

# CHAPTER 3



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# Differences: Historical and Contemporary Variations in American Family Life

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### Summary 111

## What Do YOU Think?

Are the following statements **TRUE** or **FALSE**?

You may be surprised by the answers (see answer key on the following page.)

- |   |   |                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|---|---|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| T | F | 1 Compared with contemporary families, colonial family life was considered more private.                                                                                             |
| T | F | 2 Industrialization transformed the role families played in society, as well as the roles women and men played in families.                                                          |
| T | F | 3 Slavery destroyed the African American family system.                                                                                                                              |
| T | F | 4 Compared with what came both before and after, families of the 1950s were unusually stable.                                                                                        |
| T | F | 5 Within upper-class families, husbands and wives are relatively equal in their household roles and authority.                                                                       |
| T | F | 6 Lower-class families are the most likely to be single-parent families.                                                                                                             |
| T | F | 7 Family relationships can suffer as a result of either downward or upward mobility.                                                                                                 |
| T | F | 8 Compared with Caucasian families, relationships between African American husbands and wives are more traditional.                                                                  |
| T | F | 9 Asian American or Latino families show much variation within each group, depending on the country from which they came, why they left, and when they arrived in the United States. |
| T | F | 10 European ethnic groups are as different from one another as they are from African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, or Native Americans.                                       |

One thing you can almost always count on is that sometime during the term or semester, whether in class or in conversation, someone will make the oft-heard statement, “Well, all families are different.” There is a lot of truth to that sentiment. For example, your family is not like your best friend’s family in every way. Furthermore, assuming your best friend is someone a lot like you (which, as you’ve probably noticed, is common among people who become best friends), the differences between your families likely understate how richly variable family experience actually is.

Although it is true that in some ways *every family is different*, over the next few chapters we look closely at some patterned variations that separate and diversify family experiences. Although there are a number of factors that we could include as sources of such variation, the current chapter is concerned with the following four: time, social class, race, and ethnicity. In subsequent chapters we also look at how gender and sexual orientation shape people’s experiences of relationships and families. Then, throughout the remainder of the book, we draw comparisons and make contrasts among different types of households and families—singles, cohabiting and married couples, parents and nonparents, single-parent households and two-parent households, dual earners, male-breadwinner–female homemaker households and “role reversers,” first marriages and remarriages, and step relationships in blended families and blood relationships in birth families. Therefore, the task we start here won’t end until you finish this book.

We begin by detailing the historical development of the kinds of families that predominate in the United States today, noting key transformations and the forces that created them. This accomplishes two things: It gives you a better sense of where today’s American families have come from, and it enables you to see how different family life has been across generations, even within the same families. We then shift our attention to some major racial, ethnic, and economic variations that diversify contemporary American families.

### Answer Key for What Do You Think

- 1 False, see p. 72; 2 True, see p. 73; 3 False, see p. 75; 4 True, see p. 79; 5 False, see p. 90; 6 True, see p. 89; 7 True, see p. 94; 8 False, see p. 98; 9 True, see p. 104; 10 False, see p. 110.

## American Families across Time

American marriages and families are dynamic and must be understood as the products of wider cultural, demographic, and technological developments (Mintz and Kellogg 1988). Although we tend to emphasize the more familiar changes that have occurred over the past half century or so (post–World War II), those changes represent only more recent instances of more than 300 years of change that comprise the history of American family life from the colonial period through the twentieth century. Armed with this brief history, we can recognize and make connections between changes in society and changes in families. In addition, we will be better positioned to assess the meaning of some of the more dramatic changes that have occurred recently in American family life.

Finally, on a more personal level, you can better understand your own genealogies and family histories by recognizing the shifting stage on which they were played out.

### The Colonial Era

The colonial era is marked by differences among cultures, family roles, customs, and traditions. These families were the original crucible from which our contemporary families were formed.

### Native American Families

The greatest diversity in American family life probably existed during our country’s earliest years, when 2 million Native Americans inhabited what is now the United States and Canada. There were more than 240 groups with distinct family and kinship patterns. Many groups were **patrilineal**: rights and property flowed from the father. Others, such as the Zuni and Hopi in the Southwest and the Iroquois in the Northeast, were **matrilineal**: rights and property descended from the mother.

Native American families tended to share certain characteristics, although it is easy to overgeneralize. Most families were small. There was a high child mortality rate, and mothers breastfed their infants; during breastfeeding, mothers abstained from sexual intercourse.

Children were often born in special birth huts. As they grew older, the young were rarely physically disciplined. Instead, they were taught by example. Their families praised them when they were good and publicly shamed them when they were bad. Children began working at an early stage. Their play, such as hunting or playing with dolls, was modeled on adult activities. Ceremonies and rituals marked transitions into adulthood. Girls underwent puberty ceremonies at first menstruation. For boys, events such as growing the first tooth and killing the first large animal when hunting signified stages of growing up. A vision quest often marked the transition to manhood.

### Reflections

**How far back** can you trace your family's history? What would you like to know about it? What values, traits, or memories do you wish to pass on to your descendants?

Marriage took place early for girls, usually between 12 and 15 years; for boys, it took place between 15 and 20 years. Some tribes arranged marriages; others permitted young men and women to choose their partners.

Most groups were monogamous, although some allowed two wives. Some tribes permitted men to have sexual relations outside of marriage when their wives were pregnant or breastfeeding.

### Colonial Families

From earliest colonial times, America has been an ethnically diverse country. In the houses of Boston, the mansions and slave quarters of Charleston, the mansions of New Orleans, the haciendas of Santa Fe, and the Hopi dwellings of Oraibi (the oldest continuously inhabited place in the United States, dating back to A.D. 1150), American families have provided emotional and economic support for their members.

**THE FAMILY.** Colonial America was initially settled by waves of explorers, soldiers, traders, pilgrims, servants, prisoners, farmers, and slaves. In 1565, in St. Augustine, Florida, the Spanish established the first permanent European settlement in what is now the United States. But the members of these first groups came as single men—as explorers, soldiers, and exploiters.

In 1620, the leaders of the Jamestown colony in Virginia, hoping to promote greater stability, began im-

porting English women to be sold in marriage. The European colonists who came to America attempted to replicate their familiar family system. This system, strongly influenced by Christianity, emphasized **patriarchy** (rule by father or eldest male), the subordination of women, sexual restraint, and family-centered production.

The family was basically an economic and social institution, the primary unit for producing most goods and caring for the needs of its members. The family planted and harvested food, made clothes, provided shelter, and cared for the necessities of life.

As a social unit, the family reared children and cared for the sick, infirm, and aged. Its responsibilities included teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic because there were few schools. The family was also responsible for religious instruction: it was to join in prayer, read scripture, and teach the principles of religion.

Unlike New Englanders, the planter aristocracy that came to dominate the Southern colonies did not give high priority to family life; hunting, entertaining, and politics provided the greatest pleasure. The planter aristocracy continued to idealize gentry ways until the Civil War destroyed the slave system upon which the planters based their wealth.

**MARITAL CHOICE.** Romantic love was not a factor in choosing a partner; one practical seventeenth-century marriage manual advised women that “this boiling affection is seldom worth anything” (Fraser 1984). Because marriage had profound economic and social consequences, parents often selected their children’s mates. In the seventeenth century, 8 of the 13 colonies had laws *requiring parental approval* and imposed sanctions as harsh as imprisonment or whipping on men who “insinuated” themselves into a woman’s affections without her parents’ approval (Coontz 2005). Even in instances without such restrictions, in which individuals were “free to choose,” children rarely went against their parents’ wishes. If parents disapproved, their children typically gave up out of fear of the social and financial consequences of defying their parents (Coontz 2005). Love was not irrelevant but came after marriage. It was a person’s duty to love his or her spouse. The inability to desire and love a marriage partner was considered a defect of character.

Although the Puritans prohibited premarital intercourse, they were not entirely successful. **Bundling**, the New England custom in which a young man and

woman spent the night in bed together, separated by a wooden bundling board, provided a courting couple with privacy; it did not, however, encourage restraint. An estimated one-third of all marriages in the eighteenth century took place with the bride pregnant (Smith and Hindus 1975).

**FAMILY LIFE.** The colonial family was strictly patriarchal, and such paternal authority was reinforced by both the church and the community (Mintz 2004). Steven Mintz describes the range of fathers' influence (2004, 13). Fathers were

responsible for leading their households in daily prayers and scripture reading, catechizing their children and servants, and teaching household members to read so that they might study the Bible. . . . Childrearing manuals were thus addressed to men, not their wives. They had an obligation to help their sons find a vocation or calling, and a legal right to consent to their children's marriage. Massachusetts Bay Colony and Connecticut underscored the importance of paternal authority by making it a capital offense (that is, punishable by death) for youths sixteen or older to curse or strike their father.

The authority of the husband/father rested in his control of land and property. In an agrarian society such as colonial America, land was the most precious resource. The manner in which the father decided to dispose of his land affected his relationships with his children. In many cases, children were given land adjacent to the father's farm, but the title did not pass into their hands until the father died. This power gave fathers control over their children's marital choices and kept them geographically close.

This strongly rooted patriarchy called for wives to submit to their husbands. The wife was not an equal but was a helpmate. This subordination was reinforced by traditional religious doctrine. Like her children, the colonial wife was economically dependent on her husband. Upon marriage, she transferred to her husband many rights she had held as a single woman, such as the right to inherit or sell property, to conduct business, and to attend court.

For women, marriage marked the beginning of a constant cycle of childbearing and childrearing. On average, colonial women had six children and were consistently bearing children until around age 40. In addition to their maternal responsibilities, colonial

women were expected to do a wide range of chores from cooking and cleaning to spinning, sewing, gardening, keeping chickens, and even brewing beer. (Mintz and Kellogg 1988).

**CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE.** The colonial conception of childhood was radically different from ours. First, children were believed to be evil by nature. The community accepted the traditional Christian doctrine that children were conceived and born in sin.

Second, childhood did not represent a period of life radically different from adulthood. Such a conception is distinctly modern (Aries 1962; Meckel 1984; Vann 1982). In colonial times, a child was regarded as a small adult. From the time children were 6 or 7 years old, they began to be part of the adult world, participating in adult work and play.

Third, children between the ages 7 and 12 were often "bound out" or "fostered" as apprentices or domestic servants (Mintz 2004). They lived in the home of a relative or stranger where they learned a trade or skill, were educated, and were properly disciplined. **Adolescence**—the separate life stage between childhood and adulthood—did not exist. They went from a shorter childhood (than what we are accustomed to) to adulthood (Mintz and Kellogg 1988; Mintz 2004). Thus, our contemporary notions of a rebellious life stage filled with inner conflicts, youthful indiscretions, and developmental crises do not fit well with the historical record of Plymouth Colony (Demos 1970; Mintz 2004).

### African American Families

In 1619, a Dutch man-of-war docked at Jamestown in need of supplies. Within its cargo were 20 Africans who had been captured from a Portuguese slaver. The captain quickly sold his captives as indentured servants. Among those first Africans was a woman known by the English as Isabella and a man known as Antony; their African names are lost. In Jamestown, Antony and Isabella married. After several years, Isabella gave birth to William Tucker, the first African American child born in what is today the United States. William's birth marked the beginning of the African American family, a unique family system that largely grew out of the African adjustment to slavery in America. By 1664, when the British gained what had been Dutch governed New Amsterdam, 40% of the colony's population consisted of African slaves.



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■ *Strong family ties endured in enslaved African American families. The extended family, important in West African cultures, continued to be a source of support and stability.*

During the seventeenth and much of the eighteenth centuries, enslaved Africans and their descendants faced difficulty forming and maintaining families. It was hard for men, who often outnumbered women 60% to 40% or worse, to find wives. Enslaved African Americans were more successful in continuing the traditional African emphasis on the extended family, in which aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents played important roles. Although slaves were legally prohibited from marrying, they created their own marriages.

Childhood experience was often bitter and harsh. It was common for children to be separated from their parents because of a sale, a repayment of a debt, or a plantation owner's decision to transfer slaves from one property to another (Mintz 2004). Despite the hardships placed on them, enslaved Africans and African Americans developed strong emotional bonds and family ties. Slave culture discouraged casual sexual relationships and placed a high value on marital stability. On the large plantations, most enslaved people lived in two-parent families with their children. To maintain family identity, parents named their children after themselves or other relatives or gave them African names. In the harsh slave system, the family provided strong support against the daily indignities of servitude. As time went on, the developing African American family blended West African and English family traditions (McAdoo 1996).

## Nineteenth-Century Marriages and Families

In the nineteenth century, the traditional colonial family form gradually vanished and was replaced by the modern family.

### Industrialization and the Shattering of the Old Family

In the nineteenth century, the industrialization of the United States transformed the face of America. It also transformed American families from self-sufficient farm families to wage-earning, increasingly urban families. As factories began producing gigantic harvesters, combines, and tractors, significantly fewer farm workers were needed. Looking for employment, workers migrated to the cities, where they found employment in the ever-expanding factories and businesses. Because goods were now bought rather than made in the home, the family began its shift from being primarily a production unit to being more of a consumer- and service-oriented unit. With this shift, a radically new **division of labor** arose in the family. Men began working outside the home in factories or offices for wages they then used to purchase the family's necessities and other goods. Men became identified as the family's sole provider or breadwinner. Their work was given higher

status than women's work because it was paid in wages. Men's work began to be increasingly identified as "real" work, distinct from the unpaid domestic work done by women.

### Marriage and Families Transformed

Without its central importance as a work unit, and less and less the source of other important societal functions (for example, education, religious worship, protection, and recreation), the family became the focus and abode of feelings. The emotional support and well-being of adults and the care and nurturing of the young became the two most important family responsibilities.

**THE POWER OF LOVE.** This new affectionate foundation of marriage brought love to the foreground.

Love as the basis of marriage represented the triumph of individual preference over family, social, or group considerations. Stephanie Coontz reports that "By the middle of the nineteenth century there was near unanimity in the middle and upper classes throughout western Europe and North America that the love-based marriage, in which the wife stayed home and was protected and supported by her husband, was a recipe for heaven on earth" (Coontz 2005, 162).

Women now had a new degree of power: they were able to choose whom they would marry. Women could rule out undesirable partners during courtship; they could choose mates with whom they believed they would be compatible. Mutual esteem, friendship, and confidence became guiding ideals. Without love, marriages were considered empty shells.

**CHANGING ROLES FOR WOMEN.** The two most important family roles for middle-class women in the nineteenth century were that of housewife and mother. As there was a growing emphasis on domesticity in family life, the role of housewife increased in significance and status. Home was the center of life, and the housewife was responsible for making family life a source of fulfillment for everyone. For many women, especially middle class, this "doctrine of separate spheres" was wholeheartedly accepted and enthusiastically embraced (Coontz 2005).

Women also increasingly focused their identities on motherhood. The nineteenth century witnessed the most dramatic decline in fertility in American history. Between 1800 and 1900, fertility dropped by 50%. Where at the beginning of the nineteenth century American mothers typically gave birth to between 7

and 10 children, beginning "in her early twenties and (giving birth) every two years or so until menopause," by 1900 the average number of births had fallen to just 3 (Mintz 2004).

Women reduced their childbearing by insisting that they, not men, control the frequency of intercourse. Childrearing rather than childbearing became one of the most important aspects of a woman's life. Having fewer children, and having them in the early years of marriage, allowed more time to concentrate on mothering and opened the door to greater participation in the world outside the family. This outside participation manifested itself in women's heavy involvement in abolition, prohibition, and women's emancipation movements.

**CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE.** A strong emphasis was placed on children as part of the new conception of the family. A belief in childhood innocence replaced the idea of childhood corruption. A new sentimentality surrounded the child, who was now viewed as born in total innocence. Protecting children from experiencing or even knowing about the evils of the world became a major part of childrearing.

The nineteenth century also witnessed the beginning of adolescence. In contrast to colonial youths, who participated in the adult world of work and other activities, nineteenth-century adolescents were kept economically dependent and separate from adult activities and often felt apprehensive when they entered the adult world. This apprehension sometimes led to the emotional conflicts associated with adolescent identity crises.

Education also changed as schools, rather than families, became responsible for teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic, as well as educating students about ideas and values. Conflicts between the traditional beliefs of the family and those of the impersonal school were inevitable. At school, the child's peer group increased in importance.

### The African American Family: Slavery and Freedom

Although there were large numbers of free African Americans—100,000 in the North and Midwest and 150,000 in the South—most of what we know about the African American family before the Civil War is limited to the slave family.

**THE SLAVE FAMILY.** By the nineteenth century, the slave family had already lost much of its African heritage. Under slavery, the African American family lacked two

key factors that helped give free African American and Caucasian families stability: autonomy and economic importance. Slave marriages were not recognized as legal. Final authority rested with the owner in all decisions about the lives of slaves. The separation of families was a common occurrence, spreading grief and despair among thousands of slaves. Furthermore, slave families worked for their masters, not themselves. It was impossible for the slave husband/father to become the provider for his family. The slave women worked in the fields beside the men. When an enslaved woman was pregnant, her owner determined her care during pregnancy and her relation to her infant after birth.

Slave children endured deep and lasting deprivation. Often shoeless, sometimes without underwear or adequate clothing, hungry, underfed and undernourished, and forced into hard physical labor as young as age 5 or 6, slave children suffered considerably. Rates of illness and death in infancy and childhood were high. Furthermore, family life was fragile and often disrupted. Steven Mintz reports that separation of children from parents, especially fathers, was so common that at least half of all enslaved children experienced life separate from their father, because he died, lived on another plantation, or was a white man who declined to acknowledge that they were his children. By their late teens, either temporary or permanent separation from their parents was something virtually all slave children had suffered (Mintz 2004).

Still, it is important to reiterate that slavery did not destroy all aspects of slave families. Despite the intense oppression and hardship to which they were subjected, many slaves displayed resilience and survived by relying on their families and by adapting their family system to the conditions of their lives (Mintz and Kellogg 1988). This included, for example, relying on extended kinship networks and, where necessary, on unrelated adults to serve as surrogates for parents absent because of the forced breakup of families.

Furthermore, enslavement did not forever destroy the African American family system. In no way does saying this diminish the horrors of slavery. Instead, it acknowledges the resilience of those who survived enslavement, and it illustrates how family systems may be pivotal sources of support and key mechanisms of surviving even the most extraordinary distress.

**AFTER FREEDOM.** When freedom came, the formerly enslaved African American families had strong emotional ties and traditions forged from slavery and from their

West African heritage (Guttman 1976; Lantz 1980). Because they were now legally able to marry, thousands of former slaves formally renewed their vows. The first year or so after freedom was marked by what was called “the traveling time,” in which African Americans traveled up and down the South looking for lost family members who had been sold. Relatively few families were reunited, although many continued the search well into the 1880s.

African American families remained poor, tied to the land, and segregated. Despite poverty and continued exploitation, the Southern African American family usually consisted of both parents and their children. Extended kin continued to be important.

### Immigration: The Great Transformation

**THE OLD AND NEW IMMIGRANTS.** In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, great waves of immigration swept over America. Between 1820 and 1920, 38 million immigrants came to the United States. Historians commonly divided them into “old” immigrants and “new” immigrants. The old immigrants, who came between 1830 and 1890, were mostly from western and northern Europe. During this period, Chinese also immigrated in large numbers to the West Coast. The new



National Park Service: Statue of Liberty National Monument

■ *Except for Native Americans, most of us have ancestors who came to America—voluntarily or involuntarily. Between 1820 and 1920, more than 38 million immigrants came to the United States.*



immigrants, who came from eastern and southern Europe, began to arrive in great numbers between 1890 and 1914 (when World War I virtually stopped all immigration).

Japanese also immigrated to the West Coast and Hawaii during this time. Today, Americans can trace their roots to numerous ethnic groups.

As the United States expanded its frontiers, surviving Native Americans were incorporated. The United States acquired its first Latino population when it annexed Texas, California, New Mexico, and part of Arizona after its victory over Mexico in 1848.

**THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE.** Most immigrants were uprooted; they left only when life in the old country became intolerable. The decision to leave their homeland was never easy. It was a choice between life and death and meant leaving behind ancient ties.

Most immigrants arrived in America without skills. Although most came from small villages, they soon found themselves in the concrete cities of America. Again, families were key ingredients in overcoming and surviving extreme hardship. Because families and friends kept in close contact even when separated by vast oceans, immigrants seldom left their native countries without knowing where they were going—to the ethnic neighborhoods of New York, Chicago, Boston, San Francisco, Vancouver, and other cities. There they spoke their own tongues, practiced their own religions, and ate their customary foods. In these cities, immigrants created great economic wealth for America by providing cheap labor to fuel growing industries.

In America, kinship groups were central to the immigrants' experience and survival. Passage money was sent to their relatives at home, information was exchanged about where to live and find work, families sought solace by clustering together in ethnic neighborhoods, and informal networks exchanged information about employment locally and in other areas.

The family economy, critical to immigrant survival, was based on cooperation among family members. For most immigrant families, as for African American families, the middle-class idealization of motherhood and childhood was a far cry from reality. Because of low industrial wages, many immigrant families could survive only by pooling their resources and sending mothers to work and even sending their children to work in the mines, mills, and factories.

Most groups experienced hostility. Crime, vice, and immorality were attributed to the newly arrived ethnic groups; ethnic slurs became part of everyday par-

lance. Strong activist groups arose to prohibit immigration and promote "Americanism." Literacy tests required immigrants to be able to read at least 30 words in English. In the early 1920s, severe quotas were enacted that slowed immigration to a trickle.

It is interesting to note what crucial roles families played in enabling people to survive the oppression of enslavement, the difficulties of immigration, and the impoverishment induced by industrialization.

### Reflections

*As you read* through these historical perspectives, what are your feelings about such struggles and triumphs? How does knowledge of your family history affect you, your values, and your behavior?

## Twentieth-Century Marriages and Families

### The Rise of Companionate Marriages: 1900-1960

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the functions of American middle-class families had been dramatically altered from earlier times. Families had lost many of their traditional economic, educational, and welfare functions. Food and goods were produced outside the family, children were educated in public schools, and the poor, aged, and infirm were increasingly cared for by public agencies and hospitals. The primary focus of the family was becoming even more centered on meeting the emotional needs of its members. In time, cultural emphasis would shift from self-sacrificing familism to more self-centered individualism, and individuals' sense of their connections and obligations to their families would be greatly transformed.

**THE NEW COMPANIONATE FAMILY.** Beginning in the 1920s, a new ideal family form was beginning to emerge that rejected the "old" family based on male authority and sexual repression. This new family form was based on the **companionate marriage**.

There were four major features of this companionate family (Mintz and Kellogg 1988): (1) Men and women were to share household decision making and tasks. (2) Marriages were expected to provide romance, sexual fulfillment, and emotional growth. (3) Wives were no longer expected to be guardians of virtue and sexual restraint. (4) Children were no longer to be

protected from the world but were to be given greater freedom to explore and experience the world; they were to be treated more democratically and encouraged to express their feelings.

### Through the Depression and World Wars

The history of twentieth-century family life cannot be told without considering how profoundly family roles and relationships were affected by the Great Depression and two world wars. Although many different connections could be drawn, two seem particularly significant: changes in the relationship between the family and the wider society and changes in women's and men's roles in and outside of the family.

**LINKING PUBLIC AND PRIVATE LIFE.** The economic crisis during the Depression was staggering in its scope. Unemployment jumped from less than 3 million in 1929 to more than 12 million in 1932, and the rate of unemployment rose from 3.2% to 23.6%.

Over that same span of time, average family income dropped 40% (Mintz and Kellogg 1988). To cope with this economic disaster, families turned inward, modifying their spending, increasing the numbers of wage earners to include women and children, and pooling their incomes. Often it was a broadened "inward" to

which they turned, because people often took in relatives or relied on kinship ties for economic assistance (Mintz and Kellogg 1988).

Ultimately, these more personal, intrafamilial efforts proved insufficient. President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal social programs attempted to respond to the social and economic despair that more localized efforts were unable to alleviate. Farm relief, rural electrification, Social Security, and a variety of social welfare provisions were all implemented in the hope of doing what local communities and individual families could not. Such federal initiatives reflected a dramatic ideological shift wherein government now bore responsibility for the lives and well-being of families (Mintz and Kellogg 1988).

Precipitated by the mass entrance into the workforce of millions of previously unemployed women, including many with young children, there was a clear need and opportunity for public resources to be committed to childcare. Unfortunately, the federal government's response was slow and inadequate given the sudden and dramatic increase in need and demand (Filene 1986; Mintz and Kellogg 1988; Mintz 2004). Most mothers who entered the labor force had to rely on neighbors and grandparents to provide childcare. When such supports were unavailable, many had no choice but to turn their children into "latch-key" kids



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■ During World War II women were urged to enter the labor force and especially to enter nontraditional occupations left vacant by the deployment of men overseas. The images here illustrate the kinds of messages women received and the kinds of jobs they helped fill.

fending for themselves (Mintz 2004). Unlike some of our European allies who invested more heavily in policies and services to accommodate employed mothers (Mintz and Kellogg 1988), it took the federal government 2 years to “appropriate funds to build and staff day-care centers, and the funds were sufficient for only one-tenth of the children who needed them” (Filene 1986). Despite having engineered a propaganda campaign to entice women into jobs vacated by the 16 million men who entered the service, the government remained ambivalent about welcoming mothers of young children into those positions. However inadequate or slow their efforts were, they were still more ambitious than what followed for most of the rest of the century.

**GENDER CRISES: THE GREAT DEPRESSION AND WORLD WARS.** Both the Depression and the two world wars (especially World War II) reveal much about the gender foundation on which twentieth-century families rested. During the Depression, it was men whose gender identities and family statuses were threatened by their lost status as providers. During each world war, women were the ones who faced challenges that required them to abandon their gender socialization and step into roles and situations that fell outside their traditional familial roles. In each instance, the familial gender roles and identities had to be altered to match extraordinary circumstances.

What is especially striking about men’s reactions to their job loss is their internalization of fault for what was a society-wide economic crisis. Given how widespread unemployment was, we might think that men would take some comfort in knowing that the predicaments they faced were not of their own making. Yet they had so deeply internalized their sense of themselves as providers that their identities, family statuses, and sense of manhood were all invested in wage earning and providing. When unable to provide, many men were deeply shaken. Some were even driven to the point of emotional breakdown or suicide by their sense of economic failure (Filene 1986).

For many families, survival depended on the efforts of wives or the combination of women’s earnings, children’s earnings, assistance from kin, or some kind of public assistance. For those who depended at least somewhat on women’s earnings, there were other gender consequences of running the household. Sometimes, men were pressed by their wives to contribute domestically in the women’s “absence.” Although some did, many others resisted (Filene 1986). Sometimes

women displayed ambivalence about the meaning of male unemployment and male housework. Whereas 80% of the women who were surveyed in 1939 by the *Ladies’ Home Journal* thought an unemployed husband should do the domestic work in the absence of his employed wife, 60% reported they would lose respect for men whose wives out-earned them (Filene 1986).

If the Depression illustrates male anxiety about their familial roles as providers, we see in women’s experiences during World Wars I and II that gender crises were not limited to men. Both wars share that, in the absence of millions of men, women were pressed to step into their vacant shoes and participate in wartime production. During World War I, 1.5 million women entered the wartime labor force, many in jobs previously held largely by men (Filene 1986). During World War II, the number of employed women rose dramatically. Between 1941 and 1945, the numbers of employed women increased by more than 6 million to a wartime high of 19 million (Degler 1980; Lindsey 1997). Furthermore, “nearly half of all American women held a job at some time during the war” (Mintz and Kellogg 1988). Whereas single women had long worked, and poor or minority women had worked even after marriage, the biggest change in women’s labor force participation during World War II was among married, middle-class women. Thus, despite the strong and widely held cultural emphasis on the special nurturing role of women and the belief that the home was a woman’s “proper place,” American society needed women to take over for the absent men.

Once enticed into nontraditional female employment, women received both material and nonmaterial benefits that were hard for many to surrender once the war ended and men returned.

Materially, women in traditionally male occupations received higher wages than they had in their past, more sex-segregated work experiences. As important, they also found a sense of gratification and enhanced self-esteem that were often missing from the jobs they were more accustomed to. However reluctant they may have been to take on such work, many were clearly more than a little ambivalent to leave it.

To assist women in their departures from these jobs, pro-family rhetoric and a new ideology extolling the value and importance of women’s roles as mothers and caregivers were broadly conveyed by a variety of sources (for example, popular media, social workers, and educators).

## Families of the 1950s

In the long history of American family life, no other decade has come to symbolize so much about that history, despite actually representing relatively little of it. (Mintz and Kellogg 1988; Coontz 1997). In many ways, the 1950s appear to be a period of unmatched family stability. Marriage and birthrates were unusually high, divorce rates were uncharacteristically low, and the economy enabled many to buy houses with only one wage-earning spouse.

During the 1950s, marriage and family seemed to be central to American lives. It was a time of youthful marriages, increased birthrates, and a stable divorce rate. Most families were comprised of male breadwinners and female homemakers. Traditional gender and marital roles mostly prevailed. Man's place was in the world and woman's place was in the home. Women were expected to place motherhood first and to sacrifice their opportunities for outside advancement to ensure the success of their husbands and the well-being of their children.

Given the meaning often invested in this era, it is important to understand that the 1950s were unique. Compared with both what came before and what followed, families of the 1950s were exceptional. This is important: It means that anyone who uses this decade as a baseline against which to compare more recent trends in such family characteristics as birth, marriage, or divorce rates starts with a faulty assumption about how representative it is of American family history. Looking at those same trends with a longer view reveals that the changes that followed the 1950s were more consistent with some patterns evident in the nineteenth and earlier part of the twentieth century (Mintz and Kellogg 1988).

For example, the trend since the Civil War had been an increase in the divorce rate of about 3% per decade until the 1950s. During the 1950s, the divorce rate increased less than in any other decade of the twentieth century. Similarly, after more than 100 years of declining birthrates and shrinking family sizes, during the 1950s "women of childbearing age bore more children, spaced . . . closer together, and had them earlier and faster" than had previous generations (Mintz and Kellogg 1988). After all, this was the height of the baby boom; married couples had more children than either those that preceded them or those that followed.

Much familial experience of the 1950s was created and sustained by the unprecedented economic growth and prosperity of the postwar economy (Coontz 1997).

The combination of suburbanization and economic prosperity, supplemented by governmental assistance to veterans, allowed many married couples to achieve the middle-class family dream of home ownership while raising their children under the loving attention of full-time caregiving mothers. We must be careful, though, not to oversimplify family experience of the 1950s. Americans did not all benefit equally from the economic prosperity and opportunity of the decade. Thus, overgeneralizations would leave out the experiences of poor and working-class families and racial minorities for whom neither full-time mothering nor home ownership were commonplace (Coontz 1997). In addition, many women found that the ideal lifestyle of the period left them longing for something more (Friedan 1963).

When we look at family changes that occurred in subsequent decades, we need to recognize that economic factors, again, were among the most important determinants of some more dramatic departures from the 1950s model. This especially pertains to the emergence of the dual-earner household. As Stephanie Coontz points out, "By the mid-1970s, maintaining the prescribed family lifestyle meant for many couples giving up the prescribed family form. They married later, postponed children, and curbed their fertility; the wives went out to work" (Coontz 1997). They did this not in rejection of the family lifestyle of the 1950s but in the pursuit of central features of that lifestyle, such as home ownership.

## Aspects of Contemporary Marriages and Families

The remaining 12 chapters of this book look closely at families of the latter decades of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century. The characteristics displayed by these families did not emerge suddenly but were established over years. Beginning with the latter years of the 1950s and escalating through and then beyond the 1960s and 1970s, some striking family trends surfaced. These trends persisted through and beyond the end of the twentieth century, leaving marriages and families reshaped and the meaning and experience of family life significantly altered.

Birthrates dropped, people delayed and departed marriage as almost never before, and individuals increasingly were drawn to cohabitation. The median age for marriage began to climb in the 1960s, by 1996 reaching the highest it had been in more than 100 years. Even after a slight drop in the last few years of

the 1990s, the age at entering first marriage climbed more in the first years of this century and remains 4 years older for men and nearly 5 years for women than the 1960 ages (Table 3.1).

Marriage and divorce rates rose and fell, the prevalence of cohabitation substantially increased, and birthrates dropped. But even across this shorter historical span family trends are not linear; they go up

and then drop (Table 3.2). Thus, it appears that, even in the short term, the only constant in family life is change (Mintz and Kellogg 1988).

Although the trends shown in Tables 3.2 and 3.3 are not the only dimensions of family life that have seen major change, they are important indicators that the family is a dynamic institution. Such trends are also often the sources of much controversy over their larger meaning. The debates about what is happening to family life in the United States that we depicted in Chapter 1 often focus on these very swings. It is obvious that such trends depict change, but what is less clear is what those changes say about the vitality of the family.

As we noted, some argue that changes such as these are worrisome signs of family decline (Popenoe 1993). With fewer people marrying, more people divorcing, and more people living together or by themselves outside of marriage, the importance of the family—as reflected in the stability or desirability of marriage—appears to be declining, and the future of family life

**Table 3.1 ■ Median Age at First Marriage, 1960-2003**

Year	Males (age)	Females (age)
1960	22.8	20.3
1970	23.2	20.8
1980	24.7	22.0
1990	26.1	23.9
2000	26.8	25.1
2003	27.1	25.3

SOURCE: Fields 2003.

**Table 3.2 ■ Couples and Children: 1970-2000**

	1970	1980	1990	2000
Married couples	44,728,000	49,112,000	52,317,000	55,311,000
Married couples with children	25,541,000	24,961,000	24,537,000	25,248,000
Percentage of all married couples with children	57%	51%	47%	46%
Unmarried couple households	523,000	1,589,000	2,856,000	4,486,000
Unmarried couples with children	196,000	431,000	891,000	1,563,000
Children living with two parents	59,681,000	47,543,000	46,820,000	49,688,000
Children living with one parent	8,426,000	12,349,000	15,842,000	19,227,000
Births to unmarried women	399,000	666,000	1,165,000	1,308,000
As percentage of all births	11%	18%	28%	33%

SOURCES: U.S. Census Bureau 2000, Table 77; Jason Fields 2002; National Vital Statistics Reports 2001; Fields and Casper 2000.

**Table 3.3 ■ Trends in Marriages, Divorces, and Births: 1970-2005**

	1970	1980	1990	2000	2005
Marriages	2,159,000	2,390,000	2,443,000	2,329,000	2,230,000
Marriage rate	10.6%	10.6%	9.8%	8.5%	7.4%
Divorces	708,000	1,189,000	1,182,000	1,135,000	NA
Divorce rate	2.2%	3.5%	5.2%	4.7%	3.7%
Births	3,731,000	3,612,000	4,158,000	4,063,000	4,143,000
Birth rate*	18.4%	15.9%	16.7%	14.5%	14.0%

SOURCES: U.S. Census Bureau 2002; Munson and Sutton, National Center for Health Statistics, 2005.

NA means data not available.

\*Rate per 1,000 people.

is in some doubt. Others take the more liberal position that change is not a bad thing and that with these changes come more choices for people about the kinds of families they wish to create and experience (Mintz and Kellogg 1988; Coontz 1997). Certainly, today's families do reflect considerable diversity of structure. In painting a picture of today's families, we would include many categories: breadwinner–homemaker families with children, two-earner couples with children, single-parent households with children, marriages without children, cohabiting couples with or without children, blended families, role-reversed marriages, and gay and lesbian couples with or without children.

Whereas American families have from their beginnings been diverse entities, with varying cultural and economic backgrounds (Mintz and Kellogg 1988), what distinguishes contemporary families is the diversity represented by the range and spread of people across these varying chosen lifestyles.

## Factors Promoting Change

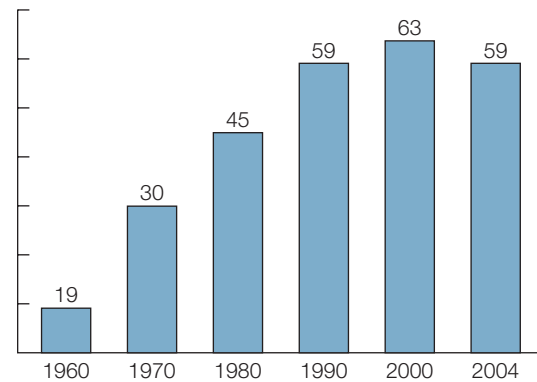
Marriages and families are shaped by a number of different forces in society. In looking over the major changes to American families, we can identify four important factors that initiated these changes: (1) economic changes, (2) technological innovations, (3) demographics, and (4) gender roles and opportunities for women.

### Economic Changes

As noted earlier, over time, the family has moved from being an economically productive unit to a consuming, service-oriented unit. Where families once met most needs of their members—including providing food, clothing, household goods, and occasionally surplus crops that it bartered or marketed—most of today's families must purchase what they need.

Economic factors have been responsible for major changes in the familial roles played by women and men. Inflation, economic hardship, and an expanding economy have led to married women entering the labor force in unprecedented numbers. Even women with preschool-aged children are typically employed outside the home (Figure 3.1). As a result, the dual-earner marriage and the employed mother have become commonplace features of contemporary families. As women have increased their participation in the

Figure 3.1 ■ Percentage of Married Women Employed outside the Home Who Have Children 6 Years Old or Younger



SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau 2006: Table 586.

paid labor force, other familial changes have occurred. For instance, women are less economically dependent on either men or marriage. This provides them greater legitimacy in attempts to exercise marital power. It has also increased the tension around the division of household chores and raised anxiety and uncertainty over who will care for children.

### Technological Innovations

Before you read further, stop and think about how your family routines and relationships are affected by various technological innovations and devices. Can you imagine how your family experiences would be different *without* these devices? You may be wondering what things we're talking about. Consider this: The family has been affected by most major innovations in technology—from automobiles, telephones, cell phones, televisions, DVD players, and microwaves to personal computers and the Internet. These devices were not designed or invented to transform families but to improve transportation, enhance communication, expand choices and quality of entertainment, and maximize efficiency. Nevertheless, they have had major repercussions in how family life is experienced.

For example, older devices such as automobiles and telephones, as well as more recent innovations such as personal computers, have aided families in maintaining contact across greater distances, thus allowing extended families to sustain closer relations and nuclear family members to stay available to one another through school- and job-related travel or relocation.

## Issues and Insights Contemporary Patterns of Marriage and Family Life



Before we begin examining marriages and families in detail, consider some changes that have occurred over the past 4 decades, sparking so much debate.

- **Cohabitation.** In its technical sense, **cohabitation** refers to individuals sharing living arrangements in an intimate relationship, whether these individuals are married or unmarried. In common usage, however, cohabitation refers to relationships in which unmarried individuals share living quarters and are sexually involved. (*Cohabitation and living together* are often used interchangeably.) A cohabiting relationship may be similar to marriage in many of its functions and roles, but it does not have equivalent legal sanctions or rights. Cohabitation has increased dramatically over the past 40 years. In addition to the almost 5 million heterosexual couples, there are an additional 600,000 to 1 million-plus same-sex couples living together outside of marriage.
- **Marriage.** A combination of factors including the women's movement, shifting demographics, family policy, and changing values, particularly as they relate to sexuality, have altered the meaning of marriage and the role it plays in people's lives. Still, between 80% and 90% of young unmarried women and men *will marry* at least once in their lifetimes.
- **Separation and divorce.** Separation occurs when two married people

no longer live together. It may or may not lead to divorce. Many more people separate than divorce. Divorce is the legal dissolution of a marriage. Over the last 50 years, divorce has changed the face of marriage and the family in America. At present, among adults 18 and over, there are nearly 20 million who are divorced. The divorce rate is two to three times what it was for our parents and grandparents.

Slightly less than half of all those who marry will divorce within 7 years.

These trends in prevalence of divorce have led to what might be considered "the normalization of divorce." Divorce has become so widespread that many scholars view it as one variation of the normal life course of American marriages (Coontz 1997). The high divorce rate does not indicate that Americans devalue marriage, however. Paradoxically, Americans may divorce because they value marriage so highly. If a marriage does not meet their standards, they divorce to marry again. They hope that their second marriages will fulfill the expectations that their first marriages failed to meet (Furstenberg and Spanier 1987).

- **Remarriages, stepfamilies, and single-parent families.** Contemporary divorce patterns are largely responsible for three related versions of American marriages and families: single-parent families, remarriages, and stepfamilies. Because of their widespread incidence, these variations are becoming part of our normal marriage and family patterns.
- **Single-parent families.** As many as one out of six U.S. households consist of single mothers or single

fathers and their dependent children. Single-parent households represented 32% of all households with children under 18. Most such households are created by divorce, but some are the product of non-marital births, widowerhood, or widowhood. There were 12.4 million single-parent households in the United States in 2003; 18% (2.3 million) were male-headed households and 82% were female-headed families. Of note, important differences can be observed between single-father-headed and single-mother-headed households in terms of standard of living, numbers of children, and marital histories (Fields 2003).

- **Remarriage.** Half of all recent marriages are remarriages for at least one partner (Coleman, Ganong, and Fine 2000). Most individuals who divorce tend to remarry. Rates differ between men and women and across different ethnic groups. Those who remarry are usually older, have more experience in both life and work, and have different expectations than those who marry for the first time. Remarriages also may create stepfamilies. When remarriages include children, a person may become not only a husband or a wife but also a stepfather or a stepmother.
- **Stepfamilies.** An estimated one-third of children will reside in a stepfamily household before reaching adulthood (Coleman et al. 2000). Ironically, despite the hopes and experience of those who remarry, their divorce rate is at least as much as that of those who marry for the first time.

The proliferation of automobiles also altered the residential and relationship experiences of many Americans, making it possible for people to live greater distances from where they work—thus contributing to the suburbanization of America—and to experience premarital relationships away from more watchful adult supervision.

Televisions, and more recently the Internet, have altered the recreation and socialization activities in which families engage, with both beneficial and negative consequences. Sitting and watching television programs together gives family members the opportunity for shared experiences. As important as the entertainment function of both television and the Internet are, they also operate as additional socialization agents, beyond parents and other relatives.

What we watch on television, or view and read on the Internet, helps shape our values and beliefs about the world around us. As shown in a subsequent chapter, the Internet has also greatly expanded our options for meeting potential partners and spouses. Finally, cell phones, e-mail, and instant messaging have altered the ways in which parents monitor children and family members remain in contact with one another.

The range of domestic appliances—from washing machines and dishwashers to microwaves—has altered how the tasks of housework are done. Although we might be tempted to conclude that such devices free people from some time- and labor-intensive burdens associated with maintaining homes, historical research has shown that this is not automatically so. For instance, as technology made it possible to more easily wash clothes, the standards for cleanliness increased. In the case of microwaves, the time needed for tasks associated with meal preparation has been reduced, freeing people to spend more time in other activities (not necessarily as families, and often away from their families—at work, for example).

Finally, revolutions in contraception and biomedical technology have reshaped the meaning and experience of sexuality and parenthood. Much of what we call the “sexual revolution” in the 1970s and beyond was fueled partly by safer and more certain methods of preventing pregnancy, such as the birth control pill. Regarding parenthood, people who in the past would have been unable to become parents have the opportunity to enjoy childbearing and rearing as a result of **assisted reproductive technologies**—including medical advances such as in vitro fertilization, as well as

surrogate motherhood and sperm donation. Such developments have thus altered the meaning of parenthood, as multiple individuals may be involved in any single conception, pregnancy, and eventual birth. Sperm and/or egg donors, surrogate mothers, and the parent or parents who nurture and raise the child all can claim in some way to have reared the child in question. Such changes have complicated the social and legal meanings of parenthood as that they have opened the possibility of parenthood to previously infertile couples or same-sex couples.

### Reflections

**As you stop** and think about your family routines and relationships, how much do they seem to be affected by the kinds of technological innovations discussed here? How would your experiences be *without* these devices?

### Demographics

The family has undergone dramatic demographic changes in areas that include family size, life expectancy, divorce, and death. Three important changes have emerged:

- **Increased longevity.** As people live longer, they are experiencing aspects of family life that few experienced before. In colonial times, because of a relatively short life expectancy, husbands and wives could anticipate a marriage lasting 25 years. Today, couples can remain married 50 or 60 years. Today’s couples can anticipate living many years together after their children are grown; they can also look forward to grandparenthood or great-grandparenthood. Since men tend to marry women younger than themselves and on average die younger than women do, American women can anticipate a prolonged period of widowhood.
- **Increased divorce rate.** The increased divorce rate, beginning in the late nineteenth century (even before 1900, the United States had the highest divorce rate in the world), has led to the rise of single-parent families and stepfamilies. In this way, it has dramatically altered the experience of both childhood and parenthood and has altered our expectations of married life.
- **Decreased fertility rate.** As women bear fewer children, they have fewer years of childrearing responsibility.



With fewer children, partners are able to devote more time to each other and expend greater energy on each child. Children from smaller families benefit in a variety of ways from the greater levels of parental attention, although they may lack the advantages of having multiple siblings. From the adults' perspective, smaller families afford women greater opportunity for entering the workforce.

### Gender Roles and Opportunities for Women

Changes in gender roles are the fourth force contributing to alterations in American marriages and families. The history summarized earlier indicated some major changes that took place in women's and men's responsibilities and opportunities. These gender shifts then directly or indirectly led to changes in both the ideology surrounding and the reality confronting families.

The emphasis on childrearing and housework as women's proper duties lasted until World War II, when, as we saw, there was a massive influx of women into factories and stores to replace the men fighting overseas. This initiated a trend in which women increasingly entered the labor force, became less economically dependent on men, and gained greater power in marriage.

The feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s led many women to reexamine their assumptions about women's roles. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* challenged head-on the traditional assumption that women found their greatest fulfillment in being mothers and housewives. The women's movement emerged to challenge the female roles of housewife, helpmate, and mother, appealing to some women as it alienated others.

More recently, the dual-earner marriage made the traditional division of roles an important and open question for women. Today, contemporary women have dramatically different expectations of male-female roles in marriage, childrearing, housework, and the workplace than did their mothers and grandmothers. Changes in marriage, birth, and divorce rates, and in the ages at which people enter marriage, have all been affected by women's enlarged economic roles.

We have also witnessed changes in what men expect and are expected to do in marriage and parenthood. Although it may still be assumed that men will be "good providers," that is no longer enough. Married men face greater pressure to share housework and participate in childcare. Although they have been slow to increase the amount of housework they do, there

has been more acceptance of the idea that greater father involvement benefits both children and fathers. New standards and expectations of paternal behavior and more participation by fathers in raising children help explain the ongoing changes—from how dual-earner households function to why we are more accepting of fathers staying home to care for their young children.

The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that there are 1 million fathers (and 7 million mothers) of children age 15 or younger who were out of the labor force and home full-time for all of 2003. Of these, 160,000 (16%) of the fathers said that the "primary reason" they were home was to care for home and family. Another 45% of the fathers were home because of illness or disability. Among at-home mothers, 6 million of the 7 million (88%) said they were home to care for home and family (Fields 2004). Furthermore, 2 million preschoolers are cared for by their fathers while their mothers are at work. This is more than the numbers cared for by any other noninstitutionalized caregiver (U.S. Census Bureau 2003).

Gender issues are so central to family life that they are the subject of the entire next chapter. It is not an exaggeration to say that we cannot truly understand the family without recognizing the gender roles and differences on which it rests.

### Cultural Changes

We can, in conclusion, point to a shift in American values from an emphasis on obligation and self-sacrifice to individualism and self-gratification (Bellah et al. 1985; Mintz and Kellogg 1998; Coontz 1997). The once strong sense of **familism**, in which individual self-interest was expected to be subordinated to family well-being, has given way to more open and widespread individualism, in which even families can be sacrificed for individual happiness and personal fulfillment.

This shift in values has had consequences for how people weigh and choose among alternative lifestyle paths. For example, complex decisions—about whether and how much to work, whether to stay married or to divorce, how much time and attention to devote to children or to spouses—are increasingly made against a backdrop of pursuing self-gratification and individual happiness. Values alone have not changed families, but such shifts in values have contributed to the choices people make, out of which new family forms predominate (Coontz 1997).

## How Contemporary Families Differ from One Another

The preceding discussion traced some ways families have changed throughout history and why. In that sense, it has led us to family life of today. But today's families differ from one another, a topic we now explore. We look first at economic factors that differentiate families and then at cultural characteristics, social class, and race and ethnicity.

### Economic Variations in Family Life

A **social class** is a category of people who share a common economic position in the stratified (that is, unequal) society in which they live. We typically identify classes using economic indicators such as ownership of property or wealth, amount of income earned, the level of prestige accorded to work, and so forth. Social class has both a structural and a cultural dimension. Structurally, social class reflects the occupations we hold (or depend on), the income and power they give us, and the opportunities they present or deny us. The cultural dimension of social class refers to any class-specific values, attitudes, beliefs, and motivations that distinguish classes from one another. Cultural aspects of social class are somewhat controversial, especially when applied to supposed “cultures of poverty”—an argument holding that poor people become trapped in poverty because of the values they hold and the behaviors in which they engage (Harrington 1962; Lewis 1966). What is unclear regarding “cultures of class” is how much difference there is in the values and beliefs of different classes and whether such differences cause or follow the more structural dimensions that separate one class from another.

To an extent, there is also a psychological aspect to social class. By this we mean the internalization of economic status in the self-images we form and the self-esteem we possess. These may also be seen as consequences of other aspects of class position, such as the self-identity that results from the prestige accorded to work or the respect paid to accomplishments. Like the structural and cultural components of social class, these are brought home and affect our experiences in our families.

The effect of social class is far reaching and deep. In an article about how social class affects marriage,

*New York Times* reporter Tamara Lewin quotes one of her sources, Della Mae Justice, of Piketown, Kentucky. Justice grew up in the coal-mining world of Appalachia, in a house without indoor plumbing. Having put herself through college and later law school, she is now solidly and unambiguously middle class. Justice says, “I think class is everything, I really do. When you're poor and from a low socioeconomic group, you don't have a lot of choices in life. To me, being from an upper class is all about confidence. It's knowing you have choices, knowing you have connections” (Lewin 2005).

Clearly, many facets of our lives (often referred to by sociologists as **life chances**) are affected by our **socioeconomic status**, including our health and well-being, safety, longevity, religiosity, and politics. A host of family experiences also vary up and down the socioeconomic ladder. For instance, class variations can be found in such family characteristics as age at marriage, age at parenthood, timing of marriage and parenthood, division of household labor, ideologies of gender, socialization of children, meanings attached to sexuality and intimacy, and likelihood of violence or divorce.

Conceptualizations of social class vary in how class is defined and how many classes are identified and counted in American society. In some formulations of social class, it is a person's relationship to the means of production that defines class position. In other models, people are grouped into classes because of similar incomes, amounts of wealth, degrees of occupational status, and years of education. Whether we claim that the United States has two (owners and workers), three (upper, middle, and lower), four (upper, middle, working, and lower), six (upper-upper, lower-upper, upper-middle, lower-middle, upper-lower, and lower-lower), or more classes, the important point about the concept of social class is that life is differently experienced by individuals across the range of identified classes and similarly experienced by people within any one of the class categories.

Using a fairly common model, we can describe these classes as follows.

### Upper Classes

Roughly 7% to 10% of the population occupies an “upper class” position. The uppermost level of this class represents approximately 3% of the population (Renzetti and Curran 1998; Curry, Jiobu, and Schwirian 2002). They own 25% to 30% of all

## Popular Culture

### Can We See Ourselves in “Zits”? Comic Strips and Changes in Family Life



Every day, millions of people in hundreds of countries open thousands of newspapers and pause to read comic strips. The list of more popular strips will have familiar names on it for just about everyone: *Calvin & Hobbes*,

*Cathy*, *Doonesbury*, *Dilbert*, *Sally Forth*, and *Peanuts*, which is so popular that it has run repeated comics for years since the retirement and later death of creator Charles Schulz.

Many comic strips focus on family life, typically featuring a couple and their young to adolescent children. Such is the case with two popular award-winning strips, *Baby Blues* and *Zits*, both of which are written by

Jerry Scott although they have different illustrators (Rick Kirkman for *Baby Blues* and Jim Borgman for *Zits*).

*Baby Blues* portrays what happens to Wanda and Darryl MacPherson when, in their 30s, they embark on life's great adventure of parenthood with the arrival of Zoe, Hammish, and Wren. On the *Baby Blues* website ([http://www.babyblues.com/family\\_tree/familytree.htm](http://www.babyblues.com/family_tree/familytree.htm)), Wanda is



private wealth and 60% to 70% of all corporate wealth. They also receive as much as 25% of all yearly income. They are sometimes referred to as the “upper-upper class” or the “ruling class” or “elite.” Their “extraordinary wealth” often takes them into the hundreds of

millions if not billions of dollars (Curry, Jiobu, and Schwirian 2002).

The rest of the upper class live on yearly incomes ranging from hundreds of thousands to billions of dollars, own substantial amounts of wealth, and enjoy

described as having “traded working full-time as a public relations executive for working **fuller** time as a mother.” She is “a complex person . . . part nurturing mother, part dynamic organizer, and part exhausted woman.” Husband Darryl is depicted as “the consummate involved parent.” Although he finds fatherhood “the hardest work he’s ever done,” Darryl is described as loving it. A March 6, 2005, strip depicted some ways in which the demands of parenthood come to dominate life, especially for mothers:

*Zits* looks at the life of 15-year-old Jeremy Duncan, “high school freshman with, thank God, four good friends, but other than that a seriously boring life in a seriously boring town made livable only by the knowledge that someday in the far-off future at least this will all be over” (<http://www.kingfeatures.com/features/comics/zits/about.htm>). His parents, mother Connie, a frustrated novelist, and father Walt, an orthodontist, struggle to find ways to communicate with Jeremy, a brooding “handful” of adolescent hormones and moods.

Comics like *Zits* and *Baby Blues* allow us to laugh at some familiar, occasionally exaggerated situations and conversations, but they do much more. They offer us a window

through which to explore the wider cultural attitudes and values about family life. Sociologist Ralph LaRossa, one of the leading experts on changes in parenthood and especially fatherhood through the twentieth century, has studied the portrayal of gender and parental roles across six decades (1940–1999) of popular comic strips (LaRossa et al. 2000, 2001). Some comics that they examined included: *Blondie*, *Cathy*, *Dennis the Menace*, *For Better or Worse*, *Hi and Lois*, *Garfield*, and *Ziggy* (LaRossa et al. 2000). They looked to see how prominently the Mother’s Day or Father’s Day theme was represented, what activities fathers and mothers were portrayed doing, whether the fathers and mothers were portrayed as incompetent, whether they were mocked or made to look foolish, and whether father and mother characters were engaged in nurturant behaviors such as expressing affection toward, caring for, comforting, listening to, teaching, or praising a child or children. The data revealed fluctuating portrayals of fathers as nurturant or competent. Looking across the 6 decades (in 5-year increments), revealed a U-shaped curve; in the late 1940s and early 1950s there were high percentages of nurturant fathers unmatched until the 1990s. However, an increase in father nurturance can

be seen beginning in the 1980s. This may be surprising to students who think that only late in the twentieth century did nurturing qualities become valued or expected of fathers. At least comic strip fathers of the late 1940s and early 1950s were often nurturing and supportive toward their children. Nurturant portrayals of mothers “spiked” in the late 1950s and late 1970s and were consistently high from the mid-1980s to the end of the century. LaRossa and colleagues note that, although cartoonists seem to have tried to acknowledge the new ideology of nurturant fathers, they did not do it “at the expense” of mothers. “Indeed, if anything, they seemed to pay homage to fatherhood and motherhood at the end of the millennium” (LaRossa et al. 2000, 385).

In Chapter 11 we more explicitly examine the “culture” and “conduct” of fatherhood and motherhood. For now, we can use the research on comic strips to reiterate and illustrate that cultural changes have occurred in our ideas about families, in this case our expectations of fathers. We can also better appreciate how much Walt Duncan and Darryl MacPherson fit the wider context of involved, if exasperated, comic strip fathers.

much prestige. Some members of the lower-upper class may be wealthier than their elite counterparts, living well in large private homes in exclusive communities and enjoying considerable privilege. The major distinction typically drawn between the elite and the

lower-upper class is between “old” and “new” money (Steinmetz, Clavan, and Stein 1992; Langman 1988). In other words, the clearest distinction we can draw between them is in how they achieved and how long they have enjoyed their affluence.

## Middle Classes

In some analyses, the middle class is considered the largest class, representing between 45% and 50% of the population (Curry, Jiobu, and Schwirian 2002; Renzetti and Curran 1998). Often, the middle class is subdivided into two groupings: the upper-middle class and the lower-middle class.

The **upper-middle class** consists of highly paid professionals (for example, lawyers, doctors, and engineers) who have annual incomes that may reach into the hundreds of thousands of dollars (Renzetti and Curran 1998). They are typically college educated, although they may not have attended the same elite colleges as the upper-upper class (Curry, Jiobu, and Schwirian 2002). Women and men of the upper-middle class have incomes that allow them luxuries such as home ownership, vacations, and college educations for their children. The **lower-middle class** comprises a larger portion of the population. Although it is impossible to specify an exact income threshold that separates the lower from the upper middle class, the lower middle class is comprised of white-collar service workers who live on less income and have less education (or less prestigious degrees) and social standing than their professional and managerial counterparts (for example, physicians, attorneys, managers) in the upper-middle class. They own or rent more modest homes and purchase more affordable automobiles than their upper-middle class counterparts, and they hope, but with less certainty, to send their children to college.

## Working Class

About a third of the U.S. population is considered **working class**. Members of this class tend to work in blue-collar occupations (as skilled laborers, for example), earn between \$15,000 and \$25,000, and have high school or vocational educations. The working class lives somewhat precariously, with little savings and few liquid assets should illness or job loss occur (Rubin 1994). They also have difficulty buying their own homes or sending their children to college (Curry, Jiobu, and Schwirian 2002).

## Lower Class

The lower class consists of those who live in poverty. Despite an official estimate of 12.5% of the population being below the “poverty line” (U.S. Bureau of

Labor Statistics 2005), a more accurate assessment might indicate that closer to 20% of Americans are poor (Seccombe 2000). As originally established, the *poverty line* was determined by calculating the annual costs of a “minimal food budget” multiplied by three, since 1960s survey data estimated that families spent one-third of their budgets on food (Seccombe 2000). In 2005, the “poverty line” for a family of four with two children was drawn at \$19,350 (see Table 3.4). Families whose incomes are just \$1 above the threshold for their size are not officially classified as poor.

Poverty is consistently associated with marital and family stress, increased divorce rates, low birth weight and infant deaths, poor health, depression, lowered life expectancy, and feelings of hopelessness and despair. Poverty is a major contributing factor to family dissolution.

Poor families are characterized by irregular employment or chronic underemployment. Individuals work at unskilled jobs that pay minimum wage and offer little security or opportunity for advancement (Renzetti and Curran 1998). Although many lower-class individuals rent substandard housing, we also find a homelessness problem among poor families. Karen Seccombe (2000) effectively describes the problems: “Poverty affects one’s total existence. It can impede adults’ and children’s social, emotional, biological, and intellectual growth and development.” She further notes that over a year, most poor families experience one or more of the following: “eviction, utilities disconnected, telephone disconnected, housing with upkeep problems, crowded housing, no refrigerator, no stove, or no telephone” (Seccombe 2000).

Despite stereotypes of the poor being African Americans and Latinos, most poor families—and of those who receive assistance—are Caucasian. However, African Americans and Hispanics or Latinos are more likely to experience poverty than are Caucasians (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2005). Those living in poverty, like their upper- and middle-class counterparts, can be subdivided.

**THE WORKING POOR.** Since 1979, there have been large increases in the proportion of the population who, despite paid employment, live in poverty. The label *working poor* refers to people who spent at least 27 weeks in the labor force but whose incomes fell below the poverty threshold (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

**Table 3.4 ■ 2005 Federal Poverty Guidelines**

People in Family Unit	48 Contiguous States and D.C.	Alaska	Hawaii
1	\$ 9,570	\$11,950	\$11,010
2	12,830	16,030	14,760
3	16,090	20,110	18,510
4	19,350	24,190	22,260
5	22,610	28,270	26,010
6	25,870	32,350	29,760
7	29,130	36,430	33,510
8	32,390	40,510	37,260
For each additional person, add	3,260	4,080	3,750

SOURCE: *Federal Register* 2005, 8,373–8,375.

2005). Factors such as low wages, occupational segregation, and the dramatic rise in single-parent families account for why having a job and an income may not be enough to keep people out of poverty (Ellwood 1988).

Based on a U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2005 report, “A Profile of the Working Poor: 2003,” we can make the following statements about the working poor:

- Of the nation’s poor, 20% can be classified as “working poor.” This amounts to 7.4 million people and 4.2 million families.
- Single-parent families are more likely to be among the working poor than are families of married couples. More than one of every five (22.5%) single-female-headed families are “working poor,” compared to 13.5% of single-male-headed families and 8.4% of families of married couples.
- Certain categories of people are more vulnerable to being among the working poor—younger workers, people who fail to finish high school, and people who work part-time. Women are more likely to be among the working poor than are older workers, college graduates, full-time workers, and men.

Although their family members may be working or looking for work, these families cannot earn enough to raise themselves out of poverty. An individual working full-time at minimum wage simply does not earn enough to support a family of three. Thus, this kind of poverty results from problems in the economic structure—low wages, job insecurity or instability, or lack of available jobs.

**THE GHETTO POOR.** The homeless and *ghetto poor*—inner-city residents, disproportionately African Americans and Latinos, who live in poverty—are deeply disturbing counterpoints to wider cultural values and beliefs that are definitive features of American life. Their lifestyles and circumstances challenge cherished images of wealth, opportunity, and economic mobility. It is not clear exactly who the ghetto poor are. They are primarily a phenomenon of the ghettos and barrios of decaying cities, where poor African Americans and Latinos are overrepresented.

The behaviors, actions, and problems found among the ghetto poor are often responses to lack of opportunity, urban neglect, and inadequate housing and schooling. With the flight of manufacturing, few job opportunities exist in the inner cities; the jobs that do exist are usually service jobs that fail to pay their workers sufficient wages to allow them to rise above poverty. Schools are substandard. The infant death rate approaches that of third world countries, and HIV infection and AIDS are epidemic. The housing projects are infested with crime and drug abuse, turning them into kingdoms of despair. Gunfire often punctuates the night. A woman addicted to crack explained, “I feel like I’m a different person when I’m not here. I feel good. I feel I don’t need drugs. But being in here, you just feel like you’re drowning. It’s like being in jail. I hate the projects. I hate this rat hole” (DeParle 1991).

**SPELLS OF POVERTY.** Most of those who fall below the poverty threshold tend to be there for spells of time rather than permanently (Rank and Cheng 1995).

About a quarter of the American population may require some form of assistance at one time during their lives because of changes in families caused by divorce, unemployment, illness, disability, or death. About half of our children are vulnerable to poverty spells at least once during their childhood. Many families who receive assistance are in the early stages of recovery from an economic crisis caused by the death, separation, divorce, or disability of the family's major wage earner. Many who accept government assistance return to self-sufficiency within a year or two. Most children in these families do not experience poverty after they leave home.

Two major factors are related to the beginning and ending of spells of poverty: changes in income and changes in family composition. Many poverty spells begin with a decline in earnings of the head of the household, such as a job loss or a cut in work hours. Other causes include a decline in earnings of other family members, the transition to single parenting, the birth of a child to a single mother, and the move of a youth to his or her own household.

**POOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN.** The **feminization of poverty** is a painful fact that has resulted primarily from high rates of divorce, increasing numbers of unmarried women with children, and women's lack of economic resources (Starrels, Bould, and Nicholas 1994). When women with children divorce, their income and standard of living fall, often dramatically. By family type, 26.5% of single-mother families are below the poverty line (U.S. Census Bureau 2003).

In 2004, 13 million children, 17.8% of children under 18, were poor. The rate is higher among younger children; 18.6% of children under age 6, living in families, were poor (Proctor and Dalaker 2003). Like their parents, they move in and out of spells of poverty, depending on major changes in family structure, employment status of family members, or the disability status of the family head (Duncan and Rodgers 1988). These variables affect ethnic groups differently and account for differences in child poverty rates. African Americans, for example, have significantly higher unemployment rates and numbers of never-married single mothers than do other groups. As a result, their childhood poverty rates are markedly higher. More than a third of African American children are poor, as are nearly 30% of Hispanic children. In contrast, 10.5% of Caucasian children and 9.8% of Asian American children lived in poverty in 2004 (U.S. Census Bureau

2004, Report P60, n. 229, Table B-2, pp. 52–57). Being poor puts the most ordinary needs—from health care to housing—out of reach.

## Class and Family Life

Working within this framework, we can note some ways in which family life is differently experienced by each of the four classes. Although there are a number of family characteristics we could consider (including divorce, domestic violence, and the division of labor), we look briefly at class-based differences in marriage relationships, parent–child relationships, and ties between nuclear and extended families.

### Marriage Relationships

Within upper-class families we tend to find sharply sex-segregated marriages in which women are subordinated to their husbands. Upper-class women often function as supports for their husbands' successful economic and political activities, thus illustrating the **two-person career** (Papanek 1973).

Although their supportive activities may be essential to the husbands' success, such wives are neither paid nor widely recognized for their efforts. Rather than having their own careers, they often volunteer within charitable organizations or their communities. They are free to pursue such activities because they have many servants—from cooks to chauffeurs to nannies—who do the domestic work and some childcare or supervision.

Middle-class marriages tend to be *ideologically* more egalitarian and are often two-career marriages. In fact, middle-class lifestyles increasingly require two incomes. This creates both benefits and costs for middle-class women. The benefits include having more say in family decision making and greater legitimacy in asking for help with domestic and childrearing tasks. The costs include the failure to receive the help they request. Because working wives likely earn less than their husbands, the strength of their role in family decision making may still be less than that of their husbands. We say they are “ideologically” more egalitarian because middle-class couples more highly value and more readily accept the ideal of marriage as a sharing, communicating relationship in which spouses function as “best friends.”



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■ *Family experiences are affected by such variables as social class and ethnicity.*

Once more explicitly traditional, working-class marriages are becoming more like their middle-class counterparts. Whereas such marriages in the past were clearly more traditional in both rhetoric and division of responsibilities, in recent years they have moved toward a model of sharing both roles and responsibilities (Komarovsky 1962; Rubin 1976, 1994). The sharply segregated, traditional marriage roles evident even just 2 decades ago have given way to two-earner households, increasingly driven by the need for two incomes.

Especially among those working-class couples who work “opposite” shifts, we find higher levels of sharing domestic and childcare responsibilities, as well as greater male involvement in home life (Rubin 1994). The reality of being the only parent home forces men to take on tasks that otherwise might be done by wives. Necessity, not ideology, creates this outcome. The meaning of male participation in home life may vary more than actual behavior or vary differently than levels of actual involvement. Male involvement may have greater “value” in the circles in which middle-class men live and work but be more of a practicality or necessity for working-class men. Thus, working-class men may understate, and middle-class men may exaggerate, what and how much they do.

Marriages among the lower class are the least stable marriages. Men are often absent from day-to-day family life. Resulting from the combination of high divorce rates and widespread nonmarital childbearing, a third of single mothers and their children are poor, roughly six times the rate of poverty among married couple families with children. Furthermore, although

they represent only about a fourth of all families in the United States, they are nearly half of the 6 million poor families (Lichter and Crowley 2002). The cultural association of men’s wage earning with fulfillment of their family responsibilities subjects lower-class men to harsher experiences within families. They are less likely to marry. If married, they are less likely to remain married, and when married they derive fewer of the benefits that supposedly accrue in marriage.

Catherine Ross and her colleagues (1991) account for the connection between poverty and divorce as follows:

It is in the household that the larger social and economic order impinges on individuals, exposing them to varying degrees of hardship, frustration, and struggle. The struggle to pay the bills and to feed and clothe the family on an inadequate budget takes its toll in feeling run-down and tired, having no energy, and feeling that everything is an effort, that the future is hopeless, that you can’t shake the blues, that nagging worries make for restless sleep, and that there isn’t much to enjoy in life.

When marriages cross class lines, other problems can arise. People may find themselves feeling out of step, as if they are in a world where there are different, perhaps dramatically different, assumptions about how to discipline and raise children, where to go and what to do on vacation, and how to save or spend money (Lewin 2005). It is more difficult to measure than interracial marriage or religious intermarriage, but using education as an indicator of class, there appear to be less cross-class marriages than in the past. Most of



those marriages that do cross class lines are now between women with more education marrying men with less. This combination does not bode especially well for the future stability of the marriages (Lewin 2005).

### Parents and Children

The relationships between parents and children vary across social lines, but most research has focused on the middle and working classes (Kohn 1990). Among the upper class, some hands-on childrearing may be done by nannies or au pairs. Certainly, mothers are involved, and relationships between parents and children are loving, but parental involvement in economic and civic activities may sharply curtail time with children (Langman 1987). For upper-class parents, an important objective is to see that children acquire the appropriate understanding of their social standing and that they cultivate the right connections with others like themselves. They may attend private and exclusive boarding schools and later join appropriate clubs and organizations. Their eventual choice of a spouse receives especially close parental scrutiny.

A considerable amount of research indicates that working- and middle-class parents socialize their children differently and have different objectives for childrearing (Kohn 1990; Rubin 1994; Hays 1996; Lareau 2003). Although all parents want to raise happy and caring children, middle-class parents tend to emphasize autonomy and self-discipline and working-class parents tend to stress compliance (Kohn 1990, Hays 1996). In her 1996 study of mothers, Sharon Hays identified differences between what middle- and working-class mothers believed made for a “good mother” and what they thought children most need. Whereas working-class mothers saw and therefore stressed education as essential for their children’s later life chances, middle-class mothers took for granted that their children would receive good-quality educations and emphasized, instead, the importance of building children’s self-esteem. And although both classes of mothers acknowledged using spanking to discipline their children, middle-class mothers spanked more selectively and favored other methods of discipline (for example, “timeout”) (Hays 1996).

One of the more recent and fascinating class comparisons is Annette Lareau’s *Unequal Childhoods* (2003). Lareau contends that “social class does indeed create distinctive parenting styles . . . that parents differ by class in the ways they define their own roles in their children’s lives as well as in how they perceive

the nature of childhood” (Lareau 2002, 748). Lareau introduces the concepts of *concerted cultivation* and *accomplishment of natural growth* to represent class-based differences in philosophy of childrearing.

Middle class families engage in concerted cultivation. Parents enroll their children in numerous extracurricular activities, from athletics to art and music, that come to dominate their children’s lives, as well as the life of the whole family. Through these activities, however, children partake in and enjoy a wider range of outside activities and interact with a range of adults in authoritative positions, giving them experiences and expertise that can serve them well later. Because of the way household life tends to center around children’s schedules and activities, the other members of these middle-class families (parents and siblings) are forced to endure a frenzied pace and a shortage of family time (See the “Real Families” box).

Working-class parents, lacking the material resources to enroll their children in such activities, tend to focus less on developing their children and more on letting them grow and develop naturally, play freely in unsupervised settings, and spend time with relatives and in the neighborhood. For a sense of how these two approaches may have been experienced by children, see the “Real Families” box.

Lower-class families are the most likely of all families to be single-parent families. Single parents, in general, may suffer stresses and experience difficulties that parents in two-parent households do not, but this situation is exacerbated for low-income single parents (McLanahan and Booth 1989). Parent–child relationships suffer from a variety of characteristics of lower-class life: unsteady, low-pay employment; substandard housing; and uncertainty about obtaining even the most basic necessities (food, clothing, and so forth). All of these can affect the quality of parent–child relationships and the ability of parents to supervise and control what happens to and with their children.

### Extended Family Ties

Links between nuclear family households and extended kin vary in kind and meaning across social class. By some measures, the least closely connected group may be the middle class, which, because of the geographic mobility that accompanies their economic status, may find themselves the most physically removed from their kin. As Matthijs Kalmijn observed among the upper-middle-class families he studied in the Netherlands, they live almost three times as far from their siblings,

## Real Families

### Middle-Class Parenting, Middle-Class Childhood



Louise and Don Tallinger are proud parents of three boys, 10-year-old Garrett, 7-year-old Spencer, and 4-year-old Sam. They are also busy professionals; Louise is a personnel consultant, and Don is a fund-raising consultant. Between them, they earn \$175,000, making them comfortably upper-middle class. They travel a lot for work; Don is out of town an average of three days a week, and Louise, four or five times a month, flies out of state early in the morning and returns sometime after dinner. Don often doesn't return home from work until 9:30 p.m. This middle-class family of five is one of the families studied by Annette Lareau in her fascinating class comparison, *Unequal Childhoods*.

With 10-year-old Garrett's involvements in baseball, soccer, swim team, piano, and saxophone lessons, his schedule dictates the pace and routines of the household. Lareau describes what life is like for Don and Louise (2003, 42):

Rush home, rifle through the mail, prepare snacks, change out of . . . work clothes, make sure the children are appropriately dressed and have the proper equipment for the upcoming activity, find the car keys, put the dog outside, load the children and equipment into the car, lock the door and drive off.

The Tallingers epitomize the middle-class childrearing strategy

Lareau called concerted cultivation. This lifestyle, dedicated as it is to each child's individual development and enrichment, is exhausting just to read about. It may be familiar to you as an extreme example of your experiences; Lareau argues that among the middle class it is not uncommon.

The brothers hardly go long stretches without some scheduled activity, most of which require adult-supplied transportation, adult supervision, and adult planning and scheduling. Rarely can they count on playing outside all day like children in working and lower-class families might.

Of course, working and lower-class children could not participate in all of the activities that the Tallinger boys do. By the Tallingers' estimate, Garrett's activities alone cost more than \$4,000 a year. Despite this obvious advantage, Garrett feels disadvantaged because he cannot attend the private school he once attended.

Although Lareau is careful to illustrate what middle-class children like the Tallinger boys miss out on—free play, closer connections to relatives, more time for themselves away from adult supervision and control, comfort with and ability to amuse themselves, and less fatigue—she also illustrates the many benefits they receive beyond involvement in activities that they enjoy. The Tallingers believe that all the activities that their boys participate in teach them to work as part of a team, to perform on a public stage and in front of adults, to compete, to grow familiar with the many performance-based assessments that will come at them through school and work

experiences, and to prioritize. The children travel to tournaments, eat in restaurants, and stay in hotels; they may fly to summer camps or special programs out of state or overseas. Indeed, Lareau suggests that children like the Tallinger boys may travel more than working-class and poor adults (2003, 63). These experiences, combined with what the Tallingers teach the boys at home, promote skills that enhance their chances of staying or even moving higher up in the middle class.

In lifestyles such as this one, family life is organized and ruled by large calendars that detail the children's sports, play activities, music, and scouting events. It then falls on the parents to see that their children arrive at these activities, often directly from one to another. As Lareau somberly puts, "At times, middle-class homes seem to be little more than holding places for the occupants during the brief periods when they are between activities" (2003, 64).

#### For Further Consideration

1. What is your reaction to the Tallingers' lifestyle? Is it at all familiar to you from either firsthand experience or experiences of those you know?
2. As you see it, what are the biggest benefits and costs associated with this way of life?
3. What do you see as the effect on Garrett? His parents? His brothers?

SOURCE: Lareau 2003.

and more than three times as far from their parents and their (adult) children, as does the lowest-educated class (Kalmijn 2004). Similar class differences can be observed in the United States.

Middle-class families do visit kin or phone regularly and are available to exchange aid when needed. Still, the emphasis is on the conjugal family of spouses and children.

Closer connections may be found among both the working and the upper classes, although the reasons differ. In the case of working-class families, there are often both the opportunity and the need for extensive familial involvement. Opportunity results from lesser levels of geographic mobility, which results in closer proximity and allows more continuous contact to result. The need for involvement is created by the pooling of resources and exchange of services (for example, childcare) that often result between adults and their parents or among adult siblings. Intergenerational upward mobility may lessen the reliance on extended families (see discussion later in this chapter).

Upper-class families, especially among the “old” upper class, highly value the importance of family name and ancestry. They tend to maintain strong and active kinship groups that exert influence in the mate selection processes of members and monitor the behavior of members. Inheritance of wealth gives the kin group more than symbolic importance in their ability to influence behavior of individual members.

Among the lower class, kin ties—both real and fictive—may be essential resources in determining economic and social survival. Grandparents, aunts, and uncles may fill in for or replace absent parents, and multigenerational households (for example, children living with their mothers and grandmothers) are fairly common. **Fictive kin ties** refer to the extension of kinship-like status to neighbors and friends, thus symbolizing both an intensity of commitment and a willingness to help one another meet needs of daily life (Stack 1974; Liebow 1967).

## The Dynamic Nature of Social Class

Like other aspects of family life, social class position is not set in stone. Individuals may experience **social mobility**, movement up *or* down the social class ladder. Either kind of social mobility can affect family relationships, especially, although not exclusively, intergenerational relationships (Kalmijn 2004; Newman 1988; Sennett and Cobb 1972). For example, children who see their parents “fall from grace,” through job loss and dwindling assets look differently at those parents. Fathers who once seemed heroic may become the source of concern, and even resentment, as their job loss threatens the lifestyle of the family on which children depend (Newman 1988). Children who in adulthood climb upward occasionally find their relationships with their parents suffering as a result. As

they are exposed to new values and ideas that differ from those held by their parents, generational tension and social distance may follow. Furthermore, as they move into a new social circle, parents (as well as less mobile siblings) may appear to fit less well with their new life circumstances. The more they strive to fit into new circles and circumstances accompanying their increased social standing, the less well they may fit comfortably within their ongoing family relationships.

Aside from the difficulty fitting parents and siblings into a new social standing, practical considerations, imposed by a job, may create obstacles preventing individuals from maintaining closer relationships. As is true elsewhere, ascending the ladder to a higher rung may require geographic relocation. Such jobs may also impose greater demands on the individual time. To these constraints of time and distance we can add that as someone establishes new friendships and participates in leisure activities, further reductions in opportunity and availability may result (Kalmijn 2004).

Marital relationships, too, may be altered by either downward or upward mobility. Research indicates that some men who lose their jobs and “slide downward” react to their economic misfortune by abusing their spouses, turning to alcohol or other substances, withdrawing emotionally, or leaving the home (Rubin 1994; Newman 1988). Changes in the marriage are not entirely of men’s doing; after an initial period of sympathy and support, wives may grow impatient with their husbands’ unemployment or alter their positive views of the husbands’ dedication as a worker or job seeker. In addition, as couples are forced to scale back their accustomed lifestyle, tensions may rise and resentment and distance may grow.

Upward mobility may also transform marriage relationships. We are familiar with the situation faced by women who, after sacrificing to help launch their husbands’ careers by supporting them through school, are left by those same husbands once they have achieved their career goals. With their own increasing economic opportunity, some women find that marriage becomes less desirable because of the constraints it continues to impose on their career development.

## Racial and Ethnic Diversity

The United States is a richly diverse society. This is not news to you; we pride ourselves on our multicultural mix of groups, whether we see them “melting” together

into one large pot or, like a salad bowl, retaining their uniqueness even when tossed together. As we begin to look at the racial and ethnic variations in family experience, we need to first note the multiplicity of different groups that make up the U.S. population. To get at this, the U.S. Census Bureau asked the following question:

What is this person's ancestry or ethnic origin? (For example, Italian, Jamaican, African American, Cambodian, Cape Verdeian, Norwegian, Dominican, French Canadian, Haitian, Korean, Lebanese, Polish, Nigerian, Mexican, Taiwanese, Ukrainian, and so on.)

The U.S. Census Bureau goes on to define *ancestry* as any of the following: "where their ancestors are from, where they or their parents originated, or simply how they see themselves ethnically" (Brittingham and de la Cruz 2004). The census also contains items about a person's race and whether she or he is of Hispanic origin. Thus, there are multiple attempts to get at the diversity of the population. This creates some inconsistency or incompatibility in the data, however. Although both African American and Mexican are options for people to select as their "ancestry," many fewer people in both groups identified themselves in terms of these ancestry categories than answered that their race was African American or that they were Hispanic of Mexican origin. In the census, 12 million fewer people answered that their ancestry was African American than answered that their race was African American. In addition, 2 million fewer people listed Mexican ancestry than answered that way on the question about Hispanic origin. Thus, the ancestry data need to be approached with some caution when dealing with groups that surface on more than one question (for example, African Americans, Chinese, Mexican, and American Indian).

Of the population, 80% identified one or more ancestries, with 58% specifying one ancestry group and another 22% specifying two. Of the remainder, 19% did not report any ancestry and 1% reported some otherwise unclassifiable category such as "a mixture" (Brittingham and de la Cruz 2004).

Seven different ancestries were reported by at least 15 million people each. Most common was German. Almost 43 million people identified themselves as German or part German, nearly one out of six people or 15% of the population. The other six ancestries that were selected by at least 15 million people were as shown in Table 3.5.

**Table 3.5 ■ Most Common Ancestries**

Group	Number of People	Percentage of Population
German	43.0 million	15
Irish	30.5 million	10.8
African American*	24.9 million	8.8
English	24.5 million	8.7
American	20.2 million	7.2
Mexican*	18.4 million	6.5
Italian	15.6 million	5.6

\*Remember, these are undercounts compared with what other census questions yield.

In addition, there are eight other ancestries that represent at least 4 million people each: Polish, French, American Indian, Scottish, Dutch, Norwegian, Scotch-Irish, and Swedish.

### Race, Ethnicity, and Minority Groups

Before we begin to look more closely at diversity in family experience, we need to define several important terms. A **race** or **racial group** is a group of people, such as whites, blacks, and Asians, classified according to their **phenotype**—their anatomical and physical characteristics. Racial groups share common phenotypical characteristics, such as skin color and facial structure. The concept of race is often misused and misunderstood. We should neither assume a purity or homogeneity within racial groupings (in skin color, facial features, and so on) nor treat racial groups as superior or inferior in comparison to one another. In either of those biological applications, the concept of race is clearly a myth (Henslin 2000). Socially, however, we perceive or identify ourselves within racial classifications and are treated and act toward others on the basis of race, which makes it a highly significant factor in shaping our life experiences. Although its biological importance may be doubtful, its social significance remains great.

An **ethnic group** is a set of people distinct from other groups because of cultural characteristics. Such things as language, religion, and customs are shared within and allow us to differentiate among ethnic groups. These cultural characteristics are transmitted from one generation to another and may then shape how each person thinks and acts—both inside and outside of families.

Either a racial or an ethnic group can be considered a **minority group** depending on social experience. Minority groups are so designated not because of their numerical size in the wider population but because of their status (position in the social hierarchy), which places them at an economic, social, and political disadvantage (Taylor 1994b). Thus, African Americans are simultaneously an ethnic, a racial, and a minority group in the United States (as well as an *ancestry category* as shown previously). The term *African American*, used increasingly instead of *black*, reflects the growing awareness of the importance of ethnicity (culture) in contrast to race (skin color) (Smith 1992; but see Taylor 1994b).

As we will soon see, ethnic and/or racial differences are often difficult to untangle from social class differences. It may be that some differences in family patterns reflect cultural background factors or distinctive values. However, it is equally plausible that ethnic or racial differences in family patterns reflect the different socioeconomic circumstances under which different groups live (Aponte, Beal, and Jiles 1999).

According to recent census data (U.S. Census Bureau 2000), more than 30% of the U.S. population are people of color: 13% are African American, 13% are Hispanic, 4% are Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1% are Native American. By 2050, the population is expected to be just over 50% Caucasian, 24% Hispanic, 13% African American, 9% Asian, and 1% Native American.

As we embark on our discussion of race and ethnicity in family life, it is important to be aware of the danger of thinking in terms of ethnocentric fallacies (a term introduced in Chapter 2), beliefs that your ethnic group, nation, or culture is innately superior to others. In the following sections we consider briefly some distinctive characteristics and strengths of families from various ethnic and cultural groups.

We also need to keep in mind that until the last 35 years most research about American marriages and

families tended to be limited to the white, middle-class family. The nuclear family was the norm against which all other families, including single parent and step-families were evaluated and often viewed as pathological because they differed from the traditional norm. A similar distortion also has influenced our understanding of African American, Latino, Asian American, and Native American families. Instead of recognizing the strengths of diverse ethnic family systems, misguided researchers viewed these families as “tangles of pathology” for failing to meet the model of the traditional nuclear family (Moynihan 1965). Part of this distortion resulted from the long-term scarcity of studies on families from African American, Latino, Asian American, Native American, and other ethnic groups. Furthermore, many earlier studies focused on weaknesses rather than strengths, giving the impression that all families from a particular ethnic group were riddled by problems (Dilworth-Anderson and McAdoo 1988; Taylor 1994a, 1994b; Taylor et al. 1991).

The “culture of poverty” approach, for example, sees African American families as being deeply enmeshed in illegitimacy, poverty, and welfare as a result of their slave heritage. As one scholar notes, the culture of poverty approach “views black families from a white middle-class vantage point and results in a pejorative analysis of black family life” (Demos 1990). This approach ignores most families that are intact or middle class. It also fails to see African American family strengths, such as strong kinship bonds, role flexibility, love of children, commitment to education, and care for the elderly.

America is a pluralistic society. Thus, it is important that students and researchers alike reexamine diversity among our different ethnic groups as possible sources of strength rather than pathology (DeGenova 1997). For instance, cultures may vary widely in how the best interests of the child are defined (Murphy-Berman, Levesque, and Berman 1996). Differences may not necessarily be problems but solutions to problems; they may be signs of adaptation rather than weakness (Adams 1985). As two family scholars pointed out, “Whether a phenomenon is viewed as a problem or a solution may not be objective reality at all but may be determined by the observer’s values” (Dilworth-Anderson and McAdoo 1988).

**AFRICAN AMERICAN FAMILIES.** According to the 2000 census, the more than 34 million African Americans in the United States represented 12.2% of the population. If we include those who consider themselves

### Matter of Fact

According to the United States Census Bureau, nearly fifty-two million Americans, more than 19%, speak languages other than English at home. Of those, more than 32 million speak Spanish. Nearly eight million people, 15% of the population, speak Asian and Pacific Island languages, the most common being Chinese, which is spoken by more than 2.2 million people in the United States (SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005 American Community Survey).

biracial, in this case black combined with one or more other races, the total reaches 36.2 million people, or 12.9% of the population of the United States (McKinnon and Bennet 2005).

Compared with the total U.S. population, African Americans are younger and less likely to be married (see Figure 3.2) Although they are no more likely to be divorced or widowed, a much greater percentage of blacks than whites have never married (43% versus 25%). Blacks are more likely to bear children outside of marriage and more likely to live in single-parent, mostly mother-headed, families. These patterns continued to increase throughout the past decade but even more so among the general population than among African Americans (McLloyd et al. 2000b).

Although African Americans are as likely as the general population to live in family households, their households differ from the family households in the general population. A third of black households are headed by married couples. In the wider population, 53% of households are headed by married couples (McKinnon and Bennett 2005, Figure 4). Because of high rates of divorce and of births to unmarried women, in 2002 53% of African American children

lived in households headed by single mothers (48%) or single fathers (5%) (U.S. Census Bureau 2003). More than 30% of black households are headed by women with no husbands present compared to 12% in the population overall. Fewer than 6% of black households and households overall are headed by men with no wives in the home (McKinnon and Bennet 2005).

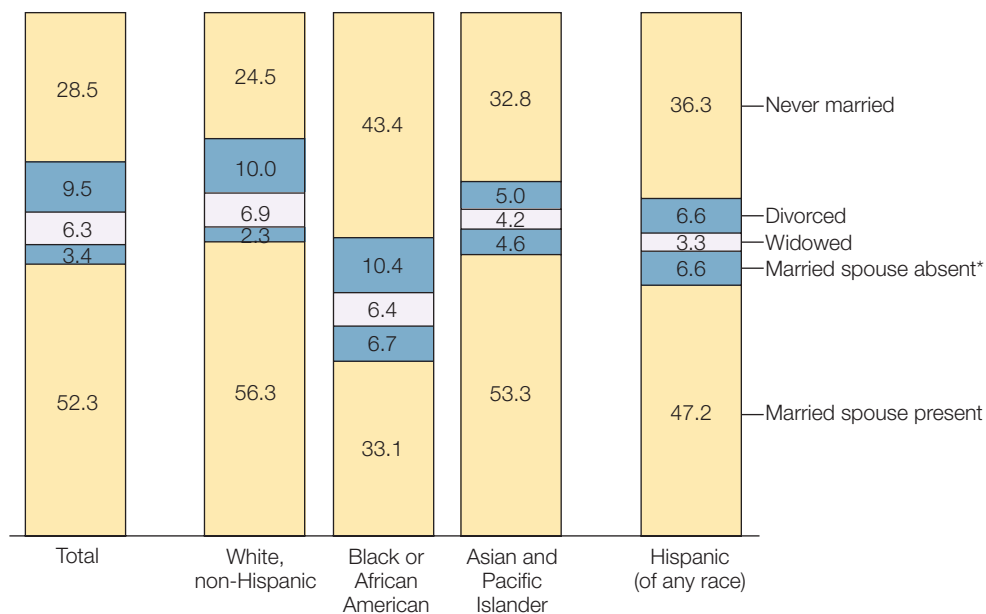
Considering families rather than households, data from 2002 reveal that 48% of African American families were married-couple families, 43% were headed by single women, and 9% were headed by single men. The equivalent percentages for whites show that more than 80% of white families are headed by married couples, 13% by women without husbands, and 5% by men without wives (McKinnon 2003).

In addition, we can note the following:

- Compared to the general population, African Americans are less likely to have completed college (17% versus 29%) (McKinnon 2003).
- Black women are slightly more likely than black men to have completed college (18% versus 16%) (McKinnon 2003).

**Figure 3.2 ■ Marital Status of People 15 Years and Older by Race and Hispanic Origin: 2002**

**Marital Status of People 15 Years and Older by Race and Hispanic Origin: 2002**  
(Percent distribution)



SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, Population of the United States: Dynamic Version; Families and Living Arrangements in 2002

- Overall, African Americans are somewhat less likely than the general population to be employed (60% versus 64%), but this difference is really a reflection of male employment patterns. Black women are actually *slightly more likely* to be employed than are women overall (59.6% versus 57.5%). Among men, a significant 10% difference separates blacks from the general population of men (60.9% versus 70.7%) (McKinnon and Bennett 2005).
- Median earnings for African Americans who are employed full-time year-round were \$27,264 in 2000. This amounts to approximately 85% of the median for all workers (\$32,098). Black men's median earnings were 81% of the median for men overall. Black women's earnings were much closer (94%) to earnings among all women. The gender wage gap among blacks is narrower than it is among the general population; black women's median income is 85% of the median among black men. In the general population, the gender wage gap was 73% in 2000 (McKinnon and Bennett 2005).
- The median income of black families was \$33,300 in 2000. This is two-thirds the median among all families (\$50,000). If we look only at married couple families, the gap between blacks and the general population is smaller; black married couples earned 89% of the median income of all married couples (McKinnon and Bennett 2005).
- Of African Americans, 25% live below the poverty line. The percentage of impoverished blacks is nearly three times the percentage of poor whites (8%) and almost twice the percentage of the general population who are poor (12%) (McKinnon 2003).
- Related to the previous point, 16% of children under 18 live in poverty. The poverty rate for black children is nearly twice as high at 30%, and black children have three times the rate of poverty as white children (10%) (McKinnon 2003).

There are several noteworthy features of African American families. First, African American families, in contrast to Caucasian families, have a long history of being dual-earner families as a result of economic need. As a consequence, employed women have played important roles in the African American family. They also have more egalitarian family roles. Black men have more positive attitudes toward working wives, take on a slightly larger share of household labor, and spend more time on domestic tasks and childcare activities (McLoyd et al. 2000b). Second, marital relations more

often show signs of greater distress than is true of the general population. Some evidence indicates a greater likelihood of spousal violence and lower levels of reported marital happiness among African American marriages (McLoyd et al. 2000b). Third, kinship bonds are especially important, because they provide economic assistance and emotional support in times of need (Taylor 1994c; Taylor et al. 1991). Fourth, African Americans have a strong tradition of familism (emphasis on family and family loyalty), with an important role played by intergenerational ties. Fifth, the African American community values children highly. Finally, African Americans are much more likely than Caucasians to live in **extended households**, households that contain several different generations (Taylor 1994c). Black children are more likely than other children to live in their grandparent's household or to have a grandparent living with them in their parent's household. Typically, this grandparent is a grandmother (U.S. Census Bureau 2003).

Many of these characteristics are often associated with poverty and thus may not be features inherent in African American families. When divorce rates are adjusted according to socioeconomic status, racial differences are minimal. Poor African Americans have divorce rates similar to poor Caucasians, and middle-class African Americans have divorce rates similar to middle-class Caucasians (Raschke 1987). Thus, understanding socioeconomic status, especially poverty, is critical in examining African American life (Bryant and Coleman 1988; Julian, McKenry, and McKelvey 1994; Wilkinson 1997).

As the preceding data reveal, African Americans and their families are at a clear economic disadvantage relative to the wider population. Compared to Caucasians, they have more than twice the unemployment rate, nearly three times the poverty rate, and two-thirds the median income (see Table 3.6).

These economic indicators point out the potential difficulty of comparing black and white family characteristics. Combined with the tendency of upper-status African American families (that is, middle and upper-middle class) to be as stable as Caucasian families of comparable status, these economic indicators suggest that much of what we may assume to be race differences are confounded by economic differences or may be social class differences *masquerading as race ones*.

This more economic argument pertains especially well to an understanding of race differences in marriage rates, divorce rates, and the numbers of single-mother-headed families. The most widely applied

Table 3.6 ■ Race, Ethnicity and Socioeconomic Status: 2003-2004

	Total	Whites	African Americans	Latinos	Asians
Median Family Income	\$52,680	\$55,768	\$34,369	\$34,272	\$63,251
Percentage Unemployed	5.5	4.8	10.4	7.0	4.4
Percentage of families in poverty	10.3	8.1	22.3	20.8	12.2
Percentage of children in poverty	17.2	13.9	33.6	29.5	12.1

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau 2006. Tables 578, 679, 694, 698.

argument is that blacks “marital prospects” have shifted dramatically, especially among the poor (Aponte, Beal, and Jiles 1999). Wilson’s notion of the “male marriageable pool index” emphasizes the importance of male employment to their “marriageability” (Wilson 1987). Downward shifts in male employment patterns would then account for some decline in marriage rates and the increase in single-mother-headed families. Not only are African Americans unlikely to devalue marriage, they may actually more highly value marriage than do other groups.

Despite the benefits of linking class and race in our efforts to understand family diversity, we cannot simply interpret all race differences as economic in nature. Don’t forget that a major feature of race in American society is that it determines much treatment we receive from others. Thus, the opportunities we are offered or refused, and whether others insult, avoid, or think less of us, are all affected by race. The interpre-

tation of race differences as only (or even largely) class differences unfortunately minimizes or ignores such expressions of racism and discrimination and fails to acknowledge patterns that may have cultural origins to them—such as greater emphasis on extended family ties or gender equality.

**LATINO FAMILIES.** Latinos (or Hispanics) are now the largest ethnic group in the United States, as well as the fastest growing. The 2000 census reported 35 million Hispanics, representing 12.5% of the U.S. population. Furthermore, it is projected that by 2050, at least 25% of the population will be of Hispanic origin. These increases result from both immigration and higher birthrate among Latinos (U.S. Census Bureau 1996; Vega 1991).

Currently, 65.8% of Latinos are of Mexican descent, 9.4% are Puerto Rican, and another 4% are Cuban. The remaining 21% includes 7.8% from Central



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■ Latino culture emphasizes the family as a basic source of emotional support for children.



American countries and 5.2% from South American countries (see Figure 3.3). Overall, more than three-fourths of Hispanics live in western and southern states, with California and Texas, together, accounting for more than half the Latino population in the United States. Latinos account for 24% of the population in the western United States, a proportion nearly twice their national level. Latinos, mostly of Mexican and Central American descent, are concentrated in California and the Southwest. Latinos of Puerto Rican descent are concentrated in the Northeast, especially New York. The greatest numbers of Cuban Americans are found in Florida. There are also significant Latino populations in Illinois, New Jersey, and Massachusetts (U.S. Census Bureau 2001).

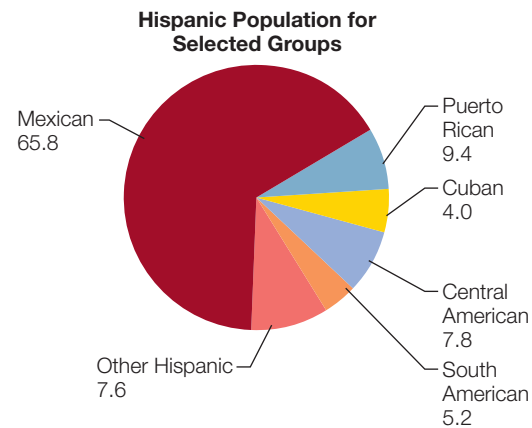
Continued immigration has transformed the nature of Latino culture in the United States. First, immigration makes both Latino culture and the larger society a “permanently unfinished” society. The newer immigrants are urban and overwhelmingly workers and laborers rather than professionals. Second, in some areas, immigration is changing the proportion of U.S.-born and foreign-born Latinos. In 1960 in California, for example, four out of five Mexicans were born in the United States; today, because of the massive influx of immigrants, only about half are born here (Zinn 1994).

It is important to remember that there is considerable diversity among Latinos in terms of ethnic heritage (such as Mexican, Cuban, or Puerto Rican), socioeconomic status (Sanchez 1997; Walker 1993), and family characteristics. Tables 3.7 and 3.8 show how marital status and types of households vary between Hispanics and the wider population, as well as among different Hispanic groups.

As the data reveal, there are differences between Hispanics and non-Hispanics, as well as among Hispanics. Generally, Hispanics are less likely than both the overall population and non-Hispanic whites to divorce or to be married. With the exception of Cubans, they are more likely than the population overall and non-Hispanic whites to have female-headed households. Regardless of Hispanic ethnicity, they are less likely than whites and the general population to maintain families headed by married couples.

Across the various Hispanic categories there is considerable social and economic variation. For example, Cubans and South Americans have the highest socioeconomic status, as indicated by incomes, poverty rates, home ownership, and educational attainment. Puerto Ricans and Mexicans and Central Americans

**Figure 3.3 ■ U.S. Hispanic Population for Selected Groups: 2004**



SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 2004, Population Division, Ethnic and Hispanic Statistics Branch.

tend to have similar characteristics, with Mexican American families being slightly more likely to be poor except for female-headed families (42% of Puerto Rican female-headed families are below the poverty line compared to 39.6% of Mexican and 35% of Central American female-headed families). These differences, although real, are not as distinctive as the ways in which Cubans, and South Americans, differ from the other Hispanic groups (see Table 3.9).

We can combine the familial characteristics with the economic ones and note interesting connections. The more affluent Hispanic groups, especially Cubans, are among the most likely to have their families be married couple families (along with Mexicans), and they are less likely to have their families be female-headed, single-parent families.

Research also indicates that the percentage of children born to unmarried mothers ranges from a low of 27% among Cubans, to 41% among Mexicans, to a high of 60% among Puerto Ricans. Similarly, the percentage of births to teenage mothers ranges from 7.5% among Cubans to 20% among Puerto Ricans. Puerto Rican women are more likely to have their first child before marriage, and Mexican American women tend to have their first child after marriage. Cuban women tend to marry later and have the lowest fertility rates among Hispanic women (McLoyd et al. 2000b). This diversity is not merely because of economics. It is further accentuated by the varying proportions of U.S.-born and foreign-born Latinos in each group. Finally,

**Table 3.7 ■ Marital Status of Hispanics in 2004: Comparisons to Non-Hispanic Population and across Hispanic Groups**

Marital Status	U.S. White	Non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Cuban	Central American	South American
Married	53.3%	57.0%	49.9%	51.5%	41.9%	55.6%	48.2%	51.0%
Widowed	6.1	6.7	3.3	3.0	3.8	8.4	2.3	2.6
Divorced	9.6	10.1	7.1	5.9	10.1	10.7	5.4	9.3
Separated	2.0	1.4	3.5	3.4	4.8	2.8	3.7	3.4
Never married	29.0	24.9	36.2	36.2	39.4	22.5	40.4	33.7

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau 2004, <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hispanic/ho04.html>, Tables 2.1 and 2.2.

**Table 3.8 ■ Household Type: Comparisons of Hispanics and Non-Hispanics, 2004**

Household Type	U.S. White	Non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Cuban	Central American	South American
Family households as % of households	68.1	66.0	79.3	81.0	77.0	72.8	81.3	76.7
Married couple as % of family households	75.6	82.5	67.0	70.0	57.0	77.0	63.0	68.0
Male head, no spouse, as % of all families	6.2	5.0	10.0	10.0	8.0	8.9	12.0	8.0
Female head, no spouse, as % of all families	18.1	13.3	23.0	20.0	34.6	13.6	25.0	23.5
Nonfamily households (%)	31.9	34.0	20.7	19.0	23.0	27.2	18.7	23.3

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, "Household Type by Hispanic Origin and Race of Householder: 2004," Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 2004, Ethnicity and Ancestry Branch, Population Division.

**Table 3.9 ■ Selected Socioeconomic Characteristics of the Hispanic Population: 2004**

	All	Mexican Hispanic	Puerto Rican	Cuban	Central American	South American
<b>% families in poverty</b>	20.8	22.9	21.1	11.3	18.8	11.4
Married couples	15.7	18.4	9.0	8.8	14.7	7.6
Female headed	37.1	39.6	42.0	19.4	35.0	25.0
<b>% unemployed</b>	7.6	8.3	8.2	4.0	5.7	4.7
<b>% earning &lt; \$25,000</b>	34.8	36.7	36.0	26.0	33.4	24.3
<b>% earning &gt; \$75,000</b>	15.8	13.0	19.2	24.5	16.2	24.9
<b>% living in own home</b>	51.2	52.0	45.7	71.2	38.8	53.6
<b>% 25 and older</b>						
% with < high school	41.6	48.1	28.2	27.9	49.7	17.3
% with college or >	12.1	7.9	14.1	24.0	10.5	33.0

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau 2004, <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hispanic/ho04.html>, Tables 6.2, 9.2, 13.2, 15.2, and 17.2.

keep in mind that characterizations of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, or any other Latino family types must avoid overgeneralization. None of these groups have a singular family system. More specifically, in Mexico,

Cuba, or Puerto Rico there is much diversity, some of which results from socioeconomics, some from rural versus urban living, some from religion, and so on (Aponte, Beal, and Jiles 1999).

Traditional Mexican and Puerto Rican families can be characterized by two distinctive cultural traits: devotion to family (that is, *familism*) and male dominance (that is, *machismo*). *La familia* is based on the nuclear family, but it also includes the extended family of grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. All tend to live close by, often in the same block or neighborhood. There is close kin cooperation and mutual assistance, especially in times of need, when the family bands together. Family unity and interdependence, sometimes extended to include fictive kin (for example, Cuban *compadres* and *comadres*—godparents), reflect the importance of extended kin ties. Male dominance, as suggested, although often exaggerated in the misuse or misunderstanding of *machismo*, is part of traditional Latino family systems but has declined, as has familism, especially among dual-earner couples. Migration and mobility disrupt traditional Latino family forms and lead to change. This change can be seen as part of a wider process of “convergence,” in which distinctive ethnic traits diminish over time (Aponte, Beal, and Jiles 1999).

Children are especially important. Fertility rates are still relatively higher among Hispanics than among the general U.S. population, although they are dropping. Because Spanish is important in maintaining ethnic identity, many Latinos, as well as educators, support bilingualism in schools and government. Catholicism is also an important factor in Latino family life. Although there has been a tradition of male dominance, current day-to-day living patterns suggest noteworthy change has occurred.

Women have gained power and influence in the family as they have increased their participation in paid employment. When wives are co-providers, Hispanic men spend more time on household tasks (Aponte, Beal, and Jiles 1999; McLoyd et al. 2000b).

**ASIAN AMERICAN FAMILIES.** As of 2002, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders made up more than 4% of the U.S. population (Reeves and Bennett 2003). The most complete data we have on where the Asian American population comes from is from the 2000 census. As revealed in Figure 3.4, Asian Americans are especially diverse, comprising Chinese, Filipino, Asian Indians, Japanese, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Hmong, Thai, and other groups.

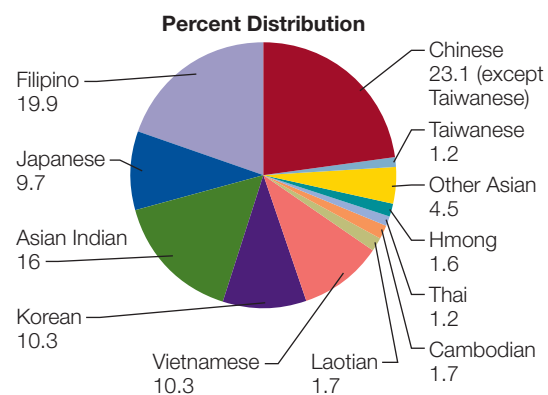
In the 2000 census, questions about race were modified to allow individuals to identify whether they were Asian alone or Asian with some other category. In 2000, the census reported 10.2 million people identifying

themselves as “Asian alone” and an additional 1.7 million who reported themselves as Asian with some other racial group. Figure 3.4 represents the population of selected Asian groups that results from combining the “Asian alone” and “Asian, in combination” categories into a population numbering nearly 11.9 million people.” As can be seen, the largest Asian American groups are Chinese Americans, Filipino Americans, Asian Indians, Koreans, Vietnamese, and Japanese Americans. Five groups—Asian Indians, Chinese, Filipinos, Koreans, and Vietnamese—account for at least 1 million people each.

Groups such as Cambodians, Laotians, and Hmong are more recent arrivals, first coming to this country in the 1970s as refugees from the upheavals resulting from the Vietnam War. In the 1980s, Koreans, Filipinos, and Asian Indians began immigrating in larger numbers. Half of all Asian Americans live in the western United States. More than half of the Asian and Pacific Islander population in the United States lives in just 3 states: California, New York, and Hawaii. Furthermore, just 10 states—California, New York, Hawaii, Texas, New Jersey, Illinois, Washington, Florida, Virginia, and Massachusetts—accounted for 75% of the Asian population. These same 10 states represent 47% of the overall population, indicating a greater tendency among Asians to cluster in these states. Of the Asian and Pacific Islander population, 95% lives in metropolitan areas, compared to 78% of non-Hispanic whites (Barnes and Bennett 2002).

General comparisons show that in many key ways Asian Americans are less like other racial or ethnic minorities than they are like Caucasians. They are as likely

Figure 3.4 ■ Selected Asian Groups



SOURCE: Barnes and Bennett 2002.

## Understanding Yourself

### Exploring the Factors That Have Shaped Your Family



What we experience in our family relationships is partly a product of when we are born and live. This, like your race, ethnicity, and social class, is something over which you neither have control nor exercise choice, yet it limits or offers you choices and constrains or opens opportunities.

One way to illustrate this is to gather information on your own family, its history, its socioeconomic status, and its ethnic and/or racial background. Examining how your family has changed over time; how it has prospered, struggled, or held its ground economically; and how it has maintained or minimized the importance of its ethnic origins will go a long way toward helping you understand why your family has experienced the things it has. Such an analysis will not include everything that influences family life but it will move you in a sociologically enlightening direction, supplying a wider context to the particulars of your family.

If you carefully map your family's history and compare it with some historical patterns discussed in this chapter, you will likely see connections between these broader patterns and your family's story. You will then be better able to both see the larger picture and understand your family's unique experiences across generations.

What do you know of your family's history? Where does your family originally come from? How, why, and when did your family members come to the United States? Where did they settle? How did they survive economically? What sorts of work did earlier

generations of your family do? How much education did they receive? Over time and generations, how did their educational and economic experiences change?

Depending on whom you might be able to get information from, consider the following questions: How did your grandparents first meet? When did they marry? How many children did they have? Where did they live and what did they do? Of your parents, how did they get together? When did they first meet? What attracted them to each other and motivated them to start a family? How many siblings do you have? How many did your parents and your grandparents have?

Did your mother work outside the home when you were younger? Were your grandmothers employed when your parents were children?

Comparing across generations, how many, if any, divorces have occurred in your family? When was the first one?

There are many ways to explore your family's history. You can examine family photographs, read letters and diaries, or interview living members to learn what happened, when, and why. Interviews need not be formal. We highly recommend learning as much as you can about your families from surviving members of your families. These may be opportunities to hear family stories and correct any misunderstanding you have had about your families that otherwise might be forever lost as people age and pass away.

Family photographs can reveal much about the relationships among members. If you can, gather photographs of your immediate family your grandparents, great-grandparents, and so on. Identify who you can. Look at such details as facial expressions, and positioning of family members relative to one another. Are family members clustered closely together or far apart? Is someone standing off from the others?

After you gather information about your relatives, see what aspects of the family discussed in this chapter apply to your family. Was a great-great-great-grandmother a slave? How did your family weather the Depression? How did relatives go about their daily household tasks? If you can, interview members of your family about what they know. Try to find out stories about the oldest family members.

Where did they come from? What did they pass down—love of learning, ambition, money, pride? Did they speak a language other than English? Did they have to learn English? What important historical events occurred during their lifetimes? In which ones did they actually participate? What were their experiences of joy and sorrow?

Such family histories will better enable you to understand where you come from and what factors have shaped the family experiences you have had. Connecting your family history to the wider history of American families is a first step toward a better understanding of both.

as Caucasians to be married (57% for each group) but only half as likely to be divorced (5% versus 10% of non-Hispanic whites). They are also less likely to be widowed but more likely to have never married (33%

versus 25% among non-Hispanic whites). Almost three-fourths (73%) of Asian American households are family households, a level greater than found among Caucasians (66%) (Reeves and Bennett 2003).

Typically, Asian Americans have fewer children, have them within marriage, and have them later than do other ethnic groups. Where 10% of European American, 18% of Hispanic, and 23% of African American births occur to women under age 20, only 6% of Asian American births occur to teenage mothers (McLoyd et al. 2000a).

Values that continue to be important to Asian Americans in general include a strong sense of importance of family over the individual, self-control to achieve societal goals, and appreciation of cultural heritage. Chinese Americans tend to exercise strong parental control while encouraging their children to develop a sense of independence and strong motivation for achievement (Ishii-Kuntz 1997; Lin and Fu 1990).

Almost 90% of Asian Americans graduated from high school, a rate comparable to that of non-Hispanics whites (89%). However, Asians are more likely than Caucasians to graduate from college. More than half of Asian men (52%) and 44% of Asian women earned at least a B.A. degree. These are significantly higher percentages than found among Caucasian men (32%) and women (27%). At the other end of educational attainment, Asians are more likely to have less than 9 years of schooling than are non-Hispanics whites (7% versus 4%).

Economically, Asians are an unusual minority in that they often exceed the economic status and earnings of the dominant majority. In 2001, for example, Asian families were more likely to earn at least \$75,000 than were Caucasian families (40% versus 35%). Unemployment rates were nearly the same (6% among Asians, 5% among non-Hispanics whites), and within employment categories, Asian men and women were more likely than Caucasian men and women to be employed in managerial and professional occupations. It is also true, however, that the poverty rate among Asians was slightly higher than among non-Hispanics whites (10% versus 8%) (Reeves and Bennett 2003).

As with Hispanics, there is noteworthy variation among different Asian American groups. In marital status, for example, although Asians were less likely than the general population to be separated, widowed, or divorced, there was much variation among them. Two thirds of Asian Indians and Pakistanis were married, but less than half of all Cambodians were married. Only 6% of Asian Indians or Pakistanis were separated, divorced, or widowed compared with Cambodians, Filipinos, Koreans, Laotians, and Thai, who

ranged between 10% and 15% in these marital statuses. The highest percentages of widowed, separated, or divorced were found among the Japanese, at 14.8%. However, this is potentially misleading because Japanese widows and widowers make up nearly half of that percentage (7.1%). The divorce rate among Japanese was 6.7%, still 3% less than among the total population (9.7%) and lower than the 7.4% found among Thai (Reeves and Bennett 2004, Figure 4).

Educationally and economically, there was also much variation among Asians. Asian Indians had the highest percentage earning a B.A. degree (64%), followed by Pakistanis (54%) and Chinese (48.1%). Meanwhile, about 50% of Laotians and Cambodians and 60% of Hmong had not completed high school. The Japanese, at 91%, had the highest percentage to have completed high school (Reeves and Bennett 2004, Figure 9). Asian Indian, Japanese, and Chinese women and men had the highest median earnings. Hmong, Cambodian, and Laotian men's and women's incomes were at the opposite end. At \$51,904, Asian Indian men had the highest median income found among Asian men. Japanese women, with median earnings of \$35,998, had the highest median income among Asian women (Reeves and Bennett 2004, Figure 12).

The median family income among Asians ranged from a low of \$32,384 among Hmong to a high of \$70,849 earned by Japanese families. Asian Indians were a close second at \$70,708. Along with Hmong families, Cambodian, Korean, Laotian, Pakistani, Thai, and Vietnamese families all had median incomes "substantially lower" than the median for all Asian families (\$59,324). Finally, poverty rates varied quite a bit. The lowest poverty rates were found among Filipinos (6.3%), Japanese (9.7%), and Asian Indians (9.8%). At the other end, the poverty rate for Hmong (37.8%) and Cambodians (29.3%) were 2.5 to 3 times the rate among Asians overall (Reeves and Bennett 2004, Figures 13 and 14).

Clearly, much diversity can be observed within Asian American families based on where they're from, time of arrival in the United States, and reasons for coming to this country (for example, political versus economic). More recent immigrants retain more culturally distinct characteristics, such as family structure and values, than do older groups, such as Chinese Americans and Japanese Americans. Asian American families tend to be slightly larger than the average U.S. family (U.S. Census Bureau 1996), although there is wide variation between older and more recent immi-

grants. Among the more assimilated Japanese, the average family has 2.5 members. Among more recent Asian immigrants (for example, Cambodians, Laotians, Vietnamese, and Hmong), families average between 4 and 5.1 members (McLoyd et al. 2000b). The greater family size reflects the presence of extended kin.

Migration and assimilation alter many traditional Asian family patterns. For example, among Japanese families there are considerable differences among the *Issei* (immigrant generation), the *Nisei* (first-generation American-born), and the *Sansei* and subsequent generations on such family characteristics as the relative importance of marriage over extended kin ties, the role of love in the choice of a spouse, and the relationship between the genders (Kitano and Kitano 1998). Similarly, we can draw distinctions between traditional Vietnamese families and American-born Vietnamese. Attitudes toward marriage and family, changes in familial gender roles, increased prevalence of divorce, and single-parent households all separate the generations.

We can also see marked change between parents' and children's attitudes about individualism and self-fulfillment versus family obligation and self-sacrifice (Tran 1998).

The most dramatic change affecting Chinese Americans has been their sheer increase in numbers over the last 30 years. The Chinese American population increased from 431,000 to 2.7 million between 1970 and 2000. More recent immigrants tend to be from Taiwan or Hong Kong rather than mainland China (Glenn and Yap 1994). Because of the large numbers of new immigrants, it is important to distinguish between American-born and foreign-born Chinese Americans; little research is available concerning the latter. Contemporary American-born Chinese families continue to emphasize familism, although filial piety and strict obedience to parental authority have become less strong. Chinese Americans tend to be better educated, have higher incomes, and have lower rates of unemployment than the general population. Their sexual values and attitudes toward gender roles tend to be more conservative. Chinese American women are expected to be employed and to contribute to the household income. More than 1.2 million speak Chinese at home.

**NATIVE AMERICAN FAMILIES.** More than 4 million Americans identify themselves as being of native descent, as American Indian or Alaska Native. This includes 2.5

million Americans who identify themselves as American Indian or Alaska Native alone and an additional 1.6 million who identify themselves as American Indian/Alaska Native, as well as one or more other races. Cumulatively, this population represents 1.5% of the 2000 population of the United States.

The increase in native population between 1990 and 2000 was greater than the increase in the entire U.S. population. Considering those who identify themselves as American Indian or Alaska Native alone, the increase was 26%, twice the size of the 13% increase in the entire U.S. population. Looking at those who identified themselves as native Americans in combination with one or more other races, the increase was a staggering 110% increase, an increase of more than 2.2 million people between 1990 and 2000.

Those who continue to be deeply involved with their own traditional culture give themselves a tribal identity, such as Dine (Navajo), Lakota, or Cherokee (Kawamoto and Cheshire 1997). The largest tribal groups include the Cherokee, Navajo, Latin American Indian, Choctaw, Sioux, and Chippewa. Together, these six tribal groups account for more than 40% of the American Indian population (see Table 3.10). Among Alaska Native tribal groups, there were 54,761 Eskimos, making them the largest group (Ogunwole 2002).

Those who are more acculturated, such as urban dwellers, tend to give themselves an ethnic identity as Native Americans or Indians. Most Americans of native descent consider themselves members of a tribal group rather than an ethnic group. According to John Price (1981), "Specific tribal identities are almost universally stronger and more important than identity as a Native American."

The American Indian population is unevenly distributed throughout the United States: 43% live in the West, 31% in the South, 17% in the Midwest, and only 9% in the Northeast. California and Oklahoma, together, account for nearly one-fourth of the American Indian population. Along with these eight other states, they lay claim to more than half of the American Indian population: Arizona, Texas, New Mexico, New York, Washington, North Carolina, Michigan, and Alaska (Ogunwole 2002).

There has been a considerable migration of Native Americans to urban areas since World War II because of poverty on reservations and pressures toward acculturation. Today, 1.2 million Americans of native descent live outside tribal lands; most live in cities, where they are separated from their traditional tribal

**Table 3.10 ■ Largest American Indian Tribal Groupings, Census 2000**

Tribal Group	# Identifying American Indian Alone	# Identifying American Indian in Combination	Total
Total	2,475,956	1,643,345	4,119,301
Tribe specified	1,963,996	1,098,848	3,062,844
Cherokee	281,069	448,464	729,533
Navajo	269,202	28,995	298,197
Latin American Indian	104,354	76,586	180,940
Choctaw	87,349	71,425	158,774
Sioux	108,272	45,088	153,360
Chippewa	105,907	43,762	149,669

SOURCE: Ogunwole 2000; U.S. Census Bureau 2002.

cultures and may experience great cultural conflict as they attempt to maintain traditional values. Not surprisingly, those in the cities are more acculturated than those remaining on the reservations. Urban Native Americans may attend powwows, intertribal social gatherings centering on drumming, singing, and traditional dances. Powwows are important mechanisms in the development of the Native American ethnic identity in contrast to the tribal identity. Urban Native Americans, however, may visit their home reservations regularly.

Based on data from the 2000 report “Census of Population and Housing Characteristics of American Indians and Alaska Natives by Tribe and Language,” we can make the following points regarding the American Indian and Alaska Native populations (U.S. Census Bureau 2003):

- Of the 770,334 American Indian and Alaska Native households, 563,651, or 73%, were family households, of which 59% had children under age 18 living with them.
- Of the family households, 61% were married couple families, of which 57% had children under 18. Another 28% were female-headed families with no husband, of which 64% had a child or children under 18.
- The American Indian and Alaska Native populations were less likely to complete high school and college and more likely to drop out of school before completing high school than were the general population. Where 80% of the general population, age 25 and older, had completed high school, 71% of the American Indian and Alaska Native populations had. Of the American Indian and Alaska Native populations, 11.5% had completed college, less than half the percentage of the general population (24.4%). At the

other end, whereas 9.8% of 16–19 year olds in the United States had not graduated high school but were also no longer enrolled, among American Indian and Alaska Native populations the percentage was 16.1%.

- Although similar percentages of American Indian and Alaska Native populations were in the labor force as the general population, with similar levels of female employment and employment of mothers with children under 6, the American Indian and Alaska Native populations were twice as likely to be unemployed, twice as likely to be below poverty, and had substantially lower median household and family incomes (see Table 3.11).

Although there is considerable variation among different tribal groups, and hence no single type of American Indian or Alaska Native family, three aspects of Native American families are important. First, extended families are significant. These extended families may be different from what the larger society regards as an extended family (Wall 1993). They often revolve around complex kinship networks based on clan membership rather than birth, marriage, or adoption. Concepts of kin relationships may also differ. A child’s “grandmother” may be an aunt or great-aunt in a European-based conceptualization of kin (Yellowbird and Snipp 1994).

Second, increasingly large numbers of Native Americans are marrying non-Indians. Among married Native Americans, more than half have non-Indian spouses. With such high rates of intermarriage, a key question is whether Native Americans can sustain their ethnic identity. Michael Yellowbird and Matthew Snipp (1994) wonder if “Indians, through their spousal choices, may accomplish what disease, Western civilization, and decades of federal Indian policy failed to achieve.”

**Table 3.11 ■ Comparative Measures of Economic Well-Being: American Indian/Alaska Native and U.S. Overall: 2000**

	U.S. Overall	American Indian/Alaska Native	American Indian as % of U.S. overall
% unemployed	5.8	12.4	
Median household income	\$41,994	\$30,599	73
Median family income	\$50,046	\$33,144	66
% of households with incomes > \$100,000	12.3%	5.4	
Median earnings: male	\$37,057	\$28,919	78
Median earnings: female	\$28,919	\$22,834	79
% in poverty: total	12.4	25.7	
% in poverty: children	16	31	
People > 65 years old	9.9	23.5	
Families in poverty	9.2	21.8	
Female-headed families in poverty	34.3	45.7	

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census of Population and Housing Characteristics of American Indians and Alaskan Natives by Tribe and Language: PHC-5, Washington, D.C., 2003; Tables 9, 10, 12, 13.

Third, family characteristics are affected by the economic status of American Indians and Alaska Natives. Given the higher levels of unemployment and poverty, and lower overall earnings and educational attainment, once again social class may be confounding our attempt to look at patterns of family living.

**FAMILIES OF MIDDLE EASTERN BACKGROUND.** People of Middle Eastern ethnic backgrounds living in the United States are among the fastest growing ethnic minority in the country. Estimates of the population vary, depending on such issues as what countries are included and whether we count only naturalized citizens or includes all immigrants, legal and illegal, temporary (for example, students and guest workers) and permanent (Camarota 2002; Brittingham and de la Cruz 2005). Furthermore, the census provides more detailed analysis of people of Arab ancestries than people whose ancestry is Middle Eastern. Thus, estimates from the census tend to undercount the overall population of Middle Eastern background.

As defined by Steven Camarota of the Center for Immigration Studies, “Middle Eastern” includes people whose backgrounds can be traced to one of the following: Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Turkey, the Levant, the Arabian peninsula, and Arab North Africa. In terms of specific countries, the designation “Middle Eastern” encompasses Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon,

Syria, Turkey, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen, Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia, West Sahara, and Mauritania (Camarota 2002).

The Middle Eastern immigrant population is relatively recent and very diverse. The population includes non-Arab countries such as Israel, Iran, Turkey, and Pakistan, representing half of the top eight Middle Eastern countries of origin in 2000. Further complicating counts, among those Middle Eastern immigrants from Arab countries we find many non-Arabs. Similarly, many immigrants from non-Arab countries, such as Israel, for example, are Arabs.

The U.S. census, counting the more narrowly defined Arab population, estimates that 1.2 million people claim some Arab ancestry, either alone or in combination. Meanwhile, the Center for Immigration Studies states that Middle Eastern immigrants numbered closer to 1.5 million in 2000, with 40% of Arab background. The center further estimates that within a decade (that is, by 2010) the number is likely to be 2.5 million or more. Putting aside the question of counts, the U.S. census, in two separate reports on the Arab population in the United States, provides the following profile:

- Three ancestry groups, Lebanese, Syrian, and Egyptian, account for 60% of the Arab population. The largest is Lebanese, representing 37% of the U.S. Arab population (Syrian and Egyptian account for 12% each).



- The Arab population, spread fairly evenly across the four regions of the United States, is disproportionately found in just five states, California, Florida, Michigan, New Jersey, and New York. Cumulatively they account for nearly half (48%) of the Arab population. The city with the largest Arab population is New York City, with 69,985 people of Arab ancestry. Second is Dearborn, Michigan, with 29,181. Interestingly, the Arab population in New York accounts for less than 1% of the city's population, whereas the Arab population in Dearborn is 30% of the city's population.
- In comparison to the general population, the Arab population is disproportionately male. Males comprise 57% of the population, compared to 49% of the total U.S. population. Furthermore, 31% of the Arab population consisted of men age 20–49. This same demographic group represented 22% of the total U.S. population (Brittingham and de la Cruz 2005).
- The Arab American population is more likely than the total population to be married and less likely to be widowed, separated, or divorced. Where 54% of the total U.S. adult population is married, 61% of the Arab population is married. As was true of Asians and Latinos, much variation exists among Arab ethnicities. Moroccans are the least likely to be married (53.4%) and Jordanians the most likely (67%). Nearly one out of five adults in the U.S. population is separated, widowed, or divorced; among Arab Americans, 13% fall into those categories (Brittingham and de la Cruz 2005).
- Compared to the total population, a greater proportion of Arab households consisted of married couples, with or without children, in 2000. Married couples made up 60% of Arab households, compared to 53% of all U.S. households. Among Palestinians and Jordanians, the percentage of married couples reached 70%. Meanwhile, where more than 1 in 10 (12%) U.S. households was headed by a woman with no husband present, only about 1 in 5 (6%) of Arab American households were headed by a woman (Brittingham and de la Cruz 2005).
- Arab Americans tend to be highly educated, employed, and have higher incomes than the total population. However, Arab women are much less likely to be in the labor force than are women overall (see Table 3.12).
- Obscured by the data in Table 3.12 are the differences among Arabs. For example, 94% of Egyptians graduated from high school compared to 73% of Iraqis in the United States. Similarly, 64% of Egyptians 25 and older had B.A. degrees compared to 36% of Iraqis (which still surpassed the 24% in the total population). Median family income ranged from a low of \$41,277 among Moroccans to a high of \$60,677 among Lebanese. Poverty rates ranged from 11% among Lebanese and Syrians to a high of 25% among Iraqis.
- Although the Middle East is approximately 98% Muslim, immigrants to the United States from the region historically were not. In the past, most were Christian. This changed in the 1990s, and estimates are that nearly three-fourths of the Middle Eastern immigrant population is Muslim (Camarota 2002). The fact of their Muslim faith may influence certain family patterns, although as happens to other ethnic groups

**Table 3.12 ■ Socioeconomic Differences: Arab Americans and U.S. Overall**

		Arab	U.S.
With ≥ high school		84%	80%
With ≥ undergraduate degree		40%	24%
In labor force	Male	73%	71%
	Female	46%	58%
Median earnings	Male	\$41,700	\$37,100
	Female	\$31,800	\$27,200
Median family income		\$52,318	\$50,046
In poverty	Total	17%	12%
	Children	22%	16.6%

## Exploring Diversity

### Iranians in the United States



Among Middle Eastern ethnic groups in the United States, Iranians are one of the faster growing and more successful (Mostashari and Khodamhosseini 2004). Although the population is estimated to be between 319,000 and 371,000, the Iranian Studies Group at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology speculates that the true population may be closer to 690,000 but is undercounted because of reluctance to identify oneself as Iranian out of fear of “adverse effects” (Mostashari 2004).

Iranians are highly educated, with 57% completing college compared to only 24% among the overall U.S. population. A greater proportion of Iranians have graduate degrees than the wider population has B.A. degrees. Iranian Americans have family incomes 38% higher than the median family income for the United States, own homes valued at 2.5 times the value of an average American home, and are twice as likely to have family incomes in excess of \$100,000 as the general population (Mostashari and Khodamhosseini 2004). More than 80% of employed Iranians work in professional, managerial, sales, or office positions compared to 60% of the total population (Mostashari and Khodamhosseini 2004).

Iranian sociologist Ali Akbar Mahdi undertook a survey comparing the division of household labor for Iranian married couples in the United States

and those in Iran. Mahdi focused on the women in a sample of 149 couples in the United States and 514 couples living in Iran. His U.S. sample was more highly educated and affluent than the general profile of Iranian American families. More than half of the women had graduate or professional degrees and another third had “just” B.A. degrees. His sample of couples living in Iran was also highly educated (60% had attended college) and comfortable (45% middle class, 26% upper-middle class). Mahdi compared how the two samples differed in their allocation of 10 household tasks. Compared to the women living in Iran, the immigrant women in the U.S. were less likely to bear responsibility for childcare and for domestic tasks that included cleaning the house or apartment; sewing, ironing and laundry. They reported their husbands as more likely to take responsibility for cooking, cleaning, and childcare than did the women living in Iran (Mahdi 2001). Although there was no typically female domestic task for which most immigrant women claimed that their husbands were now responsible, there had been some movement from tradition in the immigrant sample. As Mahdi notes about the immigrant couples (Mahdi 2001, 184):

Men are taking a more active role in the household chores . . . women also are participating actively in the roles traditionally performed by men, such as managing family finances, attending to family business, and even caring for the family car. Iranian women are seeking open equality in doing house-

hold chores, in child-rearing, decision making, ownership of family property . . . even in their sexual relationship.

Transitions such as Mahdi depicts do not come without some difficulty. He notes that in his immigrant sample some men felt, for at least a time, a loss of the traditional privilege and higher status that men in Iran expect to enjoy in marriage. There is also stress and confusion felt by husbands and wives as they attempt to renegotiate and redefine their respective places in marriage and the family. Compounding this is the absence of the wider kin network that, in Iran, may have buffered couples from some conflict (or reinforced a particular way of living and thus prevented changes of this kind). He observes that in the new setting, each spouse has to play the role of intimate partner and also, in many cases, the role of an absent father, mother, or brother” (Mahdi 2001, 187).

Mahdi suggests that although wives and husbands share in the economic gains, the social gains have been unequal. Men surrendered privileges that they previously enjoyed (or that they were raised to expect). They lost authority and the automatic respect within their marriages and kin networks that men traditionally commanded. Women, on the other hand, escaped some oppressive features of the society they left behind and gained independence; autonomy; individuality; a new, more equal identity; and a “clearer sense of their sexuality” (Mahdi 2001, 190).

assimilation operates against strict adherence to even religiously reinforced customs. Such is the case, for example, with both dating and mate selection. Sharply sex-segregated customs surrounding dating and a preference toward arranged marriage are characteristic of Muslim family life, yet both undergo consid-

erable challenge from sons and especially daughters who are exposed to and may come to value Western notions of love, marriage, and family life (Zaidi and Shuraydi 2002). As Arshia Zaidi and Muhammad Shuraydi report from their examination of Pakistanis, “Families, depending on their educational,

religious, economic, and social backgrounds, are coping with these changes by modifying the traditional authoritarian structure of the family system and their attitudes.”

**EUROPEAN ETHNIC FAMILIES.** The sense of ethnicity among Americans of European descent grew in recent decades. This is especially true among working-class Germans, Italians, Greeks, Poles, Irish, Croats, and Hungarians. This increasing awareness seems to be part of a general rise in ethnic identification over the last 30 years (Rubin 1994). Earlier, members of European ethnic groups sought to assimilate—to adopt the attitudes, beliefs, and values of the dominant culture. Most white ethnic groups have assimilated to a considerable degree—they have learned English, moved from their ethnic neighborhoods, and married outside their group, but many continue to be bound emotionally to their ethnic roots. These roots are psychologically important, giving them a sense of community and a shared history. This common culture is manifested in shared rituals, feast days, and saint’s days, such as St. Patrick’s Day.

Except for some West Coast enclaves, such as Little Italy in San Francisco, white ethnicity is strongest in the East and Midwest. The Irish neighborhoods of Boston, the Polish areas of Chicago, and the Jewish sections of Brooklyn, for example, have strong ethnic identities. Common languages and dialects are spoken in the homes, stores, and parks. Traditional holidays are celebrated; the foods are prepared from recipes passed down through generations. Elders speak of the old country and their villages—even if it was their parents or grandparents who immigrated.

As is true of some non-European ethnic groups, as children grow up and move from their neighborhoods, their ethnic identity often becomes weaker in terms of language and marriage to others within their group—but they may retain some elements of ethnic pride. Their ethnicity is what Herbert Gans (1979) calls *symbolic ethnicity*—an ethnic identity that’s used only when the individual chooses. Symbolic ethnicity has little effect on day-to-day life. It is not linked to neighborhoods, accents, the use of a foreign language, or working life. Others cannot easily identify the person’s ethnicity; he or she “looks” American. Nevertheless, for many Americans, ethnicity has emotional significance. A person is Irish, Jewish, Italian, or German, for example—not only an American.

European ethnic groups differ from one another in many ways. However, a major study of contemporary American ethnic groups (Lieberson and Waters 1988) found that European ethnic groups are more similar to one another than they are to African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and Native Americans. The researchers concluded that a European–non-European distinction remains a central division in our society. There are several reasons for this. First, most European ethnic groups no longer have **minority status**—that is, unequal access to economic and political power. Some scholars suggest that what separates ethnic groups into distinctive lifestyles is their social placement. As groups become more similar in their access to opportunities, their family lifestyles may “converge” toward a common pattern, one that includes smaller families, increased divorce, less interdependent ties with extended families, and less male dominance (Aponte, Beal, and Jiles 1999). Second, because most European ethnic groups are not physically distinguishable from other white Americans, they are not discriminated against racially.

This chapter has covered much ground. As we have now seen, in a host of ways, American families are diverse. They vary across time and, within any given period, between racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups. Family diversity is reflected throughout subsequent, more specialized chapters as relevant variations by race, class, or ethnicity are discussed. Thus, our goal of understanding American families will be made more complete and representative.

Acknowledging the diversity that exists across families has personal consequences as well. It ought to make us a bit more cautious in generalizing from our particular set of family experiences to what others “must also experience.” In addition, in noting how historical, economic, and cultural factors shape our families, we link our personal experiences to broader societal forces. In that way, we are better able to apply “sociological imaginations” to family experiences, identifying how our private and personal family worlds are largely products of when, where, and how we live (Mills 1959). Simply put, if we come of age during a period of great economic upheaval, we may put off marrying, bearing children, or divorcing because of the opportunities and constraints we face. Similarly, the kinds of family experiences we are able to have are limited or enhanced by the economic resources at our disposal, regardless of what we might otherwise choose to do.

Despite the extent to which the factors discussed in this and the next chapter may limit your opportunities or narrow your range of choices, remember that you do and will make choices about what kind of family you wish to create. You decide whether or not to

marry, whether or not to bear children, how to rear your children, whether to stay married, and so on. A major goal of this book is to equip you with a foundation of accurate information about family issues from which you can make sound choices more effectively.

## Summary

- In the early years of colonization, there were 2 million Native Americans in what is now called the United States. Many families were *patrilineal*; rights and property flowed from the father. Other tribal groups were *matrilineal*. Most families were small.
- Diverse groups settled America, including English, Germans, and Africans. In colonial America, marriages were arranged. Marriage was an economic institution, and the marriage relationship was *patriarchal*.
- African American families began in the United States in the early seventeenth century. They continued the African tradition that emphasized kin relations. Most slaves lived in two-parent families that valued marital stability.
- In the nineteenth century, industrialization revolutionized the family's structure; men became wage earners, and women, once they married, became housewives. Childhood was sentimentalized, and adolescence was invented. Marriage was increasingly based on emotional bonds.
- The stability of the African American enslaved family suffered because it lacked autonomy and had little economic importance. Enslaved families were broken up by slaveholders, and marriage between slaves was not legally recognized. African American families formed solid bonds nevertheless.
- Beginning in the twentieth century, *companionate marriage* became an ideal. Men and women shared household decision making and tasks, marriages were expected to be romantic, wives were expected to be sexually active, and children were to be treated more democratically.
- The 1950s, the golden age of the companionate marriage, was an aberration. It was an exception to the general trend of rising divorce and nontraditional gender roles. Prosperity was unusually high; suburbanization led to increased isolation.
- The terms *ethnic group*, *racial group*, and *minority group* are conceptually distinct. An ethnic group is a group of people distinct from other groups because of cultural characteristics. A *racial group* is a group of people, such as whites, blacks, or Asians, classified according to phenotype, as well as anatomical and physical characteristics. A *minority group* is a group whose status (position in the social hierarchy) places its members at an economic, social, and political disadvantage.
- African Americans are the second largest ethnic group in the United States. *Socioeconomic status* is an important element in understanding African American families.
- Because of economic necessity, African American women traditionally have been employed, which has given them important economic roles in the family and more egalitarian relationships. Kinship bonds and intergenerational ties are important sources of emotional and economic assistance in times of need. African Americans are much more likely than Caucasians to live in *extended households*.
- Latinos are now the largest ethnic group as a result of immigration and a higher birthrate than the general population. There is considerable ethnic and economic diversity among Latinos. Latinos emphasize extended kin relationships, cooperation, and mutual assistance. *La familia* includes not only the nuclear family but also the extended family.
- Asian Americans are the third largest ethnic group in the United States. Immigration has contributed heavily to the dramatic recent increase in the Asian American population. The largest Asian American groups are Chinese Americans, Filipino Americans, and Asian

Indians. More recent immigrants retain more culturally distinct characteristics, such as family structure and values, than do older groups. There are differences between Asian ethnic groups, much of which results from their socioeconomic position in U.S. society.

- More than 4 million Americans identify themselves as American Indians or Alaska Natives. Tribal identity remains a key part of their identity. More than half of Native Americans live in cities, although many remain in contact with their home reservation. Extended families are important and are often based on clan membership. About 53% of Native Americans are married to non-Indians.
- In recent years, increasing numbers of people from Middle Eastern countries have come to the United States. Overall, people of Middle Eastern background are economically better off than the general population, more highly educated, and more likely to live in married-couple headed households, though there is much social, economic and familial diversity within the Middle Eastern population.
- Ethnic identity among Americans of European descent has been growing, especially among working-class families. For many, their ethnicity is symbolic and has little effect on day-to-day life. Most members of European ethnic groups are physically indistinguishable from other white Americans and no longer have minority status.

## Key Terms

adolescence 72	matrilineal 70
assisted reproductive technologies 83	minority group 96
bundling 71	minority status 110
companionate marriage 76	patriarchy 71
ethnic group 95	patrilineal 70
extended households 98	phenotype 95
familism 84	racial group (race) 95
feminization of poverty 90	social class 85
fictive kin ties 94	social mobility 94
life chances 85	socioeconomic status 85
lower-middle class 88	two-person career 90
	upper-middle class 88
	working class 88

## Resources on the Internet

### Companion Website for This Book

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Gain an even better understanding of this chapter by going to the companion website for additional study resources. Take advantage of the Pre- and Post-Test quizzing tool, which is designed to help you grasp difficult concepts by referring you back to review specific pages in the chapter for questions you answer incorrectly. Use the flash cards to master key terms and check out the many other study aids you'll find there. Visit the Marriage and Family Resource Center on the site. You'll also find special features such as access to InfoTrac<sup>®</sup> College Edition (a database that allows you access to more than 18 million full-length articles from 5,000 periodicals and journals), as well as GSS Data and Census information to help you with your research projects and papers.

