Final PDF to printer

Public & Private Families

AN INTRODUCTION

ANDREW J. CHERLIN
Johns Hopkins University

9e

Mc Graw Hill

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE FAMILIES: AN INTRODUCTION, NINTH EDITION

Published by McGraw-Hill Education, 2 Penn Plaza, New York, NY 10121.

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 LWI 23 22 21 20

ISBN 978-1-260-81327-2 (bound edition)
MHID 1-260-81327-4 (bound edition)
ISBN 978-1-260-24082-5 (loose-leaf edition)
MHID 1-260-24082-7 (loose-leaf edition)

Product Developer: *Alexander Preiss*
Marketing Manager: *Amy Reed*
Content Project Managers: *Danielle Clement/Katie Reuter*
Buyer: *Laura Fuller*
Designer: *David Hash*
Content Licensing Specialist: *Brianna Kirschbaum*
Cover Image: *CARACOLLA/Shutterstock*
Compositor: *SPi Global*

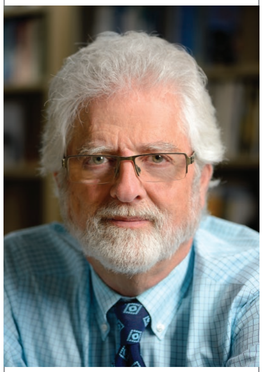
All credits appearing on page or at the end of the book are considered to be an extension of the copyright page.

Cataloging-in-Publication Data has been requested from the Library of Congress.

mheducation.com/highered

For Claire and Reid

About the Author


Courtesy of Will Kirk, Johns Hopkins University

Andrew J. Cherlin is Benjamin H. Griswold III Professor of Public Policy and Sociology at Johns Hopkins University. He received a B.S. from Yale University in 1970 and a Ph.D. in sociology from the University of California at Los Angeles in 1976. His books include *Labor's Love Lost: The Rise and Fall of the Working-Class Family in America* (2014), *The Marriage-Go-Round: The State of Marriage and the Family in America Today* (2009), *Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage* (revised and enlarged edition, 1992), *Divided Families: What Happens to Children When Parents Part* (with Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr., 1991), *The Changing American Family and Public Policy* (1988), and *The New American Grandparent: A Place in the Family, A Life Apart* (with Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr., 1986). In 1989–1990 he was chair of the Family Section of the American Sociological Association. In 1999 he was president of the Population Association of America, the scholarly organization for demographic research. He is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the American Academy of Political and Social Science, and the National Academy of Sciences.

In 2005 Professor Cherlin was awarded a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship. He received the Distinguished Career Award in 2003 from the Family Section of the American Sociological Association. In 2001 he received the Olivia S. Nordberg Award for Excellence in Writing in the Population Sciences. In 2009 he received the Irene B. Taeuber Award from the Population Association of America, in Recognition of Outstanding Accomplishments in Demographic Research. He has also received a Merit Award from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development for his research on the effects of family structure on children. His recent articles include "Nonmarital First Births, Marriage, and Income Inequality," in the *American Sociological Review;* "Family Complexity, the Family Safety Net, and Public Policy," in the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science;* "Goode's *World Revolution and Family Patterns:* A Reconsideration at Fifty Years," in *Population and Development Review;* and "The Deinstitutionalization of American Marriage," in the *Journal of Marriage and Family.* He also has written many articles for *The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Nation, Newsweek,* and other periodicals. He has been interviewed on the *Today Show, CBS This Morning,* network evening news programs, National Public Radio's *All Things Considered,* and other news programs and documentaries.

Contents in Brief

Contents

Final PDF to printer

List of Boxes

Families and Public Policy

How Do Sociologists Know What They Know?

Preface

The sociology of the family is deceptively hard to study. Unlike, say, physics, the topic is familiar (a word whose very root is Latin for “family”) because virtually everyone grows up in families. Therefore, it can seem “easy” to study the family because students can bring to bear their personal knowledge of the subject. Some textbooks play to this familiarity by mainly providing students with an opportunity to better understand their private lives. The authors never stray too far from the individual experiences of the readers, focusing on personal choices such as whether to marry and whether to have children. To be sure, giving students insight into the social forces that shape their personal decisions about family life is a worthwhile objective. Nevertheless, the challenge of writing about the sociology of the family is also to help students understand that the significance of families extends beyond personal experience. Today, as in the past, the family is the site of not only private decisions but also activities that matter to our society as a whole.

These activities center on taking care of people who are unable to fully care for themselves, most notably children and the elderly. Anyone who follows social issues knows of the often-expressed concern about whether, given developments such as the increases in divorce and childbearing outside of marriage, we are raising the next generation adequately. Anyone anxious about the well-being of the rapidly expanding older population (as well as the escalating cost of providing financial and medical assistance to them) knows the concern about whether family members will continue to provide adequate assistance to them. Indeed, rarely does a month pass without these issues appearing on the covers of magazines and the front pages of newspapers.

In this textbook, consequently, I have written about the family in two senses: the *private family,* in which we live most of our personal lives, and the *public family,* in which adults perform tasks that are important to society. My goal is to give students a thorough grounding in both aspects. It is true that the two are related—taking care of children adequately, for instance, requires the love and affection that family members express privately toward each other. But the public side of the family deserves equal time with the private side.

Organization

This book is divided into 6 parts and 14 chapters. Part One (“Introduction”) introduces the concepts of public and private families and examines how sociologists and other social scientists study them. It also provides an overview of the history of the family. Part Two (“Gender, Class, and Race-Ethnicity”) deals with the three key dimensions of social stratification in family life: gender, social class, and race-ethnicity. In Part Three (“Sexuality, Partnership, and Marriage”), the focus shifts to the private family. The section examines the emergence of the modern concept of sexuality, the formation of partnerships, and the degree of persistence and change in the institution of marriage. Finally, it covers the complex connections between work and family.

Part Four (“Links across the Generations”) explores how well the public family is meeting its responsibilities for children and the elderly. Part Five (“Conflict, Disruption, and Reconstitution”) deals with the consequences of conflict and disruption in family life. It first studies intimate partner violence. Then the formation and dissolution of marriages and cohabiting unions are discussed. Finally, in Part Six ("Family, Society, and World") family change around the world and social and political issues involving the family and the state are discussed.

Special Features

Public and Private Families is distinguishable from other textbooks in several important ways.

First and foremost, it explores both the public and the private family. The public/private distinction that underlies the book's structure is intended to provide a more balanced portrait of contemporary life. Furthermore, the focus on the public family leads to a much greater emphasis on government policy toward the family than in most other textbooks. In fact, most chapters include a short, boxed essay under the general title, "Families and Public Policy," to stimulate student interest and make the book relevant to current political debates.

In addition to this unique emphasis on both the *Public and Private Families,* the text:

- **Addresses the global nature of family change.** Although the emphasis in the book is on the contemporary United States, no text should ignore the important cross-national connections among families in our globalized economy. The text includes a chapter on "International Family Change" that provides a comprehensive treatment of the major types of change that are occurring in family life around the world (Chapter 13).
- **Includes distinctive chapters.** The attention to the public family led me to write several chapters that are not included in some sociology of the family textbooks. These include, in addition to the new chapter on international family change, Chapter 14, "The Family, the State, and Social Policy," and Chapter 10, "Older People and Their Families." These chapters examine issues of great current interest, such as income assistance to poor families, the costs of the Social Security and Medicare programs, and the extension of marriage to same-sex couples. Throughout these and other chapters, variations by race, ethnicity, and gender are explored.
- **Gives special attention to the research methods used by family sociologists.** To give students an understanding of how sociologists study the family, I include a section in Chapter 1 titled, "How Do Family Sociologists Know What They Know?" This material explains the ways that family sociologists go about their research. Then in other chapters, I include boxed essays under a similar title on subjects ranging from national surveys to feminist research methods.

Pedagogy

Each chapter begins in a way that engages the reader: the controversy over whether the Scarborough 11 in Hartford, Connecticut, constitute a family (Chapter 1); the transgender moment (Chapter 3); the courtship of Maud Rittenhouse in the 1880s (Chapter 7); and so forth. And each of the six parts of the book is preceded by a brief introduction that sets the stage.

Several *Quick Review* boxes in each chapter include bulleted, one-sentence summaries of the key points of the preceding sections. Each chapter also contains the following types of questions:

- *Looking Forward*—Questions that preview the chapter themes and topics.
- *Ask Yourself*—Two questions that appear at the end of each of the boxed features.

- *Looking Back*—Looking Forward questions reiterated at the end of each chapter, around which the chapter summaries are organized.
- *Thinking about Families*—Two questions that appear at the end of each chapter and are designed to encourage critical thinking about the "public" and the "private" family.

What's New in Each Chapter?

As with every edition, all statistics in the text have been updated whenever possible. The structure of the chapters in the book remains the same as in the 8th edition. Changes include the following:

Chapter 1. Public and Private Families.

- I have slightly altered the definition of the private family to accommodate alternative families such as the Scarborough 11 and the voluntary-kinship based families formed by some LGBTQ individuals. I explicitly say that family members do not all need to be related by blood or marriage.
- I now use *voluntary kinship* as the term for what I previously called *created kinship,* since the *voluntary* term is more common in the literature.
- I have deleted reference to a 1999 New York Times survey in which people were much more pessimistic about other families than about theirs. It is too dated, and I cannot find a more recent administration of the survey questions.
- I have added a fifth theoretical perspective: queer theory. In previous editions, I had discussed it briefly in other chapters, and I still do in this edition. But due to its popularity among scholars, I have now given it equal status with other important theoretical perspectives. I introduce several new key terms in this chapter: cisgender people, transgender people, heteronormativity, monogamy, polyamory, and queer theory.
- I have moved the discussion of intersectionality from Chapter 3 (gender) to this chapter. The intersectional perspective has become more prominent among social theorists.

Chapter 2. The History of the Family

- I have moved the section on the historical emergence of sexual identities from Chapter 6 in the previous edition to Chapter 2 of this edition. This move reflects my view that the material on sexuality and the family has become more central to sociological research and should be introduced earlier.
- I have deleted the section on the origins of family and kinship, which described hunter-gatherer society and lineages; however, I have added back in material on lineages in the section on American Indians later in the chapter.
- I have deleted a discussion of African roots of African American cultural patterns, which reflects my sense that historians are no longer pursuing this topic.
- I have added to the section on emerging adulthood a subsection on gay and lesbian emerging adults in the period from 1945 to 2000.

Chapter 3. Gender and Families

- I include an update on attention to transgender issues, including an estimate of how many transgender people there are in the United States.
- In this edition, I have introduced the concept of intersectionality in Chapter 1, rather than in this chapter. Here I write briefly about the origin of the concept in gender studies and give an example of its usefulness.

Chapter 4. Social class and Family Inequality

- I present new estimates of the lifetime prevalence of homelessness among the baby boom generation.
- I have deleted an out-of-date discussion about how couples decide what class they are in.
- There is a new section on the rise in "deaths of despair" due to alcohol poisoning and drug overdoses among whites without college degrees, but not among African Americans and Hispanics without college degrees. It draws upon a book and articles that I have written on the working-class family over the past several years.

Chapter 5. Race, Ethnicity, and Families

- I include an update on racial and ethnic categories to be used in the 2020 Census, (See boxed feature, "How Should Multiracial Families Be Counted?")
- In the section on Hispanic families, I present more information on migration from Central America. I note that Salvadorans are now a larger group in the United States than are Cubans. I have added a subsection, "Salvadorans."

Chapter 6. Sexualities

- Historical material on the emergence of sexual identities has been moved to Chapter 2.
- A new section on LGBTQ family life has been added, focusing on defining and forming families, becoming parents, and dividing the household labor.
- I present evidence that men's heterosexuality may be more precarious than women's.
- I discuss up-to-date twin studies and GWAS gene-sequencing studies on biological influences on sexuality.
- Evidence is presented that a greater increase in same-sex sexual activity has occurred among women than among men.

Chapter 7. Cohabitation and Marriage

- A new section on online matchmaking and commitment is included.
- I present a new estimate of the number of Americans who are in living-apart relationships.
- I also report that a majority of all same-sex couples in the United States who are living together are now married.

Chapter 8. Work and Families

- A new chapter opener contrasts the amount and kind of child care that male physicians and male emergency medical technicians tend to do (from Clawson & Gerstel, 2014).
- A new subsection presents research showing that single and cohabiting mothers tend to do less housework, have more leisure time, and sleep more than married mothers.
- I discuss the results of studies of the division of labor in same-sex couples.
- I have rewritten the section on work hours, formerly titled "Overworked and Underworked Americans." Among other updates, the new section emphasizes the "normal unpredictability" (new key term) of work hours among less-educated workers.

Chapter 9. Children and Parents

- I consider controversial research suggesting that the amount of time that mothers spend with their children is not associated with how well the children are faring. (See the section, "What's Important?")

- I include a new subsection on the difficulties that unauthorized-immigrant parents face in raising their U.S.-born children.

Chapter 10. Older People and Their Families

- I have written a new subsection on grandfamilies (called in previous editions, skipped-generation households): families in which grandparents are raising grandchildren without the parents being present. It draws upon a recent book by Rachel Dunifon (2018).
- I have deleted the subsection on the effects of divorce and remarriage. I include more on post-dissolution relationships in Chapter 12.

Chapter 11. Domestic Violence

- I discuss new research showing that during the Great Recession men acted in a more coercively controlling way toward their partners in areas where the unemployment rate was increasing rapidly, even after taking into account whether the men themselves were unemployed (Schneider, Harknett, & McLanahan, 2016).
- I draw attention to the sharp rise in the number of children in foster care due, in large part, to the opioid addiction and death crisis. See the boxed feature, Families and Public Policy: The Swinging Pendulum of Foster Care Policy.

Chapter 12. Union Dissolution and Repartnering

- I have greatly revised this chapter: It was too focused on divorce. It now notes that the rise of cohabiting unions has been the major factor driving dissolution and repartnering among young adults over the past few decades.
- A new chart (Figure 12.1) showing that while the overall percentage of children experiencing parental union disruption hasn't changed much, the source has: Children born to cohabiting parents constitute a larger share of all children experiencing dissolution than in the past.
- I present evidence from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics that families with older stepparents or adult stepchildren exchange less assistance up and down the generations than do families with only biological parents and children, which suggests a problem for future generations in societies (such as the U.S.) that rely on family members to provide assistance and care (Wiemers, Seltzer, Schoeni, Hotz, & Bianchi, 2019).

Chapter 13, International Family Change

- The great rise of cohabitation in many regions of the world necessitates an expanded, separate section on the "cohabitation boom."

Chapter 14, The Family, the State, and Social Policy

- I discuss recent bipartisan activity on the issue of paid parental leave that raises the possibility that national legislation will be enacted in the near future.

The 9th edition of *Public & Private Families* is now available online with Connect, McGraw-Hill Education's integrated assignment and assessment platform. Connect also offers SmartBook 2.0 © for the new edition, which is the first adaptive reading experience proven to improve grades and help students study more effectively. All of the title's website and ancillary content is also available through Connect, including

- A full Test Bank of multiple-choice questions that test students on central concepts and ideas in each chapter.
- An Instructor's Manual for each chapter with full chapter outlines, sample test questions, and discussion topics.
- Lecture Slides for instructor use in class.

SUPPORT AT every step

FOR STUDENTS

Effective, efficient studying.

Connect helps you be more productive with your study time and get better grades using tools like SmartBook 2.0, which highlights key concepts and creates a personalized study plan. Connect sets you up for success, so you walk into class with confidence and walk out with better grades.

Study anytime, anywhere.

Download the free ReadAnywhere app and access your online eBook or SmartBook 2.0 assignments when it's convenient, even if you're offline. And since the app automatically syncs with your eBook and SmartBook 2.0 assignments in Connect, all of your work is available every time you open it. Find out more at **www.mheducation.com/readanywhere**

> ***"I really liked this app—it made it easy to study when you don't have your text-book in front of you."***
>
> – Jordan Cunningham, Eastern Washington University

No surprises.

The Connect Calendar and Reports tools keep you on track with the work you need to get done and your assignment scores. Life gets busy; Connect tools help you keep learning through it all.

Calendar: owattaphotos/Getty Images

Learning for everyone.

McGraw-Hill works directly with Accessibility Services Departments and faculty to meet the learning needs of all students. Please contact your Accessibility Services office and ask them to email accessibility@mheducation.com, or visit **www.mheducation.com/about/accessibility** for more information.

Top: Jenner Images/Getty Images, Left: Hero Images/Getty Images, Right: Hero Images/Getty Images

Acknowledgments

To write a book, this comprehensive requires the help of many people. At McGraw-Hill, Product Developer Alexander Preiss and freelance Development Editor Anna Howland provided valuable editorial guidance. Brianna Kirschbaum, Senior Content Licensing Specialist, managed rights and permissions, and Danielle Clement, Content Project Manager, smoothly managed the production process.

Part One

Introduction

The family has two aspects. It is, first, the place where we experience much of our private lives. It is where we give and receive love, share our hopes and fears, work through our troubles, and relax and enjoy ourselves. Second, it is a setting in which adults perform tasks that are of importance to society, particularly raising children and assisting elderly parents. To be sure, people undertake these tasks not to perform a public service but rather to express love, affection, and gratitude. Nevertheless, family caretaking benefits us all by raising the next generation and by reducing our collective responsibility for the elderly. Indeed, people today frequently express concern over whether changes in the family have reduced parents' abilities to raise their children well. This book is about both the private and public aspects of families. It examines the contributions of family life not only to personal satisfaction but also to public welfare. The first two chapters provide an introduction to this perspective. Chapter 1 explores the most useful ways to think about families, and it examines the approaches that sociologists and other social scientists use to study families. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the history of the family. Over the past half-century family historians have produced many studies that provide useful insights. A knowledge of family life in the past can help us to understand families today.

Chapter One

Public and Private Families

Looking Forward

1. What do families do that is important for society? What do families do that is important for the individuals in them?
2. How do sociologists go about studying families?
3. What are the leading theoretical approaches to studying families?
4. How does individualism influence American family life?
5. How is globalization changing family life?

In August 2014, a group of friends consisting of two couples with children, a couple without children, and two other individuals bought a house together on Scarborough St. in Hartford, Connecticut. To drive down Scarborough is to pass mansion after mansion on what may be Hartford's most elegant street. But the eight-bedroom home that they purchased had fallen into disrepair and had been on the market for four years. The Scarborough 11, as they came to be called, deemed it perfect. "We didn't see the need to live in these isolated nuclear family units," said one of the residents. "It's sustainable for the earth, it makes economic sense, and it's a better way to raise our children. We didn't need a multifamily house with separate kitchens and separate living areas."[1] The group includes two school teachers, a college professor, employees of a clinic and of a cultural center, and a stay-at-home dad. They share the renovation costs, the monthly bills, and the household chores. Each pair of adults cooks dinner for everyone one night a week.

The problem is that Hartford's zoning law prohibits three or more unrelated individuals from living together in a single-family home. The law defines a family as two or more people who are related by blood, marriage, civil union, or adoption—which is pretty much the definition that the U.S. Census Bureau still uses. Defenders of the zoning law argue that it is necessary to protect residential neighborhoods from the establishment of rooming houses or (worse yet!) fraternities. By this standard, the Scarborough 11 comprised *too many* families: a Census-taker in the hallway might see one family consisting of parents and children to her left, a second family of parents and children to her right, a third family formed by the childless couple in the next room, and two other unrelated people making dinner in the kitchen. By her rules, which Hartford follows, none of the three families is related to each other, nor to the two singles. So there are more than two "unrelated" people in household, which violates the zoning law. Yet the Scarborough 11's radical claim is that they are *one* family and should therefore be allowed to live in a single-family home. "We have systems in place to ensure that we are functioning not just as a house but as a collective relationship," a resident told a reporter.

Shortly after the Scarborough 11 moved in, some neighbors complained to the Hartford Zoning Board that the group did not meet the zoning law and therefore

[1] My account is drawn from stories in the *Hartford Courant,* including "Zoning Squabble: Family Is What Family Does," November 21, 2014; "Scarborough 11's Family Dynamic One to Be Envious of," February 26, 2015; "Hartford Upholds Action against Scarborough Street Family," February 17, 2015; and "City of Hartford Withdraws Suit in 'Scarborough 11' Case," October 27, 2016; and in addition, "When 8 Adults and 3 Children Are a Family," *The Daily Beast,* May 10, 2015.

did not have the right to occupy the home. The attorney for the Scarborough 11 disagreed: "They may not look like your or my family but they are a family nevertheless and have a right to live there." But the zoning board sided with the complainants and ordered the Scarborough 11 to vacate the property. The Scarborough 11 appealed the ruling and lost. When they did not give up their home, the City of Hartford sued them. In response, the Scarborough 11 sued the city in federal court, challenging its definition of a family. A year later, bowing to public pressure, Hartford withdrew its suit and allowed the Scarborough 11 to remain in their home without penalties.

At the heart of the controversy over the Scarborough 11 is the question of what constitutes a family. It was a question that seemed to have a clear answer in the 20-year period after World War II, 1945 to 1965, when nearly all adults got married, divorce rates were modest, living together outside of marriage was frowned upon, and having a child out-of-wedlock was downright shameful. Back then, families centered on the marriage-based unit of husband, wife, and children. Starting in the 1970s, however, family life began a period of intense change that continues today. Divorce rates rose, cohabitation prior to marriage became the majority experience, young adults postponed marriage or forwent it entirely, childbearing outside of marriage became common, the family roles of women and men changed, and same-sex marriage became legal. Alternative family forms that extend beyond relationships based on blood or marriage, such as the Scarborough 11, have appeared. The uniformity of the post–World War II era gave way not to a dominant new family form but rather to a diversity of forms. It is therefore difficult today to impose a single definition of the family.

Yet the idea of family remains central to most people's sense of themselves and their intimate connections in life, even as it has become harder to define exactly what a family is. In this regard it is similar to some other sociological concepts such as *social class* and *race* that are difficult to define precisely but too valuable to do without. Moreover, the definition of the family is important economically: It determines who is eligible for billions of dollars in government and corporate benefits that depend on rules about who is a family member. For example, if a low-income parent applies for food stamp benefits, now called the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), how much she receives depends on how large her officially defined family is. We must place some boundaries around the concept of family, some limitations on its shape, or else it will lose its usefulness. But how do we determine what the key aspects of family life are today and how can we best specify what we mean by the term *family?*

What Is a Family?

At one extreme, some observers claim that families are so diverse that the concept may not even be useful anymore. At the other extreme are those who press politicians to use the singular form "family" (instead of the plural "families") to signify that there is only one proper kind of family—the married couple living with their biological children.

For example, I am eligible for health insurance coverage through my employer for my "family," which is defined as a spouse and children under 18. If I were unmarried but living with a woman who was the mother of my children, I could insure the children but not their mother. If I had been living for years with a man whom I considered my lifelong partner, I could not insure him in some states.

Moreover, how one defines a family plays an important role in the debate over whether the family has declined.

I would argue that there is no single definition of a family that is adequate for all purposes. Rather, how you define a family depends on what questions you want to answer. Two key questions are

1. How well are family members taking care of children, the chronically ill, and the frail elderly?
2. How well are families providing the emotional satisfaction people value so highly—intimacy, love, personal fulfillment?

These questions address, respectively, the public responsibilities and the private pleasures the family is called upon to meet. For each of these questions, I submit, one of two definitions of the family will be helpful; I will call them the public family and the private family. These definitions provide two useful ways of looking at the same reality—and often the very same group of adults and children. Some observers may impose their own theological definitions of what constitutes a family from religious works such as the Bible or the Koran. But social science cannot determine the moral essence of the family, nor need it do so.

THE PUBLIC FAMILY

In examining the concept of the public family, it's useful to borrow a few terms from the field of economics. Economists who specialize in public welfare have introduced the notion of **externalities,** of which there are two types. First, **negative externalities** occur when an individual or a business produces something that is beneficial to itself but imposes costs on other individuals or businesses. For example, factories that release sulfur dioxide through smokestacks impose a cost on everyone else by polluting the air. The factory gains by producing goods without having to install expensive smokestack scrubbers, but everyone else loses. Second, **positive externalities** occur when an individual or business produces something that benefits others but for which the producers are not fully compensated. For example, a corporation may start an expensive job-training program in order to obtain qualified workers; but some of the workers may take jobs with rival firms after completing the training. The other firms obtain skilled workers without paying the cost of their training.

Some positive externalities involve the production of what are called **public goods.** These goods have a peculiar property: It is almost impossible to stop people who don't produce them from enjoying them. As a result, public goods are often produced in smaller quantities than is socially desirable. Suppose a town raises taxes to build a water filtration plant that cleans a polluted river. It cannot stop residents of other towns downstream from enjoying the cleaner water, yet these fortunate residents have paid nothing for the cleanup. In a situation like this, it is clearly in each town's interest to have some other town farther up the river produce the public good—the treatment plant. Yet if no town builds the plant, no one will enjoy cleaner water. One solution to this dilemma is for the county or state government to raise taxes in all the towns and then build the plant. Another is for the towns to reach an agreement whereby one will build the plant but all will contribute to the costs. Either solution compensates the producer of the public good for the benefits that others obtain.

Although it may seem like a long leap from factories to families, the concepts of externalities and public goods still apply. Families do produce valuable public goods—most notably, children (England & Folbre, 1999). For example, when

externalities benefits or costs that accrue to others when an individual or business produces something

negative externalities the costs imposed on other individuals or businesses when an individual or business produces something of value to itself

positive externalities benefits received by others when an individual or business produces something, but for which the producer is not fully compensated

public goods things that may be enjoyed by people who do not themselves produce them

Americans retire, they hope to receive a Social Security check from the government each month. The funds for those checks come from payroll taxes paid by workers. During the next decade or so, the many men and women born during the post–World War II baby boom will reach retirement age. Currently, there are about five persons of working age for each retired person; but by 2030 there may be only three persons of working age for every retired person.[2] This means that the burden of supporting the elderly will increase greatly. It's in society's interest, then, for families to have and rear children today who will pay taxes when they grow up. Children, in this sense, are public goods.

More generally, it's in society's interest that today's children become good citizens with traits such as obeying the law, showing concern about others, and being informed voters. It's also in society's interest that they be productive workers who are willing and able to fill the needs of the economy. To be sure, critics charge that families often raise children in ways that reproduce existing inequalities between women and men (see Chapter 3) or between the working class and middle class (see Chapter 4). Nevertheless, what they do is of great public value. They are greenhouses growing the workers and citizens of tomorrow.

But children are costly to raise, and a retiree will receive the same Social Security check whether or not the workers were raised by her. Therefore, it's in each retiree's economic interest to remain childless and to have every other family raise children. Yet if everyone followed this strategy there would be no next generation. This dilemma is sometimes known as the **free-rider problem:** the tendency for people to obtain public goods by letting others do the work of producing them—metaphorically, the temptation to ride free on the backs of others. Luckily, people have children for reasons other than economic self-interest. At the moment, however, they are barely having enough to replace the current generation of parents. Everyone benefits from the child rearing that parents do.

free-rider problem the tendency for people to obtain public goods by letting others do the work of producing them—metaphorically, the temptation to ride free on the backs of others

In addition, families provide other services that have the character of public goods. As will be noted in Chapter 10, adult children still provide the bulk of the care for the frail elderly. If I am old and ill, I will benefit if I have adult children who will care for me. But others will also benefit from the care that my family provides, because without them, I would need more assistance from the government-funded medical insurance programs for the elderly (Medicare) and for the poor (Medicaid). Consequently, the care my family provides will keep government spending, and hence taxes, lower for everyone. The same logic applies to care that family members provide for the chronically ill.

The first definition, then, concerns the view of the family you take when you are concerned about the family's contribution to the public welfare—the useful services family members provide by taking care of one another. It is a definition of what I will call the **public family:** *one or more adults who are jointly caring for dependents, and the dependents themselves.* Dependents are defined as children, the frail elderly, and the chronically ill. By "jointly" I mean working as a cooperative unit. The family members usually reside in the same household, but that is not essential. For example, an elderly woman may live in her own apartment but still receive daily assistance from her daughter or son. Nor is it essential that the family members be married or of different sexes. Caregivers who are not related to the dependents by blood or marriage may nevertheless be considered as family members (Voorpostel, 2013).

public family one or more adults who are jointly caring for dependents, and the dependents themselves

[2] Considering 20 to 64 as working age and 65 or older as retirement age. See U.S. Bureau of the Census 2018.

The important fact is that they are taking care of dependents and, in doing so, producing public goods. This definition would include, of course, a married couple and their children or their elderly parents. But it would also include a divorced (or never-married) mother and her children, a cohabiting couple with children, a same-sex couple who are raising children, or a close friend who is the main caregiver for a frail older person. It would also include the Scarborough 11, who are jointly raising children. ("I love living here," one of the children told a reporter, "If you need company there's always someone there for you.") Note also who would be excluded by this definition: a childless married couple with no dependent or elderly relatives, or different-sex or same-sex cohabitors without children, the elderly, or ill dependents.

The production of public goods invites public scrutiny, and public families are easily identifiable to outsiders by the presence of dependents. Because society has an interest in how well families manage the care of dependents, the law allows for some regulation of these families—despite strong sentiment in the United States against intervening in family matters. For example, we require families to send their children to school until age 16. And state social welfare agencies have the power to remove children from homes judged to be harmful. More recently, several states have required medical personnel to report suspected cases of physical abuse of children. The public family, then, is about caretaking and dependency. It points us toward the kinds of kinship ties that are important for nurturing the young and caring for the elderly and the ill. It is a useful perspective for answering questions such as: How adequately will our society raise the next generation? How will we care for the growing number of elderly persons?

THE PRIVATE FAMILY

At the same time, the family is much more than a public service institution. It also provides individuals with intimacy, emotional support, and love. Indeed, most people today think of the family and experience it in these private terms. Although some of the intimacy is expressed sexually, the family is also where we get and give support to others. An appropriate definition of the private family must, therefore, encompass intimate relationships whether or not they include dependents. Yet if we are to maintain our focus on families, the definition still must encompass some rules for defining what kinds of intimate relationships constitute a family and what kinds do not. Where exactly is the boundary between family life and less intensive forms of intimacy? How do we develop a definition of the private family that applies to the married partnerships that still dominate durable, intimate relationships in American society and yet is broad enough to encompass alternative families such as the Scarborough 11?

First, we could observe that both the smaller marriage-based versions and the larger Scarborough-like versions of families involve emotional connections and commitments to each other. Second, we could see that both also involve almost daily interaction, sharing, and cooperation. One of the Scarborough family members told a reporter, "We have systems in place to ensure that we are functioning not just as a house but as a collective relationship" (Ryan, 2015). They take turns cooking; they pool money for home repairs; and they make life decisions based on each other. Third, we could note an important difference: The smaller version is tied to relationships formed by blood (intergenerational descent) and marriage, whereas the larger version includes some family members who have no biological or marital ties to others. The same Scarborough person said that the City of Hartford's suit was "a threat to anyone who's had people in their home who are not blood but who they care for and love no matter what" (Ryan, 2015). If we are to accommodate alternative families, we must expand our definition to include emotional bonds among people who are not related through blood or marriage.

Let me offer, then, this definition of the **private family:** *two or more individuals who maintain a close, emotional relationship and a commitment to each other, and who usually live in the same household and pool their incomes and household labor.* The phrase "two or more" allows for larger groups. I do not require that all members of the group be related by blood or marriage or that they be of different sexes. By a "close, emotional relationship," I mean a relationship that is intimate but not necessarily sexual. By "commitment," I mean that the individuals expect the family to endure indefinitely. This definition also includes the notion that the family is typically household-based and is economic as well as intimate—shared residence, common budgets. Nevertheless, I have added the qualifier "*usually* live in the same household" to allow for family members who live apart but in other ways meet the criteria.

private family two or more individuals who maintain a close, emotional relationship and a commitment to each other, and who usually live in the same household and pool their incomes and household labor

In fact, families are becoming so diverse and complex that it is hard to determine their boundaries from either the public or the private perspectives. Suppose that after a divorce a father makes regular child support payments to his ex-wife and sees his children often. You might argue that he is still sharing parenthood and therefore part of the family. If he doesn't make regular payments, on the other hand, and sees his children sporadically, you might not consider him to be part of the family any longer. When families are very complex, even the people who are involved may disagree about who's in them. Take the example of a large national survey that asked the mothers of teenage children who else was living in their household. Several hundred mothers said that they were living with a man who was not the father of the teenager. In other words, according to the mothers' reports, these were what might be called "cohabiting stepfamilies" that were similar to stepfamilies except that the stepfather and mother were not married. The survey also asked the teenage children in these households who besides their mothers was living with them. Strikingly, nearly half of them did not mention the man at all, as if their mothers were single parents (Brown & Manning, 2009). Perhaps in some of those households the men were present only half the week and the children considered them to be visitors; or perhaps the children rejected them as father figures. The correct answer, then, to the question of who is in the family is sometimes unclear. This is an example of **boundary ambiguity,** a state in which family members are uncertain about who is in or out of the family (Carroll, Olson, & Buckmiller, 2007). It is more common now than it was a half-century ago, when rates of divorce, remarriage, and childbearing outside of marriage were substantially lower and when alternative families such as the Scarborough 11 were less common.

boundary ambiguity a state in which family members are uncertain about who is in or out of the family

To be sure, individuals also receive emotional support and material assistance from kin with whom they are not in a close emotional relationship. The word "family" is sometimes used in the larger sense of relationships with sisters, uncles, cousins, close friends, and so forth. These broader kinship ties are still an important part of the setting in which people embed their intimate relations to spouses, partners, and children. The usual definition of "kin" is the people who are related to you by descent (through your mother's or father's line) or marriage. Yet the concept of kinship is also becoming broader and harder to define. In settings as varied as sharing networks among low-income African Americans, family networks among lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ) individuals, and middle-class networks of adults who are related only through the ties of broken marriages and remarriages, people are expanding the definition of kinship, creating kin, as it were, out of relationships that don't fit the old mold. In fact, throughout the book I will distinguish between what I will call **voluntary kinship**—kinship ties that people construct with others who are not related to them by blood or marriage (Braithwaite et al., 2010)—and **assigned kinship**—kinship ties that people more or less automatically acquire when they are born or when they marry.

voluntary kinship kinship ties that people construct with others who are not related to them by blood or marriage

assigned kinship kinship ties that people more or less automatically acquire when they are born or when they marry

Voluntary kinship is particularly valuable to people who can't find adequate support among blood-based or first-marriage-based kin. LGBTQ individuals, for example, often construct families that mix biological relatives with friends and partners (Hull & Ortyl, 2018; Soler, Caldwell, Córdova, Harper, & Bauermeister, 2018). Poor African American mothers who cannot find suitable spouses exchange help not only with their mothers and grandmothers but also with close friends, creating kinship-like relationships. A divorced mother whose ex-husband provides little support can receive assistance from a live-in partner or second husband. Yet even people who could find adequate support in conventional arrangements may intentionally create new forms that fit their preferences and needs (Nelson, 2013). You will recall that one of the Scarborough members said, "We didn't see the need to live in these isolated nuclear family units."

Some observers look at all of these new forms of intimate relationships and conclude that the concept of family is outmoded. Some of the criticism has come from scholars in Europe, where rates of marriage are lower than in the United States and where, in many countries, long-term cohabiting relationships are more common (Roseneil & Budgeon, 2004). Family is a "zombie category," wrote two social theorists (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), a dead body walking around that we mistakenly think is still alive. The critics note the boundary ambiguities of many families and the ways in which people are constructing new forms of kinship. They point to phenomena such as couples in intimate, committed relationships who are living in separate households because they value their independence, don't think they are ready to live together, or have practical constraints such as jobs in different cities (Liefbroer, Poortman, & Seltzer, 2015). Some conclude that we should give up on the term "family" and use a broader, more inclusive descriptor, such as "personal community" (Pahl & Spencer, 2004, 2010). But I think that in an American context, we are not at the point where we should give up on the concept of family. Its boundaries are fuzzy, it takes diverse forms, it is stressed and strained by social change, but for the current day it is, I suggest, still worth retaining.

TWO VIEWS, SAME FAMILY

Table 1.1 reviews the basic distinction between these two perspectives. The first row shows examples of families as seen through the public and private family perspectives. The second row shows the main functions of the family in the public and private domains. In raising the next generation of children—the workers, citizens, and parents of the future—parents and other caregivers are best viewed as carrying out the functions of the public family. The same can be said for caregivers of the frail elderly or for disabled individuals. In contrast, when providing love, intimacy, and emotional support, family members are carrying out the functions of the private family. The third row shows the key challenges families face in these two guises. It's in people's narrow self-interests to let others do the hard work of raising children

Table 1.1 Two Ways of Looking at the American Family

	THE PUBLIC FAMILY	THE PRIVATE FAMILY
Examples	Married couple, cohabiting couple, or single parent with children Single person caring for ailing parent Cohabiting person caring for seriously ill partner	Married or cohabiting couples without children Network of committed LGBTQ adults providing love and support to each other.
Main Functions	Raising the next generation Caring for the elderly Caring for the ill and disabled	Providing love and intimacy Providing emotional support
Key Challenge	Free-rider problem	Boundary problem

Source: The table is the author's, but it is based on Giddens (1991, 1992), Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (1995, 2002), and Beck, Giddens, & Lash (1994).

or caring for the elderly—activities that benefit society as a whole. (And much of this care is provided by women outside of the paid workforce. See Chapter 8.) But if too many people try to ride free, our society may not invest enough time and effort in producing the next generation or in caring for the elderly. In fact, some social critics believe American society has already reached this point. As for the private family, its key challenge is maintaining its place as the setting where people experience emotional gratification. Today there are many kinds of relationships that provide intimacy, love, and sex. Will the private family continue to cohere as a social institution, or will its boundaries collapse into a sea of diverse personal relationships?

In sum, to examine the contributions of families to the public welfare is to look at relationships through the lens of the public family. To examine the family's provisions of intimacy, love, and fulfillment is to look through the lens of the private family. Sometimes, both lenses apply to the same situation. Think of a married couple with children. Through the lens of the private family, we may see the partners providing each other with love and emotional support. Through the lens of the public family, we may see them raising children. Both perspectives are embedded in each of the chapters that follow. Which is better? Neither. They are two takes on the same reality. Many textbooks emphasize the private family by focusing primarily on interpersonal relationships, cohabitation, and marriage. In doing so, they pay less attention to the socially valuable work that families do. Although this book, too, will have much to say about the private family, it will also emphasize the public family. Most chapters will include a short essay on families and public policy; and the concluding chapter, "The Family, the State, and Social Policy," is directed primarily toward public issues.

Quick Review

- Families are more diverse in their forms than was the case in the mid-twentieth century.
- No single definition of the family is adequate for all purposes.
- This book takes two perspectives and proposes two definitions:
  - The "public family," which focuses on the care that family members provide for dependents.
  - The "private family," which focuses on the love and emotional satisfaction family members provide for each other.
- Both definitions can be applied to the same family unit because most families have both a public and a private dimension.

How Do Family Sociologists Know What They Know?

Sociologists collect and analyze data consisting of observations of real families and the people in them. For the most part, they strive to analyze their data using objective, scientific methods. **Objectivity** means the ability to draw conclusions about a social situation that are unaffected by one's own beliefs. But it is much more difficult for a sociologist to be objective than it is for a natural or physical scientist. Sociologists not only study families, they also live in them. They often have strong moral and political views of their own (indeed, strong views about social issues are what lead many people to become sociologists), and it is difficult to prevent those views from influencing one's research. In fact, there are some sociologists who argue that objectivity is so difficult to achieve that sociologists shouldn't try. Rather, they argue, sociologists should acknowledge their values and predispositions so that others can better interpret their work (see *How Do Sociologists Know What They Know?:* Feminist Research Methods, in Chapter 3).

objectivity the ability to draw conclusions about a social situation that are unaffected by one's own beliefs

But most sociologists, although aware that their views can influence the way they interpret their data, model their research on the scientific method. For a detailed examination of the scientific method in sociology, consult any good introductory sociology textbook. For example, Schaefer (2007, p. 29) defines the **scientific method** as "a systematic, organized series of steps that ensures maximum objectivity and consistency in researching a problem." The essence of the scientific method is to formulate a hypothesis that can be tested by collecting and analyzing data. (A **hypothesis,** Schaefer writes, is "a speculative statement about the relationship between two or more variables" [p. 45].) It's easy to come up with a hypothesis (God is a woman), but the trick is to find one that can be shown to be true or false by examining data. Sociologists therefore tend to formulate very specific hypotheses about family life that can be confirmed or disconfirmed by observation. For example, sociologists have hypothesized that having a first child as a teenager lowers, on average, the amount of education a woman attains; and statistical data are consistent with this claim.

scientific method a systematic, organized series of steps that ensures maximum objectivity and consistency in researching a problem

hypothesis a speculative statement about the relationship between two or more variables

Even so, there are inherent limitations in how well social scientists can use the scientific method. The best way to confirm or disconfirm a relationship between two factors is to conduct an experiment in which all other factors are held constant. Scientists do this by randomly assigning subjects to one of two groups: a treatment group and a control group. For example, to study whether a new drug speeds recovery from an illness, doctors will assemble a group of volunteers, all of whom have the illness, and then randomly give half of them (the treatment group) the new drug. By randomizing, the doctors hope that all other confounding factors (such as past medical history) will be equalized between the two groups. Then they compare the average recovery times of the treatment group and the control group (those who did not receive the drug).

But it is rarely possible for sociologists to conduct randomized experiments on families. Without randomization, there is always the possibility that another, unobserved factor, lurking just beneath the surface, is causing the relationship we see. Consider again teenage childbearing. Women who have a first child as a teenager tend to come from families that have less education and less money, on average, than do other women. So the reason that teenage mothers attain less education may reflect their disadvantaged family backgrounds rather than having a child; in other words, they might have had less education even if they hadn't had children as teenagers. To truly settle this issue, a truth-seeking but cold-blooded sociologist would want to obtain a list of all families with teenage girls in the United States and then to assign *at random* some of the girls to have children and others to remain childless until their twenties. Because of the random assignment, teenage childbearing would be about as likely to occur in middle-class families as in poor families. In this way, the social scientist could eliminate family background as a cause of any differences that emerge between teenage mothers and nonmothers.

For very good ethical and legal reasons, of course, sociologists simply cannot conduct this type of study. Without random assignment, we can't be sure that having a child as a teenager *causes* a woman to have less education. Still, the lack of randomized experiments does not mean that sociologists should abandon the scientific method. Astronomers, after all, can't do experiments either. But this limitation makes the task of deciding whether a sociological study confirms or disconfirms a hypothesis more difficult.

If not from experiments, where does the data that family sociologists use come from? Generally, from one of two research methods. The first is the **survey,** a study in which individuals or households are randomly selected from a larger population and asked a fixed set of questions. Sociologists prepare a questionnaire and give it to a professional survey research organization. The organization then selects a sample of households randomly from an area (a city, a state, or the entire nation) and sends interviewers to ask the questions of one or more family members in the households. The responses are coded numerically (e.g., a "yes" answer is coded 1 and a "no" is coded 0), and the coded responses for all individuals are made available to the sociologists as a computer file.

survey a study in which individuals from a geographic area are selected, usually at random, and asked a fixed set of questions

The random selection of households is done to ensure that the people who are asked the questions are representative of the population in the area. This kind of random selection of households shouldn't be confused with conducting a randomized experiment. A random-sample survey is not an experiment because the households that are selected are *not* divided into a treatment group and a control group. Nevertheless, data from surveys provides sociologists with the opportunity to examine associations among characteristics of a large number of individuals and families. (See *How Do Sociologists Know What They Know?:* The National Surveys, in this chapter.)

The advantage of the survey method (assuming that the households are randomly selected) is that its results are representative not only of the sample that was interviewed but also of the larger population in the area. The main disadvantage is the limited amount of information that can be gathered on each person or family. Most people won't participate in an interview that takes more than an hour or two. Moreover, the same set of questions is asked of everyone, with little opportunity to tailor the interview to each participant. Another disadvantage is that it's difficult to determine whether the people in the sample are responding honestly, especially if the questions touch upon sensitive issues. (See *How Do Sociologists Know What They Know?:* Asking about Sensitive Behavior, in Chapter 6.)

The second widely used research method is the **observational study,** also known as *field research,* in which the researcher spends time directly observing each participant in the study—often much more time than an interviewer from a survey organization spends. The researcher may even join the group she or he is studying for a period of time. The individuals and families to be studied are not usually selected randomly; rather, the researcher tries to find families that have a particular set of characteristics he or she is interested in. For example, in a classic observational study of a low-income area of Boston, Herbert Gans (1962) moved into an Italian

observational study (also known as **field research)** a study in which the researcher spends time directly observing each participant neighborhood for eight months and got to know many families well. He was able to argue that the stereotype of slum families as "disorganized" was not true. The strength of the observational method is that it can provide a much more detailed and nuanced picture of the individuals and families being studied than can the survey method. Sociologist-observers can view the full complexity of family behavior and can learn more about it.

The disadvantage of observational studies is that it is hard to know how representative the families being studied are of similar families. Because it takes a great deal of time to study a family in depth, observational studies typically are carried out with far fewer families than are surveys. Moreover, sociologists who do observational studies usually can't choose their families randomly by knocking on doors or calling on the telephone because they must win a family's cooperation and trust before the family will agree to be studied in such detail. So although observational studies may yield a great deal of information about a small number of families, we may be unsure that we can generalize this knowledge to other similar families that weren't in the observational study.

Surveys and observational studies, then, have complementary strengths and limitations. If the knowledge from sociological studies could be stored in a lake, a survey-based lake would be wide (because of the large number of people reached) but shallow (because of the limited time spent with each family), whereas an observationally based lake would be narrow but deep. Ideally, it would be best to employ both methods to study a problem, and some research projects attempt to do so. But to choose a large number of families randomly and then to send in sociologists to observe each family intensively over weeks and months is too expensive to be feasible. Moreover, the set of skills necessary to do survey research versus observational research is so distinct that sociologists tend to specialize in one or the other.

Social scientists sometimes use other research methods as well. For some topics, it is useful to examine historical sources. Chapter 7 describes a study in which magazine articles from 1900 to 1979 were used to study changing conceptions of marriage (Cancian, 1987). Occasionally, it is even possible to do an experiment. In the 1990s, the Department of Housing and Urban Development conducted an experiment in which some low-income families living in public housing in five cities were randomly selected to receive a voucher that they could use to subsidize their rent if they moved to lower poverty neighborhoods. These "treatment-group" families were compared to "control-group" families that received less assistance. Four to seven years later, families that had received the vouchers were living in safer neighborhoods and were less poor; in addition, the daughters in these families had better mental health than daughters in the control-group families. Ten to fifteen years later, young adults who had moved with their parents to better neighborhoods before age 13 had higher incomes (Chetty, Hendren, & Katz, 2015).

These are the major methods that sociologists use to study families. In several of the chapters of this book, we will examine the methodology of key studies so that you may better understand how family sociologists develop their research findings.

Quick Review

- Survey research and observational research are the two methods most commonly used by sociologists.
- The two methods have complementary strengths and limitations.
- Table 1.2 summarizes the differences between the two methods.

Table 1.2 Comparing Survey Studies and Observational Studies

WHO IS STUDIED	HOW THEY ARE STUDIED	STRENGTHS	LIMITATIONS
SURVEY STUDY			
Large, random sample of individuals or families	An interviewer asks questions from a predesigned questionnaire and records the answers	Results can be generalized to the population of interest	Only limited knowledge can be obtained; hard to judge honesty of responses
OBSERVATIONAL STUDY			
Small, purposefully chosen sample of individuals or families	A researcher observes them in depth over a long period of time, sometimes participating in their daily activities	Detailed knowledge is obtained	Findings may not be representative of other, similar individuals or families

Sociological Theory and Families

The methods sociologists use and the questions they ask are influenced by sociological theory. Let me present a brief introduction to five perspectives that I think are most actively used by family researchers today: exchange, symbolic interaction, feminist, postmodern, and queer. I will draw on these perspectives often in this book.

THE EXCHANGE PERSPECTIVE

The sociological approach known as **exchange theory** is similar to the model of human behavior that economists use. People are viewed as rational beings who decide whether to exchange goods or services by considering the benefits they will receive, the costs they will incur, and the benefits they might receive if they chose an alternative course of action. In the rational choice-based theory of the family that won Gary Becker the 1992 Nobel Prize in economics, women often choose rationally to exchange the performance of household and child care services in return for receiving the benefits of a man's income. If men are more "efficient" at market production—meaning they can earn higher wages—and women are more "efficient" at home production—meaning they are better at raising small children—then both partners gain from this exchange, argues Becker (1991). Thus, Becker's model was used to explain the prevalence in the mid-twentieth century of the **breadwinner–homemaker family**—a married couple with children in which the father worked for pay and the mother did not. His theory implied that the division of labor in this type of family is best for both husband and wife. Becker did not anticipate same-sex marriage. In Chapter 8 we will examine whether this model applies to same-sex spouses.

exchange theory a sociological theory that views people as rational beings who decide whether to exchange goods or services by considering the benefits they will receive, the costs they will incur, and the benefits they might receive if they were to choose an alternative course of action

breadwinner–homemaker family a married couple with children in which the father worked for pay and the mother did not

In the hands of others, exchange theory can lead to very different conclusions. Many sociologists maintain that exchanges take on a different character if the two actors come to the exchange with unequal resources. Richard Emerson and his colleagues developed a version of exchange theory that is useful in studying families (Cook, O'Brien, & Kollock, 1990; Emerson, 1972). According to Emerson, if person A values goods or services person B has to offer, and if person A has few alternative

How Do Sociologists Know What They Know?

The National Surveys

Sociologists who study the family in the United States draw many of their findings from a series of national surveys that have been conducted over the past few decades. These surveys interview randomly selected samples of the U.S. population. They are similar to the opinion-poll surveys you see in news sites online (e.g., what percent of the public thinks the president is doing a good job?), but they differ in several important ways:

- *They are larger* The surveys reported online typically interview 500 to 1,500 individuals. The social scientific surveys typically interview 5,000 to 10,000 individuals or more. Because of this larger size, the social scientific surveys can provide reliable information on subgroups of the population, such as couples who are living together outside of marriage, currently divorced individuals, and never-married adults.
- *They are mainly carried out using in-person interviews* In contrast, most of the online polls are conducted by randomly dialing telephone numbers and speaking to people over the telephone. In-person interviews can be longer and more detailed (because people tire of telephone conversations more quickly than in-person conversations) and can be more flexible (e.g., the interviewer can give the subject a self-administered questionnaire for her husband or partner to fill out). But in-person interviews are also much more expensive to carry out.
- *They are longitudinal* Whereas the typical online poll is a one-time activity, social scientists prefer a **longitudinal survey,** meaning a survey in which interviews are conducted several times at regular intervals. This design allows social scientists to study social change. The surveys typically select families or individuals at random and then reinterview them annually or biennially about how their lives are changing.
- *They are intended to be public resources* Most online polls are meant for **primary analysis,** meaning they are analyzed by the people who collected the information. The data from these polls are then forgotten. The social scientific studies are designed for **secondary analysis,** meaning analysis of the data by people other than the group that collected it. The questionnaires are intentionally broad so that the interviewers can collect a wide range of information that will be of interest to many researchers. The results are coded numerically into electronic files and made available to anyone who wants to analyze them.
- *They are conducted by academic research centers rather than by commercial polling firms* The academic centers, such as the NORC at the University of Chicago and the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan, typically take extra steps in designing and carrying out a survey so that the

longitudinal survey a survey in which interviews are conducted several times at regular intervals

primary analysis analysis of survey data by the people who collected the information

secondary analysis analysis of survey data by people other than those who collected it

sources of obtaining these goods or services, then person A is said to be dependent on person B. The degree of dependency is greater the more highly A values these goods or services and the fewer alternative sources A has. For example, if a husband (person B in this case), by virtue of his greater earning power, can offer to purchase many goods and services, and if his wife (person A) values these goods and services but can't purchase them on her own because she can't earn as much, then she is said to be dependent on her husband. Her dependency is greater if she has fewer alternative sources of income, perhaps because she took time away from paid work to have children and now finds it hard to find a good job. Moreover, according to Emerson, the more A is dependent on B, the greater is B's power over A. When one person is more powerful than another, he or she may be able to shape the exchange so that he or she receives greater benefits and incurs fewer costs than does the other person. Husbands, many writers have suggested, are in a stronger bargaining position when they are the sole earners in their families because their wives have fewer alternative sources of income. According to exchange theory, when wives earn money on their own, their dependence decreases and therefore their husbands' power over them decreases. They can drive a better bargain for who does the housework.

results are of better quality (e.g., the data conforms better to the statistical theory underlying random sample surveys; a greater percentage of the selected subjects are reached and interviewed).

Because of the large sample size, longitudinal design, use of in-person rather than telephone interviews, and extra care in the fieldwork, the social scientific surveys are very expensive. Most are sponsored by U.S. government agencies such as the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation, or the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The agencies support those large surveys to provide information on many research questions so that hundreds of researchers can analyze the data.

One such project is the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, which was designed to learn more about unmarried parents and their children. Interviews were conducted between 1998 and 2000 in urban hospitals around the country with nearly 5,000 mothers, about three-fourths of them unmarried, just after their child's birth. The researchers also interviewed the fathers of the children when possible, and they are still following these so-called fragile families almost 20 years later. They found that half of the unmarried mothers were living with the fathers of their children at the time of birth (McLanahan et al., 2003).

Another study is the Panel Study of Income Dynamics. In 1968, researchers at the University of Michigan interviewed 5,000 American households selected at random. They have reinterviewed the members of these households every year or two since then. When children grew up and left home, or adults divorced and moved out, the study followed them and interviewed them in their new households. The Panel Study of Income Dynamics greatly increased our knowledge of the economic fortunes of families over time. For example, the results indicate that few families are poor every year, but over the course of a decade many families, perhaps one-fourth, experience at least a year in which they are poor (Duncan, 1984).

Throughout the book, findings from these and other national surveys will be presented. Although not without limitations (see Chapter 6, *How Do Sociologists Know What They Know?:* Asking about Sensitive Behavior), they constitute a valuable resource to everyone interested in families, households, parents, and children.

Ask Yourself

1. Besides researchers, who else might be interested in the results of social scientific surveys? Can you think of any practical use for this information?
2. Why do you think researchers would want to see survey results for particular racial and ethnic groups or specific types of families?

THE SYMBOLIC INTERACTION PERSPECTIVE

Exchange theorists tend to see the social world as a concrete reality with easily perceived costs and benefits and they view individuals as rational, calculating beings, as if we each had a computer in our head, taking in data, calculating costs and benefits, and deciding how to act. The adherents of **symbolic interaction theory,** however, see the social world as a much more fragile and unstable place, in which individuals are continually creating and sustaining meanings, often without much conscious thought to costs and benefits (Stryker & Vryan, 2003). The major figure in symbolic interaction theory was philosopher George Herbert Mead, who taught at the University of Chicago early in the twentieth century. His foremost interpreter in sociology was Herbert Blumer (1962). According to these theorists, people do not react to the world like computers respond to mouse clicks, but rather they *interpret* what others do based on shared understandings they may take for granted. We interpret symbols—gestures, words, appearances—whose meanings we have come to understand. This interpretation occurs in situations in which we interact with someone. It is this process of the interpretation of symbols during social interaction that the symbolic interactionists study.

symbolic interaction theory a sociological theory that focuses on people's interpretations of symbolic behavior

For instance, when women and men interact with each other, they vary the way they dress, the gestures they use, and the tone of voice they employ according to whether the situation is a friendly conversation or a potentially romantic encounter. Each person in the interaction picks up on the symbols used by the other in order to understand which type of situation is being experienced. Most of the time the symbols are so clear and so routine that we don't even think about what's happening. In fact, we rely on not having to think about what kind of social situation we are in—we don't have the mental energy to continually scrutinize the basic facts of our social encounters. Instead, we rely on taken-for-granted symbols and meanings.

But these symbols and meanings can reinforce inequalities between women and men in subtle ways. When a man holds a door open for a woman, both people may see this as merely a display of courtesy. Yet a woman is much less likely to hold a door open for a man. Does this mean that women are less courteous than men? Of course not. Rather, the symbol of a man holding a door open has an additional meaning: It reinforces the cultural message that men are physically stronger than women and should take care of them, like gallant medieval knights ushering their ladies through the castle gates. In this way, the simple gesture of holding the door becomes a symbol of the cultural differences between men and women. And done again and again on a daily basis, it reinforces gender differences. There are many such interactions. For example, husbands who don't want to change their babies' diapers may make a display of fumbling at the changing table when called upon by their wives, thus exhibiting their male "inferiority" at the task.

The interactionist perspective is also useful in analyzing situations in which family relations seem less institutionalized, less set in concrete—such as in newly formed stepfamilies. How a stepfather acts toward his stepchildren when they misbehave, for instance, is a symbol of his emerging role: Does he speak loudly and angrily and admonish them, or does he leave that kind of language to the children's mother and avoid the role of disciplinarian? In general, the interactionist perspective helps sensitize us to the ways in which people create shared understandings of how family members should act toward one another. These shared understandings become the bases of the social roles people play in families—spouse, parent, breadwinner, homemaker, child, and so forth.

THE FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

feminist theory a sociological theory that focuses on the domination of women by men

gender the social and cultural characteristics that distinguish women and men in a society

Feminist theory is a perspective developed to better understand, and to transform, inequalities between women and men. It draws upon both the exchange and the symbolic interaction perspectives. The central concept in feminist theory is **gender,** which is usually defined as the social and cultural characteristics that distinguish women and men in a society (see Chapter 3). Feminist theorists argue that nearly all the gender differences we see in the roles of women and men are of cultural origin and have been socially constructed. By socially constructed, they mean arising not from biological differences but rather from culturally accepted rules, from relationships of power and authority, and from differences in economic opportunities. For example, the culture might include a rule that women should not work outside the home (as was the case among the American middle class from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries). Or, the opportunities for women might be limited to jobs that tend to pay less than comparable jobs in which most workers are men.

Moreover, feminist theorists assert that these cultural differences are constructed in ways that maintain the power of men over women (Thorne, 1992). For instance, feminist theorists criticize the notion that the breadwinner–homemaker family provided an exchange that was equally beneficial to women and men. Rather, like Emersonian exchange theorists, they note that women's direct access to money through paid employment was restricted in this type of family, which maintained women's dependence on men. They also note that men's relationships with their children were often limited. The cultural belief that "women's place is in the home" and the lower wages paid to women employed outside the home compelled married women to give up the idea of paid employment. Under these constraints, their best strategy may indeed have been to trade household services for a male income; but it was a forced choice set up by a social system that favored men.

In addition, feminist theorists argue that the kinds of work that women tend to do are valued less highly in our culture than the kinds that men do. In particular, they say, the work of caring for other people is undervalued because we value individualism and autonomy from others more than we value connections with others (Tronto, 1993). Women have historically done much of the work of maintaining connections with kin and caring for young children and the frail elderly. They have done much of it for free as part of their family responsibilities; in fact, we may not even consider a mother who is raising children full time to be "working." But today women also constitute most of the employees at hospitals, nursing homes, day care centers, and other settings where people are cared for. Their pay tends to be low: As we will see in Chapter 8, aides at child care centers make less, on average, than parking lot attendants. Their low wages reflect, at least in part, the devaluing of caring work, sociologists say (England, 2005). Until we value care more highly, they say, we will continue to have less caring labor than is optimal. For instance, the low pay of child care workers will continue to cause high job turnover and less stable caregiving to young children.

Feminist theory makes us aware that the experience of living in a family is different for women than it is for men. Arrangements that make men happiest don't necessarily make women happiest. A husband might prefer that his wife stay home to care for their children and do household work full time. His wife might prefer to combine a paying job with housework and child care, and she might wish that he would share more of the household tasks. In other words, women's interests in the family are not necessarily the same as men's interests. The breadwinner–homemaker bargain may have been great for men (except for those who wanted an active role in raising their children), and it may have been great for women who wished to raise children and do housework full time, but it frustrated other women by restricting the possibility of developing a satisfying career outside the home. Feminist theory urges us to view families through a prism that separates the experiences of men and women rather than just considering what's best for the family as a whole.

THE POSTMODERN PERSPECTIVE

A number of theorists of modernity claim that personal life has changed fundamentally over the last several decades. They argue that the modern era—the long period that began with the spread of industrialization in the mid-to-late nineteenth century—effectively ended in the last half of the twentieth century. It has been replaced, they state, by what they call the **late modern era** (Giddens, 1991) or sometimes the **postmodern era.** Looking back at the modern era, they emphasize that individuals moved through a series of roles (student, spouse, parent, housewife, breadwinner) in a way that seemed more or less natural. Choices were constrained.

late modern or **postmodern era** the last few decades of the twentieth century and the present day

In mill towns, two or three generations of kin might work at the same factory. Getting married was the only acceptable way to have children, except perhaps among the poor. Young people often chose their spouses from among a pool of acquaintances from their neighborhood, church, or school. Life's stages flowed in a way that one accepted and didn't have to question.

But in the late modern era, the theorists maintain, individuals must make choices about nearly all aspects of their lives (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). You can't get a job in the factory where your father and grandfather worked because overseas competition has forced it to close, so you must choose another career. Rather than allowing your relatives to help you find a partner, you sign on to an Internet dating service and review hundreds of personal profiles. As other lifestyles become more acceptable, you must choose whether to get married and whether to have children. In ways such as these, your identity in the late modern age is transformed from a "given" to a "task" you must undertake (Bauman, 1992, 2002).

self-identity a person's sense of who he or she is and of where he or she fits in the social structure

reflexivity the process through which individuals take in knowledge, reflect on it, and alter their behavior as a result

As these choices are made, it is said, questions of self-identity become more important. By **self-identity,** I mean a person's sense of who he or she is and of where he or she fits in the social structure. In societies such as ours, individuals must construct their self-identities; they cannot rely on tradition or custom to order their daily lives. "We are not what we are," wrote social theorist Anthony Giddens (1991), "but what we make of ourselves." Developing one's self-identity becomes an important project that individuals must work on. People do the work of developing their identities through **reflexivity,** the process through which individuals take in knowledge, reflect on it, and alter their behavior as a result (Beck, Giddens, & Lash, 1994). In other words, people pay attention to their experiences and regularly ask themselves: How am I feeling? Do I find my life fulfilling? How do I want to live the rest of it? Depending on the answers to questions such as these, people may change the way they are living their lives. The postmodern theorists believe that the rise of reflexive change is a key characteristic of what they call the late modern era: the last few decades of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first. Table 1.3 compares the current era with the modern era that began with industrialization and ended in the mid-twentieth century (although, in a broader sense, modernization can be traced back to the Enlightenment in eighteenth-century Europe). In reality, the periods are not quite as distinct, and the differences not as sharp, as the table suggests.

Behavior, according to the theorists, was *rule-directed* in the earlier era, meaning that (1) rules such as social norms, laws, and customs strongly influenced personal life and (2) the actions of individuals did not change those rules. Marriage was the only acceptable context for having children. Divorce was frowned upon and harder to obtain. Despite occasional movements to liberalize divorce laws, the norms and customs did not change much. In the current era, behavior is *rule-altering* to a much greater extent because the lifestyle choices individuals make can alter the laws and customs pertaining to families. For instance, as more gay and lesbian couples began to live openly together, many municipalities, in reaction, enacted domestic-partnership laws that gave same-sex couples privileges similar to those of married couples (such as requiring that employers who offer health insurance benefits that cover the spouses of their employees also cover their same-sex partners). These new laws altered the rules about what constituted a legally valid partnership. And as same-sex partnerships became more acceptable, activists urged the legalization of marriage for same-sex partners. A 2015 Supreme Court decision (Obergefell v. Hodges, 2015) legalized it nationwide.

Table 1.3 Aspects of Personal Life in the Late Modern Era

	MODERN ERA	LATE MODERN ERA
Time period	Industrialization to mid-twentieth century	Since mid-twentieth century
Behavior	Rule-directed	Rule-altering
Lifestyle choices	Restricted	Mandatory
Kinship ties	Assigned	Voluntary

Note: The table is the author's, but it is based on Giddens (1991, 1992), Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (1995, 2002), and Beck, Giddens, & Lash (1994).

Lifestyle choices, as Table 1.3 suggests, were *restricted* in the earlier era. For example, people were much less likely to choose a spouse of a different religion or racial-ethnic group. In the current era, choices are not only greater but also *mandatory:* You must make choices in nearly all aspects of personal life. Having to make so many decisions has its good and bad points. It opens the possibility of developing a self-identity that is deeply fulfilling; and it allows people to seize the opportunities that may be before them. On the other hand, choices can bring insecurity and doubt. The risk of making the wrong ones can weigh on you, creating a burden as well as a boon.

Finally, kinship ties tend to shift from being assigned to being *voluntary.* In the past, you acquired your relatives at birth; then, when you married, you acquired a spouse and in-laws. There was little choice in the matter. Today, people in a variety of settings are more likely to draw upon others, such as close friends, with whom they voluntarily—that is, by free choice—construct a kinship network.

People who choose not to rely on lifelong marriage must construe kinship differently. They must do the hard work of constructing a group of kin, a broader family, that they can rely on. These ties require continual attention to maintain. In contrast, relations of blood and first marriage are supported by strong social norms and the law. Lacking this support, people must actively keep up voluntary kinship ties. If they are allowed to lapse, there is no guarantee that they can be revived.

Postmodern theory is consistent with a view of families as diverse, changing, and developing in unpredictable directions. It can help us make sense of family life at a time when individuals must continually make choices in uncertain circumstances, for which there are no clear rules. For instance, same-sex marriage is new enough that no general agreement exists on how spouses should divide up the tasks of work at home and in the labor market. Divorce and remarriage are new enough on a large scale that stepparents and stepchildren have little guidance on who is part of their family and how they should act toward them. (We will examine stepfamilies in Chapter 12.) These new circumstances bring both opportunities for fashioning mutually beneficial arrangements and the costs of the anxiety and conflict that working out new rules can cause.

THE QUEER THEORY PERSPECTIVE

The perspective known as **queer theory** questions common assumptions about sexual and gender identities, monogamy, and the definition of the family. Queer theorists reject the idea of fixed, stable sexual and gender identities (Oswald, Blume, & Marks, 2005). For instance, they reject the idea that the paired categories of gay

queer theory the view that sexuality and gender are artificially organized into categories that reflect the power of heterosexual norms

Table 1.4 Theoretical Perspectives on the Family

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE	MAIN THEME	APPLICATION TO FAMILIES
Exchange	Individuals with greater resources and more alternatives can drive better bargains.	Husbands' power over wives is greater when wives do not earn money on their own.
Symbolic interaction	Individuals interpret the actions of others and act in ways consistent with their interpretations.	Individuals give, and look for, symbolic cues about how to conduct the activities of everyday family life.
Feminist	Society is organized in ways that privilege men over women.	A system of male dominance gives husbands more power than their wives.
Postmodern	Individuals reflexively influence their social environments.	Individuals choose how they will act in new family forms such as stepfamilies.
Queer	Sexuality and gender are fluid categories	Individuals create families from a mixture of biological kin and friends

versus straight or homosexual versus heterosexual are adequate to describe the sexual desire and behavior of everyone in society. Rather, they argue, sexuality is a continuum along which individuals may position themselves. Consistent with the postmodernists' assertion that people construct their self-identities and may choose to change the way they are living their lives, queer theorists argue that individuals may choose to change their sexual identities by moving along the continuum; or they even choose to reject the notion that they have a firm sexuality. Thus, the term *queer,* which prior to its adoption by theorists in the 1990s was pejorative (Blasius, 2001), refers to individuals who see themselves as operating in a more complex and changing sexual space than we typically assume, and who may see themselves as neither straight nor gay.

Queer theorists make a similar argument about gender: the male-female dichotomy is inadequate, they claim, to fully understand the meaning of gender. They distinguish, for instance between cisgender individuals and transgender individuals. **Cisgender people** are those whose sense of their own gender is consistent with the gender that they were assigned at birth on the basis of physical characteristics. **Transgender people** are those who sense of their own gender is inconsistent with the gender they were assigned at birth—a feeling that may emerge years or decades after they were born. Transgender people may wish to transition from one gender to the other. Yet even the cisgender/transgender distinction preserves the two gender model: transgender people are thought of as either transwomen and or transmen. Queer theorists would go further to question the basic idea that a person must have a fixed, stable gender identity as a woman or a man. Rather, they assert, some individuals may see themselves as moving fluidly and repeatedly along the continuum between women and men.

cisgender people people who identify with the identity they were assigned at birth

transgender people people who identify with a gender other than the one they were assigned at birth

Moreover, queer theorists question the definition of a family. According to the conventional definition, such as the one that the Bureau of the Census uses, a family consists of two or more people who are related by birth, marriage, or legal adoption and who reside together. Queer theorists argue that we should be willing to include family ties among people who establish close bonds but are not related by any of the Census rules and who don't necessarily live together (Oswald, Blume, & Marks, 2005). For instance, as part of their families, people may include friends to whom they have close, emotional bonds and from whom they receive love and support. Going further, some queer theorists question the norm of **monogamy**—the belief that a person should have only one long-term partner at a time, usually through marriage—whether that partner is of the same sex or of a different sex. They write of "de-centering" marriage, that is, moving it out of its central position in our conception of what a family is (Willey, 2016). They point to alternatives such as **polyamory**, the practice of having more than one open romantic relationship at a time (Schippers, 2016). Indeed, to queer theorists the supremacy of the conventional birth-marriage-or-adoption definition of the family is a prime example of **heteronormativity**, the idea that heterosexual relationships are the only normal and natural relationships, and that, by contrast, intimate relationships outside of the conventional heterosexual model are abnormal. Queer theorists argue that the dominance of heteronormativity limits the definition of a family and restricts individuals whose intimate relationships do not coincide with it.

monogamy The belief that a person should have only one long-term partner at a time, usually through marriage

polyamory The practice of having more than one open romantic relationship at a time

heteronormativity The idea that heterosexual relationships are the only normal and natural relationships

Most queer theorists also reject the view that there are important biological influences on how society organizes sexuality and gender. Rather, they argue that we unconsciously re-create the illusion of heterosexual "masculinity" and "femininity" in everyday interactions (Butler, 1990). In this way, queer theory has some similarities with the symbolic interactionist approach that views people as continually creating and sustaining meanings in daily life. Both contest the notion that people have stable, "natural" identities that exist separately from the social world they live in. But there is a difference (Green, 2007): Symbolic interactionists try to explain how we construct gender and sexual identities that seem durable and lasting to us and to those around us. But queer theorists tend to argue against the whole idea of durable gender and sexual identities; rather, they see fixed identities as deeply problematic. Queer theory, then, is deconstructive; it attempts to take apart the idea of a stable self-identity.

This perspective leads observers to question the validity not only of traditional conceptions of family life but also of some recent ones. Consider same-sex marriage. Between the early 2000s and 2015, same-sex marriage went from being illegal everywhere to being the law of the land. In large part, this transformation was due to the work of gay and lesbian social activists. While most queer theorists would consider the legalization of same-sex marriage to be an advance, they have an ambivalent stance toward it. The very term *same-sex* assumes that there are fixed gender categories and that we can easily tell whether the partners are the same or different. And the fight for the right to marry reinforces the idea that marriage is the central form of family life, a position that most queer theorists reject. Thus, some queer theorists considered the push for same-sex marriage to be misguided and argued against pursuing it (Lehr, 1999). In this way, queer theorists refute conventional categories, be they favorites among the political left or the right.

Queer theory constitutes a challenge to standard approaches to the sociology of the family (Acosta, 2018; Allen & Mendez, 2018). It rejects the idea that society should prefer fixed sexual and gender identities over fluid and changing ones. It rejects the rule that family members must be related by blood or marriage. It rejects the norm that marriage should hold a privileged place among intimate relationships. It sees the domination of these forms as privileging heterosexual monogamous relationships (and lately same-sex monogamous relationships) over other forms of family life. How might it influence a textbook such as this one? First, it would suggest that the definition of the family should be expanded beyond the conventional blood-or-marriage-related-and-living-together definition, as I have done in the definition of the private family in this chapter. Second, it would suggest that the author should be alert throughout the book to the complexities that queer theory exposes in standard treatments of gender, sexuality, marriage, and kinship. This I will also do throughout the book. It may also suggest de-emphasizing marriage and other long-term, two-person intimate unions—be they of the same sex or different sex. Here I will respectfully part ways with queer theory. Although I will write about other family forms, such as single-parent families or alternative families like the Scarborough 11, I will focus to a large extent on marriage-like relationships (including unmarried cohabitation) because they remain by far the most common form of intimate partnerships in American society today.

Quick Review

- Five widely used theoretical perspectives are exchange, symbolic interaction, feminist, postmodern, and queer.
- Table 1.4 summarizes the main theme of each perspective and its application to studying families.

INTERSECTIONALITY

intersectionality the principle that inequalities related to one social identity often overlap with inequalities in other identities

One further theoretical point: After a look at the history of the family in Chapter 2, I will present four chapters on major sources of identity and inequality as they relate to families: Chapter 3 on gender, Chapter 4 on social class, Chapter 5 on race and ethnicity, and Chapter 6 on sexuality. Although these chapters will be separate, the topics overlap. Sociological theorists maintain that in order to fully understand inequalities in one domain, we often must consider the others. Think of a person standing at the intersection of four circles: one that represents inequalities tied to class, one for inequalities tied to race, one for inequalities tied to gender, and one for inequalities tied to sexual identity. In order to comprehend the situation of, say, a working-class African American woman who identifies as queer, a sociologist must examine the joint effects of all four of her sources of inequality: her class, race, gender, and sexuality. And there may be other overlapping circles that sometimes need to be drawn, such as age or physical challenges. The theoretical principle that inequalities that are related to one social identity often overlap with inequalities that are related to other identities is called *intersectionality* (Crenshaw, 1991). The analyst using this perspective focuses on the struggles and conflicts in the overlapping domains (Allen, Walker, & McCann, 2013; Ferree, 2010).

The idea of intersectionality arose in the 1980s and 1990s, when scholars who studied minority groups criticized feminist theorists for not linking gender with race (and its close cousin ethnicity) and class—essentially, for focusing heavily on the lives of white, middle-class women (Collins, 2000; Glenn, 2000). The critics agreed that gender is as much a part of social stratification as race and class, but they noted that members of minority groups experience gender and race together, and often in combination with class. More recently, queer theorists have argued that sexual identity constitutes another overlapping circle of inequality that should be added to gender, race, and class (Allen and Mendez, 2018; Acosta, 2018).

The idea of intersectionality raises a caution for both the reader and the author of textbooks such as this one. It is true that one often needs to study a situation from all overlapping lenses at the same time in order to fully comprehend it. That is to say, when individuals experience inequality, they tend to experience it in multiple ways at once. Yet in a textbook, the author must impose some separation on these inequalities so that students can begin to comprehend them. If every section of the chapter on gender, for instance, referred to all other sources of inequality, the reader's basic understanding of gender would likely suffer. Therefore, when you read Chapters 3 through 6, you should keep in mind that although I am focusing on one domain per chapter, they exist in relation to each other. I will attempt to help the reader by noting ways in which an intersectional viewpoint is helpful.

Quick Review

- Individuals often experience interlocking inequalities that simultaneously involve domains such as gender, class, racial/ethnic position, and sexuality.

Globalization and Families

These days, many sociologists are applying their theories to the study of a major social trend that has occurred over the past few decades: **globalization,** the increasing flow of goods and services, money, migrants, and information across the nations of the world.

globalization the increasing flow of goods and services, money, migrants, and information across the nations of the world

Globalization is evident in the movement of factory work overseas so that, for instance, virtually every piece of clothing you own was probably made outside of the United States. You face it when you call the technical service line for help with a laptop problem and are connected to someone in India. You have seen it if you know one of the many middle-class families who have hired women from countries such as Mexico or the Philippines to help care for their children while the parents work. You have experienced it on news sites that collect Twitter feeds and cellphone videos keep you apprised of uprisings in distant lands. Globalization is tying together the lives of people around the world in a way that was not possible before late-twentieth-century advances in computing, communications, and transportation. It has been aided by the ascendency of a political viewpoint known as neoliberalism that supports free movement of investment funds and free trade of goods across nations, open borders, and individual initiative.

No national government controls this trend. Rather, globalization operates at world level above the nation state, as money, people, and information transit the globe. It is affecting family life in nearly every region of the world, although its effects differ from region to region (Trask, 2010). In developing countries, the new factories have created millions of low-wage jobs that have drawn mothers into the paid work force. As in the United States, the employment of mothers with young children can create child care problems, which are often worsened by the lack of any government child care assistance and by workers' inability to pay for care. But the jobs, modest in pay though they are, have also provided women with a greater degree of independence in their family lives, increasing their bargaining power with their husbands and allowing some to escape abusive marriages. Therefore, globalization is changing the relations between women and men in areas where manufacturing work has grown. In addition, the style of romantic love and companionship

Western nations the countries of Western Europe and the non-European, English-speaking countries of the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand

to be found in the United States and other wealthy countries seems to be spreading across much of the developing world.

The effects of globalization on family life can also be seen in the **Western nations,** the countries of Western Europe and the non-European, English-speaking countries of the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. This book's main focus will be on the family in the United States, but there are strong similarities between the American family and the family in other Western nations.

In the United States, the movement of manufacturing jobs overseas has made it more difficult for high school educated young adults to find decent jobs. As a result they frequently are hesitant to marry, and they form short-term cohabiting relationships instead. Meanwhile, college-educated young adults, who have an easier time finding the kinds of well-paying professional and technical jobs that still remain in the United States, finish their education, marry, and enjoy a higher standard of living. In this way, globalization is creating a gap between the family lives of the college graduates and those with less education.

Moreover, international migration is creating family forms that span the developed and developing countries in ways that have never been seen before. Whereas in the past most people who migrated from their home country to another country were men, today almost half of all international migrants are women (United Nations, 2017). Many of them are mothers who leave their children at home. For instance, the women who migrate to the United States to care for the children of working parents often leave their own children in the care of others in their home countries. They typically send back most of their salary to pay for the children's school fees, better clothes, or a nicer house. A grandmother may be minding the children during the years that the mother is gone, or the family may be paying someone else to do the caring. In this way, the immigrant nannies create transnational families in which mothers and children can be thousands of miles apart and yet keep in touch through phone calls, text messages, and Skype sessions.

Globalization, then, can influence family life both positively and negatively. In less developed countries it can induce parents to work long hours for wages that are low by Western standards and it can create child care crises. But the increase in household income does represent a step up in the families' economic fortunes, and it elevates the position of women. In the home countries of the women who migrate to the Western countries to do caring work, children are separated from their mothers by hundreds or thousands of miles; yet their opportunities are increased by the money their mothers send home. In the West, globalization has improved the economic prospects of highly educated young adults, most of whom are still forming marriage-based families, while eroding the ability of young adults with less education to form stable, long-term family bonds.

The world is too interconnected to consider what is happening to families in the United States without also considering what is happening elsewhere. Consequently, Chapter 13 will be devoted to international family change.

Quick Review

- During the past few decades, the international flows of goods and services, money, migrants, and information have increased greatly, in a process known as globalization.
- Globalization has affected family life throughout the world, although its effects are different in Western countries than in other regions.

Family Life and Individualism

A family life centered on marriage remains the preference of most Americans. When young adults are asked their plans for the future, the overwhelming majority respond that they plan to marry and to have children. But it is a different kind of marriage than it used to be. In most societies at most times in the past, marriage was the only acceptable setting for sexual activity and childbearing. As recently as the mid-twentieth century, marriage, childbearing, and sexual activity overlapped to a great extent, possibly even greater than in prior times. Sexual intercourse, for the majority of women at least, was restricted to marriage (or to the men they were engaged to); consequently, few children were born outside marriage. Cohabitation was rare except among the poor. Marriage was more nearly universal than at any other time in the twentieth century. The probability that a marriage would end in divorce, although substantially higher than in the nineteenth century, was much less than it is today. To be respectable, it was necessary to be married before living with a partner or having a child; to stay respectable, it was necessary to avoid divorce if at all possible.

By the 1990s, the power of marriage to regulate people's personal lives was much weaker than in the past. Cohabitation before marriage had become common and acceptable to most people. Although childbearing outside marriage was still frowned upon by many, it was tolerated by most. Divorce was considered to be unfortunate but acceptable if a partner wished to end a marriage. Lifelong singlehood, although still uncommon, was also acceptable. In general, there was a greater acceptance of nonmarried adults.

There are several reasons for the lesser role of marriage and the greater tolerance of those who are not married. Marriage is less economically necessary than when most people needed to pool their labor and earnings with a spouse in order to subsist. Moreover, the movement of married women into the paid workforce—a major trend of the past half-century—has lessened women's economic dependence on men. Even though women's wages remain, on average, lower than men's, it is less difficult now for a woman to support herself and her children. Also, the job prospects for young men without college educations have worsened as jobs are transferred overseas or lost to automation, discouraging young adults from marrying.

But in addition, the decline of marriage and greater tolerance for alternative lifestyles reflects the rise of a more individualized view of family and personal life. By **individualism,** I mean a style of life in which individuals pursue their own interests and place great importance on developing a personally rewarding life. Individualism in American life is of two types (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985). The older, more-established type is **utilitarian individualism:** a style of life that emphasizes self-reliance and personal achievement, especially in one's work life. Benjamin Franklin was the quintessential utilitarian individualist. In his *Poor Richard's Almanack,* he advised that "early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise" and that "God helps them that help themselves." Today, this is the style of the person determined to succeed on his or her own or to get to the top of the corporate ladder. It is also the style of a single mother who works two jobs to pay for her children's college tuition. The second type, newer on a large scale, is **expressive individualism:** a style of life that emphasizes developing one's feelings and emotional satisfaction. This is the style of the person who wants to connect emotionally with a romantic partner, express his or her innermost thoughts to a trusted friend, and develop a good body at the health club. It is

individualism a style of life in which individuals pursue their own interests and place great importance on developing a personally rewarding life

utilitarian individualism a style of life that emphasizes self-reliance and personal achievement, especially in one's work life

expressive individualism a style of life that emphasizes developing one's feelings and emotional satisfaction