy" with their marriages (Cherlin and Furstenberg 1988; Whyte 1992). To find out what makes marriage successful, sociologists Jeanette and Robert Lauer (1992) interviewed 351 couples who had been married fifteen years or longer. Fifty-one of these marriages were unhappy, but the couples stayed together for religious reasons, family tradition, or "for the sake of the children." Of the others, the 300 happy couples, all:

1. Think of their spouse as their best friend
2. Like their spouse as a person
3. Think of marriage as a long-term commitment
4. Believe that marriage is sacred
5. Agree with their spouse on aims and goals
6. Believe that their spouse has grown more interesting over the years
7. Strongly want the relationship to succeed
8. Laugh together

incest sexual relations between specified relatives, such as brothers and sisters or parents and children

Sociologist Nicholas Stinnett (1992) used interviews and questionnaires to study 660 families from all regions of the United States and parts of South America. He found that happy families:

1. Spend a lot of time together
2. Are quick to express appreciation
3. Are committed to promoting one another's welfare
4. Do a lot of talking and listening to one another
5. Are religious
6. Deal with crises in a positive manner

Other sociologists have found that the better a couple gets along with their in-laws, the happier the marriage is (Bryant et al. 2001).

Symbolic Interactionism and the Misuse of Statistics Many of my students express concerns about their own marital future, a wariness born out of the divorce of their parents, friends, neighbors, relatives—even their pastors and rabbis. They wonder about their chances of having a successful marriage. Because sociology is not just about abstract ideas, but is really about our lives, it is important to stress that you are an individual, not a statistic. That is, if the divorce rate were 33 percent or 50 percent, this would *not* mean that if you marry, your chances of getting divorced are 33 percent or 50 percent. That is a misuse of statistics, and a common one at that. Divorce statistics represent all marriages and have absolutely *nothing* to do with any individual marriage. Our own chances depend on our own situations—and especially the way we approach marriage.

To make this point clearer, let's apply symbolic interactionism. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, we create our own worlds. That is, our experiences don't come with built-in meanings. Rather, we interpret our experiences, and act accordingly. Simply put, if we think of our marriage as likely to fail, we increase the likelihood that it will fail; if we think that our marriage will work out well, our chances of a good marriage increase. In other words, we tend to act according to our ideas, creating a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy. For example, if we think our marriage may fail, we are more likely to run when things become difficult. The folk saying "There are no guarantees in life" is certainly true, but it does help to have a vision that a good marriage is possible and that it is worth the effort to achieve.

The Future of Marriage and Family

What can we expect of marriage and family in the future? Despite its many problems, marriage is in no danger of becoming a relic of the past. Marriage is so functional that it exists in every society. Consequently, the vast majority of Americans will continue to find marriage vital to their welfare.

Certain trends are firmly in place. Cohabitation, births to single women, age at first marriage, and parenting by grandparents will increase. More married women will join the work force, and they will continue to gain marital power. Equality in marriage, however, is not even on the horizon. As the number of elderly increase, more couples will find themselves sandwiched between caring for their parents and rearing their own children.

Our culture will continue to be haunted by distorted images of marriage and family: the bleak ones portrayed in the mass media and the rosy ones painted by cultural myths. Sociological research can help correct these distortions and allow us to see how our own family experiences fit into the patterns of our culture. Sociological research can also help to answer the big question of how to formulate social policy that will support and enhance family life.

To conclude this chapter, in the Down-to-Earth Sociology box on the next page we look at a subtle but fundamental change that may have just begun to affect the family.