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Marriages, Families, and Relationships

Making Choices in a Diverse Society

Twelfth Edition

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MAKING CHOICES IN A DIVERSE SOCIETY

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dedication

to our families, especially

Larry, Valerie, Sam, Janice, Simon, and Christie

Bill, Beth, Angel, Chris, Natalie, Alex, and Livia

Gwendolyn, Gene, Lee, Christine, Mom and Dad

About the Authors

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Preface

As we complete our work on the twelfth edition of this text, we look back over eleven earlier editions. Together, these represent thirty-five years spent observing and rethinking American families. Not only have families changed since we began our first edition but so has social science's interpretation of family life. It is gratifying to be a part of the enterprise dedicated to studying families and to sharing this knowledge with students.

Our own perspective on families has developed and changed as well. Indeed, as marriages and families have evolved over the last three decades, so has this text. In the beginning, this text was titled *Marriages and Families*—a title that was the first to purposefully use plurals to recognize the diversity of family forms—a diversity that we noted as early as 1980. Now the text is titled *Marriages, Families, and Relationships.* We added the term *relationships* to recognize the increasing incidence of individuals forming commitments outside of legal marriage. At the same time, we continue to recognize and appreciate the fact that a large majority of Americans are married or will marry. Hence, we consciously persist in giving due attention to the values and issues of married couples. Of course, the concept of marriage itself has changed appreciably. No longer necessarily heterosexual, marriage is now an institution to which same-sex couples in a growing number of states have legal access.

Meanwhile, the book's subtitle, *Making Choices in a Diverse Society,* continues to speak to the significant changes that have taken place since our first edition. To help accomplish our goal of encouraging students to better appreciate the diversity of today's families, we present the latest research and statistical information on varied family forms, lesbian and gay male families, and families of diverse race and ethnicity, socioeconomic, and immigration status, among other variables.

We continue to take account not only of increasing race/ethnic diversity but also of the fluidity of the concepts *race* and *ethnicity* themselves. In this edition, we give greater direct attention to the socially constructed nature of these concepts. We integrate these materials on family diversity throughout the textbook, always with an eye toward avoiding stereotypical and simplistic generalizations and, instead, to explaining data in sociological and sociohistorical contexts.

Interested from the beginning in the various ways that gender plays out in families, we have persistently focused on areas in which gender relations have changed and continue to change, as well as on areas in which there has been relatively little change. In keeping with our practice of reviewing and reevaluating every single word for a new edition, we have in this revision given concerted attention to discussions that may now be better presented in gender-neutral context and language. However, we hasten to add that assuredly not all topics lend themselves to gender-neutral language. For example, research indicates that intimate violence perpetrated by heterosexual men is qualitatively different from that perpetrated by heterosexual women.

In addition to our attention to gender, we have studied demography and history, and we have paid increasing attention to the impact of social structure on family life. We have highlighted the family ecology perspective in keeping with the importance of social context and public policy. We cannot help but be aware of the cultural and political tensions surrounding families today. At the same time, in recent editions and in response to our reviewers, we have given more attention to the contributions of psychology and to a social psychological understanding of family interaction and its consequences.

We continue to affirm the power of families as they influence the courses of individual lives. Meanwhile, we give considerable attention to policies needed to provide support for today's families: working parents, families in financial stress, single-parent families, families of varied racial/ethnic backgrounds, stepfamilies, same-sex couples, and other nontraditional families—as well as the classic nuclear family.

We note that, despite changes, marriage and family values continue to be salient in contemporary American life. Our students come to a marriage and family course because family life is important to them. Our aim now, as it has been from the first edition, is to help students question assumptions and reconcile conflicting ideas and values as they make choices throughout their lives. We enjoy and benefit from the contact we've had with faculty and students who have used this book. Their enthusiasm and criticism have stimulated many changes in the book's content. To know that a supportive audience is interested in our approach to the study of families has enabled us to continue our work over a long period.

The Book's Themes

Several themes are interwoven throughout this text: People are influenced by the society around them as they make choices, social conditions change in ways that may impede or support family life, there is an interplay

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between individual families and the larger society, and individuals make family-related choices throughout adulthood.

Making Choices throughout Life

The process of creating and maintaining marriages, families, and relationships requires many personal choices; people continue to make family-related decisions, even "big" ones, throughout their lives.

Personal Choice and Social Life

Tension frequently exists between individuals and their social environment. Many personal troubles result from societal influences, values, or assumptions; inadequate societal support for family goals; and conflict between family values and individual values. By understanding some of these possible sources of tension and conflict, individuals can perceive their personal troubles more clearly and work constructively toward solutions. They may choose to form or join groups to achieve family goals. They may become involved in the political process to develop state or federal social policy that is supportive of families. The accumulated decisions of individuals and families also shape the social environment.

A Changing Society

In the past, people tended to emphasize the dutiful performance of social roles in marriage and family structure. Today, people are more apt to view committed relationships as those in which they expect to find companionship, intimacy, and emotional support. From its first edition, this book has examined the implications of this shift and placed these implications within social scientific perspective. Individualism, economic pressure, time pressures, social diversity, and an awareness of committed relationships' potential impermanence are features of the social context in which personal decision making takes place today. With each edition, we recognize again that, as fewer social guidelines remain fixed, personal decision making becomes even more challenging.

Then too, new technologies continue to create changes in family members' lives. Discussions about technological developments in communication appear throughout the book—for example, a lengthy discussion of how technology and social media impact families in Chapter 1, maintaining ties between college students and their parents (Chapter 9), sexting and cyber adultery (Chapter 4), Internet matchmaking (Chapter 5), reproductive technology (Chapter 8), parental surveillance of children (Chapter 9), working at home versus the office (Chapter 10), and how noncustodial parents keep in touch with children through technology (Chapter 14).

The Themes throughout the Life Course

The book's themes are introduced in Chapter 1, and they reappear throughout the text. We developed these themes by looking at the interplay between findings in the social sciences and the experiences of the people around us. Ideas for topics continue to emerge, not only from current research and reliable journalism, but also from the needs and concerns that we perceive among our own family members and friends. The attitudes, behaviors, and relationships of real people have a complexity that we have tried to portray. Interwoven with these themes is the concept of the life course—the idea that adults may change by means of reevaluating and restructuring throughout their lives. This emphasis on the life course creates a comprehensive picture of marriages, families, and relationships and encourages us to continue to add topics that are new to family texts. Meanwhile, this book makes these points:

- People's personal problems and their interaction with the social environment change as they and their relationships and families grow older.
- People reexamine their relationships and their expectations for relationships as they and their marriages, relationships, and families mature.
- Because family forms are more flexible today, people may change the type or style of their relationships and families throughout their lives.

Marriages and Families— Making Choices

Making decisions about one's family life begins in early adulthood and lasts into old age. People choose whether they will adhere to traditional beliefs, values, and attitudes about gender roles or negotiate more flexible roles and relationships. They may rethink their values about sex and become more informed and comfortable with their sexual choices.

Women and men may choose to remain single, to form heterosexual or same-sex relationships outside of marriage, or to marry. They have the option today of staying single longer before marrying. Single people make choices about their lives, ranging from decisions about living arrangements to those about whether to engage in sex only in marriage or committed relationships, to engage in sex for recreation, or to abstain from sex altogether. Many unmarried individuals live as cohabiting couples (often with children), an increasingly common family form.

Once individuals form couple relationships, they have to decide how they are going to structure their lives as committed partners. Will the partners be legally married? Will they become domestic partners? Will theirs be a dual-career union? Will they plan periods in which one partner is employed, interspersed with times in which both are wage earners? Will they have children? Will they use new reproductive technology to become parents? Will other family members live with them—siblings or parents, for example, or, later, adult children?

Couples will make these decisions not once, but over and over during their lifetimes. Within a committed relationship, partners also choose how they will deal with conflict. Will they try to ignore conflicts? Will they vent their anger in hostile, alienating, or physically violent ways? Or will they practice supportive ways of communicating, disagreeing, and negotiating—ways that emphasize sharing and can deepen intimacy?

How will the partners distribute power in the marriage? Will they work toward relationships in which each family member is more concerned with helping and supporting others than with gaining a power advantage? How will the partners allocate work responsibilities in the home? What value will they place on their sexual lives together? Throughout their experience, family members continually face decisions about how to balance each one's need for individuality with the need for togetherness.

Parents also have choices. In raising their children, they can choose the authoritative parenting style, for example, in which parents take an active role in responsibly guiding and monitoring their children, while simultaneously striving to develop supportive, mutually cooperative family relationships.

Many partners face decisions about whether to separate or divorce. They weigh the pros and cons, asking themselves which is the better alternative: living together as they are or separating? Even when a couple decides to separate or divorce, there are further decisions to make: Will they cooperate as much as possible or insist on blame and revenge? What living and economic support arrangements will work best for themselves and their children? How will they handle the legal process? The majority of divorced individuals eventually face decisions about recoupling. In the absence of firm cultural models, they choose how they will define stepfamily relationships.

When families encounter crises—and every family will face *some* crises—members must make additional decisions. Will they view each crisis as a challenge to be met, or will they blame one another? What resources can they use to handle the crisis? Then, too, as more and more Americans live longer, families will "age." As a result, more and more Americans will have not only living grandparents but also great grandparents. And increasingly, we will face issues concerning giving—and receiving—family elder care.

An emphasis on knowledgeable decision making does not mean that individuals can completely control their lives. People can influence but never directly determine how those around them behave or feel about them. Partners cannot control one another's changes over time, and they cannot avoid all accidents, illnesses, unemployment, separations, or deaths. Societywide conditions may create unavoidable crises for individual families. However, families *can* control how they respond to such crises. Their responses will meet their own needs better when they refuse to react automatically and choose instead to act as a consequence of knowledgeable decision making.

Key Features

With its ongoing thorough updating and inclusion of current research and its emphasis on students' being able to make choices in an increasingly diverse society, this book has become a principal resource for gaining insights into today's marriages, relationships, and families. Over the past eleven editions, we have had four goals in mind for student readers: first, to help them better understand themselves and their family situations; second, to make students more conscious of the personal decisions that they will make throughout their lives and of the societal influences that affect those decisions; third, to help students better appreciate the variety and diversity among families today; and fourth, to encourage them to recognize the need for structural, social policy support for families. To these ends, this text has become recognized for its accessible writing style, up-to-date research, well-written features, and useful chapter learning aids.

Up-to-Date Research and Statistics

As users have come to expect, we have thoroughly updated the text's research base and statistics, emphasizing cutting-edge research that addresses the diversity of marriages and families, as well as all other topics. In accordance with this approach, users will notice several new tables and figures. Revised tables and figures have been updated with the latest available statistics—data from the U.S. Census Bureau and other governmental agencies, as well as survey and other research data.

Features

The several themes described earlier are reflected in the special features.

Former users will recognize our box features. The following sections describe our four feature box categories:

As We Make Choices. We highlight the theme of making choices with a group of boxes throughout the text, for example, "Ten Rules for a Successful Relationship," "Looking for Love on the Internet" "Disengaging from Power Struggles," "Selecting a Child Care Facility," "Ten Keys to Successful Co-Parenting," and "Tips for Step-Grandparents." These feature boxes emphasize human agency and are designed to help students through crucial decisions.

A Closer Look at Diversity. In addition to integrating information on cultural and ethnic diversity throughout the text proper, we have a series of features that give focused attention to instances of family diversity—for example, "African Americans and 'Jumping the Broom'," "Diversity and Child Care," "Family Ties and Immigration," "Parenting LGBT Children," and " Do You Speak Stepfamily," among others.

Issues for Thought. These features are designed to spark students' critical thinking and discussion. As an example, the Issues for Thought box in Chapter 16 explores "Filial Responsibility Laws" and encourages students to consider what might be the benefits and drawbacks of legally mandating filial responsibility. Similarly, in the Issues for Thought box in Chapter 4, "Bisexual or Just "Bi-Curious"? in Chapter 4, students are asked to think about whether there are different standards of same-sex attraction and behavior for women versus men.

Facts about Families. This feature presents demographic and other factual information on focused topics such as "How Family Researchers Study Religion from Various Theoretical Perspectives" (Chapter 2), on "Six Love Styles" (Chapter 5), on transracial adoption (Chapter 8), and on "Foster Parenting" (Chapter 9), among others.

Chapter Learning Aids

A series of chapter learning aids help students comprehend and retain the material.

- **Chapter Summaries** are presented in bulleted, point-by-point lists of the key material in the chapter.

- **Key Terms** alert students to the key concepts presented in the chapter. A full glossary is provided at the end of the text.

- **Questions for Review and Reflection** help students review the material. Thought questions encourage students to think critically and to integrate material from other chapters with that presented in the current one. In every chapter, one of these questions is a policy question. This practice is in line with our goal of moving students toward structural analyses regarding marriages, families, and relationships.

Key Changes in This Edition

In addition to incorporating the latest available research and statistics—and in addition to carefully reviewing every word in the book—we note that this edition includes many key changes, some of which are outlined here. We have shortened several chapters in order to make chapter length more uniform throughout the text. In shortening long chapters, we have not omitted topics; rather we have consolidated discussions and eliminated wordiness. Because the pertinent information changes often and can now be readily found online, all the appendices have been deleted.

In this twelfth edition, we have again revisited and somewhat restructured the chapter outline and order. We have dropped the former Chapter 3, "American Families in Social Context," and integrated material from former Chapter 3 into relevant other chapters. Moreover, in response to reviewers, we have returned the chapter on marriage to its earlier placement after the chapter on living alone, cohabiting, same-sex unions, and other intimate relationships.

As with previous revisions, we have given considerable attention not only to chapter-by-chapter organization, but also to *within*-chapter organization. Our ongoing intents are to streamline the material presented whenever possible and to ensure a good flow of ideas. In this edition, we have also continued to consolidate similar material that had previously been addressed in separate chapters.

Meanwhile, we have substantially revised each and every chapter. Every chapter is updated with the latest research throughout. We mention some (but not all!) specific and important changes here.

Chapter 1, Marriage, Relationships, and Family Commitments: Making Choices in a Changing Society, continues to present the choices and life course themes of the book, as well as points to the significance for the family of larger social forces. A new section, "A Sociological Imagination: Personal Troubles and Some Social Conditions That Impact Families," introduces a discussion of the sociological imagination as it relates to issues of marriage and family, incorporating historical information and demographic characteristics from Chapter 3 in the previous edition.

Chapter 2, Exploring Relationships and Families, continues to portray the integral relationship between family theories and methods for researching families, with new examples to drive home the theoretical perspectives.

Chapter 3, Our Gendered Identities, has been significantly updated with information on gender identities and expectations, including a new section on "Race/ Ethnic Diversity and Gendered Expectations." New sections on "Biology-Based Arguments" and "Society-Based Arguments" explore the emergence of gender roles.

Chapter 4, Our Sexual Selves, presents a new feature, "Issues for Thought: Bisexual or Just 'Bicurious'? The Emergence of Pansexuality." This box invites students to consider how our understandings of gender and sexual identity have become increasingly fluid in society and are different for women and men. The statistics on sexuality have been substantially revised to reflect new surveys on sexual behavior, infidelity, HIV/AIDS, and pornography use, with special focus on gender differences in each. Given the proliferation of pornography, now easily accessible on the Internet, there is a new section on how pornography affects one's own sexuality as well as intimacy between couples. With the Obama administration's withdrawal of federal funding to abstinence only sex education, we have deleted the section on the politics of sex and sex education.

Chapter 5, Love and Choosing a Life Partner, contains a new section on definitions, perceptions, and experiences of love and how they differ for women and men. There is a new section on dating and relationship development and the emergence of various patterns of "nondating" among adolescents and young adults. This discussion reflects the ever increasing age at first marriage, the lengthening time young adults remain unmarried, and how they navigate sexual and intimate relationships during this period. We have added a new box, "Looking for Love on the Internet," that incorporates technological changes in how people search for a mate. We have also revised our box on "Acquaintance Rape" to include "Sexual Assault," to highlight increased recognition of the various forms that sexual assault and abuse can take, as well as programs and campaigns geared toward educating men.

Chapter 6, Living Alone, Cohabiting, Same-Sex Unions, and Other Intimate Relationships, discusses demographic, economic, technological, and cultural reasons for the increasing proportion of unmarrieds, with updated statistics on unmarrieds in America. New sections on the numbers, age, and characteristics of cohabitors look further into the growing trend. This chapter also includes extensive, expanded, and thoroughly updated sections on trends in legal marriage for same-sex couples, including discussion of the Supreme Court decision on the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA).

Chapter 7, Marriage: From Social Institution to Private Relationship, has been thoroughly updated with new statistics and research findings. This chapter explores the changing picture regarding marriage, noting the social science debate regarding whether this changing picture represents family change or decline. As part of our updated exploration of this question, we thoroughly explore the selection hypothesis versus the experience hypothesis with regard to the benefits of marriage known from research.

Chapter 8, Deciding about Parenthood, now includes data analysis on international and transracial adoptions. A new boxed feature, "Conception, Pregnancy, and Childbirth—the Basics" integrates key information previously presented in an appendix.

Chapter 9, Raising Children in a Diverse Society, like all the chapters in this edition, has been thoroughly updated with the most current research. As in recent prior editions, after describing the authoritative parenting style, we note its acceptance by mainstream experts in the parenting field. We then present a critique that questions whether this parenting style is universally appropriate or simply a white, middle-class pattern that may not be so suitable to other social contexts. We also discuss challenges faced by parents who are raising religious- or ethnic-minority children in potentially discriminatory environments.

We continue to emphasize the challenges that all parents face in contemporary America, especially given our economic downturn. We have expanded sections on single mothers, single fathers, and nonresident fathers. We have given more attention to relations with young-adult children as more and more of them have "boomeranged" home in this difficult economy. As with all other chapters in this text, we keep in mind the linkage between structural conditions and personal decisions. Hence, there is added discussion of the parenting beliefs and practices in working-class families. We have also added a new table in this twelfth edition, "The American Academy of Pediatrics Position Against Spanking, Versus the American College of Pediatricians' Distinction between Disciplinary Spanking and Corporal Punishment." We have added a new section on parents in transnational families.

Chapter 10, Work and Family, has been significantly reorganized and considerably shortened. All research and statistics are updated. We continue to follow the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development study of child care. There are new boxes, including "Issues for Thought: When One Woman's Workplace Is Another's Family." Another new box looks at things for parents to think about if leaving kids home alone: "As We Make Choices: Self-Care (Home Alone) Kids."

Chapter 11, Communication in Relationships, Marriages, and Families has been reorganized with shortened, better-clarified sections. Additional information on relationship counseling previously included in an appendix has been included in this chapter.

Chapter 12, Power and Violence in Families, has been reorganized and shortened considerably, but without deleting any topics explored in previous editions. There is more and ongoing emphasis on power relations within the context of growing family race/ethnic diversity. This chapter consolidates the classic research on family power, while current research on marital and partner power has been expanded to include issues of

household work and money management, as well as decision making per se. A discussion of equality and equity concludes the part of the chapter on marital and partner power. Additionally, analysis of power differential between citizens and their immigrant spouses is introduced.

A clearer distinction has been made between intimate terrorism and common couple violence. The section on abuse among same-gender, bisexual, and transgender couples has been updated and expanded, as has the section on violence among immigrant couples. Finally, several new boxes have been added to this chapter: "A Closer Look at Diversity: Mobile Phones, Migrant Mothers, and Conjugal Power," "As We Make Choices: Domination and Submission in Couple Communication Patterns," "Facts about Families: Major Sources of Data on Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and Child Maltreatment," and "Facts about Families: Signs of Intimate Terrorism."

Chapter 13, Family Stress, Crisis, and Resilience, continues to emphasize and expand discussion of the growing body of research on resilience in relation to family stress and crises and has been updated with many new examples. Figure 13.2 on boundary ambiguity has been simplified to better clarify the concept.

Chapter 14, Divorce and Relationship Dissolution, has a new title to reflect the increase in committed nonmarital relationships and an awareness that these, too, often dissolve. There is new section on starter marriages and silver divorces that reflects variations in the divorce rate by age. There is also a new section that highlights the lack of information available to divorcing couples regarding the legal process of divorce ("The Black Box of Divorce"), and a new section on the consequences of divorce for divorcing couples, extended families and circles of friends (divorce fall-out). There are now separate sections for economic consequences of divorce for women, men, and children with a heavily revised section covering the socioemotional consequences of divorce for each. All reflect the very latest theories and empirical findings on these topics. New information has been added on the experience of joint and father custody, reflecting growing incidence of these practices. Finally, the section on coparenting has been revised to reflect growing acceptance of this term to describe parental relationships after divorce.

Chapter 15, Remarriages and Stepfamilies, continues to stress diversity within stepfamilies, reflecting continued growth of nonmarital childbearing, cohabitation, father custody, racial/ethnic diversity, and same sex couples with stepchildren. There is a new box, "Issues for Thought: What Makes a Stepfamily?," that focuses on how these shifts are changing societal definitions of stepfamilies. We also consider diversity in how members of stepfamilies define themselves with a new box, "A Closer Look at Diversity: Do You Speak Stepfamily?"

We continue to pay attention to micro-level stepfamily dynamics with new sections on dating with children, the process through which people become stepparents, and the challenges of day-to-day living in stepfamilies, including the complex legal and financial issues they face. We continue to add new research findings to our discussion of the short- and long-term financial, social, and emotional well-being of stepfamily members, especially children. Finally, we have additional suggestions for how society can better meet the needs of stepfamilies in our section on creating supportive stepfamilies.

Chapter 16, Aging Families, has a new thematic emphasis on multigenerational families, ties, and obligations in a cultural content of individualism. Additionally, this chapter includes a new discussion of caregiver ambivalence coupled with multigenerational families as safety nets for all generations.

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Diane Beasley developed the overall design of the book, one we are very pleased with. Caryl Gorska, Art Director, oversaw the design of new edition. Heather Mann proofread the book pages, and Edwin Durbin compiled the index. Once it is completed, our textbook needs to find the faculty and students who will use it. Kara Kindstrom, Sr. Marketing Manager, captured the essence of our book in the various marketing materials that present our book to its prospective audience.

Closer to home, Agnes Riedmann wishes to acknowledge her late mother, Ann Langley Czerwinski, PhD, who helped her significantly with past editions. Agnes would also like to acknowledge family, friends, and professional colleagues who have supported her throughout the thirty-five years that she has worked on this book.

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Mary Ann Lamanna and Agnes Riedmann continue to acknowledge one another as coauthors for thirty-five years. Each of us has brought somewhat different strengths to this process. We are not alike—a fact that has continuously made for a better book, in our opinion. At times, we have lengthy email conversations back and forth over the inclusion of one phrase. Many times, we have disagreed over the course of the past thirty years—over how long to make a section, how much emphasis to give a particular topic, whether a certain citation is the best one to use, occasionally over the tone of an anxious or frustrated email. But we have always agreed on the basic vision and character of this textbook. And we continue to grow in our mutual respect for one another as scholars, writers, and authors. We have now been joined by Susan Stewart as coauthor. She brings a fresh perspective to the book as well as a comprehensive knowledge of research in the field. Her expertise has especially contributed to revision of Chapters 4, 5, 14, and 15.

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Twelfth Edition Reviewers

Chuck Baker, Delaware County Community College; Adriana Bohm, Delaware County Community College; John Bowman, University of North Carolina at Pembroke; Jennifer Brougham, Arizona State University–Tempe; Shaheen Chowdhury, College of DuPage; Diana Cuchin, Virginia Commonwealth University; James Guinee, University of Central Arkansas; Amy Knudsen, Drake University; Wendy Pank, Bismarck State College; Rita Sakitt, Suffolk County Community College; Tomecia Sobers, Fayetteville Technical Community College; Richard States, Allegany College of Maryland; and Scott Tobias, Kent State University at Stark.

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Of Special Importance

Students and faculty members who tell us of their interest in the book are a special inspiration. To all of the people who gave their time and gave of themselves—interviewees, students, our families and friends—many thanks. We see the fact that this book is going into a twelfth edition as a result of a truly interactive process between ourselves and students who share their experiences and insights in our classrooms; reviewers who consistently give us good advice; editors and production experts whose input is invaluable; and our family, friends, and colleagues whose support is invaluable.

Marriages, Families, and Relationships

MAKING CHOICES IN A DIVERSE SOCIETY

1

Making Family Choices in a Changing Society

Janine Wiedel Photolibrary/Alamy

Learning Objectives

1. Understand why researchers and policy makers need to define family, even though definitions are not always agreed upon and can be controversial.

2. Relate ways that family structure, or form, is increasingly diverse.

3. Explain why there is no typical American family.

4. Describe and give examples of various society-wide, structural conditions that impact families.

5. Discuss why the best life course decisions are informed ones made consciously.

6. Explain and give examples of how families provide individuals with a place to belong.

7. Understand why there is a tension in our culture between familistic values on the one hand and individualistic values on the other hand.

This text is different from others you may read. It isn't necessarily intended to prepare you for an occupation. Although it could help you in a future career, this text has three other goals as well: to help you (1) appreciate the variety and diversity among families today, (2) understand your past and present family situations and anticipate future possibilities, and (3) be more conscious of the personal decisions you make throughout your life and of the societal influences that affect those decisions.

Families are central to society and to our everyday lives. Families undertake the pivotal tasks of raising children and providing family members with support, companionship, affection, and intimacy. Meanwhile, what we think of as family has changed dramatically in recent decades. This chapter explores *family* definitions while noting the many and varied structures or forms that families take today. This chapter also describes some society-wide conditions that impact families: ever-new biological and communication technologies, economic conditions, historical periods of events, and demographic characteristics such as age, religion, race, and ethnicity.

Later in this chapter, we'll note that when maintaining committed relationships and families, people need to make informed decisions. Chapter 1 introduces concepts to be explored much more fully throughout this textbook. The theme of knowledge plus commitment is integral to this book. Finally, we end this chapter with a discussion of four themes that characterize this text. You'll see that these four themes comprise the text's four learning goals, which are listed in the Preface. We begin with a working definition of family—one that we can keep in mind throughout the course.

Defining Family

As shown in Figure 1.1, people make a variety of assumptions about what families are and are not. We've noticed when teaching this course that some students, when asked to list their family members, include their pets. Are dogs, cats, or hamsters family members?

Some individuals who were conceived by artificial insemination with donor sperm are tracking down their "donor siblings"—half brothers and sisters who were conceived using the same man's sperm. They may define their "donor relatives" as family members (Shapiro 2009). Indeed, there are many definitions given for the family, not only among laypeople but also among family scientists themselves (Weigel 2008). We, your authors, have chosen to define **family** as follows: A family is any sexually expressive, parent-child, or other kin relationship in which people—usually related by ancestry, marriage, or adoption—(1) form an economic or otherwise practical unit and care for any children or other dependents, (2) consider their identity to be significantly attached to the group, and (3) commit to maintaining that group over time.

How did we come to this definition? First, caring for children or other dependents suggests a function that the family is expected to perform. Definitions of many things have both functional and structural components. Functional definitions point to the purpose(s) for which a thing exists—that is, what it does. For example, a functional definition of an iPhone would emphasize that it allows you to make and receive calls, take pictures, connect to the Internet, and access media. Structural

Married couple with children	99%
Married couple without children	88%
Single parent with children	86%
Unmarried couple with children	80%
Same-sex couple with children	63%
Same-sex couple without children	45%
Unmarried couple without children	43%
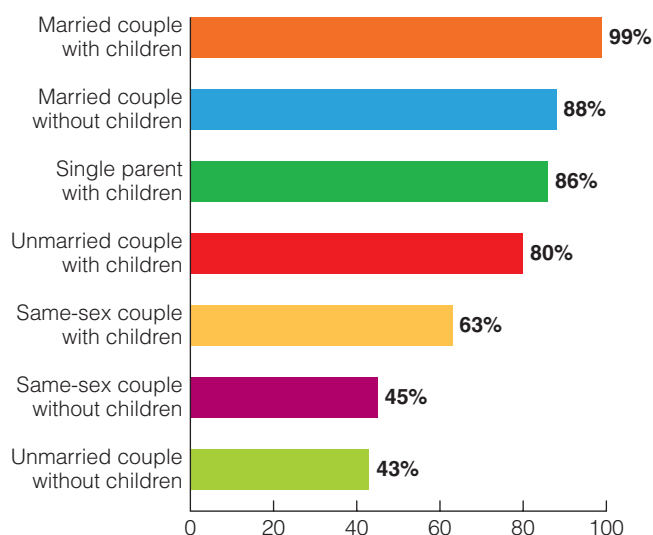
FIGURE 1.1 What is a family? Percent saying each of these is a family, 2010.

Source: Pew Research Center 2010a, p. 40.

definitions emphasize the *form* that a thing takes—what it actually is. To define an iPhone structurally, we might say that it is an electronic device, small enough to be handheld, with a multimedia screen, and with components that allow sophisticated satellite communication. Concepts of the family comprise both functional and structural aspects. We'll look now at how the family can be recognized by its functions, and then we'll discuss structural definitions of the family.

Family Functions

Social scientists usually list three major functions filled by today's families: raising children responsibly, providing members with economic and other practical support, and offering emotional security.

We can define families by their functions—raising children, providing economic support for dependents, and offering emotional support for all family members. These three look as if they're doing all of that. But functional definitions of *family* aren't enough. We also need to consider the group's structure. This family consists of a heterosexual couple and their child. They may be married or cohabiting.

Family Function 1: Raising Children Responsibly　If a society is to persist beyond one generation, adults have to not only bear children but also feed, clothe, and shelter them during their long years of dependency. Furthermore, a society needs new members who are properly trained in the ways of the economy and culture and who will be dependable members of the group. These goals require children to be responsibly raised. Virtually every society assigns this essential task to families.

A related family function has traditionally been to control its members' sexual activity. Although there are several reasons for the social control of sexual activity, the most important one is to ensure that reproduction takes place under circumstances that help to guarantee the responsible care and socialization of children. The universally approved locus of reproduction remains the married-couple family (Cherlin 2005). "Throughout history, marriage has first and foremost been an institution for procreation and raising children. It has provided the cultural tie that seeks to connect the father to his children by binding him to the mother of his children" (Wilcox et al. 2011a, p. 82). Nevertheless, in the United States and other industrialized countries the child-raising function is often performed by divorced, separated, never-married, or cohabiting parents, and sometimes by grandparents or other relatives.

Family Function 2: Providing Economic and Other Practical Support　A second family function involves providing economic support. Throughout much of our history, the family was primarily a practical, economic unit rather than an emotional one (Shorter 1975; Stone 1980). Although the modern family is no longer a self-sufficient economic unit, virtually every family engages in activities aimed at providing for such practical needs as food, clothing, and shelter.

Family economic functions now consist of earning a living outside the home, pooling resources, and making consumption decisions together. In assisting one another economically, family members create some sense of material security. For example, family members offer one another a kind of unemployment insurance. If one family member is laid off or can't find work, others may be counted on for help. Family members care for each other in additional practical ways too, such as nursing and transportation during an illness.

Family Function 3: Offering Emotional Security　Although historically the family was a pragmatic institution involving material maintenance, in today's world the family has grown increasingly important as a source of emotional security (Cherlin 2008; Coontz 2005b). Not just partners or parents but children, siblings, and extended kin can be important sources of emotional support (Waite et al. 2011). This is not to say that families can solve all our longings for affection, companionship, and intimacy. Sometimes, in fact, the family situation itself is a source of stress as in the case of parental conflict, alcoholism, drug abuse, or domestic violence. But families and committed relationships are meant to offer important emotional support to adults and children.

Family may mean having a place where you can be yourself, even sometimes your worst self, and still belong.

Defining a family by its functions is informative and can be insightful. For example, Laura Dawn, in her book of stories about people who took in survivors of Hurricane Katrina, describes "how strangers became family" (Dawn 2006). But defining a family only by its functions would be too vague and misleading. For instance, neighbors or roommates might help with child care, provide for economic and other practical needs, or offer emotional support. But we still might not think of them as family. An effective definition of family needs to incorporate structural elements as well.

Structural Family Definitions

Traditionally, both legal and social sciences have specified that the family consists of people related by blood, marriage, or adoption. In their classic work *The Family: From Institution to Companionship*, Ernest Burgess and Harvey Locke (1953 [1945]) specified that family members must "constitute a household," or reside together. Some definitions of the family have gone even further to include economic interdependency and sexual–reproductive relations (Murdock 1949).

The U.S. Census Bureau defines a family as "a group of two or more persons related by blood, marriage, or adoption and residing together in a household" (U.S. Census Bureau 2012c, p. 6). It is important to note here that the Census Bureau uses the term **household** for any group of people residing together. Not all households are families by the Census Bureau definition—that is, persons sharing a household must also be related by blood, marriage, or adoption to be considered a family.

Family structure, or the form a family takes, varies according to the social environment in which it is embedded. In preindustrial or traditional societies, the family structure involved whole kinship groups. The **extended family** of parents, children, grandparents, and other relatives performed most societal functions, including economic production (e.g., the family farm), protection of family members, vocational training, and maintaining social order. In industrial or modern societies, the typical family structure often became the **nuclear family** (husband, wife, children), which was better suited to city life. Until about fifty years

ago, social attitudes, religious beliefs, and law converged into a fairly common expectation about what form the American family should take: breadwinner husband, homemaker wife, and children living together in an independent household—the nuclear-family model.

Nevertheless, the extended family continues to play an important role in many cases, especially among recent immigrants and race/ethnic minorities. Furthermore, to cope with hardships associated with the current economic recession, more families of all races/ethnicities are doubling up—that is, relatives are moving in together to create more multigenerational or otherwise extended-family households. About 15.5 million, or 13 percent of American households are occupied by extended or multifamily groups—an increase of 12 percent or more since the onset of the recession in late 2007 (Mykyta and Macartney 2012, p. 2 and Table A-1). "Accordion" family households that expand or contract around more or fewer family members depending on family need perform important economic and often emotional social functions (Newman 2012).

Meanwhile, today's families are not necessarily bound to one another by legal marriage, blood, or adoption. The term *family* can identify relationships in addition to spouses, parents, children, and extended kin. Individuals fashion and experience intimate relationships and families in many forms. As social scientists take into account this structural variability, it is not uncommon to find them referring to the family as *postmodern* (Stacey 1990).

The extended family—grandparents, aunts, and uncles—can provide occasion for good times as well as an important source of security, its members helping each other, especially during crises.

Ariel Skelley/Photographer's Choice/Getty Images

Postmodern: There Is No Typical Family

Barely half of U.S. adults are married—a record low (Taylor et al. 2011). Think of television shows in which single parents, interracial couples, lesbian or gay male couples, and still other family variations increasingly appear. Just 6 percent of families now fit the 1950s nuclear-family ideal of married couple and children, with a husband-breadwinner and wife-homemaker (U.S. Census Bureau 2012b, Tables F1, FG8). The past several decades have witnessed a proliferation of relationship and family forms: single-parent families, step-families, families with children of more than one father, two-earner couples, stay-at-home fathers, cohabiting heterosexual couples, gay and lesbian marriages and families, three-generation families, and communal households, among others (Cherlin 2010; Dorius 2012). It appears that individuals can construct a myriad of social forms in order to address family functions. The term **postmodern family** came into use to acknowledge the fact that families today exhibit a multiplicity of forms and that new or altered family forms continue to emerge and develop.

Figure 1.2 displays the types of households in which Americans live. Just 20.9 percent of households are nuclear families of husband, wife, and children, as compared with 31 percent in 1980 and with 44 percent in 1960 (Casper and Bianchi 2002, p. 8; U.S. Census Bureau 2012c, Table 59). The most common household type today is that of married couples without children: The children have grown up and left or the couple has not yet had children or doesn't plan to.

More households today (26.7 percent) are maintained by individuals living alone than by married couples with children. There are also female-headed (40 percent) and male-headed (1.9 percent) single-parent households, unmarried-couple households (5.3 percent), and family households containing relatives other than spouses or children (7.6 percent). "Facts about Families: American Families Today" presents additional information about families. Today we see historically unprecedented diversity in family composition or form.

As one result of this diversity, law, government agencies, and private corporations such as insurance companies must now make decisions about what they once could take for granted—that is, what a family is. If rent policies, employee-benefit packages, and insurance policies cover families, decisions need to be made about what relationships or groups of people are to be defined as a family. The September 11th Victim Compensation Fund of 2001 struggled with this issue in allocating compensation to victims' survivors. New York State law was amended to allow awards to unmarried gay and heterosexual partners (Gross 2002). President George W. Bush subsequently signed a federal bill extending benefits to domestic partners of firefighters and police officers who lose their lives in the line of duty (Allen 2002).

Adapting Family Definitions to the Postmodern Family

As family forms have grown increasingly variable, social scientists have proposed—and often struggled with—new, more flexible definitions for the family. Sociologist David Popenoe (1993) defined today's family as "a group of people in which people typically live together in a household and function as a cooperative unit, particularly through the sharing of economic resources, in the pursuit of domestic activities" (1993, p. 528). Sociologist Frank Furstenberg writes as follows: "My definition of 'family' includes membership related by blood, legal ties, adoption, and informal ties including *fictive* or socially agreed upon kinship" (2005, p. 810, italics in original).

Legal definitions of family have become more flexible as well. In the past few decades, judges, when defining the family in cases that come before them, have used the more intangible qualities of stability and commitment along with the more traditional criteria of common residence and economic interdependency (*Dunphy v. Gregor 1994*). From this point of view, the

FIGURE 1.2 The many kinds of American households, 2010.* A household is one or more persons who occupy a dwelling unit. This figure displays both family and nonfamily households.**

*This is the most recent year for which all of the data for this figure are available.

**Unmarried-couple households may be composed of same-sex (10.7 percent) or heterosexual couples (89.3 percent) (calculated from Lofquist et al. 2012, Table 3); Census Bureau classifies unmarried-couple households as nonfamily households.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2012c, Tables 59, 63.

American Families Today*

What do U.S. families look like today? Statistics can't tell the whole story, but they are an important beginning. As you read these ten facts, remember that the data presented here are generalizations and do not consider differences among various sectors of society. We explore social diversity throughout this textbook, but for now let's look at some overall statistics.

1. *Marriage is important to Americans— but not to the extent that it was fifty years ago.* Sixty-one percent of never-married adults say they want to marry; another 27 percent is not sure. But 39 percent of us (44 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds and 32 percent of Americans age 65 and older) see marriage as becoming obsolete (Taylor et al. 2011).

2. *A smaller proportion of people is married today.* Between 51 and 56 percent of Americans age 18 and older were married in 2010, compared to 59 percent in 2000, 62 percent in 1990, and 72 percent in 1960. Twenty-seven percent have never married; 10 percent are divorced, and 6 percent widowed (Cohn et al. 2011; Taylor et al. 2011; U.S. Census Bureau 2012c, Table 56).

3. *Young people are postponing marriage.* In 2011, the median age at first marriage was 26.5 for women and 28.7 for men, as compared with 20.8 for women and 23.5 for men in 1970 (U.S. Census Bureau 2011b, Table MS-2). Today's average age at marriage is the highest recorded since the 1890 census.

4. *Cohabitation has become a fairly acceptable family form as well as a transitional lifestyle choice.* The number of cohabiting adults has increased more than tenfold since 1970—and by 40 percent just since 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau 2012b, Table UC-1; Lofquist et al., Table 2). Nearly 40 percent of cohabiting couples lived with children under 18 in 2011—either their own or those from a previous relationship or marriage. Unmarried-couple families are only 5 percent of households at any one time, but more than 50 percent of first marriages are preceded by cohabitation (Lofquist et al. 2012).

5. *Fertility has declined.* At 1.9 in 2011, the total fertility rate (TFR)—the average number of births that a woman will have during her lifetime—had dropped by almost 4 percent from 2009 (Martin et al. 2012, p. 9; Mather 2012). After a high of 3.6 in 1957, the total TFR has been at about 2 over the past twenty years (U.S. Census Bureau 2012c, Table 83). A society requires a TFR of at least 2.1 in order for the population numerically to replace itself, so the current TFR is below replacement level.

6. *Particularly among college-educated women, parenthood is often postponed.* The average age for a woman's first birth increased by about 2 years between 1970 and 2010—from age 21 to about 23. But the statistics differ according to education. For instance, nearly 60 percent of women who had not finished high school had a first birth by age 20, compared with 4 percent of women with a bachelor's degree or higher (Martinez, Daniels, and Chandra 2012, Figure 3).

7. *Compared to 4 percent in 1950, the nonmarital birthrate is high* with 40 percent of all U.S. births today being to unmarried mothers. Unlike 1950, however, between one-quarter and one-half of nonmarital births today occur to cohabiting couples (Carter 2009). Along with overall fertility, the unmarried-mother birthrate fell slightly between 2009 and 2010. We don't know whether this situation marks the beginning of a new trend or simply reflects a temporary response to the current recession (Martin et al. 2012, p. 10).

8. *Same-sex-couple households increased* by 80 percent between 2000 and 2010 (Homan and Bass 2012). It is difficult to precisely quantify the number of same-sex-couple households in the United States (Lofquist 2012). However, the 2010 U.S. Census counted about 646,464 same-sex couple households. Of these, 131,729—a little more than 25 percent—were married-couple households (U.S. Census Bureau 2011a). It is estimated that between 16 percent and 19 percent of same-sex households (about 14 percent of male and 27 percent of female) include children (Gates 2011; Krivickas and Lofquist 2011; Lofquist 2011).

9. *The divorce rate is high.* The divorce rate doubled from 1965 to 1980. Then it dropped and has fallen more than 30 percent since 1980 (U.S. Census Bureau 2012c, Table 78). Still, it is estimated that only about half of recent first marriages will last twenty years, although the likelihood of divorce declines with more years of education (Copen et al. 2012, Tables 5 and 6).

10. *The remarriage rate has declined in recent decades but remains significant.* About 70 percent of all current marriages are first-time marriages for both spouses. About 4 percent of all married women and of married men have wed three or more times (Kreider and Ellis 2011b, Table 10).

Critical Thinking

What do these statistics tell you about the strengths and weaknesses of the contemporary American family and about family change?

*The Census Bureau defines households as people living together in the same domicile; family households are domiciles housing persons related by blood, marriage, or adoption. Figures differ depending on whether household or family is the unit of analysis. For example, married-couple family households are 50 percent of all households, but married-couple families are 74 percent of all families (U.S. Census Bureau 2012c, Table 59).

definition of family "is the totality of the relationship as evidenced by the dedication, caring and self-sacrifice of the parties" (*Judge Vito Titone in Braschi v. Stahl Associates Company 1989,* quoted in Gutis 1989). More recently, a few state legislatures have provided that legal status and rights can be enjoyed by more than two—that is, by three or four—parents in one family. What would be an example of a family like this? Here's one: Two children spend three nights a week with their partnered gay fathers. The other nights they stay with their lesbian mothers, who live nearby (Lovett 2012).

Many employers have redefined family with respect to employee-benefit packages. Just more than half of the Fortune 500 companies, as well as many state and local governments, offer domestic partner benefits to persons in an unmarried couple who have registered their relationship with a civil authority (Appleby 2012). President Barack Obama signed an executive order granting federal employees and their domestic partners some of the rights (but, importantly, neither health insurance nor retirement benefits) enjoyed by married couples (Miles 2010). As we write, legislation that would extend domestic partner benefits to all federal civilian employees is moving through Congress (Broverman 2012). Meanwhile, federal practices permit low-income unmarried couples to qualify as families and live in public housing. Several states allow same-sex marriage, and several others provide some spousal rights to same-sex couples. Same-sex marriage is discussed in particular in Chapter 6 and elsewhere in this text as well.

We, your authors, began this section with our definition of family. Our definition recognizes the diversity of postmodern families while paying heed to the essential functions that families are expected to fill. Our definition combines some structural criteria with a more social–psychological sense of family identity. We include the commitment to maintaining a relationship or group over time as a component of our definition because we believe that such a commitment is necessary in fulfilling basic family functions. It also helps to differentiate the family from casual relationships, such as roommates, or groups that easily come and go.

We have worked to balance an appreciation for flexibility and diversity in family structure and relations with the concern that many policy makers and social scientists express about how well today's families perform their functional obligations. Ultimately there is no one correct answer to the question, "What is a family?"

Relaxed Institutional Control over Relationship Choices: "Family Decline" or "Family Change"?

Public opinion polls show that overall about 30 percent of Americans reject today's trend toward the postmodern family while about the same proportion accept new family forms. Another 37 percent accept some aspects of family change but are concerned about others (Morin 2011). Similarly, a 2010 Pew Research Center survey found that 34 percent of Americans saw the growing variety of family types as a good thing, while 29 percent thought it was a bad thing. The remainder either didn't answer or saw the changes as creating no difference (Pew Research Center 2010a, p. 3).

In 2012, 59 percent of Americans saw unmarried (heterosexual) sex as morally acceptable, but 38 percent saw it as morally wrong. Those numbers had changed from 53 percent and 42 percent in 2001. Sixty-seven percent of Americans today see divorce as morally acceptable, whereas in 2001 that figure was 59 percent. Nevertheless, a significant minority (25 percent) continue to see divorce as morally wrong. Americans are somewhat more evenly split regarding having a baby outside marriage: 54 percent say doing so is morally acceptable today, compared with 45 percent in 2002. Forty-two percent of us think that having a baby outside marriage is morally wrong; 50 percent thought so in 2002 ("Marriage" 2012). Today Americans are also fairly evenly split regarding whether same-sex marriage should be legally valid, whereas just before the turn of the twenty-first century only about one-third felt that same-sex unions should be legally valid (Gallup Poll 2012b). Americans are strongly opinionated about family change; we can better understand why if we understand that the family has historically been understood as a **social institution**.

Social institutions are patterned and largely predictable ways of thinking and behaving—beliefs, values, attitudes, and norms that are organized around vital aspects of group life and serve essential social functions. Social institutions are meant to meet people's basic needs and enable the society to survive. Earlier in this chapter, we described three basic family functions. Because social institutions prescribe socially accepted beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviors, they exert considerable social control over individuals.

During the 1960s, however, family formation became increasingly less predictable; demographers noted dramatic social transformations:

> Since the end of the postwar baby boom in 1964, age at first marriage has increased, marital childbearing has decreased, nonmarital childbearing has increased, divorce rates have risen, and cohabitation has become common among young adults. The most dramatic shifts in families and households occurred in the 1970s and 1980s, and the magnitude of most changes since then has been smaller and more gradual. (Jacobsen and Mather 2010, p. 9)

Furthermore, same-sex marriage has become legally available in 10 percent or more of states. Combined

with increased longevity and lower fertility rates, these changes have meant that a smaller portion of adulthood is spent in traditionally institutionalized marriages and families (Cherlin 2004, 2008).

Critics have described the relaxation of institutional control over relationships and families as "family decline" or "breakdown." Those with a **family-decline perspective** claim that a cultural change toward excessive individualism and self-indulgence has hurt relationships, led to high divorce rates, and undermines responsible parenting (Whitehead and Popenoe 2006):

> According to a marital decline perspective…because people no longer wish to be hampered with obligations to others, commitment to traditional institutions that require these obligations, such as marriage, has eroded. As a result, people no longer are willing to remain married through the difficult times, for better or for worse. Instead, marital [or other relationship] commitment lasts only as long as people are happy and feel that their own needs are being met. (Amato 2004, p. 960)

Moreover, fewer family households contain children. According to the family-decline perspective, this situation "has reduced the child centeredness of our nation and contributed to the weakening of the institution of marriage" (Popenoe and Whitehead 2005, p. 23; Wilcox et al. 2011a,b). "Facts about Families: Focus on Children" provides some statistical indicators about the families of contemporary children.

Not everyone concurs that the family is in decline: family change, yes, but not decline (Coontz 2005a). Scholars and policy makers with a **family-change perspective** sometimes point out that some family changes can be for the better. Longer life expectancy can mean more positive years with parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents. Easier access to divorce than was the case fifty years ago means that family members have alternatives to living with domestic violence. With 86 percent of Americans approving black–white marriages (Jones 2011), increasing tolerance for interracial unions in general can translate to greater acceptance for particular mixed-race families so that they experience more supportive or less hostile communities. Family flexibility can be functional in times of economic crisis as extended families expand to take in needy relatives.

In a world of demographic, cultural, and political changes, there is no typical family structure. Today's postmodern family includes cohabiting families, single-parent families, lesbian and gay partners and parents, and remarried families. Interracial families are more evident, too, and their increasing social acceptance may result in their experiencing greater community support.

Family-change scholars argue that we need to view the family from a historical standpoint. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, American families were often broken up by illness and death, and children were sent to orphanages, foster homes, or already burdened relatives. Single mothers, as well as wives in lower-class, working-class, and immigrant families, did not stay home with children but went out to labor in factories, workshops, or domestic service. The proportion of children living only with their fathers in 1990 wasn't much different from that of a century ago (Kreider and Fields 2005, p. 12).

Family-change scholars posit that today's family forms need to be seen as historically expected adjustments to changing conditions in the wider society, including the decline in well-paid working-, middle-, and even upper-middle-class jobs that used to provide solid economic family support. Family-change sociologists do not ignore the difficulties that separation, divorce, and nonmarital parenthood present to families, children, and the broader society. However, these social scientists view the family as "an adaptable institution" (Amato et al. 2003, p. 21) and argue that it makes more sense to provide support to families as they exist today rather than to attempt to turn back the clock to an idealized past (Cherlin 2009a; McHale, Waller, and Pearson 2012).

Today's American families struggle with new economic and time pressures that affect their ability to realize their

Focus on Children

In many places throughout this text, we focus particularly on children in families. As with our population as a whole, the number of children in the United States is growing. Today approximately 74 million children under age 18 are living in the United States (U.S. Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics 2012, Table Pop1). However, the proportion of today's population that is under age 18—about 24 percent—represents a substantial drop from the 1960s, when more than one-third of Americans were children (U.S. Census Bureau 2012c, Table 7). Here we look at five statistical indicators regarding U.S. children's living arrangements and well-being.

1. At any given time, a majority of children live in two-parent households. In 2010, 70 percent of children under 18 lived with two parents—and 68 percent with two married parents. Twenty-six percent of children lived with only one parent (23 percent with mother; 4 percent with father), and another 4 percent did not live with either parent (U.S. Census Bureau 2011b, Table SO901).

2. Many children experience a variety of living arrangements while they're young. A child may progress through living in an intact two-parent family, a single-parent household, with a cohabiting parent, and finally in a remarried family. About half of all American children are expected to live in a single-parent household at some point in their lives, most likely in a single-mother household (Kreider and Ellis 2011a, p. 24; U.S. Federal Interagency Forum 2005, p. 8, Figure POP6-A).

3. Children are more likely to live with a grandparent today than in the past. In 1970, 3 percent of children lived in a household containing a grandparent. By 2011 that rate had more than tripled to 10 percent (U.S. Census Bureau 2011c, Table C4). In about

The faces of America's children provide evidence of increasing ethnic diversity. The child population of the United States is more racially and ethnically diverse than the adult population. Making up about one-third of the U.S. population today, racial/ethnic minorities are projected to reach 50 percent of the total population by about 2042. Mostly due to rapid growth in Latino families, the population under age 18 is projected to reach this point by 2023 (Mather 2009).

a quarter of the cases, grandparents had sole responsibility for raising the child, but many households containing grandparents are extended-family households that include other relatives as well (Edwards 2009).

4. Although most parents are employed, children are more likely than the general population to be living in poverty. The poverty rate of children under age 18 stood at about 18 percent over the ten years prior to the 2008 onset of the recent recession. By 2010 that percentage had risen to 22, while that of the general adult population is about 14 percent and that of those older than age 65 is approximately 9 percent. About 16.1 million American children under age 18 live in poverty—an increase of approximately 1 million from 2009 to 2011 (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, and Smith 2012, Table 3).

5. A growing number of U.S. children have a foreign-born parent. The percentage of children under age 18 living with at least one foreign-born parent rose from 14 percent in 1994 to 23 percent in 2011—almost a quarter of all U.S. children. Twenty-one percent of children were native-born children with at least one foreign-born parent, and 3 percent were foreign-born children with at least one foreign-born parent. Having parents who were born outside the United States can affect the language spoken at home. In 2010, 22 percent of children ages 5 to 17 spoke a language other than English at home, up from 18 percent in 2000 (Wallman 2012).

Critical Thinking

Perhaps the greatest concern Americans have about family change today is its impact on children. What do these family data tell us about the family lives of children?

family values. Even amid global recession, many European countries remain committed to paid family-leave policies that enable parents to take time off from work to be with young children and that provide relatively generous economic support for families in general (Human Rights Watch 2011). Family-change scholars "believe that at least part of the increase in divorce, living together, and single parenting has less to do with changing values than with inadequate support for families in the U.S., especially compared to other advanced industrial countries" (Yorburg 2002, p. 33). Placing an individual's or family's private troubles within a society-wide context is the crux of what sociologists call a **sociological imagination**.

A Sociological Imagination: Personal Troubles and Some Social Conditions That Impact Families

People's private lives are affected by what is happening in the society around them. In his classic book, *The Sociological Imagination* (1959), sociologist C. Wright Mills developed the principle that private, or personal, troubles are connected to events and patterns in society. Many times what seem to be personal troubles are shared by others, and these troubles often reflect societal influences. For example, when a family breadwinner is laid off or quits looking for work after many months of searching, the cause does not likely lie in his or her lack of ambition but in the economy's inability to provide employment. As another example, the difficulty of juggling work and family is not usually just a personal question of individual time-management skills but of society-wide influences—the totality of time required for employment, commuting, and family care in a society that provides limited support for working families. As a final example, many families were separated by the destruction that resulted when Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans in 2005; a good number of them remain divided and probably will never be reunited (Rendall 2011).

In this section we'll look at five social factors that affect families:

1. ever new biological and communication technologies;
2. economic conditions;
3. historical periods or events;
4. demographic characteristics (statistical facts about the make-up of a population), such as age, religion, and race or ethnicity; and
5. family policy.

Ever-New Biological and Communication Technologies

The pace of technological change has never been faster; new technologies will continue to alter not only family relationships but also how we define families. Here we'll look at two types of technological change that impact family life—biological and communication technologies.

Biological Technologies   Since the 1960s invention of the birth-control pill and the 1978 arrival of the first "test-tube baby," modern science has expanded our options regarding both preventing pregnancy and enhancing fertility. These developments are further addressed in other chapters of this text, particularly in Chapter 8. Here we introduce the point that ever-new biological technologies dramatically impact families' daily lives (Farrell, VandeVusse, and Ocobock 2012).

"Mommy, Mommy, when I grow up, I want to be a mommy just like you. I want to go to the sperm bank just like you and get some sperm and have a baby just like me" (6-year-old quoted in Ehrensaft 2005, p. 1). Science continues to develop new techniques that enable individuals or couples to have biological children. The more common infertility interventions involve prescription drugs and microscopic surgical procedures to repair a female's fallopian tubes or a male's sperm ducts (Ehrenfeld 2002). More widely publicized *assisted reproductive technology* (ART) offers increasingly successful reproductive options (U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2008).

In general, ART involves the manipulation of sperm or egg or both in the absence of sexual intercourse, often in a laboratory. ART procedures include:

- *artificial insemination* (male sperm introduced to a female egg without sexual intercourse),
- *donor insemination* (artificial insemination with sperm from a donor rather than from the man who will be involved in raising the child),
- *in vitro fertilization* (sperm fertilizes egg in a laboratory rather than in the woman's body),
- *surrogacy* (one woman gestates and delivers a baby for another individual who intends to raise the child),
- *egg sale or donation* (by means of a surgical procedure a woman relinquishes some of her eggs for use by others), and
- *embryo transfers* (a laboratory-fertilized embryo is placed into a woman's womb for gestation and delivery).

ART allows otherwise infertile heterosexual couples to have biological children. ART also allows singles or lesbian and gay male couples to become biological

parents. Furthermore, the ability to freeze eggs, sperm, or fertilized embryos enables individuals to become biological parents later in life, after careers are launched, after undergoing medical treatments that will leave them infertile, or even after death. Anticipating either contact with hazardous materials or death, men deployed to Iraq have banked sperm before their departures. At least one baby has been conceived by a father who was killed in Iraq before his child's conception (Lehmann-Haupt 2009; Oppenheim 2007). A few grandparents, eager for grandchildren, have offered to finance egg freezing for their grown children (Gootman 2012).

On a somewhat different note, by testing a male's blood, it is now possible to confirm the paternity of a likely biological father as early as the eighth or ninth week of pregnancy. "Besides relieving anxiety, the test results might allow women to terminate a pregnancy if the preferred man is not the father—or to continue it if he is." Then, too, "men who clearly know they are the father might be more willing to support the woman financially and emotionally during the pregnancy which some studies suggest might lead to healthier babies" (Pollack 2012a).

Moreover, in 2012, for the first time researchers determined virtually the entire genome of a fetus using only a blood sample from the pregnant woman and a saliva specimen from the biological father. Now it's fairly easy to know the complete DNA blueprint of a fetus months before the baby is born. Thousands of genetic diseases can now be detected prenatally, a situation allowing parents to address these conditions while pregnant—either by fixing problems, accepting that the child will have a genetic disease, or aborting the fetus (Pollack 2012b).

Although biological technologies expand options, they also raise new possibilities for thorny relationship or ethnical issues. As a statistically rare, but real example, a spouse may choose to change his or her sexual anatomy with the help of drugs or surgery (Daniel 2011). As a somewhat more common example, many states have laws by which sperm donors, with the exception of the husband, have no parental rights, but this barrier between sperm donors and their biological children is gradually being broken. Some sperm donors are sought out by their "children" as they enter adolescence or young adulthood (Harmon 2007b). Moreover, some fertility-enhancing procedures and extensive DNA fetal mapping raise issues surrounding abortion. Policy and ethical issues associated with biological technologies are more fully addressed in Chapter 8.

Communication Technologies Communication technologies have dramatically changed the way that family members interact. Today we can video record family events such as a birthday party or a bris (the ritual circumcision of a Jewish son) on our cell phones and then send the images to family members around the world. Developments such as texting, e-mail, websites, webcams, blogs, Facebook, Skype, and Twitter facilitate communication in ways that we would never have dreamed possible thirty years ago. Many relationships now begin in cyberspace, minimizing the need for geographical proximity at first meeting. Family members, including grandparents, stay in contact on Facebook. With cell phone calls and text messaging, parents can monitor teens when they aren't home. Technologies installed in family automobiles allow parents to monitor their children's driving speeds, and Global Positioning Systems (GPS) can tell parents where their children have driven. Some young adults away at college or elsewhere text their parents once or more daily. Meanwhile, Internet access is changing power relations in some families as tech-savvy youth become information experts for their families, a skill that can enhance their power relative to other family members (Belch, Krentler, and Willis-Flurry 2005).

Social support for challenges from infertility to living in stepfamilies to caring for someone with a chronic illness can be found on the Internet. Using cell phones and social media or playing video games together can enhance family connection (Padilla-Walker, Coyne, and Fraser 2012). However, the Internet can also be a source of frustration and conflict for partners or parents who experienced another family member's emotional absence because of social networking or online game playing. Some families have dealt with easier access to pornography or cyberinfidelity, for instance.

Florian Franke/Alamy

Much is said about how social media separate family members—particularly teenagers who text or Facebook during what a parent hoped would be a family-togetherness event. But research shows that communication and Internet technologies can also bring families together. Using cell phones and social media or playing video games together can enhance family connection.

Furthermore, social networking sites such as Facebook have made breaking up and divorce potentially more hurtful as partners publish details on their pages (Luscombe 2009).

Moreover, communication technology results in a digital divide between those who have access to computers and the 20 percent of American households that don't and hence cannot access the benefits of computer use, such as filling out online job applications (Crawford 2011). Although 97 percent of households with annual incomes of at least $15,000 have Internet broadband access, just 37 percent of households with annual incomes of $15,000 or less do (U.S. Census Bureau 2012c, Table 1155). Social scientists also have noted a "new digital divide" among children with computer access. Virtually all youngsters use computer technology mainly for social networking and to play games, but children with college-educated parents are more likely than others to use the Internet for educational activities (Richtel 2012). This new digital divide is one of countless examples of how socioeconomic conditions—both those in the larger society and those of individual families—impact family life.

Economic Conditions

Families are facing very stressful economic times. As you will see throughout this text—and probably already know from your own experience—the economy has important consequences for family relationships. Regardless of our current economic situation, the overall long-term trend in U.S. household income has been upward (see Figure 1.3). That overall pattern masks a situation of growing inequality, however. During the post–World War II decades of the 1950s and 1960s, incomes grew rapidly and at about the same rate—almost 3 percent annually—for families at all income levels. From 1970 to 2000, however, the pattern changed sharply. Incomes of the top 1 percent grew more than threefold (300 percent), while median household income grew less than 15 percent.

Although the U.S. economy was good for some Americans during the 1990s, others experienced lost benefits, longer workdays, and more part-time and temporary work. Over recent decades, job restructuring (with the goal of employing fewer workers to accomplish a task) and outsourcing, or sending jobs to other countries where labor is cheaper, have resulted in diminished job security and lower wages for many Americans. A concern is that multinational corporations "are the new countries" inasmuch as they exist beyond any one nation's borders and detach themselves from any one country's national Interest. As one Apple executive interviewed about outsourcing put it, "We don't have an obligation to solve America's problems" (Foroohar 2012).

Over the past thirty-five years, the inequality gap has increased. In 2006, Princeton economist Paul Krugman stated, "The income gap is now as extreme as it was in the 1920s, wiping out decades of rising equality" (p. 46). The gap has continued to grow, with the poorest 20 percent of the population earning $20,000 or less annually, and the 20 percent of the population with the highest incomes earning $100,000 or more. In fact, since 1970 the annual income of top corporate
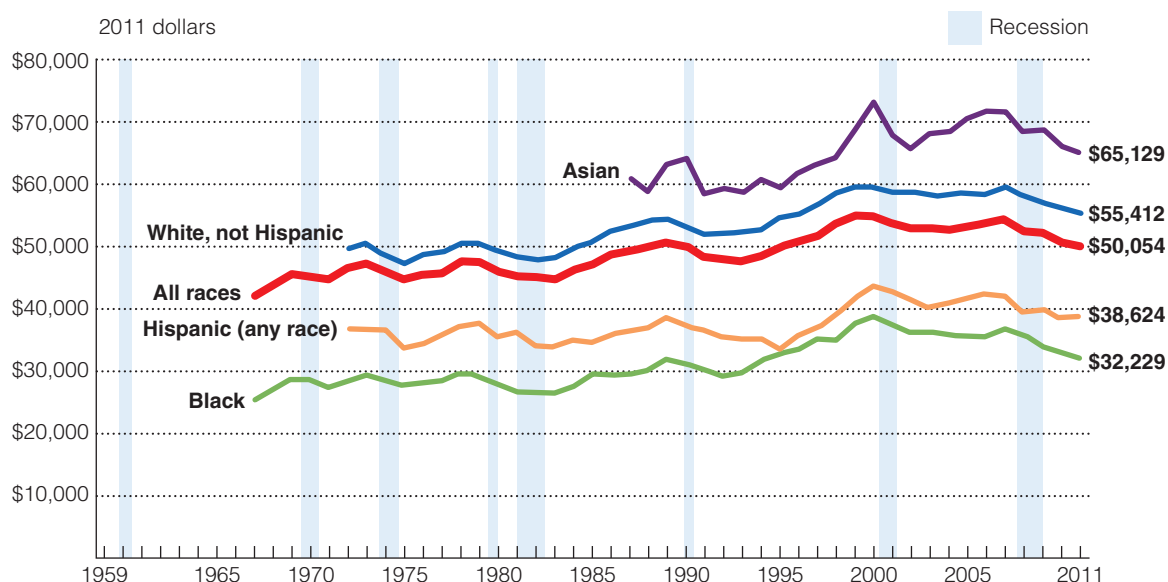
FIGURE 1.3   Real median household income by race and Hispanic origin: 1967 to 2011.

Source: DeNavas-Walt et al. 2011, Figure 1, p. 8.

CEOs has increased from an average of $1 million to $13 million dollars—an increase of 1,200 percent (DeNavas-Walt et al. 2011, p. 10). In 2011, the top one-fifth of U.S. households received slightly more than half (51.5 percent) of the nation's total income, whereas the poorest one-fifth received just 3.4 percent (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, and Smith 2012, Table 2).

Moreover, in percentage terms, the bursting of the housing market bubble and the recession that followed took a far greater toll on the middle and working classes than on the wealthy. Home ownership is the principal source of wealth for the working class and many in the middle class, whereas for wealthier Americans investment in stocks is also significant. Since the official end of the recession in mid 2009, the housing market has remained in a slump while the stock market has recaptured much of what it lost between 2007 and 2009 (Pew Research Center 2011b).

Household *wealth* differs from income. Income is the annual inflow of wages, interest, profits, or other sources of earning. Wealth is the accumulated sum of assets (houses, cars, savings and checking accounts, stocks and mutual funds, retirement accounts, etc.) minus the sum of debt (mortgages, auto loans, credit card debt, etc.). Wealth gaps between the richest few and the rest of us have always been greater than income gaps. However, wealth gaps have grown to higher and higher levels, resulting in what many economists describe as the shrinking of the middle class.

Furthermore, a substantial proportion of American families live in poverty. As a result of President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty measures in the 1960s, poverty rates fell dramatically. The current poverty rate is considerably higher, partly—but assuredly not entirely—due to the recent recession. Having risen gradually from 13.2 percent in 2000, the poverty rate

reached 15.0 percent in 2011 (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, and Smith 2012, Figure 4). That poverty rate—fifteen of every 100 Americans—"matches brief peaks after recessions in the early 1980s and 1990s but otherwise hasn't occurred since 1965" (Kiviat 2011). The *child* poverty rate is 21.9 percent—more than one child in five—much higher than child poverty rates in other industrialized nations (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, and Smith 2012, p.13). Moreover, approximately one-third of all U.S. families (10.2 million) can be classified as "working poor": at least one wage earner is employed full-time, but the family still lives with very low annual income (Roberts, Povich, and Mather 2011–2012).

Income, wealth, and poverty rates diverge by race/ethnicity, education, and parents' education. NonHispanic whites had the lowest poverty rate in 2011 (9.8 percent), followed by Asian Americans (12.3 percent). Hispanics (25.3 percent) and African Americans (27.6 percent) have higher rates of poverty. Although the poverty rate of nonHispanic whites is low, they compose 41.4 percent of the total number of persons in poverty because they are such a large part of the population (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, and Smith 2012, Table 3).

Income varies by gender as well. Women have gained more than men since about 1980, while men's wages have been largely stagnant (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, and Smith 2012, Figure 2). Still, access to a male wage remains an advantage, a situation explored further in Chapters 3 and 10. Incomes also vary by family type. Married-couple households had the highest incomes in 2011—$74,130 compared to $49,567 for unmarried male-headed households and $33,637 for unmarried female-headed households (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, and Smith 2012, Table 1). Experts debate the extent to

Dog housing inequality? Yes, indeed. Whether or not an effective definition of *family* can include pets, the lifestyle of the family pooch pretty much matches that of its owner. Economic inequality is rising in the United States. Both lower-income sectors and the middle class are losing ground.

which more female-headed, single-parent households contribute to poverty. Chapter 6 examines this question in some detail.

Meanwhile, the recession that began in late 2007 caused uncertainty and change in virtually all families. The overall unemployment rate climbed through the first decade of this century, from 4.0 percent in 2000 to 5.8 in 2008, then shot up to 9.3 in 2009, 9.6 in 2010 and to 9.8 percent in 2011 (U.S. Census Bureau 2012c, Table 622). By August 2012, the overall rate had declined to 8.1, but analysis showed that most of that decline resulted from discouraged individuals ending their searches for work (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2012a; National Employment Law Project 2012). In January 2013, the unemployment rate stood at 7.9 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2013).

Unfortunately, *long-term* unemployment also increased. The proportion of the unemployed who were without work for at least six months climbed from 11 percent in 2000 to 43 percent in 2010; it stood at 38 percent in January 2013 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2013; U.S. Census Bureau 2012c, Table 622). Overall rates that take everyone into consideration mask the situations of specific age or ethnic groups. For instance, among those under age 25, the unemployment rate was 16.2 percent in 2011, whereas for those 25 to 34 that rate—more than 10 percent in 2009—was 9.3 in 2011 (Jacobsen and Mather 2011, Figure 8).

From 1950 to 1970, a middle-class person had to work 42 hours a month to meet the monthly rent on a median-priced dwelling. In 2000, the average employee had to work 67 hours a month to put his or her family into mid-range housing (Frank 2011). "In no state can an individual working full-time at the minimum wage afford…a two-bedroom apartment for his or her family" (Children's Defense Fund 2012, p. 18). In fact, in many states it takes more than two full-time jobs at minimum wage to afford that apartment—and in California, the District of Columbia, Maryland, New York, and New Jersey, it would take three jobs (Children's Defense Fund 2012, Table 9). It would take almost four and one-half full-time jobs at minimum wage to rent that two-bedroom apartment in Hawaii—probably a good start to explaining why Hawaii has the highest proportion of multifamily households (Lofquist et al. 2012, Table 6).

Recession has made things worse for many of us. "Recession means worry—all too tangible worry" (Bazelton 2009). With the Great Recession that began in late 2007, housing prices dropped and many Americans lost their jobs and homes. With fewer tax dollars available, state governments cut services, many of them important to poor, working-, or middle-class families. Although policy makers declared the recession over in 2009 and defined what followed as a period of recovery, lost jobs and lowered median family income persisted

(Pew Research Center 2012a). Indeed, this has been a "low-wage recovery" as relatively high-wage jobs that were lost, often to outsourcing, have been "replaced" with jobs paying much less (National Employment Law Project 2012).

Because many people put off marriage until they can earn enough to support a family, more marriages were delayed or foregone during the recession, and the birthrate declined as well between 2009 and 2010 (Haub 2011; Mather 2012). Husband unemployment can mean power shifts in families as wives become sole or primary breadwinners (Rosin 2012b). Meanwhile, the divorce rate may drop, at least temporarily: "[F]ewer unhappy couples will risk starting separate households. Furthermore, the housing market meltdown will make it more difficult for them to finance their separations by selling their homes" (Cherlin 2009b).

Young adults' difficulties in finding jobs mean that more of them are cohabiting rather than marrying (Kreider 2010) or are living in their parents' homes. Job losses and housing evictions have meant not only more homeless families but also more extended-family and intergenerational households as older parents and their adult children move in together. Between 2000 and 2012, the proportion of adults ages 25 to 34 living with their parents rose from about one in ten to about one in three (Jacobsen and Mather 2011, Figure 10; Parker 2012). Figure 1.4 gives young adults' answers to survey questions asking what they've done in response to the current recession. On a positive note, many family members—including young adults who've moved back home—may find new ways to interact together with activities that don't cost money. As one middle-class mother said, "We have more time now. We talk. We may not go anywhere but at least we're all home together" (in Stetler 2009).
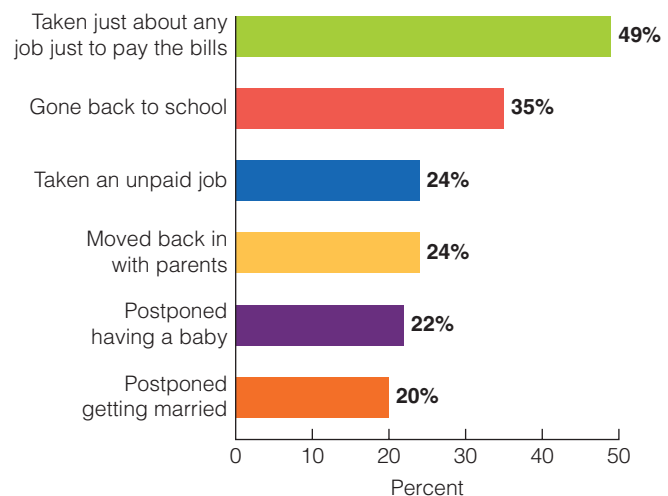
FIGURE 1.4 How economic conditions have affected young adults' lives.

Source: Pew Research Center 2012b, p. 5, survey question 29.

Life chances—the opportunities one has for education and work, whether one can afford to marry, the schools that children attend, and a family's health care—all depend on family economic resources. Money may not buy happiness, but it does afford a myriad of options: sufficient and nutritious food, comfortable residences, better health care, keeping in touch with family and friends through the Internet, education at good universities, vacations, household help, and family counseling. As this discussion on the economy implies, historical events (periods of recession, for instance) impact families.

Historical Periods and Events

In early twentieth-century United States, the shift from an agricultural to an industrial economy brought people from farms to cities and thereby helped to change family household composition as well as attitudes and behaviors. Later, family life was experienced differently by people living through the Great Depression of the 1930s, World War II in the 1940s, the optimistic fifties, the tumultuous sixties, the economically constricted seventies and eighties, the time-crunched nineties, or war and the threat of terrorism throughout the 2000s (Carlson 2009). For example, during the Great Depression, couples delayed marriage and parenthood and had fewer children than they wanted to (Elder 1974). Similar trends are in evidence today. During World War II, married women were encouraged to get defense jobs and place their children in day care. Families in certain nationality groups—Japanese and some Italians—were sent to internment camps and had their property seized even though most were U.S. citizens or long-term residents (Taylor 2002b; Tonelli 2004).

The end of World War II was followed by a spurt in the divorce rate, when hastily contracted wartime marriages proved to be mistakes. After the war, the 1950s saw an expanding economy and a postwar prosperity based on the production of consumer goods. Marriage and childbearing rates rose (Kirmeyer and Hamilton 2011). The GI bill enabled returning soldiers to get a college education, and the less educated could get good jobs in automobile and other factories. In those prosperous times, people could afford to get married young and have larger families. Most white men earned a "family wage" (enough to support a family), and most white children were cared for by stay-at-home mothers. Divorce rates slowed their long-term increase. The expanding economy and government subsidies for housing and education provided a strong foundation for white, middle-class family life (Coontz 1992).

The large baby boom cohort, children born after World War II (1946–1964), has had a powerful impact on American society, giving us the cultural and sexual revolutions of "the sixties" as they moved from adolescence to young adulthood in the Vietnam War era. Baby boomers are now reshaping aging as they enter their senior years. The (white) baby boomers had relatively secure childhoods in both family and economic terms. As one indicator, 86 percent of baby boomers grew up with both parents. The generations that followed have encountered more challenging economic and family environments. Of those born between 1965 and 1982, 79 percent grew up with both parents; 69 percent of those born between 1983 and 2001 did (Carlson 2009, Table 1).

Today an employee is much less likely to earn a family wage. Partly for that reason, more married families comprise two earners. Then, too, the feminist movement opened opportunities for women and changed ideas about women's and men's roles in the family and workplace. As young people prepare for a competitive economic environment, both sexes are delaying marriage and going further in school. In the late 1960s and through the 1970s, marriage rates declined and divorce rates increased dramatically—perhaps in response to a declining job market for working-class men, the increased economic independence of women, and the cultural revolution of the 1960s, which encouraged more individualistic perspectives. These trends, as well as the sexual revolution, contributed to a dramatic rise in nonmarital births. Today many families cope with the effects of the U.S. war against terrorism and deployment in militarized zones abroad (Wadsworth 2010).

It is no surprise that the historical period in which an individual is raised impacts that person's attitudes about family-related issues. For example, 33 percent of Americans who grew up in the 1950s favor allowing same-sex partners to marry legally, compared with 59 percent of Americans who became adults in the twenty-first century (Crowley 2011). Among other demographic characteristics, age affects family behaviors and attitudes.

Demographic Characteristics: Age Structure

A dramatic demographic development has been the increased longevity of our population. Life expectancy in 1900 was forty-seven years, but an American child born in 2008 is expected to live to seventy-eight (U.S. Census Bureau 2012c, Table 107). Furthermore, in 2011 the oldest baby boomers—that noticeably large number and proportion of Americans born between 1946 and 1964—began turning 65 (Jacobsen, Kent, Lee, and Mather 2011).

Among the positive consequences of increased longevity are more years invested in education, longer marriages for those who do not divorce, a longer period

during which parents and children interact as adults, and a long retirement during which family activities and other interests may be pursued or second careers launched. More of us will have longer relationships with grandparents or grandchildren; some of us will know our great-grandparents or grandchildren.

At the same time, the increasing numbers of elderly must be cared for by a smaller group of middle-aged and young adults. Furthermore, divorce and remarriage may change family relationships in ways that affect the willingness of adult children to care for their parents (Bergman 2006). Then, too, as the ratio of retired elderly to working-age people grows, so will the problem of funding Social Security and Medicare.

At the other end of the age structure, a declining proportion of children is likely to affect social policy support for families raising children. Fewer children may mean less attention and fewer resources devoted to their needs in a society under pressure to provide care for the elderly. Economic opportunities, resources, and obligations are an important aspect of the American society in which families are embedded.

Demographic Characteristics: Religion

Religious affiliation and practice is a significant influence on family life, ranging from which holidays are celebrated to the placement of family relations into a moral framework. For example, research shows that when children and adolescents have deeper religious connections, they tend to have less premarital sex and to be older when they have their first sexual experience and, as adults, more willing to care for their aging parents (Eggebeen and Dew 2009; Gans, Silverstein, and Lowenstein 2009, but see Stark 2009; Wildeman and Percheski 2009).

The historically dominant religion in the United States has been Protestantism, especially "mainstream" denominations such as Presbyterianism and Methodism. Catholics, Latter-day Saints, and Jews have been traditionally present and visible as well. With relatively recent heightened immigration from the Middle East and Asia, the numbers of Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists have increased in the United States. The resulting extent of religious diversity is illustrated by the fact that a Midwestern city such as

Omaha, Nebraska, has a Buddhist center, a Hindu temple, and a mosque.

Religion offers rituals to mark important family milestones such as birth, coming of age, marriage, and death. Religious affiliation provides families with a sense of community, support in times of crisis, and a set of values that give meaning to life. Membership in religious congregations is associated with age and life cycle; young people who have not been actively religious tend to become so as they marry and have children. Research suggests that "religious couples are less prone to divorce because, on average, they enjoy higher marital satisfaction, face a lower likelihood of domestic violence, and perceive fewer attractive options outside the marriage than their less religious counterparts" (Vaaler, Ellison, and Powers 2009, p. 930). Some studies show that prayer in relationships, especially praying together or for the partner's well-being, is related to greater couple happiness and commitment (Fincham and Beach 2010). What seems to be important overall is not which religion family members belong to, but the fact that family members hold religious beliefs and attend services together (Miller 2000; Vaaler, Ellison, and Powers 2009). Religious beliefs do vary and do affect attitudes, marriages, and families. For instance, Latter-day Saints, evangelical Christians, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Muslims reject homosexuality perhaps more strongly than some others. Conservative Protestant Christians and Latter-day Saints are strongly

At Arlington National Cemetery, Buddhist monks—their lives dramatically impacted by the historical period in which they live—escort the coffin of an American soldier killed in Iraq. There has been a Buddhist presence in the United States since at least the nineteenth century, and Buddhist practices have been followed by many Americans of non-Asian backgrounds. But the number of Buddhists more than doubled from 1990 to 2001 as the Asian American population increased through immigration.

opposed to abortion, whereas Muslims and Catholics remain almost evenly split (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life 2008, p. 135). We'll examine many other examples throughout this text.

U.S. families of religions out of the mainstream face the challenge of maintaining a religiously proper family life in the context of a culture that not only does not share their beliefs but also may be inclined to stereotype them (Hirji 2012). Dating, marital choice, child raising, dress, and marital decision making can be religious issues, according to which the morally correct way diverges from mainstream American culture. Muslim (and occasionally other immigrant) families have the added burden of facing suspicion and hostility in the wake of 9/11. For many Americans, finding a balance between participating in the larger society and preserving religious values is a challenge in a society characterized by religious freedom rather than religious establishment.

Demographic Characteristics: Race and Ethnicity

Race is a social construction reflecting how Americans view different social groups. "Race is a real cultural, political, and economic concept, but it's not biological," says biology professor Alan Templeton ("Genetically, Race Doesn't Exist" 2003, p. 4). The term *race* implies a biologically distinct group, but scientific thinking rejects the idea that there are separate races clearly distinguished by biological markers. Features such as skin color that Americans and many others use to place someone in a racial group are superficial, genetically speaking.

In this text, we use the race/ethnic categories formally adopted by the U.S. government because we draw on statistics collected by the U.S. Census Bureau and other agencies. In the census, racial identity is based on self-reporting. Beginning in 2000, individuals were permitted to indicate more than one race. Many Hispanics see themselves as "not white" or "not black." However, the Census Bureau defines *Hispanic* or *Latino* as an ethnic identity, not a race. Hispanics may be of any race. **Ethnicity** has no biological connotations; instead, it refers to cultural distinctions often based in language, religion, foodways, and history. Because race and ethnicity exist simultaneously in each individual and are generally difficult to separate in practice, we, your authors, often use the term *race/ethnicity*. For census purposes, there are two major categories of ethnicity: Hispanic and nonHispanic. This situation means that data on ethnicities other than Hispanic—Arabs or Portuguese, for example—come from surveys other than those done by the Census Bureau.

Social scientists and policy makers also may group African Americans, Hispanics, American Indians, Asians, and other non-whites into a category termed **minority**

Phil Schermeister/Corbis

Many social factors condition people's options and choices. One such factor is an individual's place within our culturally diverse society. These rural Navajo reservation children are learning to weave baskets to sell to tourists. Even within a race/ethnic group, however, families and individuals may differ in the degree to which they retain their original culture. Many Navajo live in urban settings off the reservation or go back and forth between the reservation and towns or cities. Less than 1 percent of the population is American Indian or Alaska Native.

group or **minority**. This term conveys the idea that persons in non-white race/ethnic categories experience some disadvantage, exclusion, or discrimination in American society as compared to the politically and culturally dominant nonHispanic white group. *Minority* in a sociological context does not have its everyday meaning of less than 50 percent. Regardless of size, if a group is distinguishable and in some way disadvantaged within a society, sociologists consider it a minority group. The term can be controversial, viewed by some as demeaning and as ignoring differences among groups and variation in the self-identities of individuals (Gonzalez 2006a; Wilkinson 2000). We, your authors, will avoid using it other than when speaking of numerical differences or in reporting Census Bureau data that is so labeled.

Race/Ethnic Diversity   Of particular interest is the increasing race/ethnic diversity of U.S. families. About one-fifth of U.S. families speak a language other than or in addition to English at home. Approximately 62 percent of them speak Spanish, with the remaining 48 percent speaking any one of forty or more other languages (U.S. Census Bureau 2012c, Table 53). Four Hispanic surnames—Garcia, Rodriguez, Martinez, and

Family Ties and Immigration

There is more racial and ethnic diversity among American families than ever before, and much of this diversity results from immigration. Depending on calculations, the U.S. foreign-born population grew by between 600,000 and 1.5 million between 2009 and 2010 (Cohn 2012b) and now constitutes 13 percent of the U.S. population (Patten 2012).

The United States admits approximately 1 million legal immigrants each year. Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean—not Europe—are now the major sending regions, with the highest percentage of new immigrants now arriving from Asia (Pew Research Center 2012c). In addition to legal immigrants, approximately 11.9 million undocumented immigrants (not legal residents) reside in the United States, with approximately 8.3 million in the U.S. labor force (Passel and Cohn 2009, p. 2). Substantial numbers are from countries such as Canada, Poland, and Ireland, but the majority are from Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean (Martin and Midgley 2006). A recent Gallup poll found that 66 percent of respondents in a nationwide random sample said they thought immigration is a good thing for the United States today. At the same time, 53 million felt that controlling U.S. borders to halt the flow of illegal immigrants into the country was extremely important (Gallup Poll 2012a).

Some immigrants, particularly recent Asian immigrants, are highly educated professionals (Pew Research Center 2012c). However, many immigrants leave a poorer country for a richer one in hopes of bettering their families' economic situations. As immigrants establish themselves, they send for relatives—in fact, the majority of legal immigrants enter the United States through family sponsorship (Martin and Midgley 2006). As a result, more Americans maintain **transnational families** whose members bridge and maintain relationships across national borders. They may experience back-and-forth changes of residence, family visits, money transfers, the placement of children with relatives in the other country, or the search for a marriage partner in the home country.

Moreover, many immigrant families are **binational**, with nuclear-family members having different legal statuses. One partner or spouse may be a legal resident, the other not. Children born in the United States are automatically citizens, even though one or both parents may be undocumented (illegal) residents. In fact, almost one-third of all immigrant children come from such mixed-status families (Fortuny et al. 2009). Problematically, the undocumented or unauthorized immigrant parents of many native-born American children in binational families increasingly face deportation (Golash-Boza 2012; Yoshikawa and Suarez-Orozco 2012). Of serious concern are the estimated 3.1 million children who, legal citizens themselves, have seen their undocumented parents deported (Preston 2007).

Immigrant families pay payroll, Social Security, property, and sales taxes even though some have only limited access to government benefits. Both costs and benefits are not evenly distributed. Most immigrant family tax dollars go to the federal government, whereas the costs of immigrants' schooling or emergency health care are largely paid by local governments (Martin and Midgley 2006). Transnational and binational families are explored in several places throughout this text.

Critical Thinking

What are some strengths exhibited by immigrant families? What are some challenges they face? At the society-wide level, what benefits does recent increased immigration offer the United States? What challenges does it bring?

Hernandez—rank among the fifteen most common in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau 2012d). The most recent national population statistics show that in 2009, the nation was 65 percent nonHispanic white, 12 percent black, and 4.5 percent Asian. In 2012, for the first time in our nation's history, nonHispanic white births accounted for 49.6 percent of all births and hence were no longer the majority (Tavernise 2012). Over the past fifty years, relatively low fertility rates among nonHispanic whites (compared to higher rates among racial and ethnic minorities) and immigration combined to "put the United States on a new demographic path" (Mather 2009; U.S. Census Bureau 2011c, Table 7). "A Closer Look at Diversity: Family Ties and Immigration" discusses immigration further. Hispanics are now 15.8 percent of the population, surpassing blacks as the largest race/ethnic group after nonHispanic whites. Hispanics and Asians are the fastest-growing segment of the population (U.S. Census Bureau 2012c, Table 6).

The 2011 child population estimate is more diverse than our adult population: 54 percent are nonHispanic white, 23 percent Hispanic, 15 percent black, and 4 percent Asian. Four percent of children are American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, or of more than one race (U.S. Census Bureau 2012b, Table C3). Race/ethnic minorities comprise more than one-third of the U.S. population and 46 percent of the child population. By 2042 they are expected to make up half of the population (Mather and Pollard 2009).

Note that no category system can truly capture cultural identity. As race/ethnic categories become more fluid and as the identity choices of individuals with a mixed heritage vary, race/ethnic identity may come

to be seen as voluntary—"optional" rather than automatic, especially for young adults (Saulny 2011a). A further point is that considerable diversity exists within major race/ethnic groupings. There are Caribbean and African blacks, for example, as well as those descended from U.S. slave populations. There are Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Indian, and other Asians. There are Salvadoran, Nicaraguan, Costa Rican, Chilean, and other Hispanics. Within-group diversity makes generalizations about race/ethnic groups somewhat questionable. For instance, "Hispanic" or "Latino" categories are "useful for charting broad demographic changes in the United States … [but they] conceal variation in the family characteristics of Latino groups [Cubans and Mexicans, for example] whose differences are often greater than the overall differences between Latinos and non-Latinos" (Baca Zinn and Wells 2007, pp. 422, 424). Moreover, there are areas of social life in which race/ethnic differences seem minor—if they exist at all. Little difference in family patterns is apparent between blacks and whites serving in the military, for example (Lundquist 2004).

Race/Ethnic Stratification Meanwhile, race/ethnic stratification persists. For one thing, a history of racial discrimination affects wealth stratification today. As one example, the GI bill, mentioned earlier, was available to returning black soldiers as well as to whites, but many colleges did not accept African Americans, and one had to be accepted into a college program in order to qualify for the GI bill's college assistance. Likewise, the GI bill did not officially discriminate against African Americans' desire for home ownership, but the bill was of little use to them because of the many restrictive covenants against black residents and because real estate agents often did not show listed properties to black customers (Reed and Strum 2008). On average, the income and wealth of Asian and of nonHispanic white households are much higher and poverty rates significantly lower than those of African American, Hispanic, or Native American households.

The experiences we have are shaped by the **social class** in which we reside, as well as our race and gender. Social theorist Pierre Bourdieu (1977[1972]) refers to *habitus* as "one's experience and perception of the social world." The perceptions we form via those experiences impact the ways in which we interact with the world, including our families. "A child develops a set of bodily and mental procedures that frames perceptions, appreciations, and actions vis-à-vis familial and intimate external environments" (Gerbrandt 2007, p. 57). In other words, the class position and racial characteristics of our family impact our childhood experiences, which will impact the decisions we make and how we experience the world as we mature into adulthood, as well as the advantages or disadvantages that we encounter.

Children born to interracial and inter-ethnic unions further add to America's diversity. Although the growth in race/ethnic intermarriage rates for Asians and Hispanics has declined somewhat since the 1990s, their numbers continued to rise. Interracial and inter-ethnic marriage and cohabitation rates involving African Americans have continued to increase significantly (Qian and Lichter 2011). As a result, the proportion of interracial children is significant (U.S. Census Bureau 2012c, Tables 10 and 13).

We'll see throughout this text that social class is often more important than race/ethnicity in shaping people's families. Yet, race/ethnic heritage—the family's place within our culturally diverse society—affects preferences, options, and decisions, not to mention opportunities. For instance, ethnicity can influence options and decisions about whether or when to marry, where the family will live, employment, wives' work preferences, preferred parenting practices, caring for aging parents, and so on. As the U.S. population changes, policy makers need to recognize the complexity and diversity of the growing minority population. We return to issues of racial and ethnic diversity throughout this textbook.

This text assumes that people need to understand themselves and their problems in the context of the larger society. Individuals' choices depend largely on the alternatives that exist in their social environment and on cultural values and attitudes toward those alternatives. Moreover, if people are to shape the kinds of families they want, they must not limit their attention just to their own relationships and families. This is a principal reason why we explore social policy issues throughout this text.

Family Policy: A Family Impact Lens

Family policy involves all the procedures, regulations, attitudes, and goals of programs and agencies, workplace, educational institutions, and government that affect families. *Family policy* encompasses policies that directly address the main functions of families—family formation, partner relationships, economic support, childrearing, adoption, child care, family violence, juvenile crime, and long-term care. Issues regarding same-sex couples' separation, divorce, and child custody, as well as determining the legal status for lesbian parents who used ART, are all social policy matters (Hare and Skinner 2008; Oswald and Kuvalanka 2008). Whether the federal government should prohibit farm children under age 16 from driving tractors or working other dangerous agricultural equipment is a matter of family policy—and hotly debated in some states ("Parents Defend…." 2012). The federal government and states have developed programs to encourage and support marriage, to encourage father involvement in fragile families, to discourage teen sexual activity, and to move single mothers from welfare to work.

Family policy expert Karen Bogenschneider urges that political decisions regarding families be scrutinized through a family policy or a **family impact lens** (Bogenschneider et al. 2012), by which we ask how the policy in question impacts families. As one example, workplace and government maternity leave policies influence new mothers' employment patterns (Laughlin 2011). Another example: Of concern have been the many young adults whose undocumented parents brought them to the United States when they were children and who are therefore not legal residents but have no connections in their country of origin (Gonzalez 2006b). In June 2012, President Obama issued an executive order allowing these individuals to stay in the United States without fear of deportation (but also without legal citizenship status) and to be able to work. The order is estimated to affect some 800,000 youth and their families who presumably will experience diminished stress associated with the fear of being abruptly separated (Preston and Cushman Jr. 2012).

Looking through the family impact lens reveals that "laws place some families in the margins of society while privileging others" (Henderson 2008, p. 983). Federal family policy has privileged heterosexual marriages by defining same-sex unions as "not-marriage," a situation that negatively affects many children in LGBT families

AP Photo/East Valley Tribune, Heidi Huber

Two volunteers at the American Muslim Women's Association work on a craft project to benefit poorer immigrants and refugees. The Arab American population is slightly more than 1.5 million. Contrary to what many think, 65 percent of Arab Americans are Christian, and most are second- or third-generation American citizens. Arabs who have immigrated since the 1950s are likely to be Muslim. Employing a *family impact policy lens,* media scholar Professor Jack Shaheen examined American movies depicting Arabs or Arab Americans and found that generally they presented negative stereotypes of "barbarism" and "buffoonery" (Beitin, Allen, and Bekheet 2010). Some modern young Muslim women have recently adopted the head scarf to express an intensified identification with Islam in the context of experiences of discrimination or challenges to their religious community.

who may not have access to a non–adoptive parent's employer-provided health care benefits (Movement Advancement Project 2011). As another example, "racial profiling, mandatory minimum sentences, and especially the disparities in drug laws [which more heavily penalize crimes involving drugs typically used by blacks] have had a dramatic effect on the incarceration rates of young male [family members], especially in urban inner-city neighborhoods" (Clayton and Moore 2003, p. 86).

Given the social and political diversity of American society, all parents or political actors are unlikely to agree on the best courses of action. Americans are not only not in agreement on the role government should play vis-à-vis families but also divided on what "family" means. Indeed, the diversity of family lifestyles in the United States makes it extremely difficult to develop family policies that would satisfy all, or even most, of us. Making well-informed family decisions can mean getting involved in national and local political debates and campaigns. One's role as family member, as much as one's role as citizen, has come to require participation in society-wide decisions to create a desirable context for family life and family choices.

The Freedom and Pressures of Choosing

Social factors influence people's personal choices in three ways. First, it is usually easier to make the common choice. In the 1950s and early 1960s, when people tended to marry earlier than they do now, it felt awkward to remain unmarried past one's mid-twenties. Now, staying single longer is a more comfortable choice. Similarly, when divorce and nonmarital parenthood were highly stigmatized, it was less common to make these decisions than it is today. As another example, contemporary families usually include fewer children than historical families did, making the choice to raise a large family more difficult than in the past (Zernike 2009).

A second way that social factors can influence personal choices is by expanding people's options. For example, the availability of effective contraceptives makes limiting one's family size easier than in the past, and it enables deferral of marriage with less risk that a sexual relationship will lead to pregnancy. Then, too, as we have seen, new forms of reproductive technology provide unprecedented options for becoming a parent.

However, social factors can also limit people's options. For example, American society has never allowed polygamy (more than one spouse) as a legal option. Those who would like to form plural marriages risk prosecution (Janofsky 2001). Until the 1967 *Loving v. Virginia* U.S. Supreme Court decision, a number of states prohibited racial intermarriage. As we will discuss in Chapter 7, the possibility of same-sex marriage is currently being contested in various courts throughout the

United States, and outcomes will either expand or limit couples' options. More broadly, economic changes of the last thirty-five years, which make well-paid employment more problematic, have limited some individuals' marital options (Sassler and Goldscheider 2004).

As families have become less rigidly structured, people have made fewer choices "once and for all." Of course, previous decisions do have consequences, and they represent commitments that limit later choices. Nevertheless, many people reexamine their decisions about family—and face new choices—throughout the course of their lives. Thus, choice is an important emphasis of this book.

The best decisions are informed ones. It helps to know something about all the alternatives; it also helps to know what kinds of social pressures affect our decisions. As we'll see, people are influenced by the beliefs and values of their society. There are **structural constraints**, economic and social forces, that limit personal choices. In a very real way, we and our personal decisions and attitudes are products of our environment.

But in just as real a way, people can influence society. Individuals create social change by continually offering new insights to their groups. Sometimes social change occurs because of conversation with others. Sometimes it requires becoming active in organizations that address issues such as abortion, racial equality, immigrant rights, gay rights, or stepfamily supports, for example. Sometimes influencing society involves many people's living their lives according to their values, even when these differ from more generally accepted group or cultural norms.

We can apply this view to the phenomenon of "living together." Fifty years ago, it was widely believed that cohabiting couples were immoral. But in the 1970s, some college students openly challenged university restrictions on cohabitation, and subsequently many more people than before—students and nonstudents, young and old—chose to live together. As cohabitation rates increased, societal attitudes became more favorable. Over time, cohabitation became "mainstream" (Smock and Gupta 2002). Although some religions and individuals continue to object to living together outside marriage, a majority of Americans today agree that a cohabiting couple who have lived together for five years or more is just as committed as a married couple (Gallup Poll 2012b). It is now significantly easier for people to choose this option. We are influenced by the society around us, but we are also free to influence it, which we do every time we make a choice.

Making Informed Decisions

By taking a course in marriage and the family, you may become more aware of your alternatives and how a decision may be related to subsequent options and choices. All people make choices, even when they are not conscious of it. Sometimes we "slide" into a situation rather than make a conscious decision. We can think of these two ways of dealing with choices as **deciding versus sliding** (Stanley 2009) (see Figure 1.5). A good way to make choices is to be well informed—that is, to do so knowledgeably.
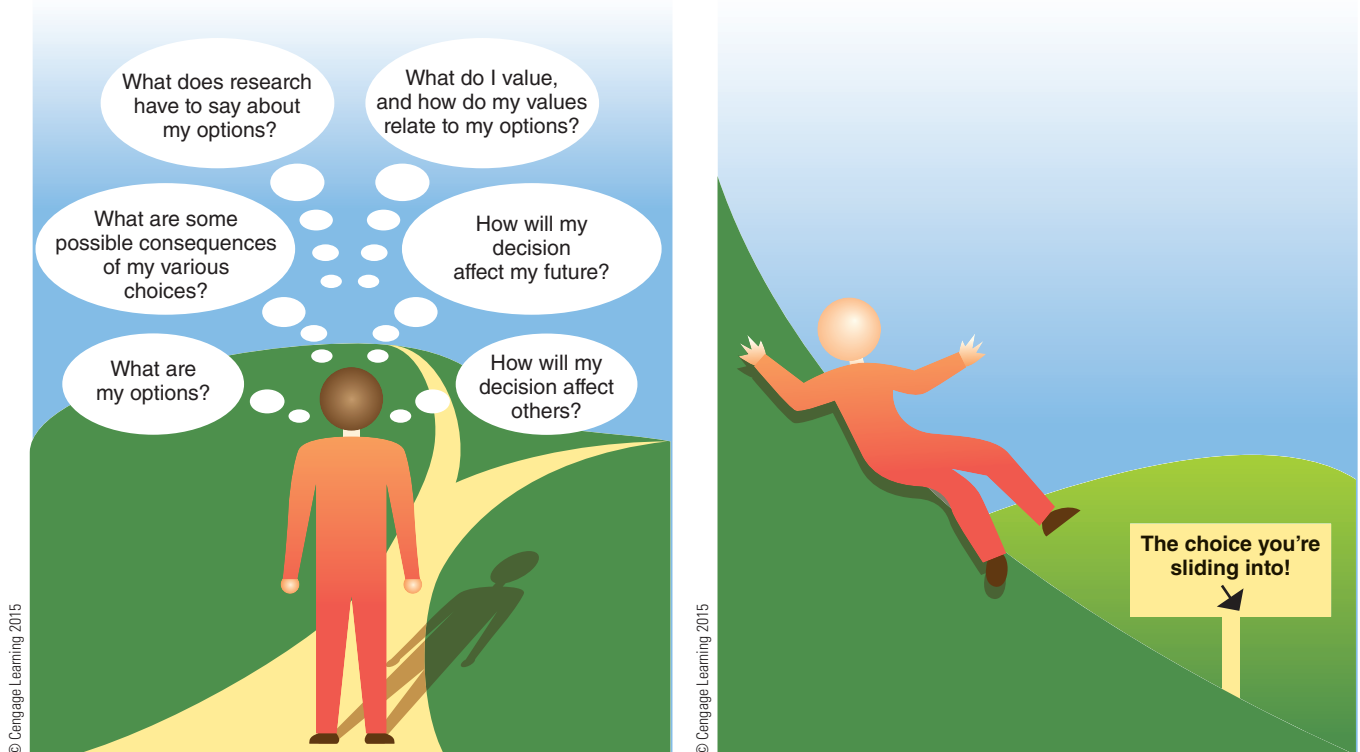
FIGURES 1.5   The process of informed decision making: deciding versus sliding.

An important component of informed decision making involves recognizing as many options as possible (Meyer 2007). In part, this text is designed to help you do that. A second component in making well-informed decisions involves recognizing the social pressures that can influence our choices. Some of these pressures are economic, whereas others relate to cultural norms. Sometimes people decide that they agree with socially accepted or prescribed behavior. They concur in the teachings of their religion, for example. Other times, people decide that they strongly disagree with socially prescribed beliefs, values, and standards. Whether they agree with such standards or not, once people recognize the force of social pressures, they can choose whether to act in accordance with them.

A third aspect of deciding about, rather than sliding into, a situation involves considering the consequences of each alternative rather than just gravitating toward the one that initially seems easier or most attractive. For example, we've seen that as a result of the recession, a growing number of young adults live with their parents. Someone deciding whether to move back into his or her parents' home may want to list the consequences. In the positive column, moving home might mean being able to help with family finances as well as save money that would have otherwise gone toward separate rent. In the negative column, returning to one's parental home could result in more cramped family space and increased family conflict. Listing positive and negative consequences of alternatives helps one see the larger picture and thus make a more informed decision.

Part of this process might also require being aware of research findings concerning your options. It might help to know, for instance, that the well-respected Pew Research Center surveyed young adults who'd moved back home and found that one quarter said the situation was bad for their relationship with their parents. Another quarter said moving home was good for their relationship, and about half said moving home made no difference (Parker 2012).

If we're going to decide, not slide, we also need to be aware of our values and understand how they relate to each of our options (Meyer 2007). We'll note here that contradictory sets of values exist in American society. For instance, standards regarding nonmarital sex range from abstinence to recreational sex. Contradictory values can cause people to feel ambivalent about what they want for themselves. Clarifying one's values involves cutting through this ambivalence in order to decide which of several standards are more strongly valued.

It is important to respect the so-called gut factor—the emotional dimension of decision making. Besides rationally considering alternatives, people have subjective (often almost visceral) feelings about what for them is right or wrong, good or bad. Respecting one's feelings is an important part of making the right decision.

Following one's feelings can mean grounding one's decisions in a religious or spiritual tradition or in one's cultural heritage, for these have a great deal of emotional power and often represent deep commitments.

Two other important components of decision making are considering how the decision will affect your future and thinking about how it is likely to affect other people. Underlying this discussion is the assumption that individuals cannot have everything. People cannot simultaneously have the relative freedom of a childfree union and the gratification that often accompanies parenthood, for instance. Every time people make an important decision or commitment, they rule out alternatives—for the time being and perhaps permanently.

It is true, however, that people can focus on some goals and values during one part of their lives, then turn their attention to different ones at other times. Adulthood is a time with potential for continued personal development, growth, and change. In a family setting, development and change involve more than one individual. Multiple life courses must be coordinated, and the values and choices of other members of the family will be affected if one member changes. Moreover, life in American families reflects a cultural tension between family solidarity and individual freedom (Amato 2004; Cherlin 2009a).

Families of Individuals

Americans place a high value on family. It is hardly surprising that a vast majority of Americans report family is extremely important to them (Carroll 2007b, "Marriage" 2008). Why?

Families As a Place to Belong

Families create a place to belong, serving as a repository or archive of family memories and traditions (Cieraad 2006). **Family identity**—ideas and feelings about the uniqueness and value of one's family unit—emerge via traditions and rituals: family dinnertime, birthday and holiday celebrations, vacation trips, and perhaps family hobbies like working together in the garden. Family identities typically include members' cultural heritage. For example, all the children in one family may be given Irish, Hispanic, Asian Indian, or Russian names.

Families provide a setting for the development of an individual's **self-concept**—basic feelings people have about themselves, their abilities, characteristics, and worth. Arising initially in a family setting, self-concept and identity are influenced by significant figures in a young child's life, particularly those in the parent role, together with siblings and other relatives.

How family members and others interact with and respond to us continues to impact self-concept and

identity throughout life (Cooley 1902, 1909; Mead 1934; Yeung and Martin 2003). A child who is loved comes to think he or she is a valuable and loving person. A child who is given some tasks and encouraged to do things comes to think of him- or herself as competent.

Early childhood also marks the onset of learning social roles. Children connect certain behaviors to the different roles of mother, father, grandmother, grandfather, sister, brother, and so on. Much of young children's play consists of imitating these roles. Role-taking, or playing out the expected behavior associated with a social position, is how children begin to learn behavior appropriate to the roles they may play in adult life. Behavior and attitudes associated with roles become internalized, or incorporated into the self. Meanwhile, expressing our individuality within the context of a family requires us to negotiate innumerable day-to-day issues. How much privacy can each person have at home? What family activities should be scheduled, how often, and when? What outside friendships and activities can a family member sustain?

Hill Street Studios/Blend Images/Getty Images

Families are comprised of individuals, each seeking self-fulfillment and a unique identity, but individuals can find a place to learn and express togetherness, stability, and loyalty within the family. Families also perform the important function associated with providing emotional support—they give us a place to belong. Events, rituals, and histories become intrinsic parts of each individual.

Familistic (Communal) Values and Individualistic (Self-Fulfillment) Values

Familistic values such as family togetherness, stability, and loyalty focus on the family as a whole. They are *communal* or *collective* values; that is, they emphasize the needs, goals, and identity of the group. Many of us have an image of the ideal family in which members spend considerable time together enjoying one another's company. Furthermore, the family is a major source of stability. We believe that the family is the group most deserving of our loyalty (Connor 2007). Those of us who marry vow publicly to stay with our partners as long as we live. We expect our partners, parents, children, and even our more distant relatives to remain loyal to the family unit.

But just as family values permeate American society, so do **individualistic** (*self-fulfillment*) **values**. These values encourage people to think in terms of personal happiness and goals and the development of a distinct individual identity. An individualistic orientation gives more weight to the expression of individual preferences and the maximization of individual talents and options.

The contradictory pull of both familistic and individualistic values creates tension in society (Amato 2004, Cherlin 2009a)—and tension within ourselves that we must resolve. "It is within the family…that the paradox of continuity and change, the problem of balancing individuality and allegiance, is most immediate" (Bengston, Biblarz, and Roberts 2007, p. 323).

American society has never had a remarkably strong tradition of familism, the virtual sacrifice of individual family members' needs and goals for the sake of the larger kin group (Sirjamaki 1948; Lugo Steidel and Contreras 2003). Our national cultural heritage prizes individuality, individual rights, and personal freedom. But, on the other hand, an overly individualistic orientation puts stress on relationships when there is little emphasis on contributing to other family members' happiness or postponing personal satisfactions in order to attain family goals.

People As Individuals and Family Members

The changing shape of the family has meant that family lives have become less predictable than they were in the mid-twentieth century. The course of family living results in large part from the decisions two adults make, moving in their own ways and at their own paces through their lives. A consequence of ongoing developmental change in individuals is that the union or family may be put at risk. If one or more individuals change considerably over time, they may grow apart instead of

together. A challenge for contemporary relationships is to integrate divergent personal change into the relationship while nurturing any children involved.

How can people make it through their own and each other's changes and stay connected as a family? Two guidelines may be helpful. The first is for family members to take responsibility for their own past choices and decisions rather than blaming previous "mistakes" on others in the family. In addition, it helps to recognize that a changing family situation—for example, a college graduate's returning home to live with parents, a partner's deciding to quit his or her job and attend graduate school, a preteen's getting used to a new stepparent—may mean that family living will be difficult for awhile. Family relationships need to be flexible enough to allow for each person's individual changes—to allow family members some degree of freedom. At the same time, it's good to remember the benefits of family living and the commitment necessary to sustain it. Individual happiness and family commitment are not inevitably in conflict; research shows that committed family bonds have significant positive impacts on individual well-being (Waite and Gallagher 2000; Wilcox et al. 2011a).

> On the one hand, people value the freedom to leave unhappy unions, correct earlier mistakes, and find greater happiness with new partners. On the other hand, people are concerned about social stability, tradition, and the overall impact of high levels of marital instability on the wellbeing of children. The clash between these two concerns reflects a fundamental contradiction within marriage itself; that is, marriage is designed to promote both institutional and personal goals…. To make marriages with children work effectively, it is necessary for spouses to find the right balance between institutional and individual elements, between obligations to others and obligations to the self. (Amato 2004, p. 962)

Throughout this text we will continue to explore the tension between individualistic and familistic values and discuss creative ways that partners and families can alter committed, ongoing relationships in order to meet their changing needs.

Marriages and Families: Four Themes

In this chapter we have defined the term *family* and discussed diversity and decision making in the context of family living. We can now state explicitly the four themes of this text.

1. Personal decisions must be made throughout the life course. Decision making is a trade-off; once we choose an option, we discard alternatives. No one can have everything. Thus, the best way to make choices is knowledgeably.

2. People are influenced by the society around them. Cultural beliefs and values influence our attitudes and decisions. Societal or structural conditions can limit or expand our options.

3. We live in a society characterized by considerable change, including increased ethnic, economic, and family diversity; by tension between familistic and individualistic values; by decreased marital and family permanence; and by increased political and policy concern about the needs of children and families. This dynamic situation can make personal decision making more challenging than in the past—and more important.

4. Personal decision making feeds into society and changes it. We affect our social environment every time we make a choice. Making family decisions can also mean choosing to become politically involved in order to effect family-related social change. Making family choices consciously, according to our values, gives our family lives greater integrity.

We will revisit these topics throughout this text, and we, your authors, believe that they provide a strong foundation for the subject of marriages and families.

Summary

- We, your authors, define family as any sexually expressive, parent-child, or other kin relationship in which people—usually related by ancestry, marriage, or adoption—(1) form an economic or otherwise practical unit and care for any children or other dependents, (2) consider their identity to be significantly attached to the group, and (3) commit to maintaining that group over time.

- Social scientists usually list three major functions filled by today's families: raising children responsibly, providing members with economic and other practical support, and offering emotional security.

- With relaxed institutional control, family diversity has progressed to the point that there is no typical family form today.

- Whether we are in an era of "family decline" or "family change" is a matter of debate.

- Families exist in a social context that affects many aspects of family life. Families are affected by ever-new biological and communication technologies, economic conditions, historical periods, and demographic characteristics such as age, religion, race, and ethnicity.

- Marriages and families are comprised of individuals. Our culture values both families and individuals.

Families provide members a place to belong and help ground identity development. Meanwhile, finding personal freedom within families is an ongoing, negotiated process.

- People make choices, either by consciously deciding or by sliding into situations; the best decisions are informed ones consciously made. Our decisions are limited by social structure, and at the same time they are causes for change in that structure.

- Change and development continue throughout adult life. Because adults change, relationships, marriages, and families are far from static.

Questions for Review and Reflection

1. Without looking at ours, write your definition of family and then compare it to ours. How are the two similar? How are they different? Does your definition have some advantages over ours?

2. Why is the family a major social institution? Does your family fulfill each of the family functions identified in the text? How?

3. What important changes in family patterns do you see today? Do you see positive changes, negative changes, or both? What do they mean for families, in your opinion?

4. What are some examples of a personal or family problem that is at least partly a result of problems in the society? Describe one specific social context of family life as presented in the text. Does what you read match what you see in everyday life?

5. **Policy Question**. What, if any, are some changes in law and social policy that you would like to see put in place to enhance family life?

Key Terms

binational 20
deciding versus sliding 23
ethnicity 19
extended family 6
familistic (communal) values 25
family 4
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