Living Together

LIVING TOGETHER

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This book embodies a collaborative effort aimed at compiling and remixing valuable insights from nine open educational resources, carefully curated to explore the intricate interplay between family structures and their influences on individuals and society. Among the foundational texts incorporated are *Critical Perspectives on Technology and the Family*, *Evolutionary Theories in Psychology*, *Human Behavior and the Social Environment II*, *Immigrant and Refugee Families*, *Introduction to Human Sexuality*, *Introduction to Sociology 3e*, *Principles of Social Psychology*, *The Developing Parent*, and *The Family*.

The selection process prioritized content that investigates the multifaceted dynamics of familial relationships, offering a comprehensive examination of their effects on various aspects of human behavior and societal norms. To enhance the relevance and currency of the material, original content, as well as updated statistical tables and figures, have been thoughtfully integrated.

Each module in this book follows a structured approach to enhance learning, featuring clearly defined learning objectives, list of key terms, practical applications or exercises, and resources for further exploration and knowledge development. Furthermore, in light of recent social and cultural developments, special emphasis has been placed on two critical topics: immigrant and refugee families, and the intersection of technology and family life.

As educators and learners navigate the complexities of familial influences in contemporary society, this compilation serves as a valuable resource, offering both theoretical insights and practical tools to foster deeper understanding and informed dialogue. We hope that this book sparks meaningful exploration and contributes to the ongoing discourse surrounding the intricate nexus of family dynamics and societal evolution.

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PART I
MODULE 1: DIVERSE FAMILY STRUCTURES

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this module, scholars will be able to:

1. Understand the concept of family variations, including nuclear families, blended families, cohabitation arrangements, same-sex couples, and single-parent households.
2. Explore the stages of family development, from formation to dissolution, and identify key milestones within each stage.
3. Examine the various functions of families such as providing economic support, socialization of children, control over sexuality and reproduction, and the assignment of ascribed statuses within familial structures.
4. Analyze the factors influencing family size decisions and the implications of family size on individual members and society.
5. Investigate the role of family culture in shaping familial dynamics, traditions, and values.
6. Explore theoretical perspectives of the family, including the sociological imagination, historical influences on family structures, and major sociological theories applied to family studies.
7. Evaluate methods for studying families, including the scientific method, interpretive frameworks, critical sociology approaches, and various research methods utilized in family research.
8. Discuss ethical considerations in family research, including informed consent, confidentiality, avoiding harm, and maintaining integrity throughout the research process.

KEY TERMS & CONCEPTS

- Achieved status
- Aging families
- Ascribed status
- Attachment theory
- Baby Boomers
- Blended family
- Boundaries
- Case study
- Childbearing families
- Chronosystem
- Closed-ended questions
- Cohabitation
- Conflict theory
- Control group
- Cultural relativists
- Culture
- Demography
- Dyads
- Dynamic view of process and change
- Dysfunctions
- Ecological theory
- Economic support
- Emotional connections
- Equity
- Ethnocentric
- Ethnography
- Experimental group
- Experiments
- Exosystem
- Extended family
- Family of origin
- False social consciousness
- Family development theory
- Family systems theory
- Families as launching centers
- Families with pre-school children
- Families with schoolchildren
- Families with teenagers
- Feminism
- Feminist theorists
- Field research
- Functionalism
- Group
- Hawthorne effect
- Heterogeneity in structures and processes
- Industrial Revolution
- Institutional ethnography
- Intimacy

- Interpretive research
- Lab environment
- Latent functions
- Liberal feminists
- Life chances
- Life course perspective
- Macrosystem
- Macro theories
- Manifest functions
- Married couples without children
- Master status
- Mesosystem
- Micro theories
- Microsystem
- Middle-age parents
- Multidisciplinary view
- Multigenerational family systems
- Multiple time clocks
- Natural or field experiments
- Nuclear family
- Open-ended questions
- Participant observation
- Personal troubles
- Populations
- Primacy data collection
- Primary groups
- Primary socialization
- Radical feminists
- Random sample
- Role conflict
- Role strain
- Same-sex couples
- Sample
- Secondary data analysis
- Secondary groups
- Secondary socialization
- Scientific method
- Single
- Social context of development
- Social exchange theory
- Social feminists
- Social issues
- Socialization
- Sociological imagination
- Surveys
- Symbolic interactionism
- Third level of socialization
- Thomas Theorem

INTRODUCTION

This module explores the diversity of family structures in contemporary society, encompassing nuclear families, blended families, cohabiting couples, same-sex couples, and singles. It looks into the development and functions of families, emphasizing their roles in providing economic and emotional support, facilitating socialization, managing sexuality and reproductive control, and conferring ascribed status. Additionally, the module addresses variations in family size and culture, highlighting how these factors contribute to the unique dynamics of each family unit. By examining these diverse family structures, we gain a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of family life.

To frame our understanding, we employ various theoretical perspectives on the family. The sociological imagination allows us to connect personal experiences with larger social and historical contexts, while sociological theories offer frameworks for analyzing family dynamics. The module also discusses the methodologies used in studying families, including the scientific method, interpretive frameworks, and critical sociology. These approaches guide researchers in exploring family-related phenomena, ensuring ethical standards are upheld throughout the research process. By integrating these theoretical and methodological perspectives, we gain a deeper insight into the complexities of family structures and their functions in society.

1.1 FAMILY DEVELOPMENT

Nuclear Families

The **nuclear family**, which is the most preferred type, consists of parents and their biological or adopted children (Murdock 1949). Another version of this is the single-parent family, where one parent raises their biological or adopted children alone, often due to unwed motherhood, divorce, or the death of a spouse.

Blended Families

The second most common family form is the **blended family**, formed through remarriage and including at least one child from a previous relationship. **Extended family** refers to relatives beyond the nuclear and blended family level, including cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents, and step-relatives.

In more recent times, the traditional idea of what constitutes a family has faced criticism for being too limited. Nowadays, families—particularly in developed societies—come in various forms such as single-parent families, foster families, same-sex couples, and families without children, among others, diverging from traditional norms. What binds these diverse family structures together are shared commitments, care, and strong emotional connections, increasingly recognized as the defining features of family (Benokraitis 2015). This evolving understanding of family is influenced by factors like divorce and remarriage. Many individuals may not grow up in their original family setting but instead become part of a stepfamily or blended family. Whether it's a single-parent, joint, or two-parent family, a person's original family or the family they are born into typically serves as the social environment where young children learn about relationships.

In certain situations, parents may find themselves unable to take care of their children. As of 2018, approximately three million children were living with someone who wasn't their biological or adoptive parent. This can happen for various reasons such as when parents face mental health issues, substance abuse problems, or legal troubles like incarceration. In some cases, children may also experience physical or sexual abuse from their parents or may be abandoned by them.

This diversity of reasons results in a wide range of living arrangements for these children, involving various individuals and organizations. Roughly half of these children end up living with their grandparents, while around 20 percent live with other relatives (ChildStats 2022). Sometimes, a grandparent or another relative temporarily takes care of the children, often informally. In other cases, this arrangement becomes more permanent, and government agencies like the state or city child welfare department get involved.

Image by Lisa Fotios on Pexels

When children are placed in foster care or other forms of care away from their parents, agencies and families typically prioritize keeping siblings together. Brothers and sisters often serve as important sources of support to help each other navigate social challenges and maintain a sense of continuity.

Research has shown that when siblings are placed together, they tend to form closer bonds with their foster caregivers and report greater satisfaction with their foster home compared to those who are separated (Hegar and Rosenthal 2011). Separating siblings can lead to concerns about each other's well-being or their birth families, and it can also hinder their adjustment to their new living situation (Affronti et al. 2015).

Sometimes, siblings find themselves taking on more of a parental role, especially when there are significant age differences among them or when there are very young children in the family. These older siblings might help with parental duties during situations like divorce or when children are sent to live with someone else.

These siblings, sometimes called "parentified," may struggle with handling the responsibilities of being like a parent when they are still young. Research by Lamothe (2017) suggests these experiences can be traumatic and may lead to problems like compulsive disorders and difficulties in relationships and self-care that can last a lifetime.

Cohabitation

More and more couples are choosing to live together before or instead of getting married. **Cohabitation** refers to when partners live together in a romantic relationship without being married. According to Gurrentz (2018), in 2018, 15 percent of young adults aged 25-34 were living with a partner they were not married to, which is an increase from 12 percent a decade ago. This rise in cohabitation is likely due to a decrease in the social stigma associated with it. Horowitz et al. (2019) report that 69 percent of Americans surveyed believe it's acceptable for adults to live together if they are not married or do not plan to marry, while 16 percent find it acceptable only if marriage is on the horizon.

Couples who choose to cohabit often do so to spend more time together or to save money on living expenses. Many see it as a way to test the waters before tying the knot. According to Horowitz et al. (2019), 66 percent of married couples who lived together before getting engaged viewed cohabitation as a step toward

marriage. Additionally, 44 percent of unmarried cohabiting adults see moving in together as a precursor to marriage.

However, recent research, as noted by Jayson (2010), suggests that cohabitation has little impact on the long-term success of a marriage. Surprisingly, those who do not live together before marriage tend to have slightly higher rates of staying married for more than ten years. Cohabitation may also contribute to the trend of delaying marriage among both men and women.

Same-Sex Couples

The number of **same-sex couples** has increased significantly over the past decade. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2020), there were 594,000 same-sex couple households in the United States, marking a 50 percent rise since 2000. This growth can be attributed to more couples forming relationships, the increasing social acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals, and a greater willingness among people to openly share their identity. Currently, same-sex couple households account for 1.5 percent of all partner-headed households nationwide.

The legalization of same-sex marriage across the United States following the 2015 Obergefell vs. Hodges Supreme Court decision has had substantial effects on various aspects of life. Now, same-sex married couples are entitled to federally mandated spousal rights and benefits, impacting areas such as Social Security, veterans benefits, and family leave. Previously, LGBTQ+ individuals faced barriers in accessing these benefits, including limitations on taking family leave or visiting their partner in the hospital during times of illness.

In terms of demographics, same-sex couples resemble opposite-sex couples in many ways. On average, same-sex couple households have an age of 52 and an annual household income of around $107,000, while opposite-sex couple households have an average age of 59 and an average income of $97,000. However, same-sex couples are less likely to have children under 18 years old, with a rate of 14 percent compared to 38 percent among opposite-sex couples, including both married and unmarried couples.

Research examining parenting among same-sex couples has found no significant difference compared to opposite-sex couples. In fact, studies by Biblarz and Stacey (2010) suggest that children of lesbian couples may even have slightly lower rates of behavioral problems and higher levels of self-esteem. Furthermore, prior to nationwide legalization, states where same-sex marriage was legal saw a decline in the rate of suicide among high school students, highlighting the positive impact of legalization on the emotional and mental wellbeing of LGBTQ+ individuals (Johns Hopkins University 2017).

Singles

Approximately three out of every ten American adults identify as **single**, meaning they are not married or in a committed relationship. This proportion varies significantly depending on age and gender. For instance,

half of men under 30 are single, while around a quarter of men aged 30 to 64 fall into this category. Among women, about 30 percent of those under 30 are single, compared to 19 percent of women aged 30 to 60. There are also differences along racial lines; White and Hispanic adults are less likely to be single than Black individuals. Single people are more commonly found in urban areas, with New York City having a particularly high concentration.

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Despite both single men and women feeling pressure to marry, women often face more intense scrutiny. Single women are frequently depicted as unhappy or lacking something they should have, while single men are often portrayed as perpetual bachelors unable to settle down. Single women may feel insecure and marginalized within their families when their unmarried status is criticized (Roberts 2007). However, women over 35 who are single often report feeling content and secure in their status, especially as many have achieved success in education and careers. Overall, women today feel more empowered and prepared to live independently without a spouse compared to previous generations (Roberts 2007).

The decision to marry or remain single can be influenced by various factors, including religious and cultural expectations. Asian individuals are more likely to marry, while Blacks are less likely to do so (Venugopal 2011). Those who place little importance on religion are also more likely to be unmarried compared to those who prioritize religion. However, for Black women, the importance of religion doesn't seem to affect their marital status (Bakalar 2010). In general, being single is not necessarily a rejection of marriage; rather, it's a lifestyle choice that may or may not include marriage.

ANALYZING FAMILY STRUCTURES

Definition of the Family

We know that definitions of family vary from individual perspectives. However, in some circumstances, it is necessary to define them narrowly.

Research how the terms "family" and "household" are defined by different organizations and the United States Census Bureau.

Describe what groups and members would be excluded by these definitions. Why do definitions matter from a **personal** and **legal** perspective?

FAMILY DEVELOPMENT

Families are often so ingrained in our lives that we may overlook the fact that they evolve gradually over time. Nuclear families, which consist of parents and children, don't just suddenly appear. Instead, parents typically meet, court or date each other, and then decide to have children. However, even after the family is formed, it continues to evolve. Children grow up and eventually leave home, leading to shifts in roles and dynamics within the family unit.

From a psychological perspective, families begin with **intimacy**, which is essentially the closeness we share with others (Payne 2020). This need for intimacy is something we all seek throughout our lives, aiming for meaningful relationships. Interestingly, the way our adult intimate relationships unfold can be traced back to our infancy and the bond we formed with our main caregiver, historically our mother. This developmental process is explained by attachment theory. **Attachment theory** suggests that different styles of caregiving lead to various types of relationship "attachments." For example, when mothers respond promptly to their infants' needs, soothing them when they cry, it results in infants forming secure attachments (Ainsworth 1973; Bowlby 1969). Around 60% of children develop these secure attachments. As adults, those who were securely attached as children tend to rely on the models of relationships they formed in infancy with their primary caregiver (often the mother) to cultivate fulfilling adult relationships. Securely attached adults feel at ease both depending on others and being depended upon.

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It's important to note that inconsistent or dismissive parenting can also impact how infants develop their attachment styles, but in a different way (Ainsworth 1973). Early research on attachment styles involved observing infants as they interacted with their caregivers, were separated from them, and then reunited.

Approximately 20% of the observed children showed a "resistant" attachment style, meaning they displayed anxiety even before and especially during separation, while another 20% exhibited an "avoidant" attachment style, actively avoiding their caregiver after separation (such as ignoring the mother upon reunion). These early attachment patterns can have lasting effects on how individuals relate to others in adulthood. Adults with an anxious-resistant attachment style tend to worry that others don't love them and may become frustrated or angry when their needs aren't met. On the other hand, adults with an anxious-avoidant attachment style may appear indifferent towards their intimate relationships and feel uncomfortable relying on others or being relied upon themselves.

Table 1.1 Early Attachment and Adult Intimacy

Table 1.1 Early Attachment and Adult Intimacy	
Secure	**"I find it relatively easy to get close to others and am comfortable depending on them and having them depend on me. I don't often worry about being abandoned or about someone getting too close to me."**
Anxious avoidant	**"I am somewhat uncomfortable being close to others; I find it difficult to trust them completely, difficult to allow myself to depend on them. I am nervous when anyone gets too close, and often, love partners want me to more intimate than I feel comfortable being."**
Anxious resistant	**"I find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. I often worry that my partner doesn't really love me or won't want to stay with me. I want to merge completely with another person, and this desire sometimes scares people away."**

Source: Payne, Whitney. 2020. *Human Behavior and the Social Environment II*. Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Libraries.

The positive news is that we have the power to change our attachment style. While it's not a simple task, it is achievable for anyone to develop a secure attachment. This journey typically involves the assistance of a supportive and reliable individual, as well as the insecure individual reaching a sense of coherence. This means realizing that their upbringing doesn't define their character permanently or reflect the entire world, nor does it prevent them from deserving love or others from being trustworthy (Treboux et al. 2004).

1.2 FAMILY FUNCTIONS

As Bowen (1978) explains, everyone in a family has a specific role to fulfill, and with each role comes certain expectations and rules. The main aim for any family is to maintain stability, meaning there are rules and expectations that benefit everyone involved. When one person's role in the family changes, it affects the established rules and expectations. These changes have a ripple effect on the entire family, prompting each member to adapt their own role and expectations to accommodate the shift.

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Consider the classic tale of Cinderella, for instance. Initially, Cinderella is portrayed as a child, fulfilling the typical expectations one would have for a young person. However, as she enters her teenage years, her circumstances change drastically. With the loss of both her biological parents, she finds herself living with her stepmother and stepsisters. Consequently, Cinderella's role shifts from being a beloved child to serving as the household maid. Despite the common stereotype suggesting that stepfamilies are inherently problematic, this is not always the case. In fact, there are valuable lessons to be gleaned from Cinderella's story, which often go unnoticed. Her role in the family evolves beyond that of a mere servant; she also becomes a caretaker, responsible for cooking and cleaning, all while enduring mistreatment and cruelty from her stepfamily members. When Cinderella eventually finds her prince and establishes her own family—referred to as a family of procreation—it's reasonable to anticipate a change in the roles of her stepmother and stepsisters. They would suddenly find themselves having to manage household chores independently.

Gender has traditionally played a significant role in determining family responsibilities. Historically, women have been primarily responsible for tasks like housekeeping and caring for children, while men have been viewed as protectors and providers, often responsible for earning money. However, there has been a noticeable shift in recent times. More families are breaking away from these traditional roles; women increasingly working outside the home and men take on greater roles in domestic and childcare duties. Despite this progress toward more equal roles, studies show that women still tend to shoulder a larger share of housekeeping and childcare responsibilities compared to their husbands. This phenomenon is often referred to as the "second shift" (Hochschild and Machung 2012).

Parental roles significantly influence their children's aspirations. A study by Croft and her team in 2014 looked at the perspectives of over 300 children. They found that when fathers supported more equal sharing

of household chores and mothers prioritized their careers, it affected their daughters' aspirations. In such households, daughters were more inclined to aspire to work outside the home and pursue careers in fields that weren't traditionally associated with their gender.

What roles do families play? Sociologists have examined the functions of families and found some key functions that are common across nearly all families worldwide. This suggests that regardless of cultural differences, most families share certain fundamental purposes.

Economic Support

Economic support is overwhelmingly the primary role of families today. When your parents allow you to raid their pantry, do your laundry at home, or top off your bank account, that's economic support. Similarly, in different cultural settings, such as in New Guinea, if a young adult hunts and shares wild game with others, that also constitutes economic support.

Some families engage in cooperative ventures akin to business partnerships. For instance, in Quebec, Montreal, there's a well-established practice among Italian immigrants where they assist family and friends in migrating from Italy to Canada. This assistance includes subsidizing travel expenses, aiding in finding employment upon arrival, and even privately financing mortgages for each other. The expectation is that each member supports others in a similar fashion.

Emotional Support

Emotional connections are widespread within families, but it's important to recognize the significant cultural differences in how closeness is expressed in different family settings worldwide. Intimacy includes social, emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and physical bonds shared among family members. Within these bonds, family members exchange secrets, confide in each other, offer advice, and demonstrate ongoing care and trust. Many researchers in family studies argue that these intimate family relationships serve as a powerful support system, helping family members cope with external stresses they encounter outside of the home.

Socialization

From the moment they're born, children begin a journey of learning about their society and culture. This process, called **socialization**, involves parents, family members, and friends teaching newborns the norms and values of their community. It helps children develop their own understanding of reality based on their experiences and interactions with others.

For instance, the typical American child grows up learning that they belong to their family and community, and they have both privileges and responsibilities within these groups. As they grow, they go through

predictable stages of life, from infancy to adulthood, each with its own set of expectations. However, not everyone follows these patterns exactly, and some people may experience different realities based on their unique life experiences.

Socialization occurs in distinct phases. **Primary socialization** begins at birth and continues until a child starts school, with family, friends, daycare, and media playing crucial roles. **Secondary socialization** takes place during later childhood and adolescence when children attend school and are influenced by non-family members. During this time, they learn to conform to societal expectations and navigate complex social dynamics, which can be stressful. As children grow older, their peers become increasingly important, often overshadowing the influence of their parents. However, parents can still maintain some influence by building relationships with their children's friends. The **third level of socialization** occurs in adulthood as individuals take on adult roles and responsibilities. Whether it's starting college, entering the workforce, getting married, or embarking on other life adventures, adults continue to adapt to new roles and expectations, drawing on the lessons learned during their earlier stages of socialization.

Sexuality & Reproductive Control

Traditionally, families have played a significant role in guiding decisions about sexuality and reproduction. In the past, parents often arranged marriages for their children, a practice that continues in many countries today. However, in America, parents typically prefer their adult children to choose their own partners. Within families, there's often a consensus that pregnancy and childbirth should ideally occur within marriage or a committed relationship. Unwed mothers, who are not legally married when they give birth, may face various challenges, including financial, emotional, and social support for both themselves and their child, particularly if the father is not involved. In such situations, it's common for older female family members to step in and provide support for the child, rather than the birth father taking on these responsibilities.

Ascribed Status

When children are born, they enter a family structure and gain an **ascribed status**. This means they're given a social position based on factors like race, gender, or class, which they inherit at birth. In the United States, many of these ascribed statuses may change over time, as discussed in the Stratification Chapter. But what exactly is a "status"? Think about your friends – have you noticed that some naturally take charge and organize plans? If you're the one who usually makes reservations or buys tickets for everyone, you might be seen as the "organizer." Status refers to these socially defined positions or roles we take on.

There are three main types of status to consider:

1. **Ascribed Status**: This is given at birth, like your race or social class.

2. **Achieved Status**: This is earned through your choices and efforts, such as being a college student, a movie star, a teacher, or an athlete.
3. **Master Status**: This is a standout status that often defines how others see us, sometimes overshadowing our other statuses.

Your racial, cultural, religious, and economic backgrounds, which are part of your ascribed status, influence how you grow up and are shaped by society. In modern societies, achieved status – what you accomplish through your own efforts – usually holds more importance than what you're born into. However, how much you achieve can depend heavily on the support you receive from your family and the stability of your home environment.

Roles also come with their challenges. For example, being a student can sometimes feel overwhelming, which is called **role strain**. And when the expectations of one role clash with those of another, you might experience **role conflict**, adding to the burden you feel.

Social Class

In both the United States and worldwide, there exist families spanning various economic statuses, ranging from wealthy to impoverished. Your social class is heavily influenced by the family you were born into or adopted by. Additionally, your economic position often correlates with your actions, given the opportunities available to you, as highlighted by Max Weber (1930). These opportunities, known as **life chances**, encompass access to essential resources and opportunities in society. For instance, while some of you may finance your college education independently and rely on public transportation, others may possess luxuries like a new car and the latest smartphone, with parents covering educational expenses.

Life chances extend beyond economic factors and can impact the quality of your marriage and family life. For instance, individuals from families with a history of shaming behaviors may be more susceptible to developing addictions. Similarly, those from divorced families may have a higher likelihood of experiencing divorce themselves, and being raised by a single parent may increase the chances of becoming a single parent in the future. However, it's important to note that these are correlations rather than direct causes. While being born into challenging family circumstances may present some disadvantages, it doesn't necessarily condemn you to replicate the patterns of your **family of origin** in your own family. Understanding life chances serves to heighten your awareness by illustrating broader social trends that may impact your personal experiences.

1.3 FAMILY SIZE

In sociology, the fundamental unit of analysis is the **group**, which consists of two or more individuals sharing a common identity, regularly interacting, having shared expectations or roles, and functioning within these agreed-upon roles (Hammond et al. 2021). However, it's important to note that the term "group" is often used differently in everyday language. For instance, people might refer to a collection of individuals, like those waiting at a bus stop, as a "group," even if they don't know each other. In sociological terms, such a collection is termed an "aggregate," which simply denotes a gathering of people in the same place at the same time, such as those in a movie theater or at a university football game.

Additionally, sociologists discuss categories, which are classifications of people who share common characteristics. For example, individuals with brown eyes, hat-wearers, or independent voters are all examples of categories. Unlike groups or aggregates, categories do not necessarily involve shared physical space or mutual expectations. In this book, we primarily focus on analyzing trends and patterns within family groups and larger categories of family types.

Family groups are essential to society and will likely be the foundation of your own adult life. These groups can vary in size, from small units like **dyads**, consisting of two people, to larger units like **triads**, consisting of three people. The number of individuals in a group significantly impacts how the group functions structurally. Dyads, being the simplest, have only one relationship between the two members, while triads have three relationships.

The complexity of relationships increases as group size grows. For instance, a group of four individuals has six relationships, while a group of five has ten relationships, and so on. In larger families, such as one with ten siblings, the number of relationships multiplies significantly.

When a triad forms, it resembles a triangle, and managing the dynamics within such a group often requires more effort than in dyads. For example, newly married couples often experience a period of freedom and opportunity to nurture their relationship. However, when their first child is born, the dynamics shift, and the couple faces new challenges as they navigate the demands of parenthood alongside maintaining their marital bond.

As sociologists investigated group dynamics, they identified two main types of groups: primary groups and secondary groups. **Primary groups**, like your family and close friends, are typically smaller, less formal, and more intimate. With these people, you can be spontaneous and informal. For example, on a Friday night, you can hang out wherever you want, change plans on the fly, and just have fun without worrying about formalities. In contrast, **secondary groups**, such as your interactions with professionals like doctors, mechanics, or accountants, tend to be larger, more formal, and less personal. For instance, when you visit a doctor, you must make appointments, wait your turn, and address them formally as "doctor." Your primary

groups are usually limited in number and carry a sense of closeness, while secondary groups, like your sociology class, are larger and more formal in nature.

1.4 FAMILY CULTURE

In studying families, it's important to recognize that while all families share some cultural characteristics, each family also has its own unique cultural identity. **Culture** encompasses shared values, norms, symbols, language, objects, and way of life passed down from generation to generation. It's what we learn from our parents, family, friends, peers, and schools, and it's shared rather than biologically determined. Most families within a society exhibit similar cultural traits, but when a couple marries, the success of their marriage often depends on how well they integrate their distinct family cultures into a new, unified culture of their own.

Despite the universality and desirability of family cultures, we tend to evaluate other cultures as either good, bad, or evil, with our own culture usually being deemed as good. This tendency is known as ethnocentrism, where we judge others based on our own experiences, believing our culture to be superior. However, a more constructive perspective is cultural relativism, which involves seeking to understand the cultural context in which differences arise. For instance, when dining with a friend's family, you might notice variations in the food served, communication styles, and values of leisure. Dismissing your friend's family as wrong simply because they differ from your own is **ethnocentric**. **Cultural relativists**, on the other hand, embrace and appreciate cultural diversity, recognizing that each culture has its own value and significance.

1.5 THEORETICAL VIEWS ON THE FAMILY

The average person's daily life is too limited to fully grasp the complexities of today's social world. We spend our time with friends and family, at work, engaging in leisure activities, and consuming media like TV and the internet. With so much going on in our own small spheres, it's impossible to comprehend the broader picture of a society with hundreds of millions of people. There are countless communities, millions of interactions between individuals, billions of online sources of information, and numerous trends unfolding without many of us even being aware of them. How can we begin to make sense of this vast and intricate social landscape?

Sociological Imagination

1. Wright Mills, a sociologist from the mid-20th century, proposed that when studying families, we can gain valuable insights by considering them within two core societal levels. He argued that understanding both the individual experiences (or "troubles") and the broader social issues they're part of is essential. Mills famously stated, "neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both" (Mills 1959:ii). By recognizing both personal challenges and larger social issues, we can begin to uncover the hidden social processes shaping today's societies.

Personal troubles are individual challenges that arise within a person's own life and immediate relationships. According to Mills (1959), we play the role of actors and actresses in our personal lives, making decisions about our friendships, family, work, school, and other aspects within our control. We have some level of influence over these personal matters. For instance, a college student who frequently parties, skips classes, and neglects homework faces personal troubles that hinder their chances of success in college. However, when these issues become widespread and affect a significant portion of the population, they are termed larger social issues. For example, when half of all college students nationwide fail to graduate, it becomes a broader social concern.

On the other hand, **social issues** extend beyond individual control and personal spheres, involving society's organization and processes. To better understand these issues, we must consider social facts, which are social processes inherent to society rather than individual experiences. Émile Durkheim (1982), a French sociologist, explored the concept of social facts as part of his study of the "science of social facts," aiming to identify social correlations and laws to comprehend the workings of modern, diverse, and complex societies (p. 50-59).

Several significant social phenomena shape our world today, including conflicts like the war in the Middle East, economic challenges, fluctuations in gas prices, imbalances in the dating market, and the rising demand for plastic surgery. These are what we refer to as social facts, which are aspects of society that exist outside the control of individual people. While they affect us, we often struggle to influence them in return. As Mills

highlighted, much of our lives unfold at the personal level, while many societal issues operate at a larger social level. Without understanding both personal experiences and broader social dynamics, we remain unaware of the full scope of social realities, which Mills (1959) termed as **false social consciousness**.

One example of a larger social issue is the nationwide trend of college freshmen arriving ill-prepared for the demands of college life. Many of them haven't faced sufficient challenges in high school to develop the skills needed to succeed in college. Across the country, teenagers spend their time texting, browsing the internet, playing video games, socializing with friends, and working part-time jobs. With such distractions, it's difficult for them to gain the focus and self-discipline required for college-level studies, including completing assignments, participating in group work, and preparing for exams.

Image by Helena Lopes on Pexels

The true strength of the **sociological imagination** lies in our ability to differentiate between the personal and social aspects of our lives. By understanding this distinction, we can make decisions that benefit us most, considering the broader social influences we encounter.

ANALYZING FAMILY STRUCTURES

Using Your Sociological Imagination

Describe and employ your sociological imagination to evaluate family.

Examine your personal family. Discuss at least three of the following, using the subheadings:

- Love
- Mate selection
- Sexuality
- Communication patterns
- Parenthood
- Divorce

How do your **life experiences** influence how you view family as a social institution?

What **agents of socialization** have impacted your vision of family and relationships?

Historical Influences

In today's United States, the family is profoundly influenced by a key factor that operates at both the broader societal and individual levels: demography. **Demography**, the scientific study of population growth and change, encompasses all aspects of society and, in turn, is influenced by them.

Following World War II, the United States underwent a period of recovery from the war's profound and lasting impacts. Families had endured separations, loss of relatives, injuries, and shifts in women's roles, with many returning from wartime factory work to their homes. This upheaval was reflected in the demographic trends of the time, particularly in the year 1946, which saw significant deviations from typical demographic patterns. During this period, people married at younger ages, had more children per woman, experienced higher rates of divorce and remarriage, and tended to have larger families. This trend, known as the Baby Boom, lasted from 1946 to 1964 and resulted in a significant increase in the birth rate, peaking before gradually declining to pre-1946 levels by 1964. The generation born during this period, the **Baby Boomers**, numbering approximately 78 million today, had a profound impact on both personal and societal levels due to their sheer numbers and the unique circumstances of their upbringing.

The influence of the Baby Boomers continues to shape U.S. society, particularly in familial dynamics. The earliest cohort of Baby Boomers holds the record for the highest divorce rates, and collectively, Baby Boomers continue to divorce at higher rates compared to previous generations. Their offspring, including Generations X and Y, also experience unique demographic patterns due to the large size of the Baby Boomer generation.

Understanding demographic processes is essential for comprehending the dynamics of U.S. families, with a focus on three key components: births, deaths, and migration. Demography can be simplified into a basic formula:

$$(\text{Births} - \text{Deaths}) +/- ((\text{In-Migration}) - (\text{Out-Migration})) = \text{Population Change}$$

The natural increase, comprising births minus deaths, and net migration, encompassing in-migration minus out-migration, are fundamental aspects of demographic analysis.

The **Industrial Revolution** triggered significant demographic shifts in the United States, leading to

increased birth rates and decreased mortality rates, which had far-reaching implications for society and family structures (Hammond et al. 2021).

Before the Industrial Revolution, families primarily lived on small farms where everyone in the family worked to support the family economy. Towns were small and similar, and families tended to be large since more children meant more workers. Living standards were lower, and life expectancy was shorter due to poor sanitation. However, with the onset of the Industrial Revolution, factory work replaced farm work, leading men to become breadwinners outside the home. This resulted in the purchasing of goods that were previously handmade or traded. Women took on the role of managing household tasks, overseeing homework, and often worked both at home and in factories. As a result, cities grew larger and more diverse, and families became smaller as less farm work required fewer children. Over time, living standards improved, and mortality rates decreased.

It's crucial to recognize the significant role of women's work both before and after the Industrial Revolution. Women have historically performed extensive unpaid labor, such as homemaking. The changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution impacted Western civilization, affecting countries like Western Europe, the United States, Canada, Japan, and Australia similarly. However, alongside the benefits, the Industrial Revolution also introduced social challenges, including poor living conditions, overcrowding, poverty, inadequate sanitation, early mortality, and family pressures. Today, sociology continues to address these complex social issues, particularly within the family context.

Table 1.2 Pre-Industrial & Post-Industrial Revolution Social Patterns

Table 1.2 Pre-Industrial & Post-Industrial Revolution Social Patterns

Pre-Industrial Revolution	Post-Industrial Revolution
Farms and cottages	Factories
Family work	Breadwinners and homemakers
Small towns	Large cities
Large families	Small families
Homogeneous towns	Heterogeneous cities
Lower standards of living	Higher standards of living
People died younger	People die older

Source: Hammond, Ron, Paul Cheney, Raewyn Pearsey. 2021. Sociology of the Family. Ron J. Hammond & Paul W. Cheney. Retrieved May 3, 2024 (https://freesociologybooks.com/Sociology_Of_The_Family/01_Changes_and_Definitions.php).

Sociological Theories

Sociological theories form the cornerstone of the discipline, offering essential guidance to both researchers and practitioners. They equip us with fundamental tools to understand the complexities of society and how its various components interact. Think of theories like a pair of binoculars; just as binoculars magnify and clarify our view of distant objects, theories magnify and illuminate our understanding of society. While you can't physically touch or see a theory, it serves as a conceptual framework to help us perceive the social world more clearly.

Imagine different social phenomena as objects viewed through different lenses of binoculars. Each theoretical perspective offers a unique vantage point, allowing us to examine society from different angles and uncover diverse insights. Whether we're analyzing social conflicts, functions, or interactions, theories provide us with distinct perspectives to explore the complexities of social life.

Theories are collections of interconnected concepts and ideas that have undergone scientific scrutiny and synthesis to deepen our comprehension of individuals, their actions, and the societies they inhabit. They serve as guiding frameworks for sociological inquiries, directing researchers to conduct specific types of studies and formulate questions that can evaluate the theory's premises. Once a study is conducted, its findings and overarching patterns are assessed to determine whether they align with the theory. If the results corroborate the theory, subsequent studies may replicate and refine the process. Conversely, if the findings diverge from the theory, sociologists reassess and revisit the assumptions underlying their research.

Theories play a vital role in examining society, whether it encompasses millions of individuals within a state, country, or globally. When applied to the study of vast populations, these theories are known as **macro theories**, which are best suited for analyzing large-scale social dynamics (i.e., conflict theory, feminism, functionalism, family systems theory). Conversely, when theories are employed to scrutinize small groups or individuals, such as couples, families, or teams, they are classified as **micro theories**, which are tailored for investigating interpersonal interactions within smaller social units (i.e., symbolic interactionism, family developmental theory, the life course perspective, and social exchange theory). However, each theoretical perspective can be used at both macro and micro levels, known as multi-level of analysis (i.e., ecological theory). Let's explore each of these major theoretical perspectives separately.

Conflict theory

Conflict theory, classified as a macro theory, is a sociological framework crafted to explore broader social, global, and societal phenomena. This theory originated from the insights of a German philosopher, economist, sociologist, and revolutionary, Karl Marx (1818-1883). Witnessing the oppression inflicted by society's privileged class upon the impoverished masses, Marx (1893) grew critical of the capitalist principles underlying such unjust exploitation. He viewed conflict as an inherent aspect of all human societies. Subsequently, another German thinker named Max Weber (1864-1920; pronounced "Veybur") elaborated on and refined

this sociological theory, adopting a more nuanced perspective. While Weber (1930) inquired further into the study of capitalism, he diverged from Marx's outright dismissal of it.

Conflict theory provides valuable insights into many social phenomena, including war, wealth disparity, revolutions, political unrest, exploitation, and various forms of social conflict such as discrimination, domestic violence, and child abuse. At its core, conflict theory posits that society is characterized by ongoing competition and struggle among individuals and groups for limited resources. Marx and Weber, prominent thinkers in sociology, would likely apply conflict theory to analyze contemporary issues like the recent bailouts orchestrated by the U.S. government, which have effectively facilitated the transfer of wealth from the rich to the affluent.

Central to conflict theory is the notion that individuals who possess power continually seek to enhance their wealth at the expense of those who lack such resources. This power struggle predominantly favors the wealthy elite, often resulting in the exploitation and suffering of the less privileged. Power, defined as the ability to achieve one's objectives despite opposition, is institutionalized through authority, with the bourgeoisie—comprising royalty, political figures, and corporate leaders—exerting considerable influence.

In this dynamic, the bourgeoisie, akin to societal "Goliaths," wield significant power and frequently impose their preferences on societal outcomes. Conversely, the proletariat—comprising the working class and the economically disadvantaged—find themselves marginalized and oppressed by the bourgeoisie. According to Marx, the inherent conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat necessitates periodic uprisings and revolutions by the latter to challenge the dominance of their oppressors.

Marx and Weber both recognized the existence of distinct social classes and observed a consistent pattern where a small minority holds significant wealth and power, while the majority struggles with poverty. This disparity in wealth often results in the affluent dictating the course of societal affairs. Consider the collection of images below depicting homes in a particular U.S. neighborhood. On the west side of a gully, these homes appear dilapidated, impoverished, and of low value. Their condition can be starkly contrasted with the opulent mansions situated on the east side, causing frustration among residents who must traverse through these "slums" to access their own lavish residences. Visit the **Dollar Street** website and compare the housing of families living in the United States. Select a house on the website for additional information about the family and their living conditions inside their home.

Political cartoon from October 1884, showing wealthy plutocrats feasting at a table while a poor family begs beneath.
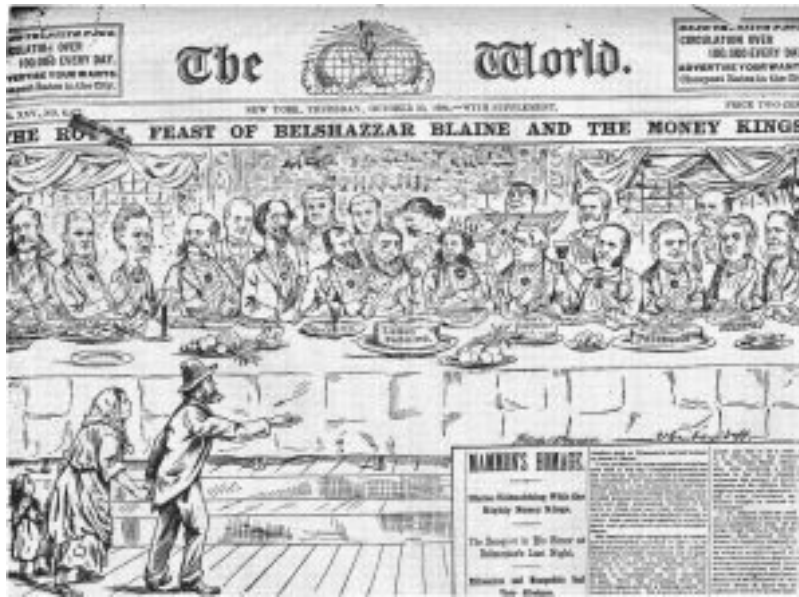
Image by Walt McDougall and Valerian Gribayedoff, Wikipedia is licensed under public domain

Conflict theory has been extensively tested using scientific data, consistently demonstrating its broad applicability across various levels of sociological investigation. However, it's important to note that not all sociological phenomena adhere strictly to conflict-based principles. Nonetheless, many conflict theorists argue that conflict assumptions frequently hold true. One theoretical perspective heavily rooted in conflict theory is feminism.

Feminism

Feminism is a perspective within sociology that builds upon conflict theory assumptions, but extends its focus to incorporate considerations of sex, gender, sexuality, and other related attributes within the study of society. **Feminist theorists** often analyze the unequal distribution of power between men and women in both societal and familial contexts. Central to the feminist perspective is the emphasis on choice and the equal valuation of individuals' choices.

There are four key themes that characterize feminism:

1. Recognition of women's oppression
2. Examination of the factors that perpetuate this oppression
3. Commitment to ending unjust subordination
4. Vision of achieving equality in the future

Historically, women's subordination has been evident in philosophical works such as those of Plato, who

espoused the notion of men's inherent virtue and superior reasoning abilities. The 19th-century Industrial Revolution marked the emergence of the women's movement, with figures like Elizabeth Cady Stanton establishing organizations like the National Organization for Women (NOW) and Susan B. Anthony advocating for women's suffrage. The feminist movement gained momentum in the 1960s, coinciding with the Civil Rights Movement, and addressed issues such as equal pay, dissatisfaction among housewives, and the role of power in shaping gender norms.

Feminism encompasses various perspectives, including liberal feminism, social feminism, and radical feminism, each with its own approach to addressing gender inequality. **Liberal feminists** advocate for social and legal reforms to achieve gender equality, while **social feminists** focus on redefining capitalism in relation to women's work. **Radical feminists** view oppression of women as the most fundamental form of oppression and seek to dismantle patriarchal systems.

Strengths of feminism include their applicability to diverse issues and their critical examination of theories that neglect gender and power dynamics. However, challenges may arise due to the emotionally charged nature of research and practice in this field, as well as potential overemphasis on gender and power dynamics.

Major assumptions underlying feminism include:

1. Recognition of women's oppression
2. Emphasis on the centrality and significance of women's experiences
3. Understanding gender as a socially constructed concept
4. Recognition of the socio-cultural context in analyzing gender dynamics
5. Critique of the concept of "family" due to its inherent biases

Feminism has evolved to incorporate the concept of intersectionality, which highlights the interconnectedness of social categories such as race, sexuality, and gender, leading to intersecting forms of discrimination and disadvantage. For example, a Black queer woman may face compounded societal disadvantages compared to a White straight woman, underscoring the importance of considering multiple dimensions of identity.

Functionalism

Functionalism posits that society operates in a state of equilibrium, maintained through the functioning of its various components. Drawing on biological and ecological concepts, this theory likens society to a living organism, with its parts working together to maintain stability. Just as one might analyze the functioning of specific systems within the human body, sociologists study society by examining which societal elements are functioning properly or malfunctioning. They diagnose issues and propose solutions aimed at restoring balance. Examples of functional processes in society include socialization, religious participation, friendships, healthcare, economic recovery, peacekeeping, justice, population dynamics, community cohesion, romantic relationships, and family dynamics, both typical and atypical.

Functionalists and conflict theorists both recognize that society experiences breakdowns and unfair treatment of individuals. These breakdowns, termed **dysfunctions**, are disruptions in society and its components that endanger social stability. Functionalists distinguish between two types of functions: manifest and latent functions. **Manifest functions** are the obvious and intended roles of institutions in society, while **latent functions** are less obvious, unintended, and often unrecognized.

Functionalism, unlike conflict theory, tends to adopt a more positive and optimistic outlook. Functionalists view society as akin to a body that can become "ill" or dysfunctional. By examining society's components and processes, functionalists seek to understand how society maintains stability or adjusts to destabilizing forces. They argue that most societies achieve a healthy balance and can recover from disruptions, maintaining equilibrium through social processes that counteract destructive forces.

Family systems theory

A crucial concept to grasp when studying families is **family systems theory**. This theory suggests that families are best understood as intricate, dynamic, and ever-changing systems composed of various parts, subsystems, and individual members. To illustrate, think of a mechanic diagnosing a broken-down car by examining its computer system to identify which components are malfunctioning—like the transmission, electric system, or fuel system. Similarly, therapists or researchers use family systems theory to interact with family members and identify areas within the family system that may need attention or intervention. Family systems theory falls under the functional theory framework and shares its approach of analyzing both the dysfunctions and functions within complex groups and organizations.

To grasp the concept of systems and subsystems, let's delve into the extended family of Juan and Maria as an illustration. Juan and Maria, a middle-aged couple, reside in a home filled with various family members: Juan's parents, Maria's widowed mother, their children Anna and José, Anna's husband Ming, and their newborn twins. Juan, being financially stable, can support this multigenerational setup, constituting a complex four-generation family system. Within the household, there are three couples: Juan and Maria, Grandpa and Grandma, and Ming and Anna. However, each couple experiences different levels of strain.

In contemporary society, **multigenerational family systems**, typically involving three generations, are becoming more prevalent, often when adult children and their families move back in with their parents. Juan and Maria raised their children with significant assistance from the grandparents. Maria's mother, a college graduate, has been especially supportive of José, who is currently a sophomore in college and a member of the basketball team. Meanwhile, Juan's elderly parents are increasingly reliant on care, particularly his mother, who requires daily assistance from Maria.

Maria shoulders the greatest individual strain within this family system. Both Juan and Maria contend with strains arising from each subsystem and dependent family member. They navigate the presence of in-laws in the household, contribute to the care of elderly relatives, and support their son's basketball commitments. Yet, the arrival of two newborn babies exacerbates the strain, especially for Maria, as Ming, occupied with medical

studies, spends long hours away. Anna, overwhelmed by the demands of caring for the infants, adds to Maria's responsibilities, making the situation overwhelming.

As the matriarch of the family, Maria is part of multiple subsystems simultaneously, including Daughter-Mother, Daughter-in-law-Father-in-law, Daughter-in-law-Mother-in-law, Spousal, Mother-Son, Mother-Daughter, Mother-in-law-Son-in-law, and Grandmother-grandchildren. However, the existence of numerous subsystems does not inherently imply strain or stress. By viewing the family as a complex system with interconnected and interdependent subsystems, solutions can be sought collectively among its members.

This discussion brings attention to the concept of boundaries. **Boundaries** represent the emotional, psychological, or physical separations between individuals, roles, and subsystems within the family. Establishing and maintaining boundaries is essential for promoting healthy family dynamics. Family systems theory offers insights into identifying areas of strain within these systems and proposes strategies to alleviate such strain.

Symbolic interactionism

Interactionism encompasses two main theoretical perspectives: symbolic interactionism and social exchange theory. **Symbolic interactionism** proposes that society is comprised of ongoing interactions among individuals who share symbols and their meanings. This theory proves highly beneficial for understanding people, enhancing communication, navigating cross-cultural relations, and fostering positive roommate dynamics.

From values and communication to love, social norms, and even significant historical events like the September 11 attacks, symbolic interactionism offers insights into various aspects of society. By recognizing that individuals inherently engage in symbolic interactions, we gain insights into how to persuade others, comprehend diverse viewpoints, and resolve conflicts.

Symbolic interactionism delves into the intricate meanings attached to symbols. Consider words like "love," "lust," and "lard"—each symbolizes distinct concepts. Through our understanding of these symbols and their meanings, we discern significant differences between terms like "love" and "lust." This theory extends to our daily interactions, where greetings like "How's it going?" often carry symbolic meanings rather than literal inquiries.

Furthermore, symbolic interactionism sheds light on our self-concept formation and understanding of social roles and expectations. One notable concept within this theory is the **Thomas Theorem**, which asserts that if individuals perceive a situation as real, its consequences are real to them. For instance, the story of a woman who, upon receiving a false HIV diagnosis, acted as though she had AIDS illustrates the impact of perceived reality on behavior.

Symbolic interactionism fosters understanding and empathy in various relationships, such as between newlyweds, roommates, and family members. By appreciating the differing symbols and meanings held by others, we can bridge gaps and find common ground. Rosa Parks's simple act of defiance, underscored by

her statement, "All I was doing was trying to get home from work," symbolized the beginning of significant social change during the Civil Rights Movement. Symbolic interactionism serves as a powerful tool for comprehending human behavior and societal dynamics, facilitating meaningful connections, and fostering positive social change.

Family developmental theory

Family developmental theory, originating in the 1930s, draws insights from sociologists, demographers, family scientists, and others to elucidate the evolving nature of families and the patterns of change they undergo across the family life cycle. Initially, it focused on delineating stages within this cycle, as outlined by Evelyn Duvall (1988):

1. **Married couples without children**
2. **Childbearing families**: From the birth of the first child until the oldest child reaches about 2½ years old.
3. **Families with pre-school children**: The oldest child is approximately 2½ -6 years old.
4. **Families with schoolchildren**: The oldest child is around 6-13 years old.
5. **Families with teenagers**: The oldest child ranges from about 13-20 years old.
6. **Families as launching centers**: Begins when the first child leaves home and continues until the last child departs.
7. **Middle-age parents**: Extends until retirement.
8. **Aging families**: Continues until the death of one spouse.

Over time, theorists observed that many families did not neatly fit into these stages, such as when launched children returned home, sometimes with their own children. Subsequent iterations of the theory shifted focus towards roles and relationships within the family, while still emphasizing developmental tasks—essential responsibilities for family growth at various life stages. Successful adaptation to changing needs and demands is critical for family survival.

The theory posits several key assumptions: individual development is significant, but the collective growth of interacting individuals within the family takes precedence. Developmental processes are both inevitable and vital for understanding families, as they progress through similar stages and encounter analogous transition points and tasks.

To comprehend families, it is imperative to consider the tasks and challenges they confront at each stage, assess how effectively they address them, and evaluate their readiness for subsequent stages. However, a notable criticism of this theory is its limited applicability to diverse family forms and its insufficient cultural sensitivity. In today's context, where myriad family structures exist and are equally valued, there is a growing need for a more inclusive theory that accommodates various life stages and family compositions.

The life course perspective

Image by cottonbro studio on Pexels

The **life course perspective** is important in family sociology and aging. It serves as a framework for understanding age-related transitions as socially constructed and acknowledged by society members. This perspective aids in comprehending how individuals and populations undergo change over time by examining the interplay between individual life stories and broader social structures.

This theoretical framework centers on the timing of events occurring in an individual's life. For instance, when viewing marriage through a life course lens, it is seen as an ongoing journey intertwined with other life events. Five key themes characterize the life course perspective:

1. **Multiple time clocks**: This refers to various events impacting an individual, including personal, family-related, and societal occurrences. Recognizing the interaction among these time frames is crucial, as historical events, like wars or economic downturns, can influence individual life trajectories.

2. **Social context of development**: The perspective emphasizes the role of an individual's position within the broader social structure, considering factors such as race, class, and sexuality. It also explores the social construction of meanings, cultural contexts, and the interplay between different levels of social development.

3. **Dynamic view of process and change**: It focuses on the interplay between continuity (stability) and change in human development, considering age, period, and cohort effects. This perspective allows researchers to disentangle the effects of these factors to understand family dynamics more accurately.

4. **Heterogeneity in structures and processes**: Acknowledging diversity across family patterns, this theme highlights the wide range of experiences within families.

5. **Multidisciplinary view**: Development is viewed as biological, psychological, and social, necessitating a multidisciplinary approach to understanding human development.

The life course perspective differs from traditional developmental theory, which often prescribes a normative sequence of life stages and overlooks the diversity of family forms. Instead, the life course perspective recognizes the variability in life events and acknowledges the impact of social and historical events on an individual's life trajectory. It views marriage as the convergence of two distinct life histories shaped by past social events and influenced by future ones.

Social exchange theory

The other interactionist theory, **social exchange theory**, posits that society comprises ongoing interactions where individuals seek to maximize benefits while minimizing costs. While sharing some assumptions with conflict theory, social exchange theory is rooted in interactionist principles. Essentially, humans are viewed as rational decision-makers capable of making informed choices by weighing the pros and cons of each option. This theory employs a simple formula to gauge decision-making processes:

<div align="center">

REWARDS – COSTS = CHOICE

</div>

In other words, individuals assess the available options to determine how to optimize rewards and minimize losses. Sometimes decisions lead to favorable outcomes, while other times they result in poor choices. A key concept in this theory is **equity**, which refers to a sense of fairness in interactions for both oneself and others involved. For instance, disparities in household chores and childcare between couples with both partners working full-time often stem from perceptions of fairness or equity.

Each person continuously evaluates the pros and cons of choices to maximize outcomes. An illustrative challenge posed to students involves going on a date with someone deemed unattractive, covering all expenses, and ending with a brief kiss. This exercise prompts students to question why they would engage in such behavior, thereby deepening their understanding of social exchange theory.

People rely on each other in relationships where they exchange goods, services, or emotions. What's valued by each person depends on what they get in return from the other. These exchanges can be one-sided, where one person gives without receiving, or reciprocal, where both give and receive.

When making decisions, individuals often consider their partner's past choices. They also think about what they expect to gain or lose in the future. In imbalanced relationships, the less dependent person usually holds more power. For instance, someone without a college education or a stable job may depend heavily on their partner who earns the household income.

These exchange relationships aren't just one-time transactions; they happen over time. For a relationship to continue, each person must see more value in staying than in leaving. For example, as long as a married couple sees more value in their relationship than in divorce, they'll stay together. Sometimes, though, people stay in difficult relationships because they see even fewer desirable alternatives or fear punishment from their partner.

Social exchange theory recognizes that people don't always act rationally, but it assumes that their actions follow certain patterns. Ultimately, it's up to each individual, not sociologists, to decide what they value most in a relationship.

Ecological theory

One theory used by sociologists and child development specialists to understand how society shapes individuals and families is Urie Bronfenbrenner's **ecological theory** (1974). This theory places the individual

at the center and examines various contexts or settings that surround them. These contexts include family, peers, education systems, communities, cultural beliefs, religion, politics, and the economy.

The major assumptions of ecological theory are as follows:

1. Humans depend on the environment.
2. The entire system and its components rely on each other and operate in connection.
3. Changes in any part of the system impact the whole system and other parts.
4. All humans depend on the world's resources.
5. Family plays a primary role in human development.
6. Families interact with multiple environments.
7. Interactions are governed by both natural laws and human-made rules.

The **microsystem** refers to the immediate social environments where an individual interacts face-to-face. These include family, school, work, church, and peer groups. The **mesosystem** connects two microsystems, either directly or indirectly. For instance, if a child like 10-year-old La'Shawn is at the center of the model, her family represents one microsystem, while her classroom at school represents another. The interaction between these two, such as during a parent-teacher conference, forms part of her mesosystem.

Moving outward, the **exosystem** comprises settings where the individual isn't directly involved but significant decisions affect those who do interact with them. Examples for a child might include neighborhood and community structures or their parents' work environment. The **macrosystem** acts as the blueprint for organizing the institutional life of society, encompassing broad patterns of culture, politics, economy, and other large social structures. Lastly, the **chronosystem** reflects changes or consistencies over time in both the individual's characteristics and their environment. This can include shifts in family structure, socio-economic status (SES), place of residence, societal attitudes towards divorce, and cultural and historical changes.

For example, when applying Ecological Theory to a child of divorce, one would consider how their family dynamics have shifted (microsystem), how changes in parental involvement may affect their schooling (mesosystem), how their parent's work situation impacts them (exosystem), societal attitudes towards divorce (macrosystem), and how their SES and living situation may have changed over time (chronosystem). Investigating these areas helps Ecological Theorists understand the child's experiences and challenges.

Theoretical applications

Each of the sociological theories can be applied to examine individual and collective behaviors, but some may offer more insight than others based on how well their assumptions align with the specific issue being studied. For example, conflict theory can be used to explore divorce by examining how conflicts arise and escalate, sometimes resulting in violent disputes. On the other hand, functionalism can shed light on divorce

as a mechanism for resolving unsustainable social situations, aiming to restore equilibrium within families or communities.

Symbolic interactionism offers a perspective on divorce that focuses on how individuals define their roles before, during, and after the marriage's dissolution, and how they navigate new identities as single adults. Meanwhile, social exchange theory can provide insights into the decision-making processes involved in divorce, including the negotiation of asset distribution, child custody arrangements, and the legal transition to single status.

For further reading, Levinger and Moles' book "Divorce and Separation: Context, Causes, and Consequences" (1979) examines the various factors contributing to divorce and its broader implications.

1.6 STUDYING FAMILIES

As sociology became established in American universities, scholars refined it into a scientific discipline that relies on research to expand our understanding. Sociologists started gathering data, including observations and documentation, and applying the scientific method—a systematic approach to inquiry—to deepen our knowledge of societies and social interactions.

Our perceptions of social situations are often influenced by our own viewpoints and limited information. To mitigate bias, sociologists conduct experiments or studies to collect and analyze empirical evidence from direct experiences. The conclusions drawn from this research undergo scrutiny by peers, who may replicate the experiments or studies or apply them to different contexts to validate the findings. Peer-reviewed research is published in scholarly journals. Sociologists, guided by the sociological perspective, explore a wide range of topics without restrictions. They examine every aspect of human behavior and observe patterns as individuals navigate through society. By employing sociological methods and rigorous research within the scientific framework, sociologists have identified social patterns in various domains, such as the workplace, families, and education, leading to transformative insights and structural changes.

Image by Konstantin Khrustov on Pexels

The research process typically begins with sociologists posing questions about how or why certain phenomena occur in the world. These questions could range from inquiries into emerging trends to investigations of common aspects of life. Once a question is formulated, sociologists embark on a thorough process to uncover answers.

1.7 THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD

Sociologists employ well-established research methods like experiments, surveys, and fieldwork to understand the complexities of human social interactions. These interactions can often seem puzzling due to their diversity. If you're new to social science, you might associate science with discoveries or chemical reactions, rather than exploring the intricacies of human behavior.

However, this is precisely why scientific models are effective for studying human behavior. The **scientific method** provides a structured approach to research, ensuring objectivity and accuracy in results. It establishes parameters that guide the study and organize its findings.

The scientific method entails developing and testing theories about the social world based on observable evidence. It emphasizes systematic observation and strives to be objective, critical, skeptical, and logical. This method follows a set of six steps refined over centuries of scientific inquiry.

Sociological research doesn't simply categorize knowledge as right or wrong. Instead, it offers insights into human behaviors, social practices, and diverse cultures, rituals, beliefs, trends, and attitudes.

Sociologists explore questions regarding how social factors influence outcomes. For instance, they investigate the psychological well-being, community cohesion, job opportunities, wealth distribution, crime rates, and other aspects of different communities. They often delve into underlying issues that hinder meeting basic human needs, studying environmental influences and behavioral patterns leading to various social issues like crime, substance abuse, divorce, poverty, unplanned pregnancies, or illness. Furthermore, sociological studies cover a wide range of topics, including positive aspects such as vacation trends, healthy lifestyles, community organizations, education patterns, recreational activities, parks, and exercise habits.

In conducting research, sociologists not only collect data but also interpret and analyze it using scientific logic and objectivity. They maintain objectivity, focus, and consistency throughout the research process to ensure rigorous analysis (Merton 1968).

Step 1: Posing a Question or Identifying a Research Topic

The initial step in the scientific method involves asking a question or pinpointing a problem within a specific area of interest. It's crucial to select a topic that's neither too broad nor too narrow. For instance, asking, "Can couples stay happy?" is too vague, while "What do personal hygiene habits tell us about family values?" is too specific. Sociologists aim to formulate questions that explore clear patterns and relationships.

Step 2: Conducting a Literature Review

The next phase is conducting background research by reviewing existing literature on the topic. This involves exploring resources like books, academic journals, and online sources to understand previous studies and identify gaps in knowledge. Properly citing sources is essential to avoid plagiarism. For instance, if studying

family conflict resolution, researchers might look into communication and therapy literature to enhance their study design.

Step 3: Crafting a Hypothesis

A hypothesis is a proposed explanation for a phenomenon based on the relationship between variables. In sociology, hypotheses often predict how one behavior influences another. For instance, a hypothesis could be framed as an "if, then" statement, like "If couples attend church regularly, then they'll resolve conflicts peacefully." In scientific research, hypotheses include an independent variable (the cause) and a dependent variable (the effect). For example, "How does gender affect income?" or "How does religion influence family size?" or "How does education level impact social class?"

In another example, let's say a researcher suggests that teaching kids good hygiene practices (independent variable) could boost their self-esteem (dependent variable). However, it's worth noting that this hypothesis could also go the other way. A sociologist might propose that enhancing a child's self-esteem (independent variable) could lead to better hygiene habits (now the dependent variable). It's crucial to identify the independent and dependent variables accurately. Simply pointing out two related topics or variables isn't enough; their potential relationship needs to be part of the hypothesis.

Step 4: Planning and Executing a Study to Collect Data

Researchers plan studies to ensure reliability, which means how likely it is for research results to be consistent if the study is done again. Think of cooking as a science experiment. When you follow a recipe and measure ingredients precisely, using the same tools, you get the same outcome every time. Accuracy in measurement tools, like using a measuring cup instead of your hand, increases reliability.

Researchers also aim for validity, which is how well the study measures what it's supposed to measure. To ensure reliable and valid results, sociologists create operational definitions, defining each concept or variable in terms of concrete steps for measurement. This approach helps maintain consistency across researchers and ensures that the experiment accurately represents what it's meant to study.

For instance, a study on tutoring's impact on grades might define tutoring as one-on-one help from an expert hired by a school. However, different researchers might have different definitions of what constitutes a "good" grade. To ensure consistency and replicability, researchers need to agree on standard definitions.

Step 5: Drawing Conclusions

Once the research design is set, sociologists gather, organize, and analyze data to draw conclusions. If the analysis supports the hypothesis, researchers discuss the implications for theory or policy. Even if results don't match predictions, they still contribute to sociological understanding. Sociologists study both general patterns and exceptions to better grasp social phenomena.

Step 6: Reporting Findings

Researchers present their results at conferences and in academic journals. Other sociologists review and often repeat studies to validate findings. This process helps refine sociological theories and deepen our understanding of social dynamics across different contexts.

Interpretive Framework

While many sociologists rely on gathering factual data and following the scientific method in their research, others work from an interpretive standpoint. Unlike the scientific method, which aims to test hypotheses to find broadly applicable results, **interpretive research** seeks to examine the social worlds from the perspectives of those involved, aiming for deep insights into the human experience.

Interpretive research tends to focus on description and narratives in its findings. Instead of starting with a hypothesis and a method to test it, interpretive researchers devise approaches to explore topics that often involve direct observation or interaction with participants, such as storytelling. These researchers learn as they go and may adjust their methods or processes during the research to enhance their findings as they progress.

Critical Sociology

Critical sociology involves analyzing and questioning existing sociological research and theories. Inspired by the ideas of Karl Marx, scholars associated with the Frankfurt School and Max Horkheimer's (1937) essay "Traditional and Critical Theory," argued that social science, like any academic field, is influenced by power dynamics shaped by factors such as class, caste, race, and gender. Therefore, it's impossible for sociology to be entirely objective. Critical sociologists see theories, methods, and conclusions as serving one of two purposes: either reinforcing systems of social power and oppression or striving to liberate people from inequality and limitations on their freedom. Deconstruction may involve collecting data, but the analysis isn't based on empirical or positivist methods.

Research Methods

Designing the research plan is a crucial step in any sociological investigation. Sociologists typically gather data through various methods:

1. **Primary data collection** involves the researcher gathering the data directly. This can include:

   ◦ Surveys
   ◦ Participant observation
   ◦ Ethnography
   ◦ Case studies
   ◦ Experiments

2. **Secondary data analysis** involves using existing sources of data, such as:

- ◦ Television shows
- ◦ Internet
- ◦ Other sources

Each research method has its strengths and weaknesses, and the choice of method depends heavily on the topic being studied. When conducting research, it's essential to consider the most effective way to gather information about your topic, much like an architect needs a blueprint to construct a building. In sociology, your blueprint is your research design, including your chosen data collection method.

When entering a social environment for research, a researcher must exercise caution. There are times to maintain anonymity and times to be open about the research. Sometimes, interviews are appropriate, while at other times, observation alone suffices. Different participants may require varying levels of information about the study. For instance, some should be fully informed, while others should not be aware of being observed. It's akin to a researcher not casually walking into a dangerous neighborhood late at night, loudly asking, "Any gang members here?"

Surveys

As a research method, **surveys** gather data from individuals who respond to a series of questions about their behaviors and opinions, often presented in a questionnaire format. Surveys are a common scientific research method in sociology. Nearly everyone in the United States encounters some form of survey at some point. A prime example is the 2020 U.S. Census, a large-scale survey aimed at collecting sociological data. The Census, which has been conducted since 1790, gathers demographic information about U.S. residents. Presently, the Census comprises 12 questions and is distributed to residents in the United States and five territories.

However, not all surveys are considered sociological research. Many surveys people encounter focus on marketing needs and strategies rather than contributing to social science knowledge or testing hypotheses. Questions like "How many hot dogs do you eat in a month?" or "Were the staff helpful?" aren't typically designed for scientific research. While the Nielsen Ratings use scientific market research to determine television program popularity, polls conducted by specific shows like American Idol or So You Think You Can Dance can't be generalized because they target specific audiences. Surveys are commonly administered via cell phones, emails, grocery stores, restaurants, and retail stores, often offering incentives for completion.

Sociologists conduct surveys under controlled conditions for specific purposes. Surveys gather various types of information from people, focusing on their feelings, thoughts, and reported behaviors. Although surveys might not capture how people behave in social situations, they excel in revealing people's feelings, thoughts, and self-reported actions. Surveys can track preferences for presidential candidates, individual behaviors (like sleeping or texting habits), employment status, income, and education levels.

Surveys target specific **populations**, such as married college students, international students living away from family, or drug-addicted teenagers. Researchers typically survey a **sample**—a manageable number of

subjects representing a larger population. The quality of a study depends on how well the sample represents the population. In a **random sample**, every person in the population has an equal chance of being selected for the study, ensuring accurate estimates of public opinion. Surveys can be conducted online, over the phone, by mail, or face-to-face.

Subjects often respond to **closed-ended questions**, such as yes-or-no or multiple-choice questions, providing quantitative data that can be counted and statistically analyzed. More complex surveys may include **open-ended questions**, prompting participants to provide short essay responses. These qualitative responses offer subjective insights into personal beliefs, views, goals, or morals. While qualitative data is harder to organize and tabulate, it provides in-depth material for analysis. For example, counting the length of time divorced couples have been separated would yield quantitative (numeric) data, while understanding their post-divorce relationships would yield qualitative (narrative) data.

Field research

Sociological research seldom occurs within the confines of a laboratory. Instead, sociologists venture out into the real world. They engage with individuals in their everyday environments—where they reside, work, and socialize. **Field research** involves gathering firsthand data from natural settings, whether it's a local coffee shop, someone's home, a homeless shelter, the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), a hospital, an airport, a shopping mall, or a beach resort. To conduct field research effectively, sociologists must be open to immersing themselves in new surroundings, where they observe, participate in, or experience different social worlds. During fieldwork, it's the sociologists who may feel out of place, rather than the subjects they're studying.

Participant observations

In 2000, comic writer Rodney Rothman embarked on an unconventional adventure to gain insights into white-collar work dynamics. He infiltrated the corporate offices of a New York "dot com" agency, blending in with the staff for two weeks without anyone questioning his presence. Rothman's experiment aimed to see if he could go unnoticed within the workplace. To his surprise, he seamlessly integrated into the team, even securing a desk, informing the receptionist of his whereabouts, and attending meetings. His experience was later documented in an article titled "My Fake Job" published in *The New Yorker* in 2000. Although Rothman faced criticism for allegedly fabricating details of his story, his narrative provided intriguing glimpses into the inner workings of a "dot com" company, illustrating the lengths writers—or sociologists—might go to uncover material.

Rothman's endeavor exemplifies a research method known as **participant observation**, wherein researchers immerse themselves in a group's activities to observe them firsthand. This approach allows researchers to experience specific aspects of social life directly. For instance, journalist Barbara Ehrenreich (2001) conducted a similar study for her book *Nickel and Dimed*. Inspired by her editor's challenge,

Ehrenreich delved into the lives of low-income workers, taking on various minimum-wage jobs like waitressing, cleaning, and retail work to understand how people survive on meager incomes. During her stint as an undercover worker, Ehrenreich witnessed the struggles and hardships faced by the working class, shedding light on issues often overlooked by middle and upper-class individuals.

Similarly, sociologists John S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd (1959) altered their research focus during a study of small towns in the United States. Originally intending to examine the role of religion in these communities, they shifted their attention to the impacts of industrialization and urbanization after observing societal changes. Despite the change in focus, the Lynds maintained their research methods, highlighting the flexibility and adaptability inherent in sociological inquiry. Through these diverse approaches, researchers like Rothman, Ehrenreich, and the Lynds uncover valuable insights into various aspects of society, enriching our understanding of social dynamics and inequalities.

Ethnography

Ethnography involves immersing the researcher in the natural environment of a particular social community to observe and experience their daily life and culture firsthand. At the core of ethnographic research lies an examination of how individuals perceive their own social status and identity within their community.

For instance, an ethnographic study might focus on various social groups, such as families in a small town in the U.S., an Inuit community, a village in Thailand, a family unit within a Buddhist monastery, or a community formed within a private boarding school. Each of these settings has its own boundaries, within which people live, work, study, or relax. Individuals within these communities have specific reasons for being there, influencing their behaviors and adherence to cultural norms. An ethnographer would dedicate a significant amount of time to thoroughly explore and understand every aspect of the chosen community, aiming to capture its essence comprehensively.

Institutional ethnography builds upon the foundational principles of ethnographic research, focusing deliberately on the everyday social interactions that shape our lives. Originating from the work of Canadian sociologist Dorothy E. Smith (2005), institutional ethnography is often regarded as a feminist-influenced approach to social analysis, particularly highlighting women's experiences within male-dominated societies and power structures. Smith's contributions are viewed as challenging sociology's historical neglect of women, both in academia and in the study of their lived experiences.

Traditionally, social science research tended to overlook women's experiences, often reducing them to objects of study seen through a male-centric lens. Contemporary feminists argue that portraying women, along with other marginalized groups, as subordinate reinforces the dominance of those in power. Smith's major works examine what she terms "the conceptual practices of power," making significant contributions to feminist theory and ethnography. These works remain influential in shaping our understanding of gender dynamics and power structures within society.

Case study

Occasionally, researchers aim to investigate a specific individual or event. A **case study** involves a thorough examination of a single event, situation, family, or individual. To conduct a case study, researchers analyze existing sources such as documents and archival records, conduct interviews, observe directly, and sometimes participate in the situation.

Researchers might employ this method to explore a variety of scenarios, such as a foster child's experience, a family coping with a cancer survivor, or the journey of a rape victim. However, a notable critique of case studies is their limited ability to draw generalized conclusions. While they offer rich insights into a particular topic, they lack the breadth of evidence needed to establish universal patterns. Consequently, most sociologists refrain from relying solely on case studies as their primary research method.

Nevertheless, case studies prove invaluable when dealing with uniquely singular cases. In such instances, a single case study can provide invaluable insights. For instance, feral children—individuals raised without human contact—present an extraordinary phenomenon. With only around one hundred documented cases globally, feral children offer researchers a rare opportunity to understand child development beyond conventional norms. Given their scarcity, case studies become the most appropriate method for studying these subjects.

Take, for example, the case of Oxana Malaya, a Ukrainian girl neglected by her parents and raised among dogs in a shed. Discovered at age eight, Oxana exhibited behaviors akin to those dogs. Despite efforts to reintegrate her into society, Oxana struggled to fully adapt and now resides in a mental institution. Cases like Oxana's offer sociologists unique data that may not be attainable through other means.

Experiments

Chances are, you've tested some of your own social theories in daily life. For instance, you might have thought, "If I study at night and review in the morning, I'll boost my retention skills," or "If I cut out soda, I'll feel healthier." These ideas follow a cause-and-effect logic: if this happens, then that happens. When you put your theories to the test, your results either support or refute your initial hypothesis. Similarly, researchers investigate social theories by conducting **experiments** to examine relationships and validate hypotheses.

Experiments in sociology come in two main flavors: lab-based experiments and natural or field experiments. In a **lab environment**, researchers can control various factors to gather data efficiently within a set timeframe. On the other hand, in **natural or field experiments**, researchers cannot control the data-gathering timeframe, but the information obtained is often considered more accurate because it's collected without researcher interference.

Both types of sociological experiments serve the purpose of testing if-then statements: if a particular event occurs (the cause), then a specific outcome will follow (the effect). In lab-based experiments, sociologists craft artificial scenarios to manipulate variables. Typically, sociologists select a group of individuals with similar

characteristics, such as age, class, race, or education level, and divide them into two groups: the experimental group and the control group. The **experimental group** is exposed to the independent variable(s), while the **control group** is not. For example, to evaluate the benefits of tutoring, researchers might provide tutoring to the experimental group but not to the control group. Both groups are then assessed for differences in performance to determine if tutoring had a significant impact on the experimental group.

However, researchers must be cautious about influencing subjects' behavior through their awareness of being observed—a phenomenon known as the **Hawthorne effect**. Subjects may alter their behavior simply because they know they are part of a study. While unavoidable in some cases, sociologists strive to minimize this effect by transparently communicating the purpose of the study to participants. Despite efforts to maintain natural behavior, some degree of artificiality may still be present in research settings (Sonnenfeld 1985).

Secondary data analysis

Although sociologists frequently conduct original research studies, they also enrich the field through secondary data analysis. Secondary data refers to information not directly gathered by the researcher but sourced from previously completed research or data compiled by organizations or agencies. Sociologists may delve into works produced by historians, economists, educators, or early sociologists, spanning a range of mediums such as periodicals, newspapers, organizational records, or internet databases like census, FBI, or CIA data.

Leveraging existing information not only saves resources but also offers the opportunity to uncover fresh insights by interpreting findings in novel ways. For instance, to investigate societal perceptions of women in the 1960s, a researcher might analyze movies, TV shows, and sitcoms from that era. Similarly, the emergence of television in the late 1950s and early 1960s could be explored through reinterpreting secondary data. Looking ahead, future researchers will likely examine the impact of technologies like mobile phones, the internet, or social media using similar methods.

Furthermore, social scientists benefit from analyzing studies conducted by various entities, including governmental departments and international organizations like the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics or the World Health Organization (WHO). For example, data on foreclosure rates can illuminate the effects of economic downturns, while comparing racial demographic profiles with education funding data can shed light on disparities in resource allocation.

A notable advantage of secondary data analysis is its nonreactive nature, meaning it does not involve direct interaction with subjects and therefore does not influence their behavior. Unlike studies requiring direct engagement with individuals, using pre-existing data avoids the complexities and risks associated with entering populations.

Nevertheless, employing available data presents challenges. Accessing public records may require considerable effort, and verifying the accuracy of existing data can be difficult. For instance, while it's

straightforward to tally the number of drunk drivers apprehended by police, determining the total number remains elusive. Similarly, tracking the outcomes of high school dropouts over time poses logistical hurdles.

The variety of research methods available reflects the diverse nature of research questions, each method offering its own set of advantages and limitations. By considering these factors, researchers can select the most suitable approach for their specific inquiry, as outlined in Table 2, aiding in the differentiation between research methods.

1.8 RESEARCH ETHNICS

Sociologists undertake studies to illuminate human behaviors, recognizing knowledge as a potent instrument for positive change. However, this pursuit carries significant responsibility, as researchers must uphold ethical standards to ensure the well-being of human subjects or groups involved in the research. Ethics delineates what is deemed acceptable or unacceptable in research practices.

Renowned German sociologist Max Weber (1949) emphasized a critical ethical concern: the potential distortion of research outcomes by personal values. While Weber acknowledged that personal values might influence aspects of research design, he vehemently opposed allowing these values to bias the interpretation of responses. Sociologists, he argued, must strive for value neutrality, maintaining impartiality, devoid of bias or judgment, throughout the study and in presenting results. It's incumbent upon sociologists to disclose research findings transparently, without omitting or distorting essential data.

Is achieving value neutrality feasible? Many sociologists contend that complete objectivity is unattainable. Instead, they caution that sociological studies may contain inherent value biases. However, this doesn't discredit the results but rather presents them as one facet of truth—a fact-based perspective. Some researchers endeavor to minimize personal biases, particularly subconscious ones, during data collection and analysis. They refrain from manipulating data to fit predetermined outcomes aligned with specific agendas, such as political or moral viewpoints. Ethically, researchers must report findings, even if they contradict personal beliefs, anticipated outcomes, or widely accepted notions.

The American Sociological Association (ASA), the principal professional body for sociologists in North America, serves as a valuable resource for sociology students. The ASA maintains a code of ethics—a set of formal guidelines for conducting sociological research—comprising principles and ethical standards for the discipline. Established in 1905 at John Hopkins University and revised in 1999, these guidelines mandate researchers to:

1. Maintain objectivity and integrity in research
2. Respect subjects' rights to privacy and dignity
3. Protect subjects from harm
4. Preserve confidentiality
5. Obtain informed consent
6. Acknowledge collaboration and assistance
7. Disclose sources of financial support

However, when these ethical standards are disregarded, it engenders an unethical environment for human

participants in sociological studies. Throughout history, numerous unethical studies have transpired, including:

- ◦ *The Tuskegee Experiment*: where African American men with syphilis were denied treatment.
- ◦ *The case of Henrietta Lacks*: whose cells were harvested without consent for medical research.
- ◦ *The Milgram Experiment*: which inflicted extreme emotional distress on participants.
- ◦ *The Stanford prison experiment*: where participants were subjected to harmful treatment.
- ◦ *Laud Humphreys' study*: which misrepresented the researcher's identity and intent to subjects.

These instances underscore the importance of upholding ethical principles in sociological research to safeguard the rights and well-being of participants.

1.9 END OF MODULE MATERIAL

CORE INSIGHTS

This module probes into the diverse landscape of family structures and dynamics, highlighting the concept of family variations. Scholars will explore the array of family types, including nuclear families, blended families, cohabitation arrangements, same-sex couples, and single-parent households. Understanding these variations is crucial for comprehending the complex fabric of modern families and their roles within society. Additionally, learners will navigate the stages of family development, from inception to dissolution, identifying key milestones along the way. This exploration provides insight into the evolving nature of familial relationships and the factors influencing family life trajectories.

Furthermore, this module examines the multifaceted functions of families within society. Scholars will analyze how families provide economic support, socialize children, regulate sexuality and reproduction, and assign ascribed statuses within familial structures. Exploring these functions illuminates the fundamental roles families play in shaping individuals and communities. Additionally, learners will investigate the intricate interplay between family size decisions, individual well-being, and societal impacts, shedding light on the complexities of family planning. Moreover, students will explore the influence of family culture on familial dynamics, traditions, and values, recognizing the profound impact of cultural contexts on family life. Lastly, ethical considerations in family research are discussed, emphasizing the importance of informed consent, confidentiality, and integrity in conducting ethical research within familial contexts.

RESOURCES

1. [Research-Based Approach to Relationships](#) (The Gottman Institute 2024)
2. [Family Inequality: Modern Marriage Commentary](#) (Philip Cohen 2023)
3. [Immigrant Family Resources in California](#) (First5 California 2024)
4. [Abolish the Family: Sophie Lewis Speaks to Ben Smoke](#) (Verso Books 2022)

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PART II
MODULE 2: COMPANIONS & PARTNERS

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this module, scholars will be able to:

1. Understand the concepts of sex and gender, including gender socialization processes, the distinction between biological sex and socially constructed gender, and the impact of gender norms on individuals and society.
2. Explore methods and approaches used in gender research, including qualitative and quantitative methodologies, to investigate topics such as gender identity, gender roles, and gender stereotypes.
3. Examine gender diversity and norms, recognizing the fluidity and complexity of gender identities and expressions across cultures and historical contexts.
4. Analyze gender inequality and oppression, including structural and institutional barriers that perpetuate disparities based on gender, such as wage gaps, access to resources, and gender-based violence.
5. Investigate gender inequality in the United States, exploring disparities in areas such as education, employment, politics, and healthcare, and identifying strategies for promoting gender equity.
6. Explore the concepts of dating, marriage, and mate selection, including cultural variations in relationship norms and practices, the evolution of romantic relationships over time, and the factors influencing partner selection.
7. Examine the institution of marriage, including its historical roots, legal frameworks, and social significance, as well as contemporary debates and challenges surrounding marriage and its alternatives.

8. Analyze the process of dating and mate selection, including individual preferences, societal expectations, and cultural influences on relationship formation, maintenance, and dissolution.

KEY TERMS & CONCEPTS

- Child marriage
- Dating
- "Define the Relationship" (DTR)
- Exclusive dating
- Exogamy
- Female genital mutilation
- Filtering
- Foot binding
- Forced veiling
- Gender
- Gender-based violence
- Gender dysphoria
- Gender inequality
- Gender role preferences
- Gender roles
- Gender socialization
- Gender unicorn
- Heterogamy
- Homogamy
- Institutional marriage

- Intersex
- Intimacy
- Intimate violence
- Marriage gradient
- Marriage squeeze
- Maternal death
- Misogyny
- Misogynistic language
- Oppression
- Rape
- Roles
- Sex
- Sexual assault
- Sexual violence
- Similarity principle
- Social exchange theory (SET)
- Soulmate marriage
- Stimulus-value-role theory
- Stimulus
- Values

INTRODUCTION

This module investigates the intricate dynamics of companions and partners through the lenses of sex and gender, as well as the processes of date and mate selection. It begins by examining gender socialization, the process through which individuals learn and internalize societal norms and expectations regarding gender roles. This exploration extends to gender research, highlighting the diverse identities and expressions that go beyond traditional binary classifications. Despite growing recognition of gender diversity, issues of inequality

and oppression persist, manifesting in various forms of discrimination. The chapter also addresses gender disparities in the U.S., particularly in employment, income, education, and political representation, underscoring the ongoing need for efforts toward achieving gender equity.

Transitioning to the theme of date and mate selection, the module discusses the evolving patterns of marriage, dating, and mate selection. It explores how marriage, traditionally seen as a legally and socially sanctioned union, transformed over time in response to changing societal attitudes and norms. The dynamics of dating are also examined, with a focus on the impact of technological advancements such as online dating platforms. Additionally, the module analyzes the criteria and processes individuals use to choose their partners, which are influenced by a complex interplay of cultural, social, and personal factors. Understanding these aspects provides valuable insights into the broader social patterns and the ways in which individuals navigate their intimate relationships within contemporary society.

2.1 SEX & GENDER

To understand the dynamics of dating and mate selection, we must first explore the concepts of sex and gender. While often used interchangeably, they refer to distinct aspects. **Sex** pertains to one's biological classification as male or female, determined at conception when an X or Y chromosome-carrying sperm fertilizes an egg, resulting in either XX (female) or XY (male) chromosomes (Young 2009). The term "sex" emphasizes biological differences, such as hormone production variations.

Biological differences between sexes primarily manifest in reproductive organs, which begin development around nine weeks into gestation in reaction to hormonal levels. Occasionally, hormonal irregularities during this phase can lead to ambiguous external genitalia, termed intersex. **Intersex** describes various conditions where reproductive or sexual anatomy doesn't align strictly with "male" or "female" categorizations, reflecting biology's natural variation.

Despite perceived differences, males and females share many biological traits, including organs, hair, skin, limbs, nervous and endocrine systems, with similarities outweighing disparities. However, societal focus often fixates on physiological distinctions to explain behavioral variations.

Conversely, **gender** denotes a cultural marker of personal and social identity, distinct from biological sex (Young 2009). Gender starts with sex assignment based on observable genitalia at birth, with sex being inherent and gender learned through socialization. It's a socially ingrained construct evident in daily interactions and behaviors, encompassing masculinity, femininity, and androgyny. Androgynous behaviors defy strict masculine or feminine categorizations, illustrating the learned nature of gender roles and expressions.

Gender encompasses attitudes, feelings, and behaviors culturally associated with one's biological sex, with gender-normative behavior aligning with cultural expectations and gender non-conformity diverging from them. Gender expression, including appearance, clothing, and behaviors, may or may not conform to an individual's gender identity, defined as one's sense of being masculine, feminine, androgynous, or transgender.

Gender dysphoria occurs when there's discomfort due to a misalignment between one's gender identity and assigned sex at birth. Transgender is an umbrella term for those whose gender identity differs from societal norms associated with their birth sex. Gender is shaped through social learning, influenced by various external factors like family, media, and culture.

Western conceptualizations of gender often adhere to a binary model, recognizing masculinity and femininity as dominant categories and reinforcing the idea of fixed gender roles. However, this perspective overlooks the diversity of gender identities, as seen in cultures like some Plains Indian communities where individuals can embody both masculine and feminine traits, challenging Western notions of gender duality.

The "**Gender Unicorn**" in Figure 2.1 illustrates a broader spectrum of elements including sex assigned at birth, gender identity, expression, and attraction, challenging binary categorizations. This graphic emphasizes

that while "sex" focuses on biological features, "gender" encompasses fluid and performative characteristics, shaped by social interactions rather than inherent traits.

Figure 2.1 The Gender Unicorn
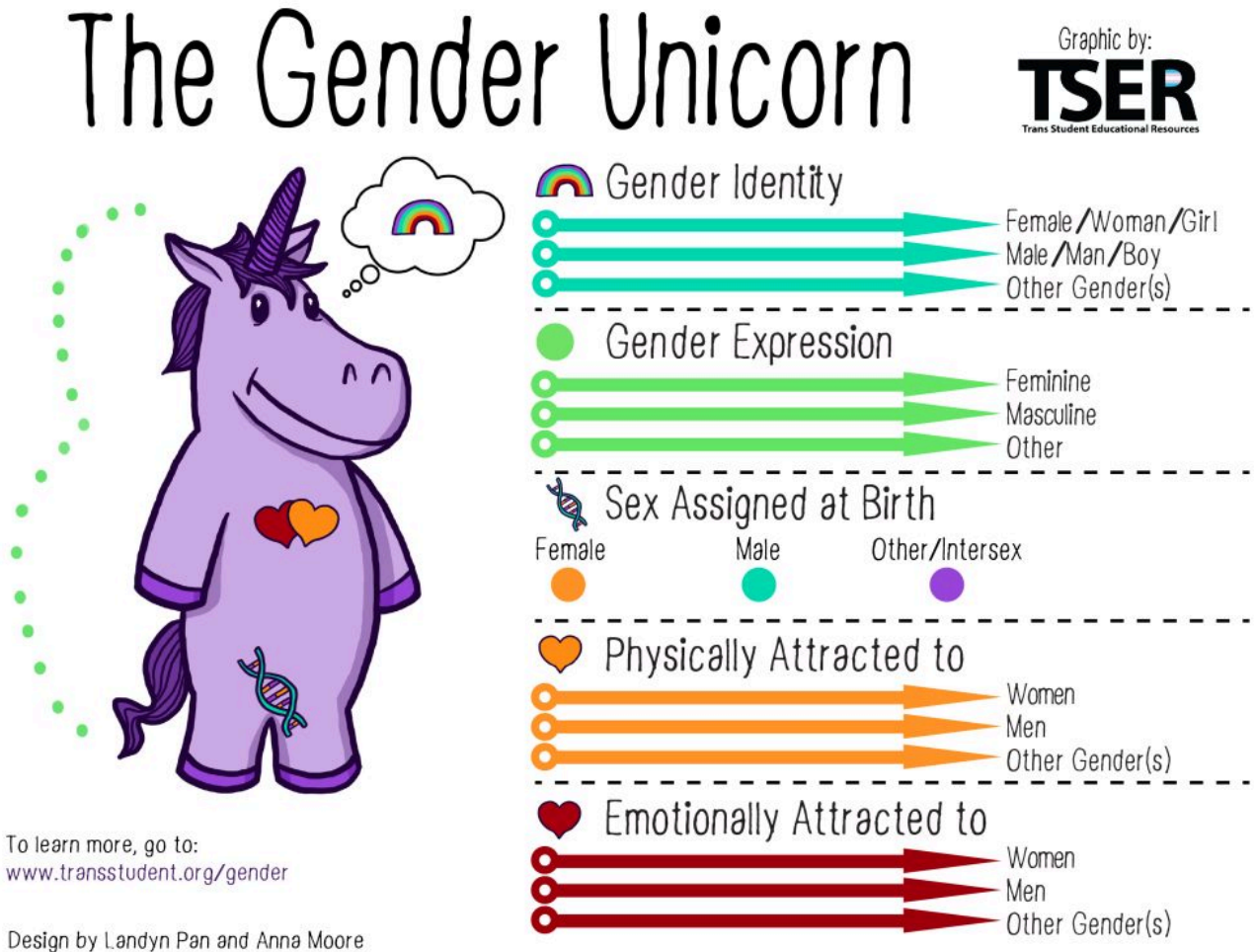
Male hormones and behavior

Both males and females produce hormones but in varying amounts. Estrogen is predominantly secreted by females, while males produce more testosterone. Studies have suggested a correlation between higher testosterone levels and increased aggressive behavior, primarily observed in animal studies where elevated testosterone levels lead to aggression. However, it's crucial to note that such findings shouldn't excuse aggressive behavior with simplistic statements like "Boys will be boys." This overlooks the role of social influences and individual experiences in shaping behavior.

In human research, higher testosterone levels have been associated with heightened edginess,

competitiveness, and anger in both females and males. Moreover, hormone levels fluctuate throughout the day and can be influenced by environmental factors. For instance, consider the contrast between hormone levels before skydiving and while relaxing on the couch watching TV, illustrating the impact of environment on biology. Thus, the notion that testosterone alone dictates men's behavior has been disproven.

Furthermore, hormones play a role in mood regulation but don't determine behavior. Despite hormonal influences, individuals can control their actions based on social contexts. For instance, in situations like classrooms or workplaces, individuals may regulate their emotions and behaviors despite feeling aggressive or upset. Behavior is primarily shaped by situational factors rather than hormones alone.

Research also challenges the stereotype that only men exhibit aggression. Women can display similar levels of aggression, especially when incentivized or when social repercussions are minimal. Examples such as athletes like Ronda Rousey and Serena Williams, political figures like Hillary Clinton, and performers like Pink and Chyna demonstrate how women can excel in domains traditionally associated with masculine behaviors. These individuals are not biologically less female but instead challenge societal norms and expectations.

Female hormones and behavior

Women's hormone levels, especially testosterone, don't fluctuate as much throughout the day as men's do. Let me emphasize that again: Women's hormone levels, particularly testosterone, remain relatively stable throughout the day. Instead, hormonal changes in women are influenced by monthly reproductive cycles and menopause later in life.

Both boys and girls are exposed to negative attitudes toward menstruation from a young age, which can shape women's perceptions of Premenstrual syndrome (PMS) symptoms. If women are taught to expect PMS to be terrible, they might anticipate it and exhibit behaviors reflecting that expectation. While many women do report mood swings and physical discomfort during this time, research suggests that external stressors can exacerbate these changes. Women might attribute undesirable behavior to PMS, but it's important to note that hormonal fluctuations don't determine behavior. It's a bit like the "Boys will be boys" excuse, isn't it? In studies involving both men and women, men were just as likely to experience mood swings, work-related issues, and physical discomfort (Hammond and Cheney 2021). Interestingly, men also undergo a daily hormone cycle with testosterone levels peaking around 4 am and lowest around 8 pm.

Gender Socialization

How do we come to understand and perform gender? This process is known as **gender socialization**, where individual behavior and perceptions are shaped to align with socially defined expectations for males and females. **Gender roles**, or the expected behaviors and attitudes associated with one's biological sex, are ingrained in various aspects of society. These include family dynamics, education systems, religious teachings,

popular culture, media portrayals, sports, and legal frameworks (Launius and Hassel 2022). Gender roles essentially outline what behaviors are considered acceptable or desirable based on perceived gender.

Gender roles are so deeply ingrained in our daily lives that we often don't even realize we're performing them. It's so ingrained that many people believe gender is innate rather than something we learn and perpetuate through our actions. Essentially, gender is a human creation that only exists when individuals actively engage in it (Zimmerman 1987).

Why do so many people want to know the sex of a fetus before birth? It's not because knowing affects the baby's health or happiness or development. It's often about planning, like decorating the nursery. The color of the nursery might seem trivial, but it reflects deeply ingrained gender expectations. Studies show that a significant majority of parents-to-be want to know the sex of their baby so they can plan accordingly, from nursery decor to toys and even future aspirations (Shipp et al. 2004).

Even before a child is born, parents often have gendered expectations based on the child's sex. This influences everything from the clothes they buy to the activities they encourage. Gender socialization begins early; parents play a significant role in shaping their child's understanding of gender. While other factors like peers, media, and religion also contribute, parents wield considerable influence, especially during a child's formative years.

Adults tend to treat baby girls and boys differently, possibly influenced by their own upbringing and societal gender expectations they experienced as children themselves. For example, in the U.S., it's often seen that fathers teach boys practical skills like fixing and building, while mothers tend to teach girls domestic tasks like cooking, sewing, and housekeeping (Andersen and Hysock 2009). Sounds a bit old-fashioned, right? Sociologists acknowledge exceptions but note that children still tend to receive more praise from parents when they conform to gender norms and adopt traditional roles, despite changing social attitudes. This reinforcement comes not only from parents but also from other social influences like media and peers, shaping children's understanding of gender from a young age.

This early socialization leads children to form a gender identity—how they see themselves in terms of being female, male, or neither and develop **gender role preferences**, aligning with culturally expected behaviors associated with their gender identity (Andersen and Hysock 2009; Diamond 2002).

These childhood gender roles often persist into adulthood, influencing how people perceive decision-making, parenting, financial responsibilities, and even workplace dynamics. It's important to note that gender roles aren't inherently good or bad; they simply exist and shape our perceptions of the world around us. Since they're not biologically determined, they can vary across generations, social groups, and individuals.

Gendered social norms also establish external standards for how females and males should behave, often justified by religious or cultural beliefs. In Western culture, alternatives to traditional gender norms have historically been rare (Foucalt 1972). While there's no single "correct" way to express gender, individuals are often pressured to conform to societal expectations, reinforcing existing gender norms. Failure to adhere to these norms may lead to individuals being judged based on their character, motives, and predispositions (Zimmerman 1987).

Family

The family, particularly parents or guardians, plays a significant role in shaping a child's understanding of gender, transmitting their own beliefs about gender to their children both explicitly and implicitly. Research suggests that parents begin to have different expectations for their sons and daughters as early as 24 hours after birth (Rubin et al. 1974). For instance, boys are often perceived as stronger and are treated more roughly and actively engaged with compared to girls from infancy. As children grow, girls tend to receive more protection and less autonomy than boys, and they may face lower expectations in academic and career achievements, especially in areas like mathematics and careers traditionally associated with men (Eccles et al. 1990).

Moreover, many parents consciously or unconsciously steer their sons away from feminine traits. According to Emily Kane, a sociology professor and author, parental efforts to maintain a boundary between masculinity and femininity can limit boys' options, reinforce gender inequality, and uphold heteronormativity (Kane 2012). These parental messages about gender, tailored to the child's sex category, are internalized by the child and influence their development into adolescence and adulthood. As a result, gender role stereotypes are often firmly established in childhood (Arliss 1991).

Peers

Peers also play a significant role in shaping a child's understanding of gender roles. Children often react when their peers deviate from expected gender behaviors. For instance, boys are more likely to face criticism from their peers if they engage in behaviors considered "gender-bending" compared to girls. Consider this: What do we usually call a girl who enjoys wearing boys' clothes? That's right, a "tomboy." But what about boys who prefer feminine attire? In the book "Dude, You're A Fag," sociologist C. J. Pascoe (2012) discusses how the concept of the "fag" is used as a way to regulate boys' behavior, focusing more on gender norms than sexuality itself.

Negative reactions from peers, especially from those of the same gender, often lead to changes in behavior. This feedback reinforces traditional gender roles, restricting children's freedom to express their gender in diverse ways.

School

Teachers also play a role in shaping how girls and boys experience education; it's important to note that they're not to be blamed for reinforcing gender norms. They're just one part of a larger picture! Schools often prioritize qualities traditionally associated with femininity, like being quiet, obedient, and passive. As a result, girls typically enjoy school more and perform better academically than boys, especially in the early grades. Even in preschool, boys receive more criticism from teachers, who may unintentionally treat children based on gender stereotypes. Unfortunately, there's often a lack of awareness about research findings, such as the fact

that girls perform just as well as boys in most areas of math. This lack of awareness may lead parents and others to unintentionally discourage girls from excelling in these subjects.

Media and toys

Children begin watching TV at a very young age, typically around 18 months old. Television holds significant sway over young minds, being one of the most influential forms of media. Since young children often struggle to differentiate between fantasy and reality, they are particularly susceptible to the portrayals of gender roles on television, especially in cartoons, which dominate children's TV viewing from ages two to eleven. As a result, children may use the depictions of males and females in cartoons as templates for their own gender performance, aiming to conform to societal norms.

In a study analyzing 175 episodes from 41 different cartoons, researchers observed significant disparities in the prominence and portrayal of male and female characters. Males were consistently given more screen time, appeared more frequently, and had more dialogue compared to their female counterparts (Thompson and Zebrinos 1997). This research underscores the powerful influence of television on shaping children's perceptions of gender roles in society. Susan Witt (2000) suggests traditional gender roles, which encourage men to be assertive leaders and women to be submissive and reliant, are detrimental, especially to women. These roles limit the spectrum of expression and achievement. It is essential for children to grow in a gender-neutral environment that fosters a sense of belonging and encourages everyone to fully participate in society.

Image by Janko Ferlic on Pexels

Numerous factors beyond the family contribute to the way we learn about gender roles. In media like television and children's books, masculine and feminine roles are often depicted in ways that reinforce stereotypes. For instance, men are commonly shown as aggressive, competent, rational, and powerful in the workforce, while women are frequently portrayed as focused on housework or childcare (Louie and Louie 2001).

Children's books often follow gendered themes: boys' books may feature robots, dinosaurs, astronauts, and sports, while girls' books may emphasize princesses, fairies, makeup, and fashion. There's nothing inherently wrong with these themes, but it becomes problematic when they're consistently presented as exclusively for one gender. After all, girls can enjoy adventure and pirates, and boys can appreciate cute animals and dressing up. Why limit children's interests based on their gender?

Parents and guardians are usually the ones who buy toys for children, meaning young kids typically have little say in what toys they have at home. After all, they're not the ones doing the shopping, are they? Unfortunately, this often leads to parents selecting toys that are specific to gender and reinforcing play

behaviors that align with gender stereotypes (Witt 2000). For instance, research has found that girls' rooms tend to have more pink items, dolls, and toys that encourage nurturing play, while boys' rooms are more likely to have blue items, sports gear, tools, and toy vehicles (Witt 1997).

Gender Research

Margaret Mead's (2003) groundbreaking work became a pivotal force in the women's liberation movement and played a significant role in reshaping the perception of women in many Western societies. Her research, focused on the gender dynamics of three tribes—Arapesh, Mundugamor, and Tchambuli—triggered a national dialogue that prompted many to reassess conventional assumptions about sex and gender.

In her studies, Mead discovered intriguing variations in gender roles across these tribes:

- Among the Arapesh, both men and women exhibited what were traditionally considered feminine traits, such as sensitivity, cooperation, and low aggression levels.
- In the Mundugamor tribe, both genders displayed characteristics typically associated with masculinity: insensitivity, uncooperativeness, and high levels of aggression.
- In contrast, the Tchambuli tribe challenged conventional gender norms, with women being assertive, rational, and socially dominant, while men assumed passive roles focused on artistic and leisure pursuits.

Mead's findings led her to question the prevailing belief that reproductive roles determined cultural and social opportunities. She pondered whether our own society had progressed similarly to these tribal cultures, challenging the idea that biology alone dictated gender roles. Instead, she proposed that tradition and culture exerted a stronger influence than biology.

Mead's work fundamentally altered perceptions of sex and gender, advocating for the understanding that biology is only one aspect of the complex interplay between sex and gender. She emphasized that sex does not necessarily dictate gender. Despite criticism, Mead's research underscored the influential role of culture in shaping gender dynamics, highlighting the importance of considering both biological and cultural factors in understanding how men and women are treated in society.

Gender Diversity & Norms

Cultural gender-role standards differ not only within the United States but also across various cultures worldwide. In the U.S., for instance, these standards can differ based on factors like ethnicity, age, education level, and occupation. Now, having looked at how sex and gender are defined and constructed, let's take a closer look at some traditional gender norms from cultures that don't entirely conform to Eurocentric, Westernized gender norms.

North America

In traditional Zuni culture, there's a group called lhamana, who are male-bodied individuals taking on social and ceremonial roles typically carried out by women. They wear a mix of men's and women's clothing and often work in areas traditionally assigned to Zuni women. Additionally, they're known for their role as mediators (Bost 2003).

Among the Mojave in North America, distinct institutional structures were established for both males and females (Roscoe 1988). For instance, husbands and wives collaborated in farming, with men handling planting and watering, and women managing the harvest. Both genders participated in storytelling, music, artwork, and traditional medicine (Hill 1935).

In Mojave society, pregnant women believed they could predict the biological sex of their children through dreams, sometimes hinting at their child's future gender variant status. Boys displaying unusual behavior before their puberty ceremonies might undergo a two-spirit ceremony to confirm their status. During this ceremony, witnessed by the community, if the boy danced like a woman, he would be recognized as an alyha, with his gender status permanently changed. Alyha would then adopt aspects of female life, including menstruation, puberty rituals, and roles as healers, particularly in treating sexually transmitted diseases.

Many other Native American tribes had similar rituals for children displaying non-conforming gender behavior, with each tribe having unique traditions. Today, various Native American cultures recognize and have specific terms for two-spirit individuals, such as nàdleehé among the Dinéh (Navajo), winkte among the Lakota (Sioux), lhamana among the Zuni, mexoga among the Omaha, achnucek among the Aleut and Kodiak, ira' muxe among the Zapotec, and he man eh among the Cheyenne (Nanda 1999).

In traditional Hawaiian culture, there was a celebration of diverse expressions of gender and sexuality as authentic aspects of being human. Throughout Hawaiian history, individuals known as "māhū" emerged, identifying their gender between male and female. Among the Kanaka Maoli indigenous people, there existed a tradition of multiple genders. Māhū could be biological males or females occupying a gender role that encompassed both masculine and feminine characteristics or fell somewhere in between. They held a revered social role as educators and preservers of ancient traditions and rituals. However, with the arrival of Europeans and the colonization of Hawaii, native culture was nearly eradicated, leading to discrimination against māhū in a society heavily influenced by white Eurocentric ideals (Perkins 2013).

Mexico

In Juchitán, located in Oaxaca, Mexico, gender norms differ significantly from traditional Western practices. Women here typically manage businesses, wear vibrant traditional attire, and exude confidence. They're seen as empowered individuals, and the community has a long-standing acceptance of homosexuality and transgender individuals as part of their cultural tradition. Men who adopt traditional female roles, known as "Muxes," are not only welcomed but also celebrated as symbols of good fortune (Maiale 2010). This community represents

a unique gender system that deviates from the binary gender classifications prevalent in many other cultures worldwide.

India

In Indian Hindu culture, compared to indigenous North American cultures, the gender system is predominantly binary, but the concepts themselves differ significantly from Western perspectives, often rooted in religious beliefs. Some Hindu myths depict androgynous or hermaphroditic ancestors, a theme echoed by ancient poets through imagery blending physical attributes of both sexes. These ideas persist in Hindu culture, even becoming institutionalized. The most well-known group embodying this is the hijras (Nanda 1999). Today, hijras are not categorized as male or female but rather as "hijra." Being a hijra

Image by Dibakar Roy on Pexels

involves a commitment that provides social support, some economic stability, and a cultural identity, connecting them to the broader community (Nanda 1999).

Brazil

In Brazilian culture, while a gender binary exists, it differs from the traditional Western model. Instead of strictly categorizing individuals as men and women, certain regions of Brazil classify them as men or "not-men." Men are associated with masculinity, while those displaying feminine traits are labeled as "not-men." This classification stems from the notion that gender is determined by sexual penetration, with individuals who are penetrated considered "not-male." Regardless of sexual orientation, anyone not fitting this criterion is still regarded as male in Brazilian society (Kulick 1997).

Among the groups most frequently discussed concerning gender in Brazil are the travestí, who are transgender sex workers. Unlike in indigenous North American and Indian cultures, the travestí's existence isn't rooted in religious beliefs; rather, it's an individual choice. Born as males, they undergo significant transformations to appear more feminine. However, they acknowledge they are not female and cannot fully transition into female. Instead, their culture revolves around this notion of being either a man or "not-man" (Kulick 1997).

Thailand

In Thailand, the term "kathoey" is used by both men and women to describe individuals who cross-dress and adopt identities that differ from their assigned birth gender, encompassing both masculine and feminine

traits. Historically, until the 1970s, individuals of all genders who engaged in cross-dressing could be referred to as kathoey. However, the term is now specifically used for male individuals who are transgender. Feminine females who cross-dress are now called "tom" (Nanda 1999). Consequently, "kathoey" is commonly understood today as a category for male transgender individuals, often referred to colloquially as "lady-boys" (Nanda 1999).

The term "kathoey" originates from a Buddhist myth depicting three original human sexes/genders: male, female, and a biological hermaphrodite, known as "kathoey." Unlike merely being a variation between male and female, "kathoey" is viewed as an independent third sex in Thai culture.

Nigeria

In Nigerian Yoruba society, social dynamics and gender roles diverge from those in the Western world. Instead of emphasizing gender differences, the culture primarily emphasizes age distinctions. The Yoruba language lacks strong gender distinctions, and their traditional culture maintains gender balance. This cultural perspective sheds light on alternative ways of understanding gender, which are common among various indigenous communities. Furthermore, men who opt to wear women's attire, jewelry, and cosmetics are designated as "wife of the god," as the role of wife is traditionally associated with women in relationships with mortal men (Case 2016).

Indonesia

In Indonesia, the term "waria" refers to a third gender outside of the conventional masculine and feminine norms in this predominantly Islamic country. Waria individuals are biologically male but exist along a spectrum of gender identity that goes beyond traditional Western notions of masculinity. The term encompasses individuals who may identify as male but exhibit feminine traits, occasionally wearing makeup, jewelry, and women's clothing. Some waria identify so strongly as female that they can seamlessly pass as female in their everyday interactions within society (Boellstorff 2004).

Australia

In Australia, indigenous transgender individuals are referred to as "sistergirls" and "brotherboys." Like in some other indigenous cultures, historical evidence suggests that transgender and intersex individuals were widely accepted before colonization. However, the influence of Eurocentric ideas on Western gender norms has led to increased stigma surrounding sistergirls and brotherboys in contemporary Australian society. Despite this, the emergence of more support groups tailored to these individuals suggests the potential for change. Gender, as we've seen, is constantly evolving and reshaping, reflecting the dynamic nature of societal constructions (Pullin 2014).

Gender Inequality & Oppression

In certain cultural traditions, females face significant challenges compared to males. These challenges include depriving females of nutrition, abandonment by husbands and fathers, abuse, neglect, violence, displacement as refugees, diseases, and childbirth complications, often exacerbated by lack of government support. **Oppression** refers to the systemic mistreatment of a particular group of people, which can manifest in various ways. This mistreatment can include cultural and symbolic forms, such as unrealistic standards of beauty and success, as well as material forms, like structured neglect or deprivation that affect certain groups more than others (Launius and Hassel 2022). While instances of sexism, classism, racism, and other forms of oppression can occur on a personal level, sociologists use the sociological imagination to examine these issues on a larger scale, focusing on how they influence cultural, economic, social, and material structures. To understand the historical oppression of women, it's essential to consider three key social factors across different societies: religion, tradition, and economic dynamics driven by labor supply and demand.

Religion

In most of the world's major religions, such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, and others, there are clear expectations regarding gender roles. These expectations dictate what is considered normal, desirable, acceptable, and expected behavior for males and females in various roles within societies and organizations throughout their lives. These gender roles significantly influence the daily lives and activities of individuals living under religious cultures both historically and in contemporary times.

For instance, religious texts like the Book of Leviticus in the Judeo-Christian Old Testament include numerous rituals related to women's hygiene, despite lacking scientific evidence supporting their health benefits or relevance to reproduction. These rituals were part of religious codes rather than scientifically justified practices.

Many ancient religious texts discuss perceived flaws of females, their reproductive challenges, their temperament, and regulations governing their conduct within religious communities. While some religious doctrines have evolved to reflect modern values of gender equality, religion often continues to justify gender inequality in patriarchal societies.

Throughout history, religions have wielded significant influence in many societies, with religious doctrines often reinforcing cultural values that subordinate women to men in various ways. For example, passages like Genesis 2:18 and 3:16 in the Bible depict Eve as an afterthought and suggest a hierarchical relationship between men and women, with man created in the image of God and woman as a secondary creation.

It's worth noting that interpretations of religious texts can vary widely based on individual and community perspectives, influenced by the social construction of reality. Different groups may interpret the same scriptures differently, shaping their understanding and behavior in diverse ways. Thus, it's not just the words of the

scriptures themselves but also the collective interpretation and construction of their meaning that influence how they are understood and applied in society.

Traditions

Alongside religion, tradition is another powerful social influence. Traditions have often been harsh towards women. Even though, on average, women live three years longer than men worldwide, and seven years longer in developed countries, there are still some countries where cultural and social oppression directly results in shorter life expectancies for women. These oppressive practices persist both publicly and privately.

Although pregnancy itself is not a disease, it poses significant health risks, particularly when governments fail to allocate resources to support expectant mothers before, during, and after childbirth. **Maternal death** refers to the death of a pregnant woman due to complications arising from pregnancy, delivery, or recovery. In 2017, an estimated 295,000 women died from pregnancy or childbirth-related causes, with a majority succumbing to severe bleeding, sepsis, eclampsia, obstructed labor, or the consequences of unsafe abortions – all of which have highly effective interventions available (UNFPA 2019). Preventing infections, managing complications, and assisting mothers typically require minimal medical attention.

Addressing this issue necessitates a comprehensive approach at the societal level, involving government policies, healthcare systems, economic support, family dynamics, and other institutional efforts. In 2017, the maternal mortality rate was significantly higher in low-income countries, with 462 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births, compared to 11 per 100,000 live births in high-income countries (World Health Organization 2019).

Female genital mutilation (FGM) involves the traditional cutting, circumcision, or removal of most or all external genitalia from women, resulting in the closure of some or part of the vagina until marriage when it's cut open. This practice is often carried out to uphold the perceived purity of females before marriage, which is an ideal in certain cultures. Some traditions have religious influences, while others are rooted in customs and rituals passed down through generations. However, it's important to note that the main body of any major world religion does not endorse or mandate this practice. Female genital mutilation predates Islam, although it is prevalent in some predominantly Muslim countries where local traditions have distorted the original teachings of the religion (Obermeyer 1999).

Female genital mutilation has no medical or therapeutic benefits and can lead to various adverse medical consequences, including pain, complications during childbirth, illness, and even death. Despite efforts from numerous human rights groups, the United Nations, scientists, advocates, the United States, the World Health Organization, and others, progress in eradicating this practice has been slow. One challenge is that women often perpetuate the ritual and continue the tradition as it was imposed upon them.

Foot binding was a practice in China that, much like the obsession with tiny waists in Victorian England, symbolized the epitome of female refinement. In families with daughters eligible for marriage, foot size served as a form of social currency and a way to climb the social ladder. Small feet were considered a sign of wealth,

as women with bound feet couldn't engage in strenuous work for extended periods. This economic status eventually became a symbol of sexual desirability for potential suitors. Even though foot binding has ancient roots, it persists in some regions today. Although it's banned in China, there are still instances of women and girls practicing foot binding.

The most sought-after bride possessed a foot measuring three inches, referred to as a "golden lotus"(Gates 2014). Having four-inch feet, known as a "silver lotus," was also respectable. However, feet measuring five inches or longer were deemed too large and dubbed "iron lotuses." Girls with feet this size had limited marriage prospects (Gates 2014).

To put it into perspective, imagine holding up your iPhone. Regardless of the model, its length is close to five inches. So, feet the size of your iPhone were considered less attractive, reducing a woman's chances of marrying into high social status. In fact, even women with feet just one inch shorter than the iPhone were not valued as highly as those with feet two inches shorter.

How does foot binding work? First, starting around the age of two or three, a girl's feet were soaked in hot water and her toenails trimmed short. Then, all her toes, except the big toe, were bent and pressed flat against the sole, creating a triangular shape. The foot was then bent double, straining the arch. Finally, the foot was tightly bound using a silk strip measuring ten feet long and two inches wide. These bindings were removed briefly every two days to prevent infections. Sometimes, any "excess" flesh was trimmed or left to rot. Girls were made to walk long distances to accelerate the breaking of their arches. As time passed, the bindings became tighter and the shoes smaller, crushing the heel and sole together. After about two years, the process was complete, resulting in a deep cleft that could hold a coin in place. Once a foot had been crushed and bound, its shape could not be reversed without subjecting the woman to the same pain all over again (Smithsonian Magazine 2015).

Indeed, despite its incredible nature, foot binding was endured and enforced by women themselves. While the practice is now condemned in China— the last shoe factory producing lotus shoes operated until 1999—it persisted for a millennium, partly due to women's social adherence to the tradition.

Child marriage, which is when someone gets married or enters into an informal union before turning 18, affects both boys and girls, although girls are disproportionately impacted (UNICEF 2022). Currently, approximately one-third of women aged 20-24 in the developing world were married as children. Those who marry before 18 face higher risks of domestic violence, marital rape, and even homicide.

According to a recent UNICEF report, around 10 million girls are married off before they turn 18 worldwide each year. While most child marriages occur in sub-Saharan Africa, India contributes significantly to this issue as well.

In India, child marriages are against the law and those involved can face fines and up to two years in prison. However, this tradition is deeply rooted in Indian culture, particularly in remote villages, where the entire community often supports it. It's rare for anyone to report these marriages to the police, making it difficult to stop them.

Child marriage is mainly driven by gender inequality, disproportionately affecting girls. Globally, girls are six

times more likely than boys to be married off before they turn 18. In some societies, girls are viewed as financial burdens, and marriage shifts this responsibility to the girl's husband. Economic hardships, including dowry expenses, may prompt families to marry off their daughters at a young age to alleviate financial strain.

Patriarchy, social class, and caste also play significant roles in shaping attitudes and expectations regarding the roles of women and girls. In many communities where child marriage is prevalent, rigid norms confine girls to roles as daughters, wives, and mothers. Girls are often regarded as possessions of their fathers and later, their husbands. Limited educational opportunities for girls, particularly in rural areas, further expose them to the risks associated with child marriage.

Sexual violence is a form of oppression that disproportionately affects women. Rape, an unlawful act involving forced sexual intercourse or threats of harm against a person's will, is a global issue (Amnesty International 2008). However, it is more prevalent in the United States compared to most other countries worldwide. Among the 195 countries globally, the U.S. consistently ranks in the top five percent for incidents of rape. South Africa has the highest rates of all crimes, including rape, according to consecutive studies conducted by the United Nations (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2024).

Women aged 15 to 44 are at a higher risk of experiencing rape and domestic violence than they are of cancer, motor accidents, war, or malaria, as reported by the United Nations using World Bank data (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2024). A study by the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics in 2000, which defines rape as forced penetration by the offender, found that 94% of reported rape victims are female, while 6% are male (Renninson 2000).

Most rapes in the United States go unreported, according to various sources, including the American Medical Association (1995). Sexual violence, particularly rape, is considered one of the most under-reported violent crimes (National Institute of Justice 2010). Victims often cite reasons such as fear of retaliation, shame, and self-blame for not reporting the rape. Under-reporting affects the accuracy of data on sexual violence.

Image by Saad Emris on Pexels

The practice of **forced veiling** or covering females' bodies from head to toe has sparked both opposition and support. Various religious groups, including Christians and Hindus, have historical traditions of veiling or covering. However, in the past three decades, certain fundamentalist Muslim nations and cultures have reverted to more traditional practices. The term "hijab," meaning to cover or veil in Arabic, has become increasingly common. In daily life, hijab often signifies modesty and privacy.

While some individuals in certain countries view hijab as a personal choice, for others, it's enforced through laws mandating veiling. Such laws violate human rights, including equality, privacy, and freedom of expression and belief (Amnesty International 2019). Previously, the Taliban even imposed the death penalty for non-compliance, along with restrictions on women's education and use of makeup. Many women's rights groups have raised concerns about

this trend. It's not just about the act of covering females, but rather, it symbolizes religious, traditional, and labor-related forms of oppression that have plagued women and persist today.

Misogyny appears in various forms, including male privilege, patriarchy, gender discrimination, sexual harassment, belittlement, violence against women, and sexual objectification (Code 2000). The public denigration of women has been tolerated across different cultures because it aligns with the prevalent attitudes and interactions in daily life, where those who are privately undervalued or deemed flawed are publicly demeaned. Misogyny, characterized by the hatred and mistreatment of women, often manifests as physical or verbal abuse and oppressive behavior towards women. **Misogynistic language** comes in many shapes and leads to undesirable consequences. It can perpetuate harmful masculine ideals, reinforce dominant gender norms, oppress women, and constrain men from expressing their gender more freely (Moloney and Love 2018).

Gender Disparities in the U.S.

Gender inequality remains a pervasive issue in the United States, spanning across various domains of society. This section delves into several key aspects of gender inequality, shedding light on the persistent challenges faced by women. Wage disparity continues to plague the workforce, with women earning less than men for comparable work, perpetuating economic disparities. In the realm of politics, women still struggle for equal representation and face barriers in breaking the highest political glass ceiling. Gender violence, including intimate partner violence, rape, and sexual assault, remains prevalent, highlighting the alarming rates of violence experienced by women. Moreover, the use of misogynistic language perpetuates harmful stereotypes and attitudes towards women, contributing to a culture of discrimination and oppression. Through an examination of these interconnected issues, this section aims to elucidate the multifaceted nature of gender inequality and the ongoing efforts towards achieving gender equity in the United States.

Wage disparity

Wage gaps between men and women are often explained by differences in labor supply and demand. Statistics reveal historical and ongoing inequalities, with women typically earning less than men. In a 1997 presentation to the United Nations General Assembly, Diane White highlighted that American women lose an estimated $250,000 over their lifetimes due to this wage gap (United Nations 2024). Nationally, women working full-time, year-round jobs earn a median annual pay of $40,742, while men in similar positions earn $51,212, resulting in women being paid 80 cents for every dollar paid to men (U.S. Census Bureau 2022).

The wage gap is even wider for women of color. For instance, African American women earn approximately 63 cents and Latinas earn just 54 cents for every dollar earned by white, non-Hispanic men (U.S. Census Bureau 2022). Asian women fare slightly better, earning 85 cents for every dollar earned by white, non-Hispanic men, though specific ethnic subgroups may experience more significant disparities.

Why do women receive lower wages? Part of the explanation lies in traditional views of women's roles as primarily reproductive, which are often considered inferior or supplementary. These beliefs, coupled with the perception that reproductive responsibilities disrupt work continuity, contribute to wage disparities. Outdated notions and economic factors have perpetuated the practice of paying women less than men for comparable work, despite similar levels of education, experience, and effort.

Politics

Women have faced numerous challenges in American politics, from fighting for their right to vote to advocating for equal representation in decision-making roles. Despite legislative efforts to promote gender equality, discrimination against women persists in the political arena. It wasn't until 1981 that the first woman, Sandra Day O'Connor, was appointed to the Supreme Court, followed by Ruth Bader Ginsburg. In 2024, four out of the nine sitting justices are women: Sonia Sotomayor, Elena Kagan, Amy Coney Barrett, and Ketanji Brown Jackson.

In 1996, Madeline Albright became the first female Secretary of State, a position later held by Condoleezza Rice and Hillary Clinton. Women's presence in politics gained significant attention during the 2008 election when Hillary Clinton ran for the Democratic nomination against Barack Obama, becoming the first woman with a substantial chance of securing a major party's nomination. However, her candidacy faced scrutiny regarding her appearance and style, highlighting persistent gender biases.

Despite some progress, gender stereotypes continue to affect perceptions of female politicians. Data from a 2006 study showed that both male and female voters tended to view men as more competent politicians than women (Sanbonmatsu and Dolan 2007). In 2024, women hold only 24 out of 100 seats in the Senate, constituting 24% of its members, and 104 out of 535 seats in Congress, representing 27% of total seats. While this marks a significant increase compared to a decade ago, it still falls short of reflecting the proportion of women in the U.S. population.

Gender violence

Gender-based violence refers to violence directed against an individual because of their gender (European Institute for Gender Equality 2014). Shockingly, in the United States, nearly 20 people are physically abused by an intimate partner every minute. This adds up to over 10 million women and men experiencing such abuse in a single year. Studies show that approximately 1 in 3 women and 1 in 4 men have encountered some form of physical violence from an intimate partner during their lifetime. Additionally, about 1 in 5 women and 1 in 7 men have suffered severe physical violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime. Disturbingly, 1 in 7 women and 1 in 18 men have been stalked by an intimate partner to the extent that they felt intense fear for their safety or the safety of someone close to them (Black et al. 2011).

Intimate partner violence constitutes 15% of all violent crimes. This type of violence has severe repercussions

on physical, mental, and sexual health. It has been associated with various health issues such as adolescent pregnancy, unintended pregnancy, miscarriage, stillbirth, nutritional deficiencies, gastrointestinal problems, neurological disorders, chronic pain, disabilities, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and non-communicable diseases like hypertension, cancer, and cardiovascular diseases. Moreover, individuals who are victims of domestic violence are at a heightened risk of developing addiction to alcohol, tobacco, or drugs (World Health Organization 2013).

Rape and sexual assault

The United States Justice Bureau defines **rape** as "forced sexual intercourse, including psychological coercion and physical force, where penetration by the offender(s) occurs. This definition encompasses attempted rapes, with victims of both genders and of various sexual orientations, including heterosexual and same-sex rapes. Attempted rape also includes instances of verbal threats of rape" (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2024). Shockingly, one in five women and one in 71 men in the United States have experienced rape in their lifetime. Nearly half of female (46.7%) and male (44.9%) rape victims were assaulted by someone they knew. Among these cases, 45.4% of female victims and 29% of male victims were raped by an intimate partner. Interestingly, from 1995 to 2010, the estimated annual rate of female rape or sexual assault victimizations decreased by 58%, from five victimizations per 1,000 females aged 12 or older to 2.1 per 1,000. During 2005-2010, women aged 34 or younger, those from lower-income households, and residents of rural areas experienced some of the highest rates of sexual violence. Moreover, during the same period, 78% of sexual violence incidents involved an offender who was a family member, intimate partner, friend, or acquaintance (Walters et al. 2013).

The Justice Bureau also defines **sexual assault** as a "wide range of victimizations, distinct from rape or attempted rape, involving unwanted sexual contact between the victim and the offender. These acts may or may not involve force and can include grabbing or fondling, as well as verbal threats" (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2024). Shockingly, one in five women and one in 16 men experience sexual assault while in college. Despite this prevalence, 63% of sexual assaults go unreported to the police. Furthermore, various studies reveal alarming rates of sexual violence, excluding rape, among different sexual orientation groups, with higher percentages reported among bisexual individuals. Traditional gender norms and inequality are closely linked to sexual violence. When societies or systems tolerate or trivialize violence against women, rates of such violence increase. Additionally, scholars have observed that problematic forms of masculinity, often termed toxic masculinity, can contribute to men's violence against women. This phenomenon arises when masculinity is equated with physical force and violence, reinforcing aggressive, dominant, or hypersexual behavior (Jhally et al. 1999; Kimmel 2013).

Misogynistic language

Misogyny takes various forms, including male privilege, patriarchy, gender discrimination, sexual harassment,

the belittling of women, violence against women, and sexual objectification (Code 2000). Sadly, demeaning women in public has often been deemed acceptable across different cultures because it aligns with how society privately devalues and perceives them as flawed. Misogyny, characterized by hatred towards women, frequently manifests through physical or verbal abuse and the oppressive mistreatment of women.

The use of misogynistic language yields numerous negative consequences. It can perpetuate harmful ideals of masculinity, reinforce dominant gender norms, oppress women, and limit men's ability to express their gender freely (Moloney and Love 2018). Additionally, linguistic sexism is a significant concern, as it involves discrimination rooted in assumptions about biological sex, often leading to the belief that men are inherently superior to women. Misogyny can be seen as an extreme and violent expression of sexism.

Efforts have been made by professional and volunteer organizations to raise awareness about the demeaning language prevalent in English, which often perpetuates biases against women, people of color, the economically disadvantaged, and non-royal individuals. By discussing and addressing the assumptions embedded in language, we contribute to social transformation towards fairness and equality, both culturally and biologically. Understanding the influence of language on our culture and how cultural values impact our treatment of one another underscores the significance of language in shaping our quality of life. For instance, language perpetuates unequal connotations such as master—mistress, bachelor—spinster, and generic terms like "he" or "man" in professions such as policeman or fireman, which exclude women.

2.2 DATE & MATE SELECTION

Seventy years ago, individuals often chose their partners based on their parents' approval, the perceived health and morality of the person, and their economic stability. Today, however, we often seek soul mates in our partners. What caused this shift in how we approach selecting a mate? The changes in society over this time period played a significant role. Before examining these changes, let's clarify the purpose of dating and what we aim to achieve through it.

Marriage

As mentioned, seventy years ago and continuing through the 1960s, people typically sought a partner primarily to start a family. They aimed for what was known as an **institutional marriage**, often referred to as a "good enough marriage," which adhered to clearly defined gender roles, reflecting functionalist ideas. During this period, marriage was not primarily about love but rather about establishing a family together. The main objective was marriage itself, particularly to have children, and the means to achieve this was to settle down and start a family as soon as possible. There was little emphasis on finding the perfect partner; instead, the focus was on promptly starting a family. Getting married and becoming a parent were seen as markers of adulthood. For both men and women of that time, marriage and parenthood were the primary pathways to achieving adult status in society. For men, becoming a husband and father allowed them to fulfill the role of breadwinner, showcasing their masculinity through financial responsibility for their dependents. This transition to adulthood was considered unlocked through marriage. For women, marriage was seen as a means to become mothers and fulfill traditional feminine roles. The significance of marriage extended beyond personal feelings of love; it was viewed as a crucial economic and political institution. As Coontz (2006) aptly stated, marriage was too crucial an economic and political institution to be based solely on something as irrational as love.

In the past, there were limited ways for young people to transition into adulthood, so marriage often followed just six months of dating. The rush was to gain independence from parental oversight and start the next chapter of life. Back then, love was understood within the framework of traditional gender roles, rather than appreciating the unique qualities of the individual partner. This stands in sharp contrast to today's approach, which prioritizes individual desires. The rise of the soulmate marriage model reflects the increasing emphasis on personal emotional and romantic fulfillment, paralleling the growing individualism in the United States and a shift away from communal values.

The **soulmate marriage** model is driven by a desire for passionate love, focusing on personal fulfillment rather than solely on traditional societal roles like procreation. Dating is now viewed as a journey toward self-

discovery and happiness, rather than solely a means to start a family. In 2024, we have the luxury of taking more time to explore relationships before rushing into marriage, allowing us to search for 'the one' at our own pace. However, while soulmate marriages offer the potential for great fulfillment, they also carry a high risk of disappointment. In our current society, we expect our partners to fulfill roles that were once provided by an entire community: offering a sense of belonging, identity, continuity, transcendence, and mystery, all within one person.

View the video provided below to witness Stephanie Coontz's portrayal of the evolution of marriage, comparing its past and present states. Stephanie Coontz is renowned as one of the leading authorities on marriage in the United States.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.whccd.edu/livingtogether/?p=66#oembed-1

Dating

Take a moment to glance around your classroom. How many single people do you think are sitting there? In simpler terms, how many people in the same room do you think are currently unattached? And of those, how many do you find attractive enough to consider as a potential date, and how many do you instinctively feel you'd probably never date? These are the kinds of questions and answers that researchers explore when studying dating and mate selection. But before we delve into this, it's crucial to recognize that our perceptions of attractiveness are shaped by societal norms, culture, and our own personal experiences.

The concept of dating as we know it today emerged during the 20th century. **Dating** involves meeting and spending time together to get to know one another. Before dating became widespread, courting was the norm in the United States. Courting, characterized by strict rules and customs, transitioned into dating thanks to the widespread use of automobiles following the Industrial Revolution. The newfound mobility provided by automobiles allowed young people more freedom, often away from the watchful eyes of their parents for the first time. With the shift from agrarian lifestyles to industrial work, love rather than practical necessity became the primary basis for marital relationships. Nowadays, dating takes on various forms, including traditional couple outings, group activities, online platforms, apps, and casual encounters.

In the United States, there are millions of individuals aged 18-24, which is considered prime dating and mate selection age. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), approximately 30.6 million people fell into this age group in 2017, accounting for around 9.4% of the U.S. population. Does this mean there are potentially millions of suitable mates out there? In theory, yes, but realistically, it would be impossible

for anyone to interact with such many people in their lifetime. Dating and mate selection aren't about quantity but rather about finding quality and intimacy in relationships.

When we encounter others, we subconsciously categorize them as either potential dates or not based on societal norms of attractiveness and suitability. This process, known as **filtering**, involves various criteria, including physical appearance, mutual acquaintances, and personal preferences.

Image by Sharefaith on Pexels

Propinquity refers to the geographic closeness between potential partners. It's the nearness you might feel when living in the same dorms or apartment buildings, attending the same university or college, working at the same job, or being part of the same religious community. Essentially, it means being in the same place at the same time, breathing the same air. Proximity is important because the more you see or interact with someone, whether directly or indirectly, the more likely you are to view them as a potential partner. Increased contact increases the likelihood of seeing someone as dateable.

Attraction and the assessment of physical appearance are subjective and vary from person to person, influenced by cultural standards of attractiveness. What one person finds attractive may not be what others find appealing. However, there are certain biological, psychological, and socio-emotional factors related to appearance that generally make an individual more attractive to a wider range of people. These factors include possessing slightly above-average desirable traits and facial symmetry. Nevertheless, societal norms play a significant role in shaping perceptions of attractiveness.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, the average height and weight for men and women in the United States are as follows: men are approximately five feet ten inches tall and weigh about 177 pounds, while women are about five feet four inches tall and weigh about 144 pounds (Sampson and Brazier 2023). Have you ever compared yourself to these averages or to people you know? Many of us tend to gauge our own attractiveness based on such comparisons. Understanding that we subjectively assess our attractiveness is crucial because it often shapes our choices in dating partners, as we tend to limit our options to those we perceive to be in our same attractiveness category.

If you are six feet tall as a man or five feet eight inches as a woman, you are slightly above the average height. For cisgender men, possessing what society deems "manly" facial features (such as a strong chin and jaw, along with some upper body musculature, and a slim waist) can make them more universally desirable. Conversely, cisgender women with larger eyes, softer facial features, a less prominent chin, fuller lips, and an hourglass figure tend to embody more culturally desirable traits. Essentially, individuals who fit into society's norms of attractiveness are often perceived as more appealing.

But what if you don't possess these universally desirable traits? Are you automatically excluded from the dating and mating pool? Not necessarily. One principle that significantly influences how we choose our

partners is homogamy. **Homogamy** refers to the tendency for individuals to seek out partners who are similar to them in terms of attractiveness, background, interests, and needs. This tendency holds true for most couples as they typically pair off with someone who shares more similarities than differences with them. While it's commonly said that opposites attract, research suggests that similarities in a relationship can indirectly contribute to its long-term quality by minimizing disagreements and fostering mutual understanding.

Conversely, **heterogamy** involves dating or pairing with individuals who possess differences in traits. While all of us engage in relationships with both heterogamous and homogamous individuals, there tends to be more emphasis on the latter over time, especially after commitments are made. Couples often find themselves developing more similarities as they spend more time together, adopting similar mannerisms, interests, and even dressing alike.

Abraham Maslow (1970), one of the most influential psychologists of the mid-20th century, introduced the concept of the Hierarchy of Needs, depicted in his famous pyramid. Maslow's theory sheds light on how and why we choose our partners by focusing on how they fulfill our needs. For example, individuals from dysfunctional families may be attracted to partners who can provide the nurturing and support they lacked in childhood. On the other hand, those from supportive backgrounds may seek partners who offer growth and support in intellectual or self-actualization areas of life. While it may seem self-centered, our choices in dating and mating are often based on what we perceive we can gain from the relationship or how our needs can be met.

ANALYZING FAMILY STRUCTURES

Dating & Courtship

Compare the practices of courtship and dating. Describe how industrialization and consumerism brought about changes in how people explore relationships. Do you think courtship has evolved for better or for worse? Qualify your answer with examples.

Finding a date

Surprisingly, nowadays, online dating has become the most common method for people to connect with each other. While traditional ways of meeting, such as through friends, family, or community gatherings, have been on the decline, the trend of meeting online has been steadily rising. According to a recent study conducted by Stanford sociologist Rosenfeld, which analyzed data from a nationwide survey of American adults in 2017, it was found that approximately 39 percent of heterosexual couples reported meeting their partners online. This is a significant increase from the 22 percent reported in 2009 (Shashkevich 2019). Take a look at this excerpt from the Stanford News discussing Rosenfeld's findings.

Mate Selection

The **social exchange theory**, along with its rational choice formula, sheds further light on the process of selecting a partner. We aim to maximize the benefits and minimize the drawbacks in our choices of a mate. It's like a simple equation:

REWARDS – COSTS = CHOICE

When we engage with potential dates and mates, we mentally weigh the pros and cons. For instance, she might think, "He's tall, confident, funny, and friends with my friends." But as the conversation progresses, she might add, "But, he chews tobacco, only wants to party, and just flirted with another woman while we were talking." Throughout our interactions, we assess them based on various factors like appearance, personality, goals, and how we see ourselves in comparison. Rarely do we seek out the most physically attractive person unless we perceive ourselves as equally desirable. Instead, we typically evaluate the overall exchange rationally, aiming to maximize our gains while minimizing our losses.

Furthermore, the evaluation of a potential relationship also heavily depends on factors like racial and ethnic background, religious beliefs, socioeconomic status, and age similarities. The process of selecting a partner involves many obvious and subtle processes that you can relate to your own experiences. If you're single, you can apply these concepts to your own dating and mate selection endeavors.

Bernard Murstein explored the **stimulus-value-role theory** of marital choice in the early 1970s. According to Murstein (1972), the exchange in a relationship is mutual and relies on the subjective attractions and assets each individual brings. The **stimulus** is the initial trait, usually physical, that draws you to someone. As you spend time together, you compare **values** to assess compatibility and calculate the balance between maximizing rewards and minimizing costs. If compatibility and relational support align, the couple may progress to assuming **roles** such as boyfriend, girlfriend, husband, or wife, which may include exclusive dating, cohabitation, engagement, or marriage. The figure below illustrates how the stimulus-values-role theory overlaps with a couple's development of intimacy through increased time and interaction.

But how do strangers move from not knowing each other to living together or getting married? From the first encounter, two strangers embark on a process that either excludes or includes each other as potential

partners and begins establishing intimacy. **Intimacy** involves a mutual sense of acceptance, trust, and connection, despite acknowledging each other's imperfections. In essence, intimacy is about becoming close to one another, accepting each other as is, and feeling accepted by the other. It's important to note that intimacy isn't limited to sexual intercourse although it may be one expression of it. When two strangers meet, there's a stimulus that catches one or both parties' attention.

In Judith Wallerstein's book, there's a story about a woman who, while on a date, heard another man laugh in a way that reminded her of Santa Claus. Wallerstein (2019) asked her date to introduce her, and that marked the beginning of a relationship that eventually led to her marrying the man with the distinctive laugh. Many people share stories of feeling a subtle connection, like reuniting with a long-lost friend, when they first meet someone they click with.

The process of forming a connection starts with a stimulus, which could be physical, social, emotional, intellectual, or spiritual, sparking interest and initiating interaction. As time passes and interaction increases, two individuals may compare and contrast their values, which ultimately determines whether they include or exclude each other from their lives. The more time spent together, coupled with growing trust and self-acceptance, the greater the intimacy and likelihood of a long-term relationship.

Although Figure 2.2 suggests that intimacy typically increases smoothly over time, this isn't always the case. As a couple develops a bond, they establish patterns of commitment and loyalty, leading to the roles listed in Figure 2.2. These roles increase in commitment level but don't follow a predictable sequence. For instance, some couples may stick to **exclusive dating**, the mutual agreement to exclude others from dating either individual in the relationship, while others may progress to cohabitation or marriage.

Figure 2.2 Stimulus-values-role theory
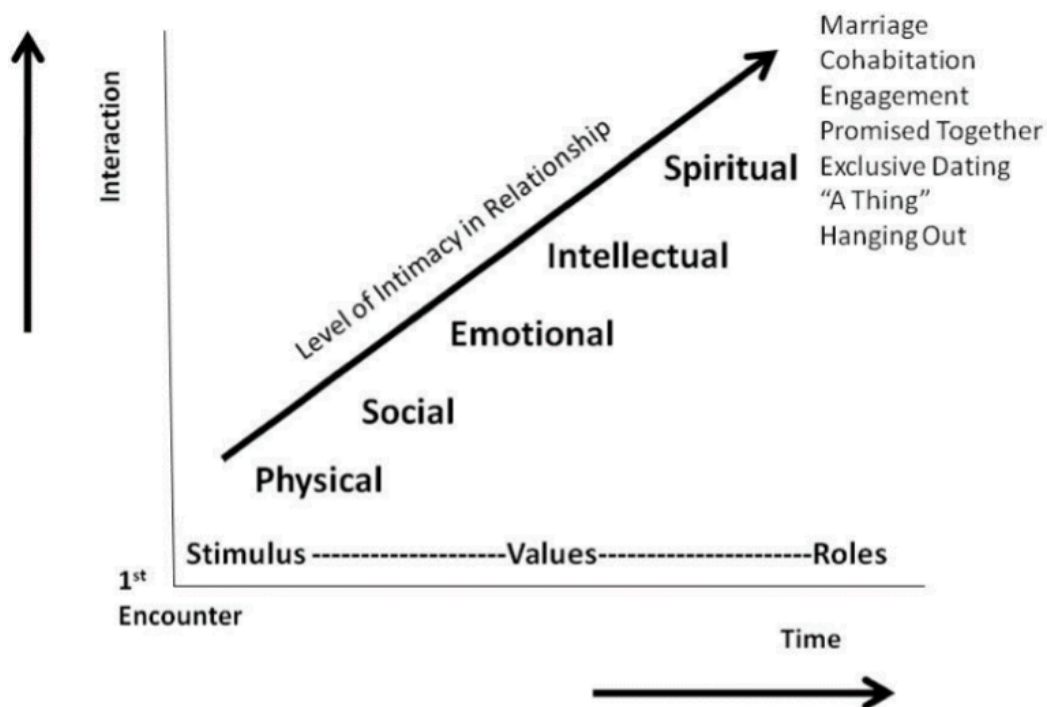
It's worth noting that what you look for in a date may differ from what you seek in a spouse. Dates are temporary adventures where factors like physical attraction, personality, entertainment value, and social status matter. Dates can be short-term or consist of a few outings. Many college students develop relationships that are noticed by themselves and their peers but lack a defined destination until they have a DTR, or **"Define the Relationship"** talk, where they openly discuss their goals for the relationship, such as exclusive dating or ending it.

Have you ever experienced a DTR? Many find them awkward due to the stakes involved. DTRs can be risky because they require vulnerability and self-disclosure. In the TV show *The Office*, Jim and Pam navigate several DTRs early in their relationship, reflecting on the challenges many couples face in real life.
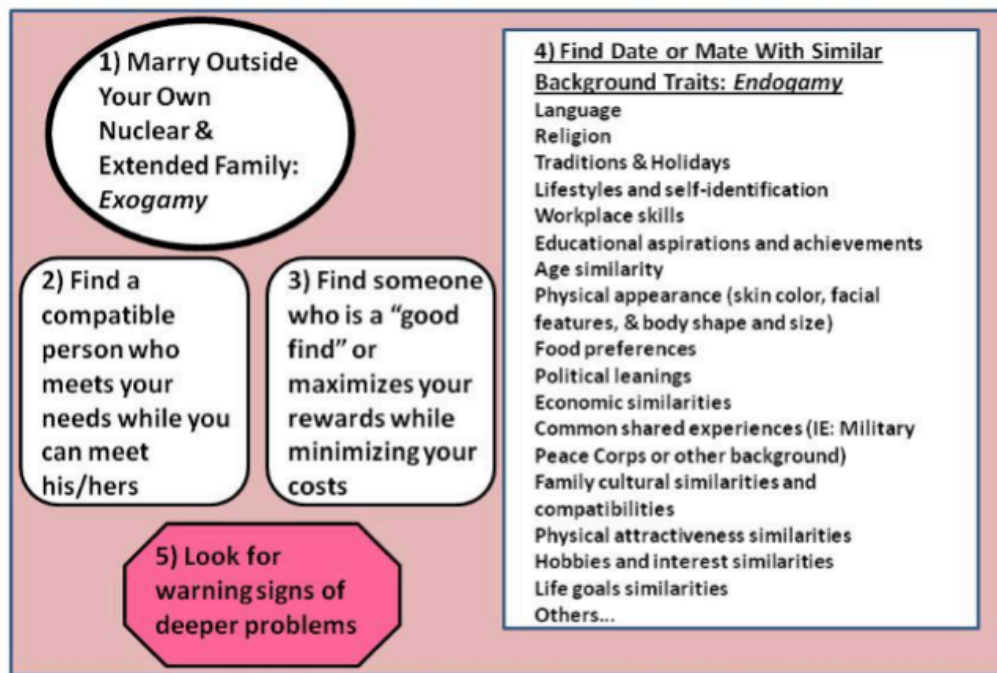
Jim and Pam's story also highlights the importance of cultural similarities in relationships. Despite coming from the same region and sharing many social and cultural traits, their relationship faced hurdles. Cultural and ethnic background traits influence inclusion and exclusion decisions in relationships, with the **similarity principle** playing a key role. This principle suggests that perceived similarities between individuals increase the likelihood of relationship success, with individuals often prioritizing certain background traits over others based on personal preferences and beliefs.

In the movie *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, the main character, a Greek American woman, meets a charming man from a different ethnic background. She struggles with including him as a potential partner due to her perception that her cultural and family background might not be desirable to others. However, he finds her family deeply appealing because they fulfill his need for connection, tradition, and support. He embraces the Greek culture and adopts her family as his own.

In reality, most people don't make such significant compromises when choosing a partner. Relationships are more likely to develop when there are common traits, particularly in areas that individuals consider important. Dating often leads to exclusive relationships, allowing young adults to gain experience in intimate relationships and daily routines together. While not all dating relationships evolve into long-term commitments, the experience gained is invaluable compared to the pain of a breakup.

Figure 2.3. summarizes several rules that can guide how we include potential partners in our dating pool. Rule #1 is **exogamy**, which involves pairing off or marrying someone outside of your own familial groups. Rule #4 emphasizes maximizing homogamy by seeking commonalities that ease daily adjustments in the relationship. While finding a perfect match on all traits is unlikely, compatibility in personality and background characteristics is crucial. Rule #5 is particularly important as it involves identifying trouble and danger signs in a potential partner. **Intimate violence** is a serious concern, especially for women, and early warning signs should not be ignored.

Figure 2.3 Dating & Mate Selection Rules

1) Marry Outside Your Own Nuclear & Extended Family: *Exogamy*

2) Find a compatible person who meets your needs while you can meet his/hers

3) Find someone who is a "good find" or maximizes your rewards while minimizing your costs

4) Find Date or Mate With Similar Background Traits: *Endogamy*
Language
Religion
Traditions & Holidays
Lifestyles and self-identification
Workplace skills
Educational aspirations and achievements
Age similarity
Physical appearance (skin color, facial features, & body shape and size)
Food preferences
Political leanings
Economic similarities
Common shared experiences (IE: Military Peace Corps or other background)
Family cultural similarities and compatibilities
Physical attractiveness similarities
Hobbies and interest similarities
Life goals similarities
Others...

5) Look for warning signs of deeper problems

Source: Hammond, Ron, Paul Cheney, Raewyn Pearsey. 2021. Sociology of the Family. Ron J. Hammond & Paul W. Cheney. Retrieved May 7, 2024 (https://freesociologybooks.com/Sociology_Of_The_Family/08_Dating_and_Mate_Selection.php).

Most people don't encounter extreme dangers while dating, but emotional risks are common. Engagements often occur more frequently in warmer months, leading to the initiation of various social experiences as couples announce their plans to family and friends. Engagement announcements mark the exclusion of other potential suitors as the couple transitions into exclusive monogamy. The engagement ring symbolizes the agreement to marry, with its cost varying widely. Wedding plans are formalized through newspaper announcements, mailed invitations, or online posts. In-laws become part of the family network upon marriage, though relationships with them may not always be smooth sailing. There's a recent article by Jennifer Bernstein (2019) titled "What does an engagement ring actually signify?" that's definitely worth checking out.

Establishing connections with extended family members is essential for a successful engagement. In-law relationships are expected to be at least somewhat compatible with the new family member (the fiancé), ideally leading to close bonds. Engagement signifies the couple's commitment to the direction of their relationship, ultimately leading to marriage and the blending of social networks, possessions, finances, intimacy, rights, children, and other aspects. It offers opportunities for the couple to practice various aspects of married life. While most engagements culminate in marriage, some end in breakups where the wedding is called off. Couples may realize they aren't as compatible as they initially thought, face geographical separation, encounter conflicts with in-laws, or simply drift apart.

Finding a spouse can be challenging due to what social scientists term a **marriage squeeze** in the United States—a demographic imbalance in the number of eligible males and females. Additionally, there's the phenomenon of the **marriage gradient**, where women tend to marry slightly older and taller men, while

men tend to marry women perceived as slightly more attractive. According to the U.S. Census, there are approximately 15,675,000 males and 15,037,000 females aged 18 to 24, leaving a surplus of 638,000 males in the marriage market within this age group (Walker et al. 2023). This surplus contributes to a "marriage squeeze" because women generally prefer to marry men who are slightly older, resulting in an imbalance where there are too few females for all available males.

China and India face significant challenges related to their marriage squeeze issues. Sex-selective abortion, cultural preferences for males, female infanticide, and societal views that consider female children burdensome rather than sources of joy have led to tens of millions of missing females in these populations. For example, India had an excess of 35 million men nationwide (Denyer and Gowen 2018). Similarly, China was reported to have approximately 35 million more men than women (Denyer and Gowen 2018).

ANALYZING FAMILY STRUCTURES

The Cost of Singlehood

Read the article, "The Cost of Singlehood," from *The Atlantic*.

Respond to the article with the following:

1. Summarize the main idea and conclusion the authors conveyed.
2. What was your reaction or feelings about the reading?
3. What is the most important idea or concept presented as it relates to the economic and social impact of remaining single?

"The Cost of Singlehood" by Katie Conklin, Lemoore College is licensed under CC BY 4.0

2.3 END OF MODULE MATERIAL

CORE INSIGHTS

This module provides a comprehensive exploration of sex, gender, and relationship dynamics, delving into their multifaceted nature and societal implications. Firstly, scholars will gain a deep understanding of the concepts of sex and gender, unraveling the complexities of gender socialization processes and the distinction between biological sex and socially constructed gender. They will analyze the profound impact of gender norms on individuals and society, recognizing how these norms shape behavior, opportunities, and expectations. Moreover, learners will explore various methods and approaches used in gender research, from qualitative to quantitative methodologies, to investigate topics such as gender identity, roles, and stereotypes. This examination equips students with the analytical tools to critically assess and understand the intricate dynamics of gender in diverse contexts.

Furthermore, this module reviews the rich tapestry of gender diversity and norms, highlighting the fluidity and complexity of gender identities and expressions across cultures and historical contexts. Students will analyze gender inequality and oppression, dissecting the structural and institutional barriers that perpetuate disparities based on gender, including wage gaps, limited access to resources, and gender-based violence. Additionally, scholars will investigate gender inequality in the United States, examining disparities in education, employment, politics, and healthcare, and identifying strategies for promoting gender equity. Lastly, students will explore the intricacies of dating, marriage, and mate selection, unpacking cultural variations in relationship norms, the evolution of romantic relationships over time, and the factors influencing partner selection. They will analyze the institution of marriage, including its historical roots, legal frameworks, and contemporary debates, while also scrutinizing the process of dating and mate selection, considering individual preferences, societal expectations, and cultural influences on relationship dynamics.

RESOURCES

1. Gender & LGBTQ (Pew Research Center 2024)
2. Boundaries Info Sheet (Therapist Aid 2016)
3. How To Start Dating At Every Stage of Life (BetterHelp Editorial Team 2024)
4. How to Support a Friend or Loved One Who Has Been Sexually Abused (New York Times 2019)

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PART III
MODULE 3: LOVE & INTIMACY

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this module, scholars will be able to:

1. Define and differentiate between various types of love, including romantic love, platonic love, and familial love, and understand how these types of love manifest in different relationships and contexts.

2. Explore the concept of sexual scripts, including sexual behavior scripts, the double standard, and the role of hookup culture in contemporary sexual interactions, and analyze how these scripts influence individuals' attitudes, behaviors, and expectations in sexual relationships.

3. Examine the diverse aspects of sexuality, including sexual identity, sexual orientation, sexual behaviors, and sexual health, and understand how these components contribute to individuals' overall sexual experiences and well-being.

4. Investigate the concept of sexual orientation, including heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, and asexuality, and recognize the fluidity and complexity of sexual orientation across individuals and communities.

5. Analyze societal norms and attitudes surrounding sexuality and sexual orientation, including stigmas, stereotypes, and discrimination, and explore strategies for promoting inclusivity, acceptance, and understanding of diverse sexual identities and experiences.

KEY TERMS & CONCEPTS

- Agapé
- Altruism
- Asexuality
- Attachment
- Committed love
- Criteria or realistic love
- Deceptive love
- Double standard
- Eros
- Excitement
- Fantasies
- Friendship love
- Genderbread Person
- Gender expression
- Gender identity
- Heterosexuality
- Homosexuality
- Hookup
- Intimacy
- Long-term relationships
- Love
- Ludis

- Mania
- Masturbation
- Orgasm
- Perception
- Plateau
- Pragma
- Resolution
- Romantic attraction
- Self-disclosure
- Sexual attraction
- Sexual fluidity
- Sexual orientation
- Sexual Response Cycle (SRC)
- Sexual scripts
- Sexual script theory
- Sexual socialization
- Sexuality
- Somatosensory cortex (SC)
- Storgé
- Short-term relationships
- Unrequited love

INTRODUCTION

This module explores the multifaceted nature of love and intimacy, focusing on affection and emotional connection, sexual response, and sexuality. We begin by examining the different types of love, from romantic to platonic, and how these forms of affection create deep emotional bonds between individuals. The module then examines the complexities of the sexual response, investigating the role of the brain, sensation, and perception in sexual arousal. It also considers the influence of hormones and pheromones on sexual attraction and behavior, as well as the physiological aspects of sexual response.

Further, the module addresses sexual scripts, which are the societal guidelines that shape sexual behavior and expectations. It explores various sexual behavior scripts, including the role of fantasies and masturbation, and how these scripts are influenced by cultural norms such as the double standard and hookup culture. Finally,

the module reviews sexuality, with a focus on sexual orientation and the diverse ways individuals experience and express their sexuality. By understanding these elements, we gain a comprehensive view of how love and intimacy are experienced and expressed in contemporary society.

Begin by viewing the video addressing the necessity of love. Skye Cleary inquires whether romantic love serves a purpose, exploring the insights of five philosophical viewpoints on the subject.

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3.1 AFFECTION & EMOTIONAL CONNECTION

Love and intimacy are closely linked in relationships. **Love** encompasses various aspects such as physical, emotional, sexual, intellectual, or social affection that one person feels for another. It includes feelings like adoration, desire, preference, possessiveness, care, service, and even worship. On the other hand, **intimacy** refers to a close relationship where there's mutual acceptance, nurturing, and trust shared to some extent. To understand love in human relationships, it's essential to consider how our socialized self either boosts or hinders our ability to love.

Our socialized self develops under the guidance of caregivers or parents. As a newborn, you relied entirely on adults to meet your needs and provide a safe environment. You needed to be fed, clothed, bathed, held, and loved. Caregivers fulfilled these basic needs during your early development, forming attachments in the process. An **attachment** is an emotional and social bond between individuals, and humans are driven to form attachments throughout their lives.

Attachments are crucial for human existence and form the emotional foundation of our relationships. As an infant, you learned to trust those who cared for you, knowing they would return and be reliable. With cognitive development, your brain enables you to love and care for the person you're attached to, regardless of whether they reciprocate. This understanding shapes how you form attachments as an adult. For instance, strong attachments in childhood may make it easier to form adult relationships, while weak or disrupted attachments may pose challenges in forming adult connections.

Romantic chemistry often evokes imagery of warm, affectionate sentiments flowing from the heart's core, doesn't it? However, the reality is a bit more intricate. The primary architect of attraction is, in fact, the brain, orchestrating swift and intricate computations when evaluating a potential partner. In this exploration, Dawn Maslar discusses how our five senses play pivotal roles in this intricate mating dance, supported by intriguing findings from various studies.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.whccd.edu/livingtogether/?p=71#oembed-1

One of the earliest signs that you're falling in love as an adult is feeling happier and more confident when

you're with the other person. It's suggested that your capacity to love is limited by your own self-esteem. Why? Because intimacy grows alongside love, and being intimate means being able to be genuine and authentic with your partner.

When two strangers meet, they often start to share personal information, a process known as **self-disclosure**. This means revealing your true self to another person. However, once you or the other person opens up and shares something vulnerable, you're entering into a kind of emotional minefield where there's a risk of getting hurt. Past relationship experiences, feelings of emotional vulnerability, and the fear of being seen as flawed all play a part in this process of letting someone else see your true self.

This sorting process is influenced by many interactions with others that came before this moment. Going through past experiences can make it risky for some, but once you start sharing, there's potential for intimacy and love to grow. Intimacy is more likely to develop when the other person reciprocates by also sharing personal information.

For example, imagine a scenario where a guy and a girl meet during university cheer squad tryouts. They make small talk while waiting in line, but true intimacy requires deeper conversations. As they share more personal details, they create a foundation for intimacy. If their interactions continue positively over time, they may become close friends or even romantic partners.

However, if one person doesn't reciprocate by sharing personal information, intimacy is less likely to develop. Once self-disclosure happens, there's a risk involved. If both parties reciprocate, intimacy can grow. But if not, intimacy is unlikely to develop further.

Researchers from different fields offer various explanations for our attraction to others. Psychologists and biologists point to chemicals and hormones in our bodies like testosterone and oxytocin. Sociologists highlight the importance of social relationships and attachments in our lives. Theologians see love as divine and intrinsic to our nature.

Types of Love

Love is a complex concept, and psychologists and sociologists have defined it in various ways. John Lee's (1977) research on love, which categorizes love into six types, is widely referenced. Lee proposed that all of us experience six fundamental components of love, and our current relationships can be assessed and measured based on these types. He also suggested that the quality of love types can vary, with some being more conducive to lasting and supportive relationships, while others may hinder relationships.

Lee's love types help people understand their own love styles. These types include **Eros**, which is sensual love related to physical senses like touch and taste, often associated with feelings of arousal. **Storgé** refers to the love of a close friend in everyday life, where a friendship unexpectedly deepens into something more significant. **Pragma** is about appreciating the qualities and details of the other person, often based on rational thinking. **Agapé** is selfless love focused on serving others, akin to the love of God in Christian theology. **Ludis** is an

immature love characterized by manipulation and deceit, while **Mania** is marked by insecurity and intense emotional swings.

Abraham Maslow (1970) viewed love as meeting unmet childhood needs, while Robert Sternberg (1986) analyzed love in terms of intimacy, passion, and commitment, emphasizing the importance of balance between these elements for a satisfying relationship. Additionally, there are modern components of love, such as commitment, trust, friendship, and passion, which are considered essential ingredients of love.

Different love types, such as romantic love based on continued courtship and physical intimacy, or infatuation characterized by idealization of the other person, have their own dynamics and durations. **Committed love** is loyal and devoted, often built on a history of care and concern for each other's well-being. **Altruism** involves selfless acts of love for others, while sexual or passionate love focuses on sensual pleasures and physical closeness.

Friendship love is rooted in intimacy and trust among close friends, which can sometimes evolve into romantic relationships. **Criteria or realistic love** is based on meeting personal preferences and traits in a partner, while obsessive love is marked by conflict and dramatic extremes. **Deceptive love** involves dishonesty and manipulation, either for personal gain or ulterior motives.

Unrequited love, where one person desires a relationship with someone who doesn't reciprocate, is a common experience that can lead to hurt and disappointment. Understanding love is important in many cultures, with the United States emphasizing love before marriage, while in other cultures, love may follow marriage.

Image by Mark Tacatani on Pexels

For young couples, especially teenagers, love can often be driven by social status and physical affection, with romantic relationships serving different needs for both genders. However, adult relationships tend to prioritize intimacy and friendship, leading to greater satisfaction in both sexual and relational aspects.

Love is influenced by the choices we make and the decisions we take, especially when we weigh the benefits against the costs in our lives. Regardless of the type of love you experience, some relationships feel rewarding while others seem demanding. It's crucial to understand how our needs and love intersect. In any relationship, we mentally keep track of the rewards and costs, evaluating the overall value of that relationship to us. Being in love means each partner feels safe, nurtured, and accepted for who they are, even when facing challenges in the relationship.
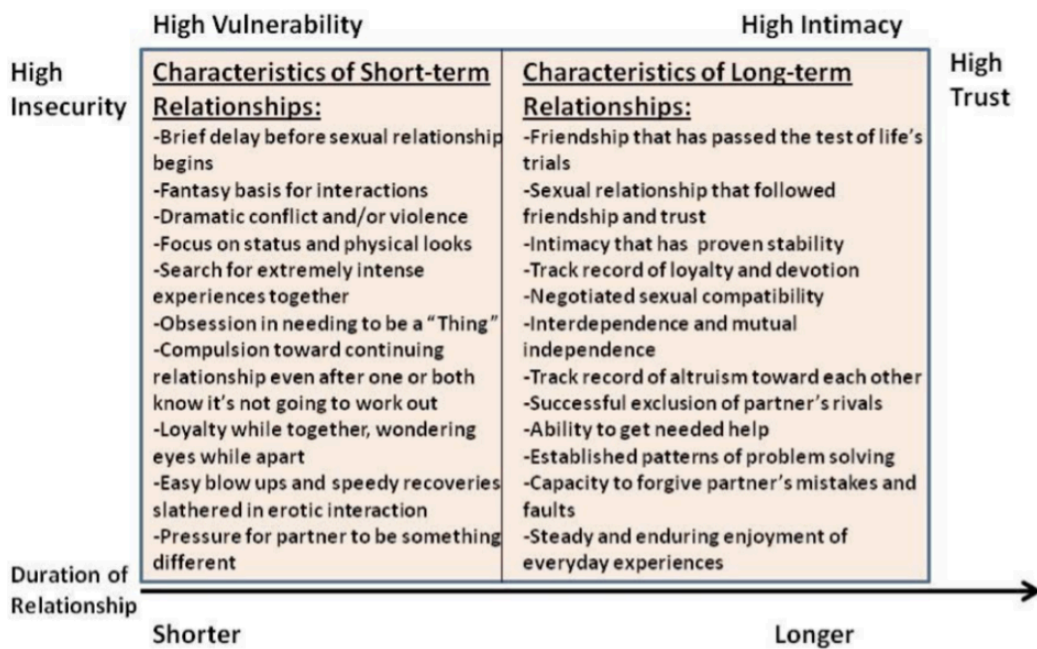
Short-term and long-term love

In evaluating relationships, losing the safety and nurturing provided by a relationship where one's sense of

self is threatened can be a significant cost. Individuals must weigh this cost against the rewards and potential outcomes. This is why some short-term relationships end abruptly, while many long-term ones continue despite difficulties.

Figure 3.1 describes characteristics of short-term and long-term relationships. **Short-term relationships** often progress quickly from acquaintance to sexual involvement. Many of these relationships involve unrealistic fantasies and inflated perceptions of their positive aspects. They tend to experience more drama, conflict, and infidelity, with exclusivity not being a prominent feature. There's often a focus on appearances and physical intimacy, serving as a distraction from underlying problems that need addressing.

Long-term relationships may start with similar traits as short-term ones but transition into deeper, more meaningful connections over time. These relationships prioritize friendship, with sexual intimacy being a part of the overall relationship rather than its sole focus. Intimacy deepens through loyalty, devotion, and exclusive fidelity. Forgiveness is important, recognizing that both partners are human and prone to mistakes.

Figure 3.1 Short-term and Long-term Relationships

High Vulnerability | High Intimacy

High Insecurity	**Characteristics of Short-term Relationships:**	**Characteristics of Long-term Relationships:**	High Trust
	-Brief delay before sexual relationship begins	-Friendship that has passed the test of life's trials	
	-Fantasy basis for interactions	-Sexual relationship that followed friendship and trust	
	-Dramatic conflict and/or violence	-Intimacy that has proven stability	
	-Focus on status and physical looks	-Track record of loyalty and devotion	
	-Search for extremely intense experiences together	-Negotiated sexual compatibility	
	-Obsession in needing to be a "Thing"	-Interdependence and mutual independence	
	-Compulsion toward continuing relationship even after one or both know it's not going to work out	-Track record of altruism toward each other	
		-Successful exclusion of partner's rivals	
	-Loyalty while together, wondering eyes while apart	-Ability to get needed help	
	-Easy blow ups and speedy recoveries slathered in erotic interaction	-Established patterns of problem solving	
		-Capacity to forgive partner's mistakes and faults	
	-Pressure for partner to be something different	-Steady and enduring enjoyment of everyday experiences	

Duration of Relationship

Shorter | Longer

Source: Hammond, Ron, Paul Cheney, Raewyn Pearsey. 2021. Sociology of the Family. Ron J. Hammond & Paul W. Cheney. Retrieved May 3, 2024 (https://freesociologybooks.com/Sociology_Of_The_Family/05_Love_and_Intimacy.php).

In both early and ongoing stages, partners prioritize each other and maintain exclusivity. They rely on each other daily while also respecting each other's need for space and individuality. Altruism and nurturing are present, even if not always reciprocated. Couples support each other in various areas of life including medical, emotional, relational, and familial needs. Sexual intimacy requires negotiation and mutual agreement within the relationship.

ANALYZING FAMILY STRUCTURES

Culture of Love

Dr. Robert J. Sternberg is a professor of human development who continues to study the concepts of love and intimacy. In addition to his Triangular Theory of Love, Sternberg considers a "Theory of Love as a Story."

Review these two theories articulated on the website, Robert Sternberg Theories of Love.

Complete the following reflection:

1. Love is a concept that is at the center of music culture. Choose a contemporary love song that speaks about love. Share the title and artist, including a link to the song. Categorize the type of love using Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love. What lyrics or sentiments did you use to support your categorization?
2. Sternberg's website describes 26 stories that conceptualize people's notion of love. Consider your own culture. This can include your ethnic background, social groups, and familial origins. Choose three different stories that speak to your idea of love. Describe why you selected these stories and how they contribute to your understanding of love.


3.2 SEXUAL RESPONSE

Sexual response is a complex interplay between biological factors and social influences. Each person has a natural level of arousal in response to sexual stimuli, akin to how some individuals react strongly to loud noises or have varying pain thresholds. Life experiences over time further shape and modify these responses. Individual differences in how sexual stimuli are perceived affect the desire to engage in particular sexual behaviors. Social factors, such as societal norms and attitudes surrounding certain sexual activities, can also impact this process by shaping perceptions of touch and sexual contact. Let's examine different aspects of the nervous system involved in sexual response.

Sex on the Brain

Figure 3.2 Regions of the Brain During Pleasure Experiences
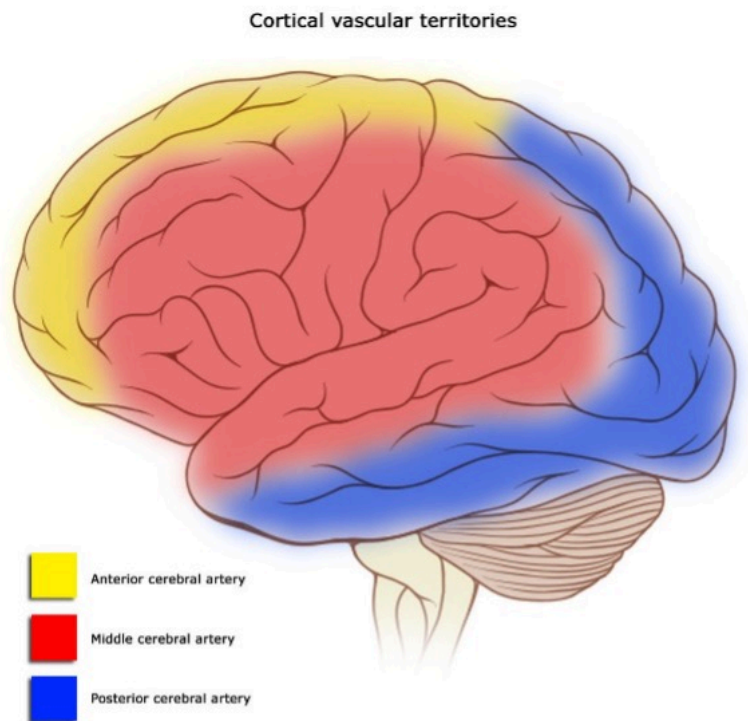
"Brain and brainstem normal human diagram" by Frank Gaillard is licensed CC BY 2.5

Upon initial observation or tactile exploration, the clitoris and penis might appear to be the primary sources of pleasure within our bodies. However, the true seat of pleasure lies within our central nervous system. When

experiencing pleasure, various regions of the brain and brainstem become highly active. These include the insula, temporal cortex, limbic system, nucleus accumbens, basal ganglia, superior parietal cortex, dorsolateral prefrontal cortex, and cerebellum (Ortigue et al. 2007). Neuroimaging methods have revealed that these brain regions are engaged during instances of spontaneous orgasms, even without direct skin stimulation (Fadul et al. 2005). Similarly, when individuals self-stimulate erogenous zones, these brain areas show heightened activity (Komisaruk et al. 2011). Erogenous zones are specific areas of the skin connected to the somatosensory cortex in the brain through the nervous system.

The **somatosensory cortex (SC)** is a region in the brain that plays a key role in processing sensory information from the skin. It's like the brain's hub for understanding what you feel on your skin. Interestingly, the size of the area in the somatosensory cortex dedicated to a particular part of your skin corresponds to how sensitive that part is. For instance, areas like your lips, which are very sensitive, have larger representations in the somatosensory cortex, while less sensitive areas like your trunk have smaller representations (Penfield and Boldrey 1937). When you touch a sensitive part of your body, like your lips, your brain typically interprets the sensation in one of three ways: 1) "That tickles!" 2) "That hurts!" 3) "That feels good, do it again!" This means that more sensitive areas of our bodies have the potential to create pleasure sensations.

A study conducted by Nummenmaa et al. (2016) explored this idea further. They showed participants images of bodies and asked them to mark which areas would feel sexually arousing when touched during masturbation or sex with a partner, for both themselves and members of the opposite sex. The study found expected "hotspot" erogenous zones like the genitals, breasts, and anus, but also identified other areas of the skin that could trigger sexual arousal. Nummenmaa et al. (2016) concluded that touching plays a significant role not only in physical pleasure but also in strengthening emotional bonds between partners during sexual activity.

Sensation & Perception

Sensation refers to how the nervous system processes information from the environment including stimuli like light, sound, smell, and touch/pain. Let's focus on touch within the realm of sensory experience. In this context, transduction is a key process. Receptors in the skin send signals of touch to transmitters in the spinal cord, which then convert these signals into neural messages interpreted by the brain. The brain then prompts responses through effectors, which are neurons within muscles. For example, if something hot touches your hand, this process might lead to a reflexive jerking away of the hand to avoid injury. **Perception**, on the other hand, involves how individuals attribute meaning to their sensory experiences. Consider the example of masturbation. Physical sensations from touching oneself activate receptor sites and the nervous system, leading to arousal. However, the interpretation of this arousal can be influenced by internal dialogue, such as thoughts about the morality of masturbation. It's important to recognize how societal attitudes, particularly those related to pleasure and sensuality, can shape our perceptions of our physiological experiences.

Discovering your erogenous zones: Which parts of your body do you find especially enjoyable to touch?

Besides the genitals, there are several common areas to explore such as the lower back, inner thighs, lips, nipples, feet, and hands. Remember, each person may have unique spots that bring pleasure, so it's worth exploring this question with your sexual partners too.

Sensate focus is a method sometimes used in sex therapy to help individuals gain better control over their physiological responses and understand their partner's pleasure zones, all without directly stimulating the genitals. Many people feel anxious about being sensual as it can make them feel vulnerable and uneasy. Incorporating elements of cognitive-behavioral therapy and behavioral modification, sensate focus shifts the focus onto sensory experiences and aims to change the way individuals perceive sexual interactions. These techniques are accessible to anyone interested and can improve sexual pleasure by promoting self-awareness and enhancing communication with partners centered on pleasure.

Hormones & Pheromones

Androgens, estrogen, and progestin attach to hormone receptor sites, facilitating the production of neurochemicals (Hyde and DeLamater 2017). When experiencing excitement and arousal, hormones like dopamine, oxytocin, and norepinephrine are released into the bloodstream. Subsequently, during orgasm, opioids and endocannabinoids are released (Hyde and DeLamater 2017). Hormones play a role in both activating and deactivating sexual arousal. Testosterone, for example, is closely associated with increasing sexual desire. Imbalances in testosterone levels, either too high or too low, can diminish sexual desire. Additionally, strong emotions like happiness, anger, anxiety, and sadness can heighten sexual arousal due to their impact on our endocrine and nervous systems. For example, both sex and aggression involve hormones like epinephrine and norepinephrine, which also function as neurotransmitters. These hormones induce feelings of excitement followed by resolution. The relationship between emotions and our physiological responses is an increasingly studied area (Hyde and DeLamater 2017).

Hormones, released into the bloodstream, play a role in sexual arousal, while pheromones are chemicals emitted outside the body, communicating information about hormonal levels and ovulation to others on a chemical level. This subconscious signaling, based on our own body's chemistry, can attract us to others (Hyde and DeLamater 2017). Researchers continue to explore the impact of pheromones on sexual responses (Savic 2014). Studies show that individuals tend to be more attracted to the scent of others that aligns with their sexual orientation, even without additional information provided. Interestingly, the scent of individuals who are biologically related is often perceived as less attractive, possibly linked to evolutionary mechanisms that discourage unintentional incest (Savic 2014). Animal studies, particularly male monkeys, suggests that exposure to the urine of an ovulating female can lead to increases in testosterone levels (Hyde and DeLamater 2017). Pheromones are believed to influence the hormonal balance in others as evidenced by instances where women's menstrual cycles synchronize when they spend significant time together. These findings highlight the biological and social interconnectedness among humans, illustrating how our bodies respond to chemical signals in addition to social interactions.

Physiology & Sexual Response

The brain and other sexual organs react to sexual stimuli in a consistent pattern known as the **Sexual Response Cycle** (SRC; Masters and Johnson 1966). This cycle consists of four phases:

- **Excitement:** This phase is marked by activation of the sympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system. It leads to increased heart rate, breathing, and blood flow to sexual organs like the penis, vaginal walls, clitoris, and nipples (known as vasocongestion). Involuntary muscle movements, such as facial grimaces, may also occur.

- **Plateau:** During this phase, which is often considered as "foreplay," blood flow, heart rate, and breathing intensify further. Individuals with a clitoris may experience a tightening of the outer third of the vaginal walls known as the orgasmic platform. Meanwhile, a person with a penis may experience the release of pre-seminal fluid containing sperm cells. However, this fluid release makes the withdrawal method of birth control less effective.

- **Orgasm:** The orgasm phase is brief but intensely pleasurable. It involves the release of neuromuscular tension and a surge of the hormone oxytocin, which facilitates emotional bonding. While the muscle contractions during orgasm often coincide with ejaculation, it's important to note that these events are distinct physiological processes. In other words, ejaculation doesn't always occur alongside orgasm and vice versa.

- **Resolution:** In this phase, the body returns to its pre-aroused state. Most individuals with a penis enter a refractory period during which they are unresponsive to sexual stimuli. The duration of this period varies depending on factors such as age, recent sexual activity, intimacy with a partner, and novelty. A person with a clitoris, in contrast, typically does not experience a refractory period, allowing them physiologically to have multiple orgasms.

It's worth mentioning that the Sexual Response Cycle (SRC) occurs regardless of the type of sexual activity—whether it involves masturbation, romantic kissing, or various forms of sexual intercourse (Masters and Johnson 1966). Additionally, it's important to note that while having a partner or environmental stimulus can trigger the SRC, it's not always required for it to happen.

3.3 SEXUAL SCRIPTS

In sociology, the study of sexuality revolves around understanding how society shapes our perceptions and behaviors regarding sex. This involves recognizing that our ideas about sexuality, including what is expected of us and how we express ourselves sexually, are influenced by the social environment in which we live. Our interactions with various social agents, such as family and mass media, play a significant role in shaping our sexual identities and behaviors. One way sociologists explore sexuality is through the concept of sexual scripts.

Imagine **sexual scripts** as blueprints or guidelines for how we should behave in sexual situations. These scripts dictate our roles in sexual expression, orientation, behaviors, desires, and how we define ourselves sexually. While we're all sexual beings, each of us develops our own unique sexual script through socialization. **Sexual socialization** is the process by which we learn about sexuality; it includes when, where, and with whom we express our sexuality.

From the moment we're born, we're driven by biological needs and sexual urges. Sexual drives compel us to engage in sexual activity and adopt certain sexual roles. Once we've learned our sexual scripts, they shape how we respond to these biological urges. Our sexuality is not innate; it's learned through cultural and social influences. While everyone's sexual script is unique, there are common themes that reflect broader social patterns.

Many of us absorb our sexual scripts passively, through a synthesis of concepts, images, and ideals presented by society. For example, the idea that men and women are fundamentally different beings was popularized in recent years, shaping how an entire generation viewed gender dynamics.

In the United States, an increasing number of people are embracing less religious values and have a broader range of sexual experiences. Additionally, many younger generations are particularly focused on the orgasm during sexual encounters, which signifies the peak of sexual pleasure and involves physical sensations such as muscle tightening in the genital area and the release of pleasure-inducing hormones throughout the body. An **orgasm** is the peak of sexual pleasure experienced during sexual activity. It involves the tightening of muscles in the genital area, sensations of electricity spreading from the genitals, and a release of various hormones that induce pleasure throughout the body. Various cultures have documented sexual expression, with some even documenting methods to enhance sexual pleasure (Mukherjee 2023).

Traditional sexual scripts, which have been extensively studied, often harbor problematic assumptions. These include beliefs such as men must take charge, women should not openly express enjoyment during sexual activity, and a man's sexual prowess is measured by his partner's orgasm. Scripts often perpetuate gender stereotypes and hinder open communication between partners regarding sexual needs and desires. More contemporary approaches to sexual relationships emphasize shared responsibility, open communication, and mutual fulfillment of each other's desires and needs. These modern perspectives prioritize the importance

of both partners actively participating in shaping their sexual experiences to ensure satisfaction and intimacy within the relationship.

Sexual Behavior Scripts

Sexual script theory suggests that our sexual behaviors are influenced by learned patterns and interactions. These scripts are acquired from our environment and culture, shaping our actions to conform to societal expectations. These scripts, largely influenced by culture, often adhere to heterosexual norms and can be reinforced by people in our lives, societal norms, and media. Our personal experiences, both with others and internally, further shape these scripts. Consequently, our interactions with partners often reflect culturally ingrained behaviors, leading to predictable patterns within relationships (Helgeson 2012).

For instance, if a male traditionally initiates sex in a relationship, the female may wait for him to do so, establishing a pattern that may persist; patterns can become internalized and influence future relationships. Deviating from established scripts can lead to negative feelings, such as guilt or judgment, reflecting internalized societal norms (Seabrook et al. 2016).

In the United States, the heterosexual script is dominant and comprises three main components: a double standard, courtship roles, and a desire for commitment. The double standard dictates that women should be passive in sexual encounters while men are expected to be assertive. Men are often praised for sexual conquests, while women are expected to resist sex outside of committed relationships. Courtship roles prescribe men to initiate sex and pursue multiple partners, while women are expected to be desired and less experienced. In terms of commitment, women are scripted to seek intimacy and trust, while men are not necessarily bound by the same expectations (Masters et al. 2013).

Image by Alexander Mass on Pexels

Research indicates that deviating from these scripts can have consequences (Masters et al. 2013). For example, if a woman challenges traditional gender roles, a man may lose interest in pursuing a relationship further; non-conforming behavior can lead to judgment and negative repercussions. However, this underscores the importance of clear communication in relationships. Establishing expectations early can help avoid misunderstandings and uncomfortable situations.

Fantasies

Sexual behaviors and fantasies are closely related yet different. **Fantasies** are thoughts or images related to sexual experiences, and although they are often considered private and individual activities, they can also

influence partnered sexual interactions. Ultimately, it's up to you to decide whether to keep your fantasies to yourself or share them with others.

Leitenberg and Henning (1995) describe sexual fantasies as any form of mental imagery that stimulates sexual arousal. One frequently encountered fantasy is the replacement fantasy, where individuals imagine being with someone other than their current partner (Hicks and Leitenberg 2001). Surprisingly, over 50% of people admit to having forced-sex fantasies (Critelli and Bivona 2008). However, it's crucial to note that having such fantasies does not imply a desire to cheat on our partners or engage in sexual assault. It's essential to distinguish between sexual fantasies and actual sexual behaviors.

It's worth noting that sexual fantasies are distinct from sexual desires. In his book, *Tell Me What You Want* (2018), sex researcher Justin Lehmiller conducted a survey involving over 4,000 Americans to explore their sexual fantasies. He gathered detailed information about their personalities, sexual histories, and demographics. Lehmiller defines sexual fantasy as a sexually arousing thought or mental image that occurs while awake, rather than during a dream. These fantasies can arise spontaneously or be intentionally summoned for various reasons such as enhancing arousal, alleviating boredom, or simply relaxing. In contrast, sexual desire refers to actions or experiences that an individual actively wishes to pursue in their sex life. It represents future plans or goals regarding sexual activities that one would like to explore at some point.

*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.whccd.edu/livingtogether/?p=75#oembed-1*

"How Men's and Women's Sexual Fantasies Are Similar And Different" by Dr. Justin Lehmiller is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

Understanding the distinction between fantasy, desire, and behavior is crucial, especially in discussions about fantasies with your partner(s). It's important to recognize that these concepts are interconnected yet distinct. When communicating fantasies with your partner(s), it's essential to clarify whether these are merely fantasies or actual desires that you wish to explore. Assuming all shared fantasies represent genuine desires can lead to misunderstandings or unnecessary conflicts. Therefore, it's beneficial to establish mutual understanding about the purpose of sharing fantasies. Are you sharing fantasies to deepen intimacy, gain insight into each other's desires, or arouse each other? Alternatively, are you discussing ideas for activities you both wish to explore together (Lehmiller 2021)? Clarifying these intentions can facilitate constructive communication and mutual understanding in your relationship.

Masturbation

Sexual fantasies often play a role in **masturbation**, which involves stimulating the body for sexual pleasure. Throughout history, masturbation has been stigmatized and labeled as "self-abuse" with false claims linking it to various negative effects like hairy palms, acne, blindness, insanity, and even death . Cultural attitudes still impact how masturbation is perceived. For example, you might have heard sayings that shame masturbation, such as "You'll grow hair on your palms," implying that it's shameful and others will judge you for it. It's crucial to reflect on your own views regarding this topic.

Figure 3.3 United States Early 20th Century Anti-Masterbation Chastity Belt Patent Drawing
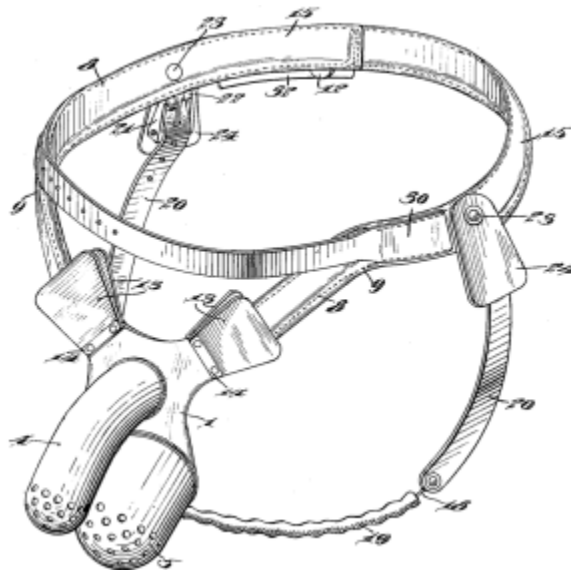
"Chastity belt Heyser 0" by Wikimedia Commons is licensed under public domain

Alfred Kinsey, a pioneer in sex research from 1894 to 1956, was one of the first to investigate Americans' sexual behavior, including masturbation. He surveyed around 18,000 participants. Kinsey's research revealed that women are equally interested in and experienced with sex as men, and that both genders engage in masturbation without negative health effects (Bancroft 2004). Although these findings were met with criticism initially, they spurred further exploration into the benefits of masturbation.

Many people consider masturbation to be beneficial for various reasons. It's associated with lower stress levels, decreased engagement in risky sexual behaviors, and a better understanding of one's own body, which can be seen as empowering and a way to embrace one's sexuality. Clinical professionals sometimes suggest masturbation to explore physical and sensual aspects of oneself and address challenges related to sexual functioning. Research supports the idea that masturbation contributes to increased sexual and marital satisfaction, and overall physical and psychological well-being (Hurlburt and Whitaker 1991; Levin 2007).

Additionally, there's evidence indicating that masturbation can significantly reduce the risk of prostate cancer in men over the age of 50 (Dimitropoulou et al. 2009).

Masturbation is a common practice among both men and women in the United States. Robbins et al. (2011) found that 74% of men and 48% of women in the U.S. report engaging in masturbation. However, cultural influences can affect the frequency of masturbation. For example, a study in Australia found that only 65% of men and 35% of women reported masturbating; not, in the UK, 86% of men and 57% of women ages 16–44 reported masturbating within the past year (Regenerus et al. 2017). In contrast, rates of reported masturbation in India are lower, with only 46% of men and 13% of women reporting engaging in the practice (Ramadugu et al. 2011). Despite its prevalence, masturbation can be surrounded by feelings of shame and guilt for many individuals. Cultural background, family upbringing, and religious beliefs can all influence how one perceives and experiences solo sexual activity. However, it's worth noting that, as Kinsey suggested, there are typically few, if any, negative consequences associated with masturbation, except for feelings of guilt and shame in some cases.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.whccd.edu/livingtogether/?p=75#oembed-2

"Masturbation Myths" by TED is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

The Double Standard

Research into the **double standard** in sexual behavior began in the 1960s by Ira Reiss. Reiss explored how society allowed men to engage in premarital sexual behavior but prohibited women from doing so (Milhausen and Herold 1999). This double standard affects various aspects of sexuality such as the age of first sexual intercourse (men being younger) and the number of sexual partners (men having more). In terms of behavior, males are often praised for sexual activity and promiscuity from adolescence onwards, while females may face shame. As males increase their number of sexual partners, they tend to gain more acceptance from their peers, whereas females may experience less acceptance (Kraeger et al. 2016). Additionally, research suggests that a girl's sexual history leads to a decline in peer acceptance, whereas boys with similar histories may see increased acceptance (Kraeger et al. 2016).

Interestingly, perceptions of the double standard differ when it comes to activities like kissing or "making out." Girls may be more accepted by their peers for such behaviors, while boys may face less acceptance (Kraeger et al. 2016). These attitudes may not only affect perceptions but also impact actual sexual encounters. For instance, in hookups, males tend to achieve orgasm more frequently than females (Garcia et al. 2012).

While women acknowledge the existence of a sexual double standard, they often deny holding it themselves (Milhausen and Herold 1999). However, research indicates that men are more likely to hold double standards (Allison and Risman 2013). Despite challenges from young men and women, the double standard persists. While a significant portion of individuals reject the double standard, many still hold some degree of it (Sprecher et al. 2013).

Hookup Culture

A **hookup** refers to a situation where two people who are not in a committed relationship engage in sexual activity, which could involve intercourse, oral sex, digital penetration, kissing, and so forth. Typically, there's no expectation of forming a romantic bond afterward (Garcia et al. 2012). This trend is becoming increasingly common among young adults in the U.S., but why? In the 1920s, attitudes towards sexual promiscuity started to shift, becoming more open and accepted. As time went on and medical advancements like birth control became available, discussing sex openly and engaging in casual sexual behavior became more widespread, breaking traditional moral and religious boundaries, such as the expectation of abstinence until marriage (Garcia et al. 2012). Nowadays, the term "friends with benefits" (FWB) describes a relationship where two individuals agree to have purely physical intimacy without emotional attachment (Garcia et al. 2012). Around 60% of college students report having been in a FWB relationship at some point.

There are some gender differences in how often people hookup and how they feel afterward. Women tend to be more conservative in their attitudes towards casual sex compared to men. Both genders report mixed feelings after hooking up, with about half of men feeling positive, a quarter feeling negative, and the rest feeling a mix of emotions. For women, it's somewhat reversed, with about a quarter feeling positive, half feeling negative, and the rest having mixed feelings. Despite mixed feelings, around three-quarters of people overall report feeling regret after a hookup. Factors like hooking up with someone they've just met or only hooking up once tend to lead to regret. Men may feel regret because they feel they've used someone, while women may feel regret because they feel used. Women tend to be more negatively affected by hookups overall (Garcia et al. 2012).

Most college students don't worry about contracting sexually transmitted infections (STIs) after a hookup, and fewer than half use condoms during one. Reasons for hooking up vary; substance use, especially alcohol, is often involved and can lead to unintended hookups. Feeling depressed, isolated, or lonely is also a common factor. Generally, individuals with lower self-esteem are more likely to engage in hooking up (Garcia et al. 2012). The impact of hookups varies too; some people report feeling less depressed or lonely afterward, while others may experience an increase in depressive symptoms, particularly if they didn't have them before (Garcia et al. 2012).

3.4 SEXUALITY

Sexuality holds significance for us because it marks a transition into adulthood, offers pleasure, and reinforces gender roles and aspirations. However, despite its importance, sexuality is a relatively passive aspect of our daily lives. In 1993, Samuel and Cynthia Janus (1993) conducted The Janus Report on Sexual Behavior, studying 2,765 men and women to uncover general trends in U.S. sexual practices. They found that sexual frequency is quite similar across age groups, with most individuals engaging in 2-3 sexual encounters per week.

On average, individuals with a sexual partner engage in sex about three times a week, with each session lasting around 25 minutes. This amounts to approximately 75 minutes per week or 65 hours per year spent on sexual activity. While this might seem like a significant portion of time, it pales in comparison to other daily activities.

Consider the following breakdown: assuming the average person sleeps for eight hours, works for 8.5 hours, eats for 1.5 hours, commutes for 0.5 hours, watches TV for three hours, and engages in miscellaneous activities for 2.5 hours daily, sexual intercourse comprises a relatively small portion of our time (Janus and Janus 1993).

Table 3.1. Daily and Yearly Hours Spent in Various Activities for an Average Person

Activities	Daily Hours=24	Yearly Hours=8,760
Sleep	8.0	2,920.0
Work	8.5	3,102.5
Television viewing	3.0	1,095.0
Eating	1.5	547.5
Commuting	0.5	182.5
Miscellaneous	2.32	846.8
Sexual Intercourse	0.18 hours (average 11 minutes/day)	65.0

Sexual intercourse plays a passive role in the lives of most individuals, accounting for only 65 hours per year on average. Many people abstain from regular sexual activity until their twenties, and those who are unmarried are less likely to engage in it compared to married individuals. Additionally, these estimations do not include individuals without sexual partners or those who abstain from intercourse, which would further lower the average involvement in sexual activity.

Indiana University is renowned for conducting the largest sex-focused survey in the United States, known as the National Survey of Sexual Health and Behavior (NSSHB). The survey's initial phase was done in 2009, gathering data from over 20,000 participants aged 14 to 102. This extensive study has resulted in more than 30 research publications, exploring various aspects of sexual behavior (NSSHB 2024).

The survey delves into diverse sex-related topics, including condom usage, intimate behaviors like kissing and cuddling in relation to sexual arousal and intimacy, patterns of sexual behavior across different sexual orientations and identities, knowledge about sexually transmitted diseases, and relationship dynamics (NSSHB 2024).

The findings from the first wave of data collection revealed several interesting trends. A majority of U.S. youth were found not to engage in regular intercourse, and condom use was not commonly associated with reduced sexual pleasure among adults. Men were more likely to experience orgasm during vaginal intercourse, while women's orgasm experiences were more varied, often influenced by factors like oral sex (NSSHB 2024).

Despite a relatively small percentage identifying as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, a significant number reported engaging in same-sex behavior at some point. Women were more inclined to identify as bisexual rather than lesbian. Interestingly, there was a discrepancy between men's perception of their partners' orgasms and women's actual reported experiences. Older adults were found to maintain active sex lives, with the lowest rate of condom use observed among those over 40 (NSSHB 2024).

Subsequent waves of data revealed further insights. Women were generally more accepting of individuals identifying as bisexual compared to men. Most participants reported being in monogamous relationships, but same-gender sexually oriented individuals were less likely than their opposite-gender counterparts to report monogamy (NSSHB 2024).

Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation refers to the part of a person's identity that involves being attracted to another individual, whether in a sexual, emotional, physical, or romantic sense. Traditionally, sexual orientation has been viewed as binary, either heterosexual (attraction to the opposite sex/gender) or homosexual (attraction to the same sex/gender). However, recent advancements in sexuality research have led to discussions about orientation occurring on a continuum, encompassing a variety of orientations (Killerman 2020).

Before examining into the broader spectrum of orientations, it's essential to understand the **Genderbread**

Person concept in Figure 3.2 (Killerman 2020). This framework helps us comprehend orientation along a continuum, considering factors like birth sex, anatomical sex, gender identity, gender expression, sexual attraction, and romantic attraction.

We are all born with a biological sex, but one's current anatomical sex may differ from their birth sex, especially for individuals who have undergone sexual reassignment surgery (Killerman 2020). **Gender identity** pertains to how we perceive ourselves and may not necessarily align with our anatomical sex or gender expression. For instance, one may be biologically female but identify as male or have a fluid gender identity.

Gender expression refers to how we present ourselves in terms of adhering to gender norms. This can range from extremely masculine or feminine to androgynous, with expressions changing over time and in different contexts (Killerman 2020).

Attraction comes in two forms: sexual and romantic. These can vary independently, meaning one may be romantically attracted to individuals of one gender but sexually attracted to another. **Sexual attraction** involves arousal and desire for sexual intimacy, while **romantic attraction** relates to emotional connections (Killerman 2020).

Figure 3.2 The Genderbread Person

The Genderbread Person v4 *by it's pronounced METROsexual.com*
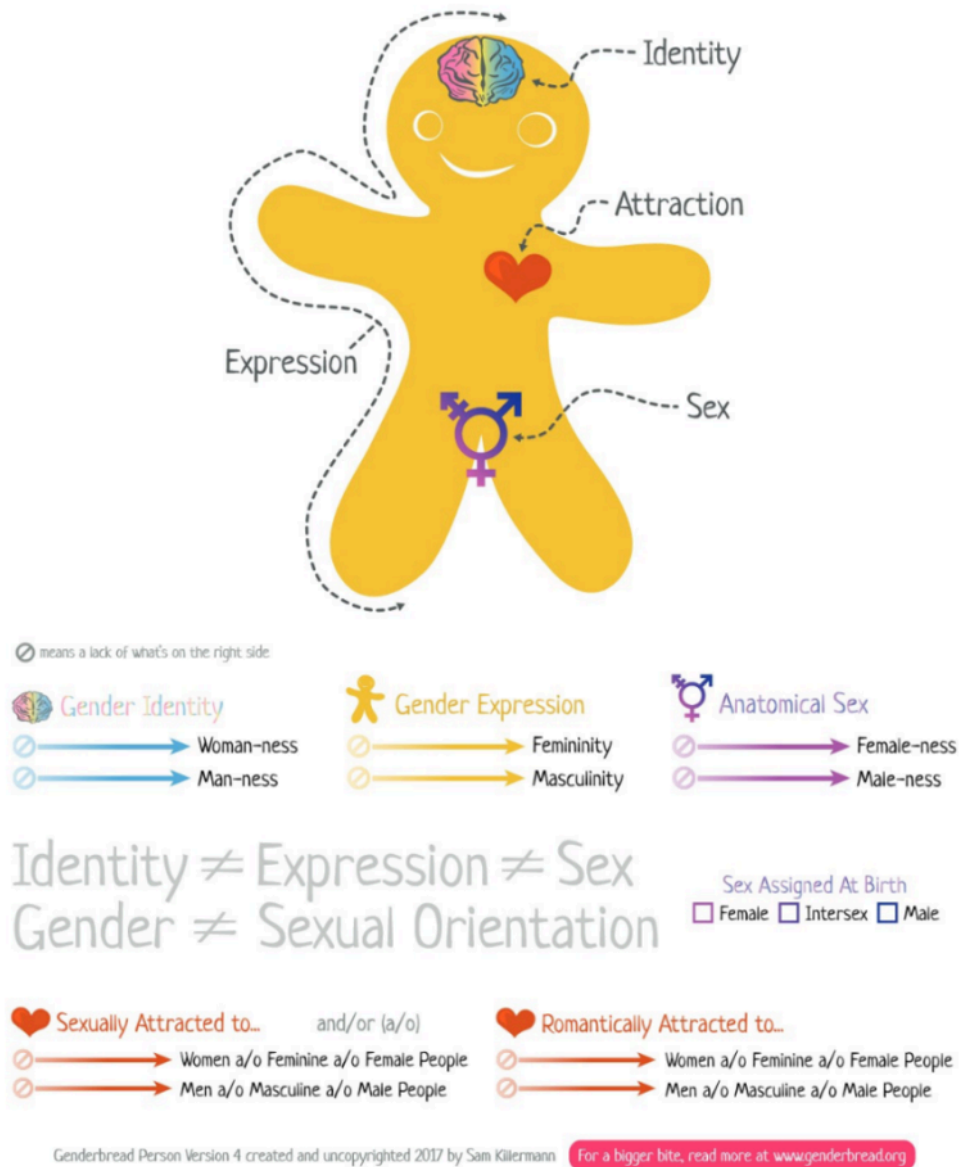
Source: Killerman, Sam. 2020. "The Genderbread Person v3.3." *It's Pronounced Metrosexual*. Retrieved May 8, 2024 (https://www.itspronouncedmetrosexual.com/2015/03/the-genderbread-person-v3/).

Asexuality refers to a sexual orientation where individuals lack sexual attraction to others, but it's important to note that it's not considered a disorder. Despite being one of the least studied orientations, there's ongoing debate about whether asexuality represents a lack of orientation or is an orientation. Only a small percentage, around 0.5-1% of the population, identifies as asexual, with potential underestimations. Those identifying as asexual are mostly white (Deutsch 2017).

Being asexual doesn't necessarily mean abstaining from sexual behavior or intercourse, nor is it defined by

virginity, low sex drive, or lack of masturbation. Asexual individuals may experience physical arousal, though some may feel disconnected from it, a phenomenon known as auto-crissexualism (Deutsch 2017). Asexuality manifests in various forms, such as gray asexuality, where individuals experience low levels of attraction, and demisexuality, where sexual attraction only occurs after forming a close bond. Importantly, an asexual person may still experience romantic attraction to any gender (Deutsch 2017).

Heterosexuality denotes attraction to the opposite gender and is the most common orientation. Cultural norms historically centered around heterosexuality as the norm, marginalizing other orientations. Though efforts have been made to challenge this mindset, its influence persists (Gates 2011).

Same-gender sexuality, or **homosexuality**, involves being sexually attracted to individuals of the same gender. Around 3.5% of the U.S. population identifies as having same-gender attractions, with rates higher among women. While fewer individuals identify as homosexual, a significant portion report attraction to the same gender or engaging in same-gender sexual behavior (Copen et al. 2016).

Sexual fluidity challenges binary views of sexuality by acknowledging that attraction can be fluid. Bisexual individuals are attracted to both same and opposite genders, whereas pansexual individuals are attracted to all genders, not limited to a binary framework (Rice 2015). Visual aids like Figure 3.3 help illustrate how sexual orientation, desires, and behaviors can align or diverge. Surprisingly, these dimensions of sexuality often don't align among adults in U.S. society (Rice 2015).

Figure 3.3 Sexual Orientation, Desires, and Behaviors
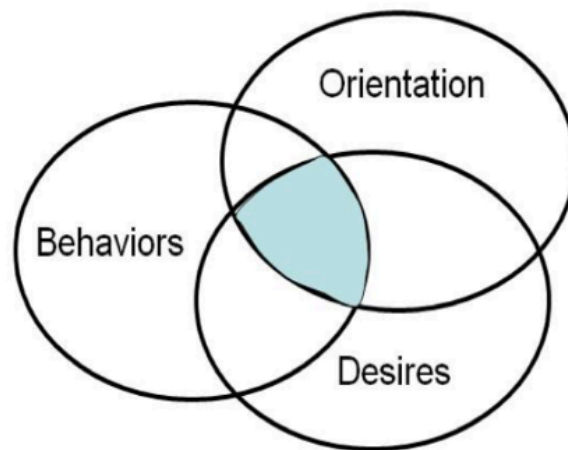
-**Orientation**=established preference
-**Behaviors**=sexual action
-**Desires**=sexual attractions

1) When orientation, desires, and behaviors are congruent=dimensional continuity
2) When desires and orientation are not congruent with behaviors=dimensional discontinuity

Edward O. Laumann and his team (1994) conducted the most extensive sociological study on U.S. sexuality to date. In their research, they explored the prevalence of self-identified sexual orientations, surveying approximately 3,400 participants. Many individuals in U.S. society identify as heterosexual, although Laumann opted not to use the terms "heterosexual" or "homosexual." They found that a small percentage of both males and females had engaged in sexual activity with a partner of the same sex (Laumann et al. 1994).

Laumann's (1994) study also revealed that over 96% of males and 98% of females identified as heterosexual. A very small percentage identified as homosexual, while slightly more identified as bisexual. The Janus Report (1993), another significant study, also examined sexual behaviors and orientations. Their findings indicated that a notable proportion of men and women reported having had a homosexual experience.

According to Janus, many men and women identified as heterosexual, with a small percentage identifying as homosexual or bisexual. Heterosexuality consistently emerges as the most common identification when individuals are asked about their sexual orientation (Janus and Janus 1993).

However, individuals who identify as heterosexual may still have diverse sexual experiences yet maintain their heterosexual identity. Despite variations in sexual experiences, the U.S. is characterized as a nation with a high level of sexual activity. Many men and women reported having had vaginal intercourse, with men typically initiating sexual activity earlier than women. Only a small percentage of individuals reported no sexual experience before marriage (Janus and Janus 1993).

ANALYZING FAMILY STRUCTURES

Is it Love or Lust?

How do you know whether the passion and butterflies in your stomach are signs of romantic love or simply lust? In the video, Is it love or lust?, Dr. Orbuch will discuss signals to distinguish between lust and love, and how to reignite that lustful desire in loving long-term relationships.

Consider the following questions in your response:

Dr. Orbuch is a professor of sociology, and has been referred to as the "Doctor of Love" by some

news media outlets. Consider her area of research. What sociological theory underlies her perspectives on love? What signs distinguish lust from love, according to Dr. Orbuch?

"Is It Love Or Lust?" by Katie Conklin, Lemoore College is licensed under CC BY 4.0

3.5 END OF MODULE MATERIAL

CORE INSIGHTS

This module explores love, intimacy, and sexuality, shedding light on their multifaceted nature and societal implications. Firstly, scholars will explore the intricate world of love, differentiating between various types such as romantic love, platonic love, and familial love. They will understand how these types of love manifest in diverse relationships and contexts, recognizing the nuances and dynamics that shape each form of affection. Additionally, learners will explore the concept of sexual scripts, dissecting sexual behavior scripts, the double standard, and the pervasive influence of hookup culture in contemporary sexual interactions. Through critical analysis, students will unravel how these scripts mold individuals' attitudes, behaviors, and expectations in sexual relationships, illuminating the complexities of human intimacy.

Furthermore, this module investigates the diverse aspects of sexuality, including sexual identity, sexual orientation, sexual behaviors, and sexual health. Scholars will examine how these components intricately intertwine to contribute to individuals' overall sexual experiences and well-being, fostering a deeper understanding of the multifaceted nature of human sexuality. Moreover, learners will investigate the concept of sexual orientation, encompassing heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, and asexuality, and recognize the fluidity and complexity of sexual orientation across individuals and communities. Finally, scholars will critically analyze societal norms and attitudes surrounding sexuality and sexual orientation, including stigmas, stereotypes, and discrimination, and explore strategies for promoting inclusivity, acceptance, and understanding of diverse sexual identities and experiences, fostering a more inclusive and supportive societal framework.

RESOURCES

1. [Sensate Focus](#) (Cornell University 2019)
2. [What I Want To Do](#) (Sexapalooza 2014)
3. [Sex Tips for Neurodivergent Individuals and Those with Sensory Sensitivities: An Expert Guide from Sydney King](#) (ShopEnby Journal 2021)
4. [Love in the Time of Crisis w/Maira Olivia-Rios and Levi Harter](#) (Red Nation Podcast 2024)

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PART IV

MODULE 4: INTIMATE & LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIPS

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this module, scholars will be able to:

1. Understand the key principles and concepts of evolutionary theories related to intimate relationships, including sexual selection and sexual strategy theories.
2. Analyze the factors contributing to liking and loving in long-term relationships, exploring the distinctions between these forms of affection and their implications for relationship dynamics.
3. Evaluate the concepts of closeness and intimacy within the context of interpersonal relationships, examining the various dimensions and manifestations of emotional and psychological proximity.
4. Compare and contrast communal and exchange relationships, discerning the fundamental differences in motivations, expectations, and patterns of interaction between these two types of relationships.
5. Assess the concept of interdependence and its role in fostering commitment and cooperation within intimate relationships, considering the implications for relationship stability and satisfaction.
6. Identify the different attachment styles in romantic relationships and their impact on the formation, maintenance, and dissolution of intimate bonds.
7. Critically evaluate the influence of the internet on contemporary relationships, including the opportunities and challenges posed by online interactions and digital communication platforms.
8. Analyze the institution of marriage and its significance within the context of long-term

relationships, exploring cultural variations, legal implications, and social norms surrounding marital unions.

9. Examine the phenomenon of cohabitation as an alternative to traditional marriage, considering the motivations, benefits, and challenges associated with living together without formal matrimony.

10. Develop strategies for making relationships last, drawing on evidence-based practices and principles to enhance communication, resolve conflicts, and sustain intimacy over time.

KEY TERMS & CONCEPTS

- Attachment styles
- Avoidant-fearful attachment style
- Cohabitation
- Commitment
- Communal relationships
- Companionate love
- Couple
- Disorganized style
- Egalitarian families
- Equity
- Evolutionary theories
- Exchange orientation
- Insecure attachment styles
- Interdependent
- Intimate relationships

- Intra-sexual competition
- Intersexual competition
- Marital entropy
- Marriage
- Measuring relationship closeness
- Monogamy
- Other-concern
- Patriarchal families
- Polyandry
- Polygamy
- Romantic love
- Secure attachment style
- Serial monogamy
- Serial polygamy
- Sexual selection

INTRODUCTION

This module investigates the dynamics of intimate and long-term relationships, exploring the theories and factors that contribute to their development and sustainability. We begin with evolutionary theories that provide a framework for understanding the biological and psychological underpinnings of intimate

relationships. The module then examines the distinctions between liking and loving in long-term partnerships, highlighting how closeness and intimacy evolve over time. Concepts such as communal exchange relationships, interdependence, and commitment are discussed to illustrate how partners maintain and deepen their connections. The roles of love and attachment are analyzed, including how these bonds are formed and sustained in both offline and internet relationships.

Transitioning to the specifics of marriage and long-term relationships, the module looks into the growing trend of cohabitation and its implications for long-term partnership stability. The discussion extends to strategies for making relationships last, emphasizing the importance of communication, mutual support, and adaptability. By integrating these various perspectives and insights, the chapter aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of what makes intimate and long-term relationships thrive, offering valuable guidance for those seeking to nurture and maintain enduring connections in their own lives.

4.1 INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

Humans share a common ancestry with both chimpanzees and bonobos, our closest living relatives in the animal kingdom (Prüfer et al. 2012). Despite significant differences between these two ape species, humans exhibit many behaviors related to relationships and sexuality that are observed in both chimpanzees and bonobos.

When it comes to mating and relationships, human males vary in their behavior, with some displaying protective and aggressive tendencies towards perceived sexual conquests, while others show respect and admiration for strong women in their lives. Similarly, societal attitudes towards sexuality vary greatly, with some cultures enforcing strict rules dictating that sexual behavior should only occur for the purpose of reproduction, while others embrace sexual fluidity for pleasure, connection, and community.

Therefore, human behavior reflects a blend of characteristics seen in both chimpanzees and bonobos, influenced by evolutionary history, societal structures, and prevailing social norms. To dig deeper into the factors driving humans to seek long-term intimate relationships, we can draw upon insights from evolutionary psychology, social psychology, current evidence-based research on healthy relationships, and critical theories that emphasize intersectionality. These perspectives offer diverse lenses through which we can better understand the complexity of human relationships.

Evolutionary Theories

The desire to pass on genes and have children may influence why some individuals choose to pursue intimate relationships. In heterosexual relationships between cisgender individuals, certain behaviors have evolved over time to enhance the likelihood of producing healthy offspring. However, it's important to note that this perspective may not fully encompass the experiences of sexual minorities and gender-diverse individuals. As you explore sexual selection theory and sexual strategies theory, you'll notice that they often use the term "sex" rather than "gender." These evolutionary theories primarily focus on the biological differences in anatomy and function related to sexual behavior.

Sexual selection theory

Darwin observed that certain traits and behaviors in organisms couldn't be explained solely by their usefulness for survival. Take the peacock's vibrant plumage, for instance. Rather than aiding in survival, these flashy feathers actually make the peacock more noticeable to predators, increasing its risk of becoming a tasty meal.

Why do peacocks have such extravagant feathers? Similar questions arise for other animals, like the large antlers of male stags or the wattles of roosters, which also seem to pose disadvantages for survival.

If these traits are seemingly detrimental to an animal's survival, why did they evolve in the first place? And how have these animals managed to persist with these traits over thousands of years? Darwin proposed an answer to this puzzle: **sexual selection**. This theory suggests that certain characteristics evolve not because they improve survival, but because they enhance mating opportunities.

Sexual selection operates through two main processes. The first is **intrasexual competition**, where individuals of one sex compete among themselves, and the winner earns the chance to mate with a member of the opposite sex. For instance, male stags engage in battles using their antlers, with the victor, often the one with larger antlers, gaining mating access to females. Despite the disadvantage of having large antlers for survival, as they hinder agility in navigating forests and evading predators, they increase reproductive success by making stags more attractive to potential mates. Similarly, human males may compete physically in activities like boxing or team sports, enhancing their appeal to potential partners despite the potential risks to survival. Traits that lead to success in intrasexual competition are passed on more frequently due to their association with increased mating success.

The second process is preferential mate choice, also known as **intersexual competition**. Here, individuals are attracted to specific qualities in potential mates, such as vibrant plumage, signs of good health, or intelligence. These desired qualities become more prevalent in the population because individuals possessing them mate more frequently. For example, the colorful plumage of peacocks evolved due to peahens' historical preference for males with brightly colored feathers.

In all sexually reproducing species, adaptations in males and females arise from both survival selection and sexual selection. However, unlike in other animals where one sex typically has control over mate choice, humans engage in mutual mate choice, where both partners have a say in selecting mates. Human preferences often prioritize qualities such as kindness, intelligence, and dependability, which are beneficial for fostering long-term relationships and effective parenting.

Sexual strategies theory

Sexual strategies theory builds upon sexual selection theory, suggesting that humans have developed various mating strategies, both short-term and long-term, influenced by factors such as culture, social context, parental influence, and personal desirability in the mating market.

Initially, sexual strategies theory focused on the contrasting mating preferences and strategies between men and women (Buss and Schmitt 1993). It considered the minimum parental investment required to produce offspring, noting that for women, this investment is substantial as they carry the child for nine months. In contrast, men's investment is minimal, limited to the act of sex.

These differing levels of parental investment significantly shape sexual strategies. Women face higher risks associated with poor mating choices, such as partnering with unsupportive or genetically inferior mates.

Consequently, women tend to be more selective in short-term mating situations. Men, on the other hand, are less selective due to lower associated costs, often engaging in more casual sexual activities. This can lead to men deceiving women about their intentions for short-term gains.

Empirical evidence supports these predictions, indicating that men generally desire more sex partners, engage in casual sex more readily, and lower their standards for short-term mating (Buss and Schmitt 2011). However, in long-term mating situations, where both parties are interested, both men and women invest substantially in the relationship and their children, leading to increased selectivity in partner choice.

While men and women generally seek similar qualities in long-term mates, such as intelligence and kindness, there are differences due to distinct adaptive challenges. Women value resource-related qualities in men, while men prioritize youth and health in women, indicating somewhat divergent preferences shaped by evolutionary pressures. Though these preferences were initially thought to be universal, emerging evidence suggests variations, particularly in industrialized western cultures. Factors like sex ratios, cultural practices, and the strategies of others also influence mate selection, complicating the straightforward application of sexual strategies theory in diverse contexts.

In summary, sexual strategies theory, rooted in sexual selection theory, highlights both commonalities and differences in men's and women's mating preferences and strategies. However, numerous other factors beyond evolutionary tendencies also play a role in shaping mate selection processes.

Liking & Loving Long-term

Previously, we've explored the dynamics of attraction between individuals just beginning to form connections. However, the fundamental principles of social psychology can also shed light on relationships that endure over time. As friendships deepen, marriages solidify, and families strengthen bonds, relationships evolve, requiring us to understand them in nuanced ways. Nevertheless, social psychology principles remain relevant in deciphering the factors contributing to the longevity of these relationships.

The elements sustaining affection and love in long-term relationships partly echo those fostering initial attraction. Even as time passes, individuals remain intrigued by their partners' physical attractiveness, albeit with reduced emphasis compared to initial encounters. Similarly, the importance of similarity persists. Relationships thrive when partners share common interests, values, and beliefs over time (Davis and Rusbult 2001). Both perceived and actual similarity tend to increase in long-term relationships, correlating with satisfaction in heterosexual marriages (Schul and Vinokur 2000). Moreover, certain aspects of similarity, such as positive and negative affectivity, influence satisfaction in same-sex marriages (Todosijevic et al. 2005). However, demographic factors like education and income similarity may hold less significance for satisfaction in same-sex partnerships than in heterosexual ones (Todosijevic et al. 2005).

Proximity also remains crucial, as relationships strained by prolonged physical separation are more susceptible to dissolution. But what about passion? Does it endure over time? Yes and no. Individuals in enduring relationships, reporting high satisfaction, maintain feelings of passion for their partners—they still

desire closeness and intimacy (Simpson 1987; Sprecher 2006). Moreover, they find their partners increasingly attractive as their love deepens (Simpson et al. 1990). However, the intense passion experienced during initial encounters is unlikely to sustain throughout long-term relationships (Acker and Davis 1992). Nonetheless, physical intimacy retains its importance over time.

As time passes, thinking becomes relatively more significant than feeling, and strong relationships often rely on companionate love. **Companionate love** is defined as a type of love rooted in friendship, mutual attraction, shared interests, respect, and care for each other's well-being. This doesn't imply that lasting love is any less powerful; instead, it might possess a different foundation compared to the initial intense love driven primarily by passion.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.whccd.edu/livingtogether/?p=81#oembed-1

"The Secret to Desire in a Long-term Relationships" by [TED](#) is licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND 4.0](#)

Closeness & Intimacy

While many factors influencing initial attraction remain relevant in long-term relationships, additional variables also come into play as the relationship progresses. One significant change is that as partners spend more time together, they become more acquainted with each other and develop deeper care and concern for one another. In successful relationships, this growing familiarity leads to increased closeness, whereas in unsuccessful relationships, closeness may stagnate or decline. A key aspect of this closeness is reciprocal self-disclosure, where partners communicate openly, without fear of judgment, and with empathy.

Intimate relationships, as defined by Sternberg (1986), are characterized by feelings of caring, warmth, acceptance, and social support between partners. In these relationships, individuals often view themselves and their partners as a unified entity, rather than as separate individuals. Moreover, individuals who feel close to their partners are better equipped to maintain positive feelings about the relationship, while also expressing negative emotions and making accurate judgments about their partner (Neff and Karney 2002). Additionally, people may use their partner's positive traits to enhance their own self-esteem (Lockwood et al. 2004).

Aron, Aron, and Smollan (1992) directly assessed the role of closeness in relationships using a simple measure called "**Measuring Relationship Closeness**." This measure allows individuals to assess the level of closeness in their relationships by indicating how much they perceive themselves and their partner to overlap as depicted in Figure 4.1. Completing this measure can provide insights into the level of intimacy in various

relationships, such as those with family members, friends, or romantic partners. Choosing circles that overlap more indicates greater closeness, while less overlap suggests a less intimate relationship.

Figure 4.1. Measuring Relationship Closeness
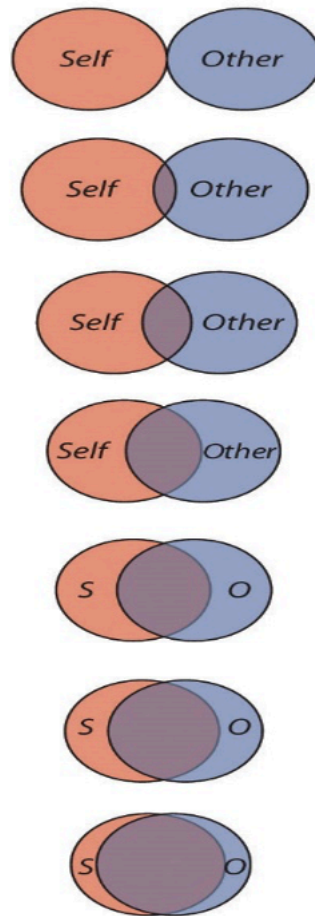
This measure helps gauge the level of closeness between two partners. Respondents simply circle the figure they believe best represents their relationship (Aron et al. 1992).

Despite its simplicity, research has shown that the closeness measure is highly predictive of individuals' satisfaction with their close relationships and their likelihood to stay together. Interestingly, the perceived closeness between romantic partners can be a more accurate predictor of relationship longevity than the number of positive feelings partners express for each other. In successful close relationships, the boundaries between self and other tend to blur, emphasizing acceptance, care, and social support as crucial factors (Aron et al. 1991).

Aron and his colleagues (Aron et al. 1997) conducted an experiment to investigate whether disclosing intimate thoughts to others would increase closeness. In this study, college students were paired with unfamiliar peers and asked to share intimate experiences by answering questions like "When did you last cry in

front of another person?" Those who engaged in intimate self-disclosure reported feeling significantly closer to their partners compared to control participants who engaged in small talk (e.g., discussing favorite holidays).

Communal & Exchange Relationships

In close, **intimate relationships**, partners often become deeply attuned to each other's needs, sometimes prioritizing the desires and goals of their partner over their own. This level of attentiveness and support, without expecting anything in return, characterizes what psychologists term a communal relationship. In such relationships, partners suspend the need for equality and exchange, offering support to meet their partner's needs selflessly, without considering the costs to themselves. This is contrasted with exchange relationships, where partners keep track of contributions to the partnership.

Research indicates that **communal relationships** can be advantageous, with studies showing that happier couples are less likely to keep score of their respective contributions (Buunk et al. 1991). Additionally, reminders of the external benefits partners provide may decrease feelings of love (Seligman et al. 1980).

However, this doesn't mean partners in long-term relationships always give without expecting anything in return. They may indeed keep track of contributions and benefits received. If one partner feels they are contributing more than their fair share over time, it can lead to dissatisfaction and strain in the relationship. **Equity** is crucial, with marriages being happiest when both partners perceive they contribute relatively equally (Van Yperen and Buunk 1990). Interestingly, our perception of equity compared to others' relationships around us also plays a role. Those who perceive they are receiving better treatment than others tend to be more satisfied with their relationships (Buunk and Van Yperen 1991).

Furthermore, individual differences exist in how people perceive equity's importance. Those high in **exchange orientation** find equity more critical for relationship satisfaction, while those low in exchange orientation may not show the same association (Buunk and Van Yperen 1991). Still they tend to be more satisfied overall with their relationships.

Ultimately, relationships that endure are characterized by partners who are attentive to each other's needs and strive for equitable treatment. Yet, the most successful relationships go beyond mere rewards and adopt a communal perspective, focusing on the well-being of the relationship as a whole.

Interdependence & Commitment

Long-term relationships differ from short-term ones in their complexity. As couples establish households, raise children, and possibly care for elderly parents, the demands on the relationship increase accordingly. This complexity leads partners in close relationships to rely on each other not only for emotional support but also for coordinating activities, remembering important dates, and completing tasks (Wegner et al. 1991). Partners become highly **interdependent**, relying on each other to achieve their goals.

Developing an understanding of each other's needs and establishing positive patterns of interdependence takes time in a relationship. The image we hold of our significant other is rich and detailed due to the time and care invested in the relationship (Andersen and Cole, 1990). Additionally, as relationships endure, particularly those involving children, the costs associated with ending the partnership become increasingly significant.

In relationships characterized by positive rapport and maintained over time, partners naturally find satisfaction and commitment. **Commitment** encompasses the feelings and actions that keep partners invested in the relationship. Committed partners view each other as more attractive, are less likely to consider other potential partners, and are less prone to aggression or breakup (Simpson 1987; Slotter et al. 2011).
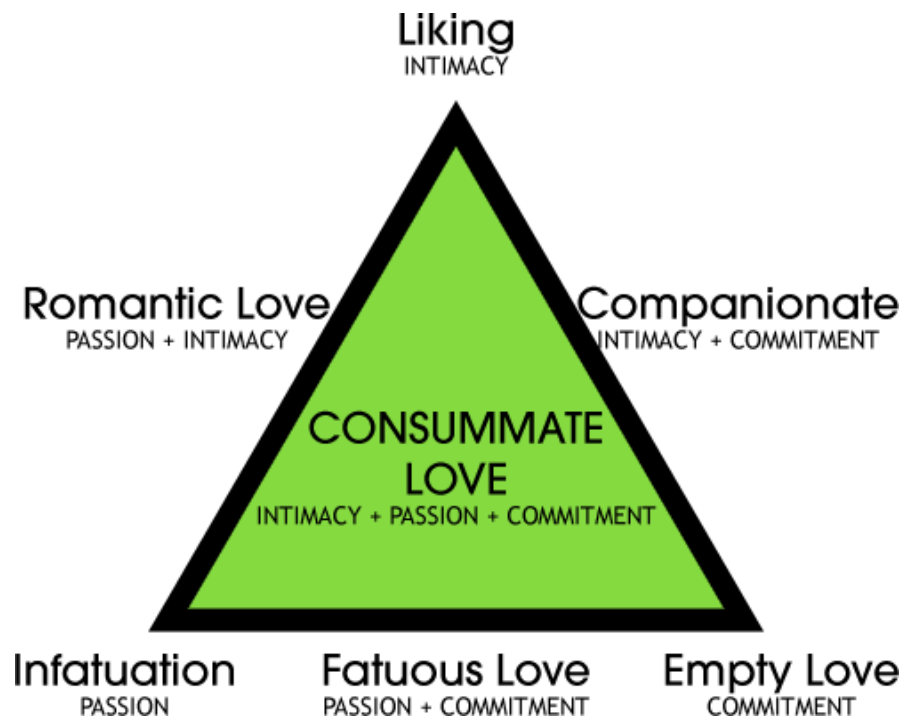
However, commitment may also lead individuals to stay in relationships even when the costs are high. This can be attributed to the consideration of both the benefits and costs of leaving, as well as the investments made in the relationship over time, known as the sunk costs bias (Eisenberg et al. 2012). Thus, when evaluating whether to stay or leave, individuals weigh the costs and benefits of the current relationship against those of potential alternatives (Rusbult et al. 2001). While interdependence and commitment contribute to the longevity of relationships, they can also complicate breakups. The closer and more committed a relationship, the more difficult a breakup can be.

Love & Attachments

Although we've discussed it indirectly, we haven't looked into defining love itself, despite its clear significance in many close relationships. Social psychologists have explored the role and characteristics of **romantic love**, discovering that it involves cognitive, emotional, and behavioral elements, and it's observed across different cultures, albeit with variations in experience.

Robert Sternberg and his colleagues (Arriaga and Agnew 2001; Sternberg 1986) have put forward a triangular model of love, proposing that there are various types of love, each comprising different combinations of cognitive and emotional factors—specifically passion, intimacy, and commitment. According to this model illustrated in Figure 4.2, consummate love, which entails all three components, is likely experienced only in the strongest romantic relationships. Other types of love may involve just one or two of these components. For instance, close friends may exhibit intimacy alone, or if they've known each other for a long time, they might also share commitment (companionate love). Similarly, individuals in the early stages of dating might feel infatuation (passion only) or romantic love (both passion and intimacy, but not commitment).

Figure. 4.2 Triangular Model of Love by Robert Sternberg (1986)

Liking
INTIMACY

Romantic Love
PASSION + INTIMACY

Companionate
INTIMACY + COMMITMENT

CONSUMMATE
LOVE
INTIMACY + PASSION + COMMITMENT

Infatuation
PASSION

Fatuous Love
PASSION + COMMITMENT

Empty Love
COMMITMENT

Source: Goerling, Ericka & Emerson Wolfe. 2002. *Introduction to Human Sexuality*. Portland, OR: Open Oregon Educational Resources. Retrieved March 27, 2024 (https://open.umn.edu/opentextbooks/textbooks/1273).

Research investigating Sternberg's theory has found that the importance of the different aspects of love tends to change over time. Lemieux and Hale (2002) collected data on the theory's three components from couples at various stages of their relationship—casually dating, engaged, or married. They discovered that while passion and intimacy showed a negative association with relationship duration, commitment displayed a positive correlation with the length of the relationship. Engaged couples reported the highest levels of intimacy and passion.

In addition to these changes in the dynamics of love within relationships over time, there are intriguing gender and cultural distinctions. Despite common stereotypes, men typically express beliefs indicating enduring love and report falling in love more rapidly than women (Sprecher and Metts 1989). Regarding cultural differences, individuals from collectivist cultures generally place less emphasis on romantic love compared to those from individualistic societies. Consequently, they may prioritize companionate aspects of love more and give relatively less importance to passion-based aspects (Dion and Dion 1993).

Attachment styles

One crucial factor that influences the quality of close relationships is how partners interact with each other. This interaction can be understood through **attachment styles**, which reflect individual differences in how people connect with others in close relationships. Our attachment styles are evident in our interactions with parents, friends, and romantic partners (Eastwick and Finkel 2008).

Attachment styles are developed in childhood, where children form either healthy or unhealthy attachments with their parents (Ainsworth et al. 1978; Cassidy and Shaver 1999). Most children develop a **secure attachment style**, feeling that their parents are safe, available, and responsive caregivers. These children find it easy to relate to their parents and view them as a secure base from which they can explore the world. However, some children develop **insecure attachment styles**. For instance, those with an anxious/ambivalent attachment style become overly dependent on their parents and continually seek more affection than they receive. Others develop an avoidant attachment style, becoming distant and fearful, lacking warmth in their interactions.

These attachment styles established in childhood tend to persist into adulthood (Caspi 2000; Collins et al. 2002; Rholes et al. 2007). Fraley (2002) conducted a meta-analysis confirming a significant correlation between infant attachment behavior and adult attachment over a span of 17 years. Another attachment style, the **disorganized style**, which combines features of insecure attachment, also shows links to adulthood, particularly with an **avoidant-fearful attachment style**.

The consistency of attachment styles across the lifespan implies that individuals who develop secure attachments in childhood are better equipped to form stable, healthy relationships as adults (Hazan and Diamond 2000). On the other hand, insecurely attached individuals may face challenges in their relationships. They tend to exhibit less warmth, express anger more frequently, and struggle with emotional expression. Moreover, they often worry about their partner's love and commitment, interpreting their partner's behavior negatively (Collins and Feeney 2000; Pierce and Lydon 2001).

People with avoidant and fearful attachment styles may encounter difficulties in forming close relationships altogether. They struggle with expressing emotions, experience negative affect during interactions, and have trouble understanding their partner's emotions (Tidwell et al. 1996; Fraley et al. 2000). They also show less interest in learning about their partner's thoughts and feelings (Rholes et al. 2007).

Attachment styles can be viewed in terms of meeting **self-concern** and **other-concern** goals in close relationships (see Table 4.1. "Attachment as Self-Concern and Other-Concern"). Individuals with a secure attachment style tend to have positive feelings about themselves and others. In contrast, those with avoidant attachment styles feel good about themselves but struggle in their relationships.

Anxious/ambivalent individuals are primarily other-concerned but have low self-esteem, hindering their ability to form strong relationships. The fourth category represents the avoidant-fearful style, where individuals struggle to meet both self-concern and other-concern goals.

Table 4.1. Attachment as Self-Concern and Other-Concern

		Other-concern	
		Goals are met	Goals are not met
Self-Concern	Goals are met	Secure attachment (Healthy feelings about the self and about important others)	Avoidant attachment (Healthy feelings about the self but fears about connecting with others)
	Goals are not met	Anxious/ambivalent attachment (Desires to reach out to others but also anxious about the self)	Fearful attachment (Relationships with others are poor but so is the self-concept)

Source: Jhangiani, R., & Tarry, H. 2014. *Principles of Social Psychology*. 1st ed. Retrieved March 27, 2024 (https://opentextbc.ca/socialpsychology/chapter/close-relationships-liking-and-loving-over-the-long-term/).

Given the significant impact of attachment styles on relationships, it's essential to consider potential partners' interactions with others in their lives. The quality of relationships with parents and close friends predicts the quality of romantic relationships. However, attachment styles don't determine everything. Adults have diverse experiences that can influence their ability to form close relationships positively or negatively. Additionally, there is diversity in attachment styles across cultures, suggesting that some attachment styles may be more adaptive in certain cultural contexts (Agishtein and Brumbaugh 2013). Moreover, attachment styles can vary across different relationships and change over time with varying relationship experiences (Pierce and Lydon 2001; Ross and Spinner 2001; Chopik et al. 2013). Therapeutic interventions can leverage these findings to help individuals develop more secure attachment styles and improve their relationships (Solomon 2009; Obegi 2008).

Internet Relationships

Many of us are increasingly connecting with others through digital platforms. Online relationships are becoming more prevalent. However, you might question whether interacting online can foster the same sense of closeness and care as face-to-face interactions. Additionally, you may wonder if spending more time on social media and the internet detracts from engaging in activities with physically close friends and family (Kraut et al. 1998).

Despite these concerns, research indicates that internet usage can contribute to positive outcomes in our close relationships (Bargh 2002; Bargh and McKenna 2002). In a study by Kraut et al. (2002), individuals who reported using the internet more frequently also reported spending increased time with their loved ones and experiencing better psychological well-being.

Moreover, the internet can facilitate the formation of new relationships, with their quality often rivaling or exceeding those formed in person (Parks and Floyd 1996). McKenna et al. (2002) found that many participants in online news and user groups developed close relationships with individuals they initially met on the internet.

A substantial portion of participants even reported forming real-life relationships, including marriages, engagements, or cohabitation, with internet acquaintances.

In laboratory studies, McKenna et al. (2002) compared interactions between previously unacquainted college students who met either in an internet chat room or face-to-face. Interestingly, those who initially met online tended to express greater liking for each other compared to those who met in person, even when interacting with the same partner both online and face-to-face. Additionally, people often find it easier to express their emotions and experiences to online partners than in face-to-face encounters (Bargh et al. 2002).

Several factors contribute to the success of internet relationships. The anonymity of online interactions can facilitate self-disclosure, allowing individuals to share personal information more freely. Moreover, the absence of physical attractiveness cues may lead individuals to prioritize other important characteristics such as shared values and beliefs. Additionally, the internet enables individuals to maintain connections with distant friends and family and facilitates the discovery of like-minded individuals with shared interests and values (Wellman et al. 2001).

Furthermore, online interactions can enhance offline relationships. A study by Fox et al. (2013) explored the impact of publicly declaring relationship status on Facebook, known as going "Facebook official" (FBO), among college students. They found that discussions between partners often preceded the FBO status change and that couples who went FBO reported increased perceived commitment and stability in their relationships. Rather than fostering isolation, interacting with others online helps us maintain close connections with family and friends and often leads to the formation of intimate and fulfilling relationships.

4.2 MARRIAGE & LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIPS

Before discussing marriage, cohabitation, and other forms of relationship building, it's crucial to consider the diversity present both at a personal and societal level within the United States and globally. As of the publication of this book, the world's population stands at 8 billion, with 336 million individuals being citizens of the United States (U.S. Census Bureau 2024). These numbers are continually increasing, evident by visiting the [website](). The United States and the world are experiencing rapid population growth, resulting in a multitude of diverse individuals within our communities. With billions of people globally, diversity is abundant, ranging from various family structures such as polygamous, monogamous, and cohabiting arrangements to differing views on childbirth within and outside of marriage.

Here is an activity we use in our race and ethnicity classes, which usually have about 40 students per section. Scholars are asked to jot down the top one or two traits they admire in other people and then the top one or two traits that really annoy them. After collecting their lists, we tally up the most common admirable and annoying traits, creating ranked lists. We then spend a significant portion of class time on a sympathy-building and empathy-awareness activity.

To start, we read out the most commonly reported admirable traits one by one, pausing for anyone who feels they possess that trait to stand up. This part is usually quite fun as students awkwardly but bravely rise when I mention their trait. Eventually, almost every scholar ends up standing at least once. It can take a bit more encouragement for scholars to stand for the annoying traits, but they come to trust that it's a safe environment. By the end, most students have stood up for both lists.

Afterwards, we ask scholars to share their observations. Many are surprised to find commonalities with their peers, realizing they're not as unique as they thought. Some notice traits they have that bother others. This often leads to feelings of sympathy for classmates with less desirable traits. We point out how almost every scholar stood up for both admirable and annoying traits, suggesting an increased capacity for empathy, the ability to understand others' feelings.

To help scholars grasp the diversity of modern society, we emphasize that everyone likely has traits that someone admires and others find annoying. In such a diverse world, learning to tolerate those with different backgrounds, beliefs, and traits is essential for peaceful coexistence. Tolerance is the baseline for respectful living in today's society. Feeling sympathy for others can enhance this tolerance.

However, there's a growing divide between liberal and cultural values, leading to not just a lack of tolerance but outright contempt for opposing views. In the past, tolerance might have been enough, but today, respecting and empathizing with those who hold different political beliefs is crucial. Respecting others, even those with opposing views, is essential in classrooms, workplaces, neighborhoods, and broader society.

If you find it challenging to respect others with differing political views, you're not alone, as many in our society feel the same. Starting with sympathy and tolerance is a good foundation. The teachings of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. offer valuable lessons on how to promote respect and empathy, even in the face of political differences, aligning with the principles outlined in the U.S. Constitution.

On The King Center's website, you can find Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s philosophy regarding the three evils of racism and his suggestions for overcoming hate, contempt, mistreatment, violence, and bigotry (The King Center 2024). Dr. King didn't just urge Americans to tolerate people of color; he called for a change in attitudes and beliefs to combat prejudice, blame, contempt, and mistreatment of those who are different. While the website contains more details, Dr. King advocated for nonviolent action, compassion, forming genuine friendships with diverse individuals, choosing love over hate, and addressing harmful actions rather than condemning individuals.

What does this mean for studying marriage and intimate relationships? It implies that, at a basic level, we should be able to tolerate people who are different. It's important to work respectfully within the bounds of federal and state laws that protect individuals based on their "protected class" status. Protected classes include categories like race, color, religion, ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, disability, and medical/genetic information, with workplace protections enforced by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). These protections extend to preventing mistreatment in the workplace, including discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment, and retaliation against those who file complaints. Similar rules and laws apply on college campuses.

But what about interactions at home, in public, or within religious settings? There are no laws mandating empathy, sincere friendships, or compassion. While laws exist to address hate crimes, such as those defined in criminal codes, tragic events like the murder of George Floyd highlight that laws alone cannot ensure proper behavior.

What if others pressure you to change your beliefs? It's important to note that forcing someone to abandon their beliefs is wrong. Diversity of thought is a fundamental aspect of American society. Those who hold contempt for differing beliefs exhibit behavior akin to the arrogance Dr. King identified as one of the three evils of racism. Dr. King described it as the belief that one race (or set of beliefs) is superior to others, demanding submission (King 1963).

As sociologists, our aim is to study rather than judge, striving for objectivity in research and teaching. We invite you to apply this objectivity as we explore lifestyles that may differ from your own. We'll also examine the widening gap between liberals and conservatives, and how legal definitions of marriage have contributed to this divide in recent decades.

Image by Ketut Subiyanto on Pexels

ANALYZING FAMILY STRUCTURES

Supreme Court Opinions

On June 26th, 2015, the United States Supreme Court rendered a decision regarding the legality of same-sex unions. Justice Kennedy wrote that under the 14th Amendment's equal protection provision, "couples of the same sex may not be deprived of that right and liberty." This is a historic decision that many civil liberties experts compare to Brown vs. Board of Education and Roe vs. Wade.

As a marriage and family scholar, it is pertinent for you to read the majority opinion written by Justice Kennedy. The opinion is intended to reflect the reasoning and legal precedence behind this historic decision. Read the opinion of the court by Justice Kennedy then write a response to the following questions: https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/576/644/#tab-opinion-3427255

1. State the "four principles and traditions which demonstrate that the reasons marriage is fundamental under the Constitution apply with equal force to same-sex couples" (Kennedy, 2015: 1-5).

2. Fill-in-the-blank: The right of same-sex couples to marry is also derived from the Fourteenth Amendment's guarantee of _____.

3. The lead plaintiff in the case, Jim Obergefell, who challenged Ohio's ban on same-sex marriage, stated that the ruling "affirms what millions across this country already know to be true in their hearts – that our love is equal." Throughout the written opinion by Kennedy many different couples stories were described. Which story resonated the most with you and why? What hardships were endured as cause for their case before the court?

4. How does this decision affect your view of civil liberties and freedom as it relates to marriage?

"We"

A **couple** is essentially a pair of individuals who perceive themselves as belonging together, trusting each other, and sharing a unique bond, distinct from all others. The concept of "We" is closely related, but it emphasizes the relationship itself as an entity. "We" often refers to a married couple, but it can also include cohabiting or other non-married intimate partnerships. This relationship stands out as deeply connected, not closely intertwined with any other relationships to the same extent as the bond between these two partners.

To illustrate, think of a "We" as akin to a jointly owned vehicle that both partners invest in maintaining. Both individuals must nurture and care for it to ensure its longevity. Sometimes, actions or words from one partner can damage the trust within this relationship. The "We" delineates the social and emotional boundaries a couple sets when they commit to each other, encompassing only the husband and wife while intentionally excluding children, extended family, coworkers, and friends.

Establishing a strong marital bond often involves distinguishing oneself as part of this "We" entity and partially disengaging from prior relationships with children, grandchildren, or close friends. This doesn't mean cutting off ties with parents, relatives, or friends altogether. Instead, it means forging a new, exclusive intimacy reserved solely for the couple. Judith Wallerstein and Sandra Blakeslee's book "The Good Marriage" explores this aspect.

There's a popular saying aimed at improving marital relationships: "Marriage requires less of 'Me' and lots more of 'We'." This highlights the importance of prioritizing the collective partnership over individual

needs or desires. Part of forming this "We" involves treating certain matters as "Spouse-only Issues," which are decisions, advice, and discussions reserved exclusively for partners and intentionally kept separate from family and friends. These may include topics like birth control, budget management, sexual preferences, or resolving arguments. Maintaining confidentiality within the marital relationship is crucial to prevent harmful intrusions from external sources.

Image by Lucxama Sylvain on Pexels

Marriage, as a formal, legally recognized union between individuals, contrasts with **cohabitation**, which is an informal arrangement based on sharing a residence without the legal formalities. While monogamy remains the culturally preferred form of marriage in the U.S. and worldwide, allowing only one spouse at a time, cohabitation has become increasingly popular over the last 30 years. Cohabiting couples live differently from married couples in various aspects of daily life, and while many eventually marry, they often face a higher risk of divorce compared to couples who never cohabited.

In the United States, marriage is commonly associated with **monogamy**, where one person is married to only one partner at a time. However, in many countries and cultures worldwide, marriage takes various forms beyond monogamy. **Polygamy**, which involves being married to more than one person simultaneously, is accepted to different extents across the globe, with most polygamous societies concentrated in northern Africa and east Asia (OECD 2019).

Polygamy primarily involves a man being married to multiple women concurrently, rather than the reverse (Altman and Ginat 1996). Despite its acceptance in many societies, the actual practice of polygamy is not widespread. Even in regions where it's prevalent, only around 11 percent of the population live in such arrangements, on average (Kramer 2020). Typically, these relationships involve older, affluent men with high social status (Altman and Ginat 1996). The average polygamous marriage consists of no more than three wives, with examples such as Negev Bedouin men in Israel often having two wives, although having up to four is acceptable (Griver 2008). Urbanization tends to decrease the prevalence of polygamy due to increased exposure to mass media, technology, and education (Altman and Ginat 1996).

In contrast, polygamy is illegal in the United States. According to a recent Gallup poll, 21 percent of respondents view polygamy as morally acceptable, representing a notable increase from previous polls. However, polygamy remains one of the least acceptable behaviors among those surveyed, ranking lower than consensual sex between teenagers but higher than a married person having an affair (Barosso et al. 2020). Engaging in marriage while still legally married to another person is termed bigamy and is considered a felony in most states.

Polyandry is a type of marriage that allows for more than one husband at the same time. Historically and

presently, this practice is rare, but it has been documented in various cultures across the globe, including some Pacific Island cultures, Africa, Asia, Europe, and South America (Wikipedia 2024).

What if someone enters into multiple marriages and divorces over time? This phenomenon is known as **serial monogamy** or **serial polygamy**. It involves establishing intimate relationships through marriage or cohabitation that eventually end and are followed by new relationships, repeating the pattern. While polygamists have simultaneous multiple spouses, serial monogamists or polygamists have multiple spouses in a sequence of relationships. Millions of adults in the United States will experience serial marriages and divorces. Despite the risks associated with marriage, many individuals still desire to remarry, even after going through divorce or witnessing their parents' unhealthy marriages.

Traditional gender roles have historically influenced power dynamics within marriages and families. **Patriarchal families**, where males hold more power and authority, have been prevalent throughout history, with rights and inheritances typically passing from fathers to sons. However, there is a growing trend towards **egalitarian families**, where power and authority are more evenly distributed between husbands and wives.

Marriage

Marriage, as legally registered by the state and recognized by the federal government, has evolved over centuries. While in the past, marriage rights were often dictated by fathers, clan or kinship leaders, religious leaders, and community members, today, the state or nation claims authority over marriage licenses and legal recognition. The legalization of same-sex marriage in the United States marked a significant shift in marriage laws, with the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in 2015 granting same-sex couples the right to marry nationwide (Cherlin 2010). This ruling sparked both celebration and controversy, reflecting the deep divide between liberal and conservative viewpoints in American society. Pew Research (2017) reports illustrate the widening gap between these two groups over time, emphasizing the increasing polarization of social issues including same-sex marriage.

The U.S. Census Bureau conducts yearly surveys called the Current Population Surveys, which provide insights into the makeup of the U.S. population. Table 4.2 displays the numbers and percentages of different family types in 2019 compared to 2011. It's evident that married couples constituted the largest proportion of family types in both years. Marriage remains the most preferred marital status, encompassing various types such as first marriages, remarriages, heterosexual or same-sex marriages, as well as inter-racial or inter-ethnic marriages. The number and percentage of marriages increased from 2011 to 2019. The proportion of widowed individuals remained fairly constant, with minimal changes. On the other hand, the numbers of divorced and separated individuals increased, although not significantly in terms of percentages. There was also an increase in the number and percentage of never-married singles from 2011 to 2019. These changes in marital status composition reflect shifts in society as a whole.

Table 4.2. U.S. Family Types Numbers & Percentages 2019 and 2011

Table 4.2. U.S. Family Types Numbers & Percentages 2019 and 2011

| Types	2019 & 2011 Numbers in Millions	2019 & 2011 Percentages
Married	137 & (123.9)	53% & (52%)
Widowed	14.2 & (14.2)	6% & (6%)
Divorced & Separated	40.3 & (30.0)	11% & (12.6%)
Never Married-Single	85.2 & (75.8)	32 % & (30%)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 2023. "MS-1. Marital Status of the Population 15 Years Old and Over by Sex, Race and Hispanic Origin: 1950 to Present." Retrieved March 27, 2024 (https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/families/marital.html).

Analyzing U.S. Census data reveals changes in the proportions of marital status for both men and women from 1950 to 2019. Figure 4.3 illustrates the trend of percentages of marital status types for men during this period. Despite being the most common status, the proportion of married men declined from around 70% in 1960 to approximately 53% in 2019. Conversely, the percentage of never-married singles among men increased from about 26% in 1950 to around 36% in 2019. This trend indicates that more individuals from Generation Y and Z are postponing marriage in the United States.

Similarly, Figure 4.4 displays the trend of percentages of marital status types for women from 1950 to 2019. Like men, married women remained the most common status, although it declined from approximately 68% in 1960 to about 51% in 2019. The proportion of never-married singles among women rose from about 20% in 1950 to around 30% in 2019, indicating a similar trend of delaying marriage among women, particularly among Generation Y and Z.

Can we explore why some marriages endure while others end in divorce? Robert and Jeanette Lauer, a husband-wife duo who extensively studied families, authored a book titled "Marriage and Family: The Quest for Intimacy" in 2009. Through their research, they examined the commitment and longevity of married couples, identifying 29 factors among couples who had been together for 15 years or more. Among these factors, both husbands and wives consistently ranked "My spouse is my best friend" and "I like my spouse as a person" as their top two factors. The Lauers also examined the level of commitment couples had toward their marriage, finding that they were dedicated to not only their own marriage but also the institution of marriage as a whole.

Figure 4.3. Men's Percentage Marital Status Proportions 1950-2019
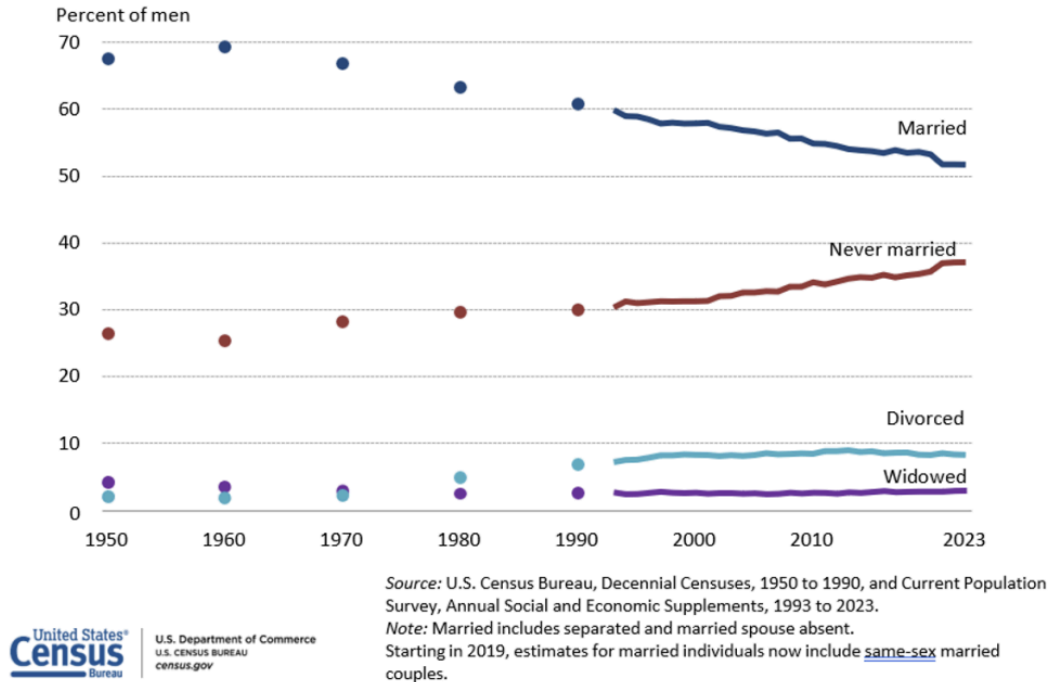
Percent of men

Source: Hammond, Ron, Paul Cheney, Raewyn Pearsey. 2021. *Sociology of the Family*. Ron J. Hammond & Paul W. Cheney. Retrieved March 27, 2024 (https://freesociologybooks.com/Sociology_Of_The_Family/09_Marriage_and_Other_Long-Term_Relationships.php).

Figure 4.4. Women's Percentage Marital Status Proportions 1950-2019
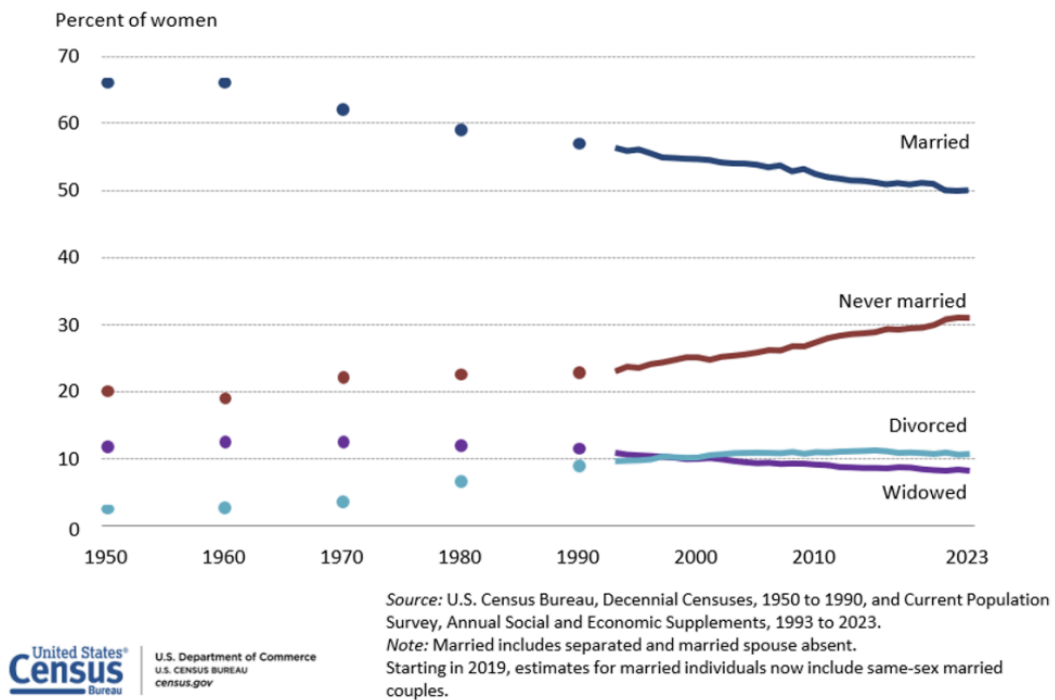
Percent of women

Source: Hammond, Ron, Paul Cheney, Raewyn Pearsey. 2021. *Sociology of the Family*. Ron J. Hammond & Paul W. Cheney. Retrieved March 27, 2024 (https://freesociologybooks.com/Sociology_Of_The_Family/09_Marriage_and_Other_Long-Term_Relationships.php).

It's common for marriages to encounter irreconcilable differences, and the key strategy to address them is negotiation, acceptance of differences, and maintaining a positive outlook on the marriage. While technically all married couples face a risk of divorce, this risk varies. Newly married couples, particularly within the first 10 years of marriage, undergo significant adjustments, especially in the initial 36 months. They must establish new boundaries and relationships, negotiate daily life routines, and get to know each other better. However, as couples stay together longer, their risk of divorce tends to decrease. In fact, most marriages in the U.S. endure for a long time.

Individuals who marry during their teenage years, even as young as 17, 18, or 19, have notably higher rates of divorce. This might be attributed to the fact that individuals continue to undergo significant changes until around the age of 25-26, when they achieve full psychological maturity. Couples who marry in their teens often find themselves outgrowing each other, including changes in attraction due to evolving preferences. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau (2023) often reveals that individuals marrying in their teenage years have the highest rates of divorce. However, it's worth noting that the divorce rate may be decreasing as people are waiting longer before getting married. Figure 4.5 from the U.S. Census show that the median age at marriage has risen over the years, reaching its highest recorded levels in 2019, with the median age being 29.0 for men and 28.6 for women in the United States.

Figure 4.5. U.S. Median Age at Marriage for Men and Women 1890 and 2019

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Censuses, 1890 to 1940, and Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplements, 1947 to 2023.
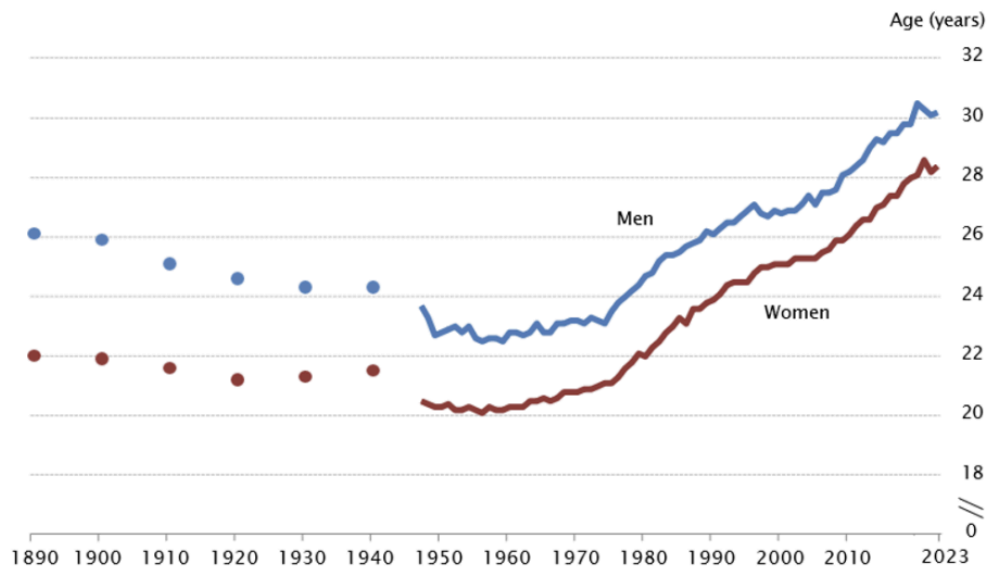Note: Starting in 2019, estimates for marriages now include same-sex married couples.

Source: Hammond, Ron, Paul Cheney, Raewyn Pearsey. 2021. Sociology of the Family. Ron J. Hammond & Paul W. Cheney. Retrieved March 27, 2024 (https://freesociologybooks.com/Sociology_Of_The_Family/09_Marriage_and_Other_Long-Term_Relationships.php).

As mentioned earlier, most unmarried mothers eventually marry the biological father of their child. However, these marriages are more likely to end in divorce compared to marriages between non-pregnant newlyweds. The presence of children at the time of marriage is often linked to higher divorce rates. Family Scientists have adopted a concept from physics known as entropy, which essentially suggests that matter tends to deteriorate and simplify over time. For instance, if a new car is left neglected in a field, it will eventually decay and deteriorate. Similarly, an untended garden will be overrun by weeds and pests, yielding little to no crop.

Marital entropy applies this principle to marriages, suggesting that without proactive maintenance and improvements, marriages tend to deteriorate and break down. Couples who recognize that marriage isn't always a constant state of bliss and understand that it requires effort are more likely to experience stability and strength in their relationship. They prioritize preventative measures, treating their marriage like a valuable possession that requires care and attention.

ANALYZING FAMILY STRUCTURES

Marriage Law

Conduct research and find an academic journal article about marriage law changes in the U.S.

1. How has marriage law changed over the years?
2. Describe the specific laws and changes that have transformed at the federal level.
3. What influences or social movements have contributed to these changes?

"Marriage Trends & Benefits?" by Katie Conklin, Lemoore College is licensed under CC BY 4.0

Many individuals struggle to fully embrace their married status, mentally remaining open to the possibility of finding someone better than their current spouse. Norval Glenn argued in 1991 that for many, marriage is seen

as a temporary arrangement while they keep an eye out for a better partner. This highlights the cultural values associated with the risk of divorce.

Figure 4.6 depicts a recent study conducted by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020) examined the marital statuses of individuals born between 1980 and 1984, tracking them longitudinally until they reached the age of 33. The study revealed differences between men and women and among individuals with various levels of educational attainment. For example, by age 33, 50 percent of Americans born between 1980 and 1984 were married, while 17 percent were cohabiting, and 33 percent were single. Women were more likely than men to be married at age 33 and less likely to be single. Additionally, individuals with higher levels of education were more likely to be married and less likely to be cohabiting compared to those with lower levels of education. For instance, 60 percent of college graduates born between 1980 and 1984 were married by age 33.

It's reasonable to expect that your marriage will likely be a positive and fulfilling relationship. However, the key is that the positivity and fulfillment of your marriage depend on the efforts you and your partner choose to invest in it. Gone are the days when traditional marriage was strongly supported by various social institutions like schools, religion, government, media, economy, education, and technology (although there's debate about how supportive they ever truly were). Nowadays, the responsibility for nurturing a happy and fulfilling relationship falls almost entirely on the personal-level, continuous, proactive, and dedicated efforts of both partners. Despite this shift, the odds are still in your favor for a quality and lasting marriage.

You've probably come across commercials boasting about the success of matchmaking websites in pairing people together. While there have been some criticisms of online marital enhancement services, millions of individuals have found them useful. Additionally, there are self-help books, podcasts, seminars, and even websites dedicated to supporting married couples who want to be proactive and preventive in their relationship.

Figure 4.6. Partner Status At Age 33
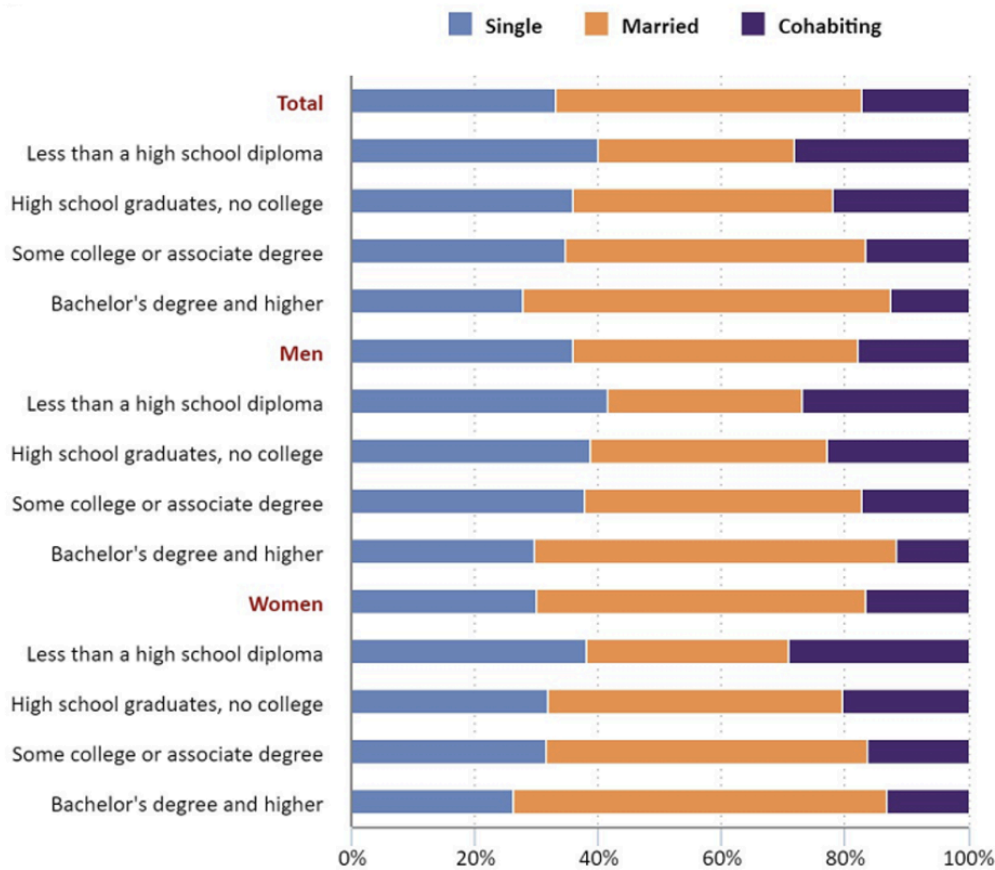
Source: Hammond, Ron, Paul Cheney, Raewyn Pearsey. 2021. *Sociology of the Family*. Ron J. Hammond & Paul W. Cheney. Retrieved March 27, 2024 (https://freesociologybooks.com/Sociology_Of_The_Family/09_Marriage_and_Other_Long-Term_Relationships.php).

Taking the time to do your homework during the mate-selection process is crucial. As the saying goes, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," and this certainly applies to selecting a partner. Understanding yourself, waiting until you're in your twenties or older, and forming a strong friendship with your spouse can significantly impact your marital experience. It's worth noting that most people don't marry strangers; rather, they meet their partners through social networks such as work, campus, dorms, fraternities and sororities, friends of friends, and other connections.

Marriage remains popular among U.S. adults because it offers numerous rewards that unmarried individuals may not experience. Sociologist Linda Waite, along with Maggie Gallagher, co-authored a book titled "The Case For Marriage: Why Married People Are Happier, Healthier, and Better Off Financially" (2001), which highlights the benefits of marriage based on decades of research. Despite the controversy surrounding marriage, particularly regarding the legalization of same-sex marriage, the political efforts to recognize it underscore its significance as a rewarding and valued institution.

There is a wealth of studies and literature detailing the benefits of marriage for individuals. Table 4.3 outlines ten categories of these benefits for your consideration.

Table 4.3. Ten Benefits of Being Married

1. Better physical and emotional health
2. More wealth and income
3. Positive social status
4. More and safer sex
5. Lifelong continuity of intimate relationships
6. Safer circumstances for children
7. Longer life expectancy
8. Lower odds of being crime victims
9. Enhanced legal and insurance rights and benefits (tax, medical, and inheritance)
10. Higher self-reported happiness

Source: Hammond, Ron, Paul Cheney, Raewyn Pearsey. 2021. Sociology of the Family. Ron J. Hammond & Paul W. Cheney. Retrieved March 27, 2024 (https://freesociologybooks.com/Sociology_Of_The_Family/09_Marriage_and_Other_Long-Term_Relationships.php).

Consider that there's no solid evidence proving that staying in a toxic marriage is better than being unmarried or never married. Rushing into marriage without careful consideration would be imprudent. Additionally, don't assume that getting married means the end of your problems. A newlywed once exclaimed to her mother, "Now that I'm married, I'm at the end of all my problems." Her mother wisely replied, "Which end, dear?" Remember, maintaining a fulfilling and satisfying marriage requires consistent, proactive, and timely effort from both partners. Ultimately, the responsibility for the quality of your marriage rests with you and your spouse.

ANALYZING FAMILY STRUCTURES

Marriage Trends & Benefits

Research shows a trend toward delaying marriage until later life. Consider the textbook illustrations that outline the potential benefits of marriage.

1. Choose the three most desirable benefits of marriage you enjoy or look forward to.
2. Categorize these benefits as either psychological, financial, or social, and share why think these are important to you culturally.

Cohabitation

Research on cohabitation has been extensive over the past three decades, particularly focusing on the likelihood of cohabiting couples eventually marrying. The findings consistently show that cohabitation and marriage are distinct, with economic factors playing a significant role in the transition from cohabitation to marriage.

There has been a noticeable increase in non-married cohabiting couples in recent decades, a trend that Pew Research Center reported as continuing in 2019. In 2017, Pew Research (2019) found that 50 percent of adults had ever married, while 59 percent had ever cohabited. This contrasts with their 2002 findings, where approximately 60 percent had ever married and only 54 percent had ever cohabited. Notably, Pew Research also reported that from 1995 to 2019, the percentage of adults living with an unmarried partner rose from 3% to 7%.

Moreover, Pew Research (2019) surveys revealed that a majority of U.S. adults, both cohabiting and married, expressed significant trust in their partner or spouse. However, married adults tended to express higher levels of trust compared to cohabiting adults regarding fidelity, acting in their best interest, honesty, and financial responsibility.

When asked about their reasons for cohabiting, respondents cited reasons such as love, companionship,

the desire to make a formal commitment, financial practicality, the intention to have children someday, convenience, and wanting to test the relationship. The Pew Research Center (2019) found U.S. cohabitation rates between 1995 and 2018 have largely stabilized in recent years, showing no significant increase or decrease for most age groups.

In 2012, the U.S. Census Bureau revealed that there were approximately 7,845,000 million heterosexual couples living together and about 687,000 same-sex couples. However, Gallup (2024) reported a significant decline in same-sex cohabitation rates from 12.8 percent before the Supreme Court's ruling on same-sex marriage (Obergefell v. Hodges, 26 June 2015) to only 6.6 percent in 2017. This decrease coincided with an increase in the number of same-sex couples legally married, rising from 7.9% before the ruling to 10.2% afterward (Jones 2017).

Studies have also examined the duration of first cohabitation relationships and their outcomes. Approximately 42 percent of cohabiting women transitioned to marriage within three years, while 32 percent remained together without marrying, and 27 percent ended their relationship (U.S. Census Bureau 2012).

Research by David Popenoe and others has highlighted the differences between cohabitation and marriage, emphasizing that cohabiting relationships tend to be less stable and less beneficial for children's well-being compared to marriage (Popenoe 2009; Williams et al. 2008). Serial Cohabiters, individuals who have multiple cohabiting relationships over time, often face higher divorce risks if they eventually marry compared to those who never cohabit serially (Lichter and Qian 2008).

Despite the various forms of relationships, marriage remains the most sought-after and preferred structure for most adults, although cohabitation continues to increase as a choice for many. It is essential to recognize that same-sex marriage, which has been legal in the U.S. for about five years, may have distinct patterns and challenges compared to heterosexual marriage. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s principles of social reform, emphasizing compassion and love for all, including those different from oneself, can provide valuable guidance in navigating interpersonal relationships and promoting a better quality of life for all individuals (Frankl 2006).

4.3 MAKING RELATIONSHIPS LAST

Now that you have a better understanding of the factors that contribute to interpersonal attraction and the essentials for maintaining close relationships, you can begin to grasp what partners need to do to stay together. While it's true that many marriages end in divorce, particularly in individualistic cultures where emphasis is placed on individual needs rather than group cohesion, the divorce rate is decreasing, especially among the more educated segments of society in Western countries like the United States (Kreider and Fields 2001). Building successful relationships requires effort, but the rewards are significant. Happily married individuals tend to experience greater overall happiness and improved psychological and physical health, with marriage even associated with longer life, especially for men (Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton 2001).

Let's examine some strategies that enduring couples often employ and compare them with findings from social psychological research:

Image by William Fortunato on Pexels

1. Expect disagreements: Conflict is normal in any relationship and can actually be constructive. Working through minor conflicts can enhance social skills and strengthen the relationship (Pickett and Gardner 2005).

2. Stay positive: Negative thoughts and emotions can harm relationships significantly. Avoid getting trapped in negative thinking patterns and strive to maintain a positive outlook (Gottman 1994).

3. Be fair: It's common for individuals to overestimate their own positive actions and underestimate those of their partner. Strive to evaluate behaviors objectively and give your partner the benefit of the doubt (Murray et al. 1996).

4. Show kindness: The principle of social exchange suggests that being kind and considerate to your partner fosters reciprocal kindness and strengthens the relationship.

5. Have fun: Relationships where partners experience positive emotions and avoid boredom tend to last longer (Tsapelas et al. 2009).

6. Share values and positive affect: Successful couples share similar values and display positive emotions toward each other. They laugh together, express approval, and view each other in a positive light (Murray et al. 1996).

7. Communicate openly: Successful relationships involve partners expressing their thoughts and needs openly, allowing for intimacy to deepen through effective communication patterns.

8. Address sexual compatibility: Compatibility in sexual preferences and attitudes is crucial for relationship

success. Partners should align in their views on monogamy and other sexual behaviors to prevent conflicts and maintain trust (Wiederman 1997).

9. Manage jealousy: Jealousy can threaten relationships, but understanding its evolutionary roots and differences in how men and women experience it can help partners navigate its challenges (Buss et al. 1992).

By incorporating these strategies into their relationships, couples can enhance their connection and strengthen their bond over time.

4.4 END OF MODULE MATERIAL

CORE INSIGHTS

This module provides a comprehensive exploration of intimate relationships within the framework of evolutionary theories and socio-psychological concepts. Beginning with an examination of evolutionary theories, including sexual selection and sexual strategy theories, students gain insight into the evolutionary roots of human mating behavior and relationship dynamics. Subsequently, the module examines the complexities of liking and loving in long-term relationships, dissecting the nuanced differences between these forms of affection and elucidating their profound impact on relationship dynamics. Further, the module evaluates the concepts of closeness and intimacy, offering scholars a multifaceted understanding of emotional and psychological proximity in interpersonal relationships. By comparing and contrasting communal and exchange relationships, scholars develop an understanding of the motivations, expectations, and patterns of interaction inherent in different types of relationships, setting the stage for an exploration of interdependence and its pivotal role in fostering commitment and cooperation within intimate relationships.

Moreover, the module reviews attachment theory and its implications for romantic relationships, empowering scholars to identify and comprehend the various attachment styles and their influence on the formation, maintenance, and dissolution of intimate bonds. Through a critical examination of the influence of the Internet on contemporary relationships, scholars gain insight into the opportunities and challenges posed by online interactions and digital communication platforms. Additionally, the module analyzes the institution of marriage within the context of long-term relationships, exploring cultural variations, legal implications, and social norms surrounding marital unions. Furthermore, scholars examine the phenomenon of cohabitation as an alternative to traditional marriage, considering its motivations, benefits, and challenges. Finally, the module equips scholars with evidence-based strategies for making relationships last and sustaining intimacy over time.

RESOURCES

1. Relationship Gratitude Tips (Therapist Aid 2017)
2. Relationship Growth Activity: Discovery Questions (Therapist Aid 2015)
3. The Four Horsemen and Their Antidotes (Therapist Aid 2021)

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PART V
MODULE 5: FAMILY LIFE & WELLNESS

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this module, scholars will be able to:

1. Understand the role of socialization in shaping communication patterns within families and communities.
2. Analyze the dynamics of arguments within families and their impact on relationships and communication.
3. Examine the various structures and functions of families, including their processes and roles within society.
4. Evaluate the concept of parental investment and its significance in family dynamics and child development.
5. Compare and contrast different types of parenting styles and their effects on family cohesion and individual well-being.
6. Investigate the unique challenges and opportunities faced by immigrant and refugee families in maintaining their cultural identity and connections while adapting to new environments.
7. Explore the motivations that drive immigrant and refugee families to migrate and the impact of these motivations on family dynamics.
8. Assess the importance of family connections and identity in the context of immigrant and refugee experiences.
9. Examine the concept of family obligation and its implications for decision-making and support networks within immigrant and refugee families.
10. Analyze strategies for achieving aspirations and overcoming challenges within immigrant and refugee families.

11. Identify contextual risks faced by immigrant and refugee families, including socio-economic, political, and cultural factors.

12. Evaluate the process of resettlement and its effects on family dynamics, relationships, and well-being.

13. Explore the influence of technology on family communication, relationships, and interactions.

14. Examine strategies for promoting healthy family dynamics, including effective communication, conflict resolution, and boundary-setting.

KEY TERMS & CONCEPTS

- Acceptability
- Accessibility
- Accommodation
- Acculturation
- Affordability
- Ambiguity
- Ambiguous loss theory
- Anonymity
- Approximation
- Ascribed status
- Behaviorism
- Beliefs
- Blended families
- Blood cell arguments
- Childhood instability
- Children with grandparents
- Closed family system
- Cognitive Model
- Cohabiting families
- Control of sexuality
- Core issues
- Critical theories
- Digital jealousy
- Directional arguments
- Dominating parents
- Double ABC-X stress model
- Economic support
- Emotional support
- Enmeshment
- Extended families
- Family cohesion
- Family communication
- Family functions
- Family identity

- Family processes
- Family resilience framework
- Family systems
- Gender differences
- General Fertility Rate (GFR)
- Human ecology framework
- Individuation
- Immediate families
- Immigrant paradox
- Leukemia's of arguments
- Massive bleeding arguments
- Mentoring parents
- Mood
- Morphogenesis
- Morphostasis
- Non-directional arguments
- Non-verbal cues
- Nuclear family
- Olson's circumplex model
- Open family system
- Phubbing
- Problem resolution strategies
- Procreation
- Resue parents
- Same-sex cohabiting/married families
- Self-worth
- Shame
- Situational inequality
- Social network theory
- Socialization of children
- Socioeconomic status (SES)
- Stepfamilies
- Systems theory
- Values

INTRODUCTION

This module explores the intricate dynamics of family life and wellness, emphasizing the importance of communication and connection within various family structures. We begin by examining the role of

socialization and communication in fostering strong family bonds and how arguments can be navigated constructively to maintain healthy relationships. The module also examines different family structures, highlighting the processes and functions that sustain them. This includes parental investment and functions as well as diverse parenting styles that contribute to a supportive family environment.

The discussion extends to the unique challenges and strengths of immigrant and refugee families, focusing on family motivation, connections, and identity. We explore the concept of family obligation and how these families strive to achieve their aspirations amidst contextual risks and the resettlement process. The module also considers the impact of technology on family interactions, both positive and negative. Finally, we address strategies for making healthy families, offering insights into practices that promote overall family wellness and resilience. By understanding these various aspects, readers can gain a comprehensive perspective on fostering healthy, connected, and resilient family units.

5.1 COMMUNICATIONS & CONNECTIONS

Couples quickly discover that a relationship isn't always smooth sailing and often requires effort to maintain stability and strength. Those who prioritize nurturing their partnership, treating it like a prized possession such as a well-maintained car, tend to fare better. Rather than waiting for problems to arise and then fixing them, they proactively prevent breakdowns. These couples often turn to experts like Gottman, Cherlin, Markman, Popenoe, and others who have extensively researched methods for maintaining healthy relationships and preventing decay if left unattended.

Effective communication is key in any relationship, and there are some fundamental principles that can be helpful to understand. Firstly, it's crucial to be in touch with your own feelings and express yourself honestly. However, many people aren't fully aware of their inner issues, which can be compared to the tip of an iceberg. When conflicts arise, asking yourself questions like how it happened, what led to it, and what was at stake for you can help uncover underlying issues.

Past experiences of hurt or rejection can hinder open communication in current relationships. Some individuals may have grown up feeling ashamed or worthless, leading to hypersensitivity to criticism and reluctance to reveal vulnerabilities.

While everyone has vulnerabilities, some people actively avoid conflict to the point of neglecting important issues in their relationships. Painful experiences from the past often shape our present behavior, either through suppression, denial, or projection onto our current relationships. Fear, in particular, can be highly detrimental, overpowering rational thought and hindering communication. Since the availability of free textbooks online in 2010, over a million individuals worldwide have accessed them, with some requesting guidance on arguing effectively over electronic communication. However, arguing via technology poses unique challenges due to the absence of nonverbal cues and the difficulty in conveying tone and emotion accurately.

Fear, stemming from past hurts and pains, can severely limit communication and should be managed effectively to prevent it from dictating one's actions. It's estimated that 90 percent of feared outcomes never materialize, and seeking support from others can help navigate the remaining 10 percent. Failure to manage fear can stifle communication and impede relationship growth.

It's common to feel that there's always someone out there who excels more than us in various aspects of what we offer our partners. Feeling inadequate is a natural experience for many. However, spouses can come together to support each other in dealing with their insecurities. By doing so, a weakness can transform into a communication strength, allowing the couple to address the vulnerabilities they each bring to the relationship.

Socialization & Communication

Gender differences play a role in how we communicate, sometimes leading to misunderstandings or avoidance of healthy communication patterns in favor of conforming to stereotypical behaviors associated with men or women. While self-help books can be beneficial, it's important to approach them with caution, particularly those making broad claims about the behavior of all men or all women.

Deborah Tannen (2007) discusses how our upbringing shapes our communication styles based on gender expectations. Men, she argues, are raised with a keen awareness of societal hierarchies, constantly conscious of others who may hold higher status. Consequently, many men avoid vulnerability in conversation to prevent potential put-downs, prioritizing maintaining their perceived status.

On the other hand, Tannen suggests that women are socialized to prioritize relationships, investing significant effort in maintaining connections with friends and family. This focus on relational dynamics leads women to approach conversations with a goal of fostering connection and preserving relationships. However, these differing approaches to communication can sometimes create challenges in connecting between men and women. It's essential to recognize that individuals vary in their communication styles regardless of gender. Rather than viewing differences as wrong or uncooperative, it's important to appreciate and understand each other's unique perspectives.

ANALYZING FAMILY STRUCTURES

Gender Communication Patterns

This exercise aims to compare your communication habits with concepts discussed in modern self-help books about gender communication. Complete the Gender Talk Patterns Assessment.

Reflect on your own communication behaviors as you go through each question. Keep in mind that listening, speaking, and non-verbal communication styles may differ to some extent depending on the individuals in your relationships. Nonetheless, completing this assessment can help identify patterns in your communication style.

Refer to the key provided after you've completed the entire evaluation.

1. Summarize your findings.
2. What did you learn about your communication patterns and stereotypes?
3. How does this relate to your relationships?

If you answered true to both sections, you likely exhibit communication patterns that align with the average person, blending aspects of both "men talk" and "women talk" stereotypes.

The true value of self-help books discussing differences in communication between genders lies not in categorizing all men or all women into specific talking styles. Instead, these books offer insights into general communication patterns, helping us recognize these patterns in the people we interact with, regardless of gender. They also encourage us to understand that our partners or significant others may simply communicate differently, rather than being perceived as uncooperative or unsupportive.

Consider having someone you regularly interact with take a version of this assessment tailored for partners, family members, or friends, and discuss the results together afterward.

Adapted from Hammond, Ron, Paul Cheney, Raewyn Pearsey. 2021. Sociology of the Family. Ron J. Hammond & Paul W. Cheney. Retrieved March 27, 2024 (https://freesociologybooks.com/Sociology_Of_The_Family/09_Marriage_and_Other_Long-Term_Relationships.php).

Communication involves more than just verbal exchanges. **Non-verbal cues**, such as touch, gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, distance, and body positioning, play a crucial role in conveying meaning and understanding one another. For instance, touch is a significant aspect of human interaction, with cultural norms influencing its expression. Similarly, gestures vary across cultures, emphasizing and illustrating verbal messages. Eye contact, although challenging for some, can convey emotions and intentions effectively, provided it is genuine. Body positioning also offers insights into one's disposition, with certain postures indicating openness or defensiveness.

Therapists rely on both verbal and non-verbal cues to assess a person's mood and affect. **Mood** refers to one's emotional state, often detected through the words and speech patterns a person uses. On the other hand, affect pertains to one's current emotional expression, observed through non-verbal signals. Sometimes, mood and affect may not align, as illustrated by a student who disclosed being sexually assaulted.

In 2017, Deborah Tannen published a book titled "You're the Only One I Can Tell: Inside the Language of Women's Friendships," delving into gender-related communication dynamics (Tannen 2017). While Tannen's

background is in linguistics, she draws on sociological concepts to explore how cultural norms influence communication patterns among women and girls.

Arguments

Arguments often revolve around who is right, what facts are involved, and who should take the blame. These kinds of arguments can be bothersome, whether you're directly involved or just listening nearby. A classic example of this type of argument can be seen in the Monty Python skit "Argument Clinic" on www.Youtube.com. These are referred to non-directional arguments because they fail to address the underlying issue. **Non-directional arguments** occur for various reasons but rarely contribute positively to the relationship.

Many people struggle with arguing because they view it as a sign of weakness, trouble, or even a moral failing. However marriage and family researchers have long established that it's not the argument itself that's problematic, but rather how it unfolds.

In contrast, **directional arguments** have a clear purpose and aim to address the root cause of the disagreement. Yet, it's not always easy to argue constructively. Markman et al. (2001) developed a training program to help couples navigate conflicts effectively, outlined in "Fighting for Your Marriage: Positive Steps for Preventing Divorce and Preserving a Lasting Love." Similarly, John Gottmann (2002) offers strategies for healthy conflict resolution in his book "The Relationship Cure: A 5 Step Guide to Strengthening Your Marriage, Family, and Friendships."

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At the heart of a healthy argument lies the ability to address the core issue in a way that leaves both parties satisfied with the outcome. Sounds simple, right? It's often easier said than done. But fear not, learning how to argue effectively isn't as complex as rocket science, the principles that work for most people can work for you too.

You've probably heard the expression "beating around the bush." In this expression, the bush represents the surface-level argument. However, the true cause of the argument lies deeper, at the root core of the problem. Too often, we waste time arguing about who's right, the facts, or who's to blame, instead of addressing the real issue. The root cause is often less obvious because we might not fully understand what's bothering us. We simply feel frustrated or concerned and start arguing. When emotions and pride take over, the argument becomes aimless and burdensome.

At the heart of most disagreements lie **core issues**, revolving around values, beliefs, needs, and wants. **Values** refer to what we consider important, desirable, and worthy, while **beliefs** encompass what we perceive as real

and accept as truths in our lives. It's within these realms that most disagreements originate and are ultimately resolved.

Some arguments stem from underlying issues within one partner's personality, akin to diseases affecting the relationship. These are referred as the **Leukemia's of arguments**. They're like medical conditions requiring professional intervention. Certain personality disorders like Borderline, Narcissistic, and Histrionic, among others, can significantly strain a relationship and may necessitate professional counseling to address effectively.

On the other hand, there are day-to-day arguments, termed **blood cell arguments**, reminiscent of the millions of blood cells our bodies generate and lose annually. These common disputes, such as disagreements over squeezing toothpaste, cooking an omelet, or navigating to a destination, are typical among newlyweds. However, they can serve as valuable practice for couples to learn how to engage in healthy arguments.

Practice becomes especially crucial when faced with more significant conflicts, akin to **massive bleeding arguments**. These disputes endanger the very foundation of the relationship, involving clashes over core values, beliefs, needs, and desires. For instance, infidelity can severely damage trust and the sense of exclusivity in marital sexuality, requiring significant effort to rebuild.

There are four **problem resolution strategies** that have been drawn from counseling and communication literature that are useful in managing arguments. The first strategy involves negotiating a **win-win solution**. It's essential for every couple to find ways to resolve disagreements where both parties feel their needs are acknowledged and met. Consider this, if one always wins, it implies the other always loses, which could lead to one partner feeling like a perpetual loser, which isn't conducive to a healthy relationship. The second option is to agree as a gift. This approach should be reserved for very unique circumstances. However, it's important to note that agreeing as a gift comes with risks, as it entails compromising on something significant to your core values. Strategy 3 involves learning to accept and live with differences in a relationship. It's common for couples to have irreconcilable differences, yet they recognize and appreciate each other's individuality, which enriches the relationship. Lastly, strategy 4 suggests considering personal change. This entails reflecting on oneself and being open to changing certain aspects to foster better understanding and harmony within the relationship.

To navigate arguments effectively, it's essential to address issues as they arise, focusing on finding solutions that benefit both partners. Additionally, maintaining boundaries around the relationship is crucial, ensuring that arguments remain between the partners themselves without involving external parties. Seeking guidance from professionals and utilizing resources like self-help books and seminars can offer valuable insights into healthier argumentative practices. Lastly, treating the relationship with care, akin to caring for a prized possession like a car, involves regular maintenance, preventative measures, and avoiding neglect to prevent marital entropy—the gradual breakdown of the relationship over time without proper upkeep.

5.2 FAMILY STRUCTURES

As we discussed in Module 1, family structures refer to the arrangement of individuals in a household who are connected either by blood relations or legal bonds. Typically, this includes households with at least one child below the age of 18. Different types of family structures exist: two-parent households, single-parent households, and situations where children live with neither parent, such as with grandparents or in foster care.

The U.S. Census Bureau (2019) defines various family structures:

1. **Nuclear family**: This consists of a child living with two married biological parents along with any full siblings.
2. **Cohabiting families**: In these families, a child's parent lives with at least one unrelated adult of the opposite sex. This adult may or may not be the child's biological parent.
3. **Same-sex cohabiting/married families**: A child's parent lives with at least one unrelated adult of the same sex. Again, this adult may or may not be the child's biological parent.
4. **Stepfamilies or blended families**: These are formed through remarriage, resulting in children living with one or no biologically related parents. The presence of a stepparent, stepsibling, or half-sibling indicates a blended family.
5. **Children with grandparents**: An arrangement where grandparents assume primary caregiving responsibilities, often due to circumstances such as parental incapacity, economic needs, or family tradition, providing stability and continuity but also facing financial and physical challenges.

Family Processes & Functions

Family processes refer to how families operate internally to handle cognitive, social, and emotional situations. These include how families adjust, talk to each other, deal with challenges, solve problems, raise children, make choices, organize activities, and take charge (Pasley and Petren 2015). Many **family functions** overlap with tasks, objectives, and duties of parenting. However, it's crucial to grasp how these functions and parenting responsibilities influence each other. Here's a list of family functions that are somewhat universal, meaning most families worldwide share some of these:

1. **Economic support**: This involves providing essentials like food, shelter, and clothing.
2. **Emotional support**: Families offer love, comfort, closeness, companionship, care, and a sense of belonging.
3. **Socialization of children**: This includes raising and guiding children to thrive within their society.

4. **Control of sexuality**: Families establish and regulate when and with whom sexual activity, including marriage, occurs.

5. **Procreation**: Families contribute to the continuation of society and the production of offspring.

6. **Ascribed status**: Families impart social identities such as social class, race, ethnicity, kinship, and religion (Hammond et al. 2021).

Influences of parenting on development

Parenting is a complicated process where parents and children affect each other. Parents behave the way they do for various reasons, and researchers are still studying the many factors that influence parenting. Some suggested influences on parental behavior include traits of the parents themselves, characteristics of the child, and surrounding environmental and cultural factors (Belsky1984; Demick 1999).

Parents bring their own unique characteristics and qualities into the parenting relationship, which shape how they make decisions as parents. These traits include factors such as their age, gender identity, personality, personal history, beliefs, knowledge about parenting and child development, as well as their mental and physical well-being. Additionally, parents' personalities play a significant role in their parenting behaviors. For instance, parents who are agreeable, conscientious, and outgoing tend to be warmer and provide more structure for their children. Conversely, parents who exhibit less anxiety and negativity are more supportive of their children's autonomy compared to those who are more anxious and less agreeable (Prinzie et al. 2009). Parents with these personality traits seem better equipped to respond positively to their children and maintain a consistent and structured environment for them.

Moreover, parents' own experiences during their upbringing, known as their developmental histories, can also influence their parenting approaches. They may adopt parenting practices learned from their own parents, with fathers who received monitoring, consistent discipline, and warmth during their childhood being more likely to employ these constructive parenting techniques with their own children (Kerr et al. 2009). Unfortunately, patterns of negative parenting and ineffective discipline can also be passed down from one generation to the next. However, parents who were unhappy with their own caregivers' methods may be more inclined to alter their own parenting strategies when they become parents themselves.

Parenting involves a two-way exchange. Not only do parents and caregivers influence their children, but children also have an impact on their parents or primary caregivers (Diener 2024). Certain characteristics of children, like their gender identity, birth order, temperament, and health status, can affect how parents raise them and the roles they assume in caregiving. For instance, having an infant with an easy temperament may make caregivers feel more effective because they can easily soothe the child and elicit positive responses like smiling and cooing. Conversely, caring for a cranky or fussy infant may lead to fewer positive interactions and make parents feel less effective in their role (Eisenberg et al. 2008).

Over time, parents of more difficult children may become stricter and less patient with their parenting (Clark et al. 2000; Kiff et al. 2011). Studies have shown that parents of fussy or difficult children often report

lower satisfaction in their relationships and face greater challenges in balancing work and family responsibilities (Hyde et al. 2004). Thus, a child's temperament is one of the factors influencing how caregivers interact with them.

Another factor is the child's gender identity. Some parents assign different household chores to their children based on their gender identity. For example, older research indicates that girls are typically tasked with caring for younger siblings and doing household chores, while boys are more often assigned outdoor chores like mowing the lawn (Grusec et al. 1996). Additionally, studies have found that parents communicate differently with their children based on their gender identity, such as providing more scientific explanations to sons and using more emotional language with daughters (Crowley et al. 2001).

The relationship between parents and children doesn't happen in a vacuum. Various sociocultural factors, such as economic challenges, religious beliefs, political climate, neighborhood environments, school settings, and social support networks, can also shape parenting behaviors. When parents face economic difficulties, they may experience heightened frustration, depression, or sadness, which can impact their ability to parent effectively (Conger and Conger 2004). Additionally, culture plays a significant role in shaping parenting practices. While all parents aim to equip their children with skills to succeed in their community, the specific skills valued can differ greatly across cultures (Tamis-LeMonda et al. 2007). For instance, some parents may prioritize independence and individual achievements, while others emphasize maintaining harmonious relationships and being part of a strong social network. These cultural differences in parental goals can also be influenced by factors such as immigration status.

Moreover, contextual factors like neighborhood safety, school environment, and social connections can also affect parenting, even when both the child and parent are not directly involved in these settings (Bronfenbrenner 1979). For example, research has shown that Latina mothers who perceive their neighborhood as unsafe may exhibit less warmth towards their children, likely due to the added stress associated with living in a threatening environment (Umaña-Taylor et al. 2011).

Parental Investment & Functions

The growth of an individual involves actively adapting within their social and economic environment. For instance, the level of closeness and positive attachment in the parent-infant bond, often with the mother, and the support provided by parents during early childhood, including nutrition, shape a child's experiences. These experiences influence the development of individual variations in how the brain responds to stress, impacting memory, attention, and emotions. From an evolutionary perspective, this process enables offspring to adjust gene expression patterns. These adjustments contribute to the formation and functioning of neural circuits and molecular pathways, supporting three main aspects: (1) biological defensive systems for survival (e.g., stress resilience), (2) reproductive success to promote establishment and persistence in the present environment, and (3) adequate parenting in the next generation (Bradshaw 1965).

Parenting is the essential process of nurturing, guiding, and preparing children for adulthood. It's a universal experience found in every culture throughout history. When babies are born, they're not automatically fully equipped for society. They need to learn social and emotional skills through interactions with family and friends as they grow.

Parents serve various crucial roles in society. They provide care, protection, and guidance to their children from birth through adulthood. They also play a vital role in socializing their children, teaching them the norms, values, and behaviors of their

Image by August de Richelieu on Pexels

community. Socialization begins early in a child's life with parents, family, and friends shaping their understanding of the world. This primary socialization continues until the child starts school, influencing how they interact and meet society's expectations.

Parents act as teachers throughout their children's lives, imparting skills and values essential for success. They also serve as guardians, ensuring their children's well-being and making important decisions on their behalf. Additionally, parents act as mediators between their children and the wider community, advocating for their needs and defending them when necessary. They play a crucial role in ensuring their children have the best opportunities for growth and development.

Surprisingly, there has been a decline in the number of babies born per mother in recent years in the U.S. This decline is evident across various demographic indicators. For instance, the **General Fertility Rate (GFR)**, which measures the number of births per 1,000 women aged 15-44, has been decreasing. Additionally, the Completed Fertility Rate, representing the total number of children a woman has in her lifetime, has also seen a decline. A May 2019 Pew Research Report highlights this trend, indicating that U.S. fertility has reached an all-time low according to three significant measures spanning from 1950 to 2018.

In Module 1 of our book, we explored the concept of "instability" in children's lives, which reveals a significant aspect of parenting in the United States that warrants further discussion. Traditionally, most couples refrained from sexual intercourse until marriage due to limited access to effective birth control, resulting in pregnancies often following unprotected sexual encounters. Andrew Cherlin (2010) highlights how Baby Boomers shaped a cultural shift by extending the pattern of sexual relations beyond marriage to include premarital, extramarital, post-divorce, and post-remarriage scenarios.

Childhood instability refers to frequent changes in household and parental relationship statuses during a child's first 18 years. This can encompass various scenarios, including children born to single, cohabiting, or married parents, experiencing parental divorce, separation, or remarriage, or encountering parental challenges like incarceration or addiction, and even entering the foster care system.

Cherlin's book offers in-depth analysis and research on shifts in U.S. family structures over the past century. He argues that a transition in U.S. individualism has shifted focus from collective family units to individual pursuits of self-fulfillment. Cherlin illustrates how this shift in values, evident from Baby Boomers to

Generations X, Y, and Z, clashes with the traditional emphasis on marriage, influencing trends in family dynamics observed both domestically and globally.

Supported by robust research data, Cherlin demonstrates the significant decline in the percentage of children living with two parents (married or cohabiting) from 88 percent in 1960 to about 70 percent in 2019, as depicted in Figure 5.1 from the U.S. Census Bureau. Furthermore, in 2019, many children residing in two-parent households experience childhood instability even before any remarriage occurs, reflecting broader societal shifts known as the "Marriage Go Round."

From a developmental standpoint, parents aim to nurture children into becoming independent, competent, and self-reliant adults who can thrive both within and outside their family circles. Typically, children start out with low levels of independence, which gradually increase during adolescence. This period is marked by a process known as individuation, where teenagers strive to establish their own identities and reduce their reliance on others, particularly their parents. The journey toward independence begins as early as the second year of life, with children gradually mastering self-care tasks as they grow older. Table 5.1 provides an overview of the stages of dependence and a child's ability to care for others across different life stages.

Parenting from birth to age 18 demands a deep understanding of how children grow and evolve from infancy to young adulthood. Psychologists like Jean Piaget, Sigmund Freud, Eric Erickson, and sociologists such as John B. Watson, George Herbert Mead, and Charles Cooley have spent years studying child development, shaping critical research in this field. While we can't delve into all their theories, let's explore some key concepts that can aid parents in their journey.

Figure 5.1. Living Arrangements of Children: 1960 to Present

Percent of children in each arrangement
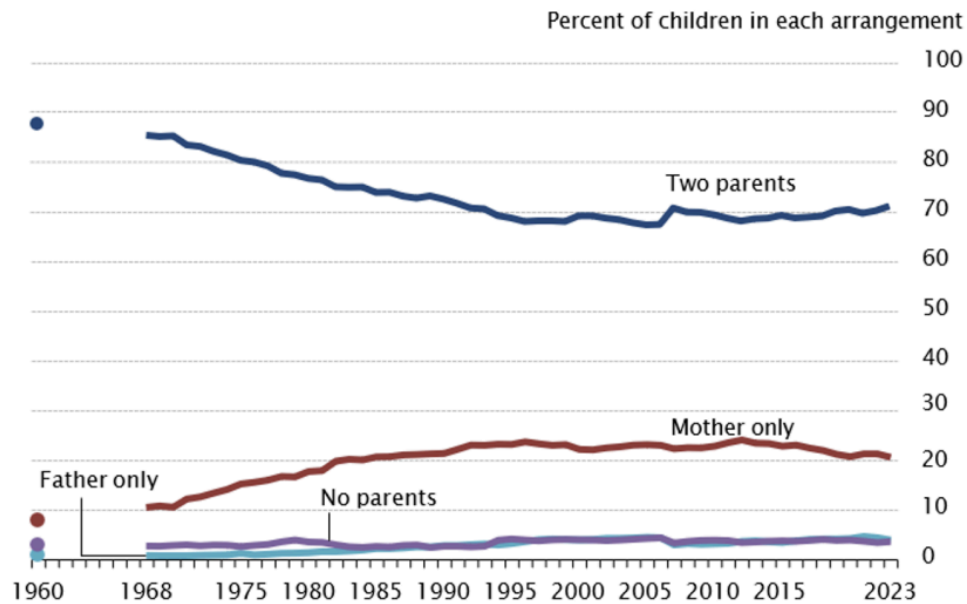
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census, 1960, and Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplements, 1968 to 2023.

Note: Direct identification of both parents began in 2007, resulting in the ability to identify children living with two unmarried parents.

Source: Hammond, Ron, Paul Cheney, Raewyn Pearsey. 2021. Sociology of the Family. Ron J. Hammond & Paul W. Cheney. Retrieved March 27, 2024 (https://freesociologybooks.com/Sociology_Of_The_Family/09_Marriage_and_Other_Long-Term_Relationships.php).

From birth to age 5, children have limited independence and rely heavily on adult caregivers for survival. Although they crave autonomy, their cognitive and physical abilities are still developing, making them reliant on adults for most tasks. However, through play, they begin to exhibit nurturing behaviors.

Between ages 6 and 12, children experience physical growth and emotional and intellectual development. They become more self-sufficient and can assist with tasks, but their ability to nurture is limited due to their still-developing reasoning skills. During adolescence (ages 13 to 18), teens undergo significant cognitive growth, engaging in abstract reasoning and emotional complexity. While they gain some independence and can offer care to others, their emotional volatility can pose challenges.

Parenting strategies must adapt to each age group's unique needs and developmental stage, recognizing that individual children vary in their response to different approaches. As children transition into young adulthood, they navigate a balance between independence and reliance on their parents for guidance and support. Despite seeking autonomy, they still lean on their parents for advice, resources, and emotional support as they prepare for adult roles. When young adults become parents themselves, they join a legacy of caregivers who have aimed to raise their children effectively. They often turn to their own parents for guidance, benefiting from the wisdom and experience they offer. Studies suggest that young parents thrive with support from friends and family, highlighting the importance of a supportive network in nurturing their own children.

Table 5.1. Children's Dependence and Their Ability to Nurture Others

Stage	Independence Levels	Ability to Nurture
Newborn	None	None
1-5	Very Low	Very Little
6-12	Functional	Low
13-18	Moderate	Moderate
19-24	Increasingly higher	Increasingly higher
Parenthood	High but needs support	High but needs support

Source: Hammond, Ron, Paul Cheney, Raewyn Pearsey. 2021. Sociology of the Family. Ron J. Hammond & Paul W. Cheney. Retrieved March 27, 2024 (https://freesociologybooks.com/Sociology_Of_The_Family/09_Marriage_and_Other_Long-Term_Relationships.php).

Balancing control and freedom

Given the wide range of development and growth among children, how can parents effectively fulfill their parenting duties? The solution lies in identifying a few key parenting paradigms and approaches. These approaches stem from both classical and modern parenting research.

Many families have a tradition of overcoming past traumas, addictions, heartaches, and tragedies that have shaped their upbringing. In this model, two key strategies are emphasized: individuation and avoiding enmeshment with children.

Individuation is the process by which children establish their own identities, recognizing themselves as unique individuals with distinct tastes, desires, talents, and values. Individuated children can differentiate between the consequences of their own actions and those of others. For example, an individuated child may feel embarrassed by a drug-addicted sibling but understands that the sibling's choices are separate from the family's identity. Individuated children also develop the independence to pursue their own paths and assume adult responsibilities.

Conversely, **enmeshment** occurs when parents and children intertwine their identities so closely that they struggle to function independently. Enmeshed relationships lack clear boundaries and foster unhealthy dependence, resembling overcooked spaghetti noodles melded into a single mass. For instance, parents may exert control over aspects of their adult child's life, such as finances or marital decisions.

Parents who prioritize their children's autonomy foster individuation and minimize enmeshment. By allowing children to make their own choices, from selecting clothing to setting personal boundaries, parents encourage independence and self-sufficiency. Studies suggest that providing both support and guidance yields

the most positive outcomes for children. While support nurtures individual growth and societal contribution, guidance ensures that children learn to respect limits and accept responsibility for their actions. Ultimately, a balanced approach of support and control empowers children to navigate adulthood successfully.

Baby Boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, were raised by parents who adhered to strict "spare the rod, spoil the child" or "my house, my rules" approaches to parenting. These parents maintained firm control over their children, leaving little room for negotiation or input. Interestingly, the countercultural movement of the Hippie era emerged from this generation, often as a reaction to the authoritarian parenting style they experienced. Children tend to rebel against strict authority figures, making it easier to rebel against rigid parents than those who adopt a more democratic approach. When parents strike a balance between authority and cooperation, rebellion tends to decrease.

In the middle of the parenting spectrum lies a healthy zone where control is shared between parents and children. Healthy parents value their children's input and involve them in decision-making processes, such as planning vacations or home renovations. They have the confidence to relinquish some control to their children while maintaining overall authority.

Many Baby Boomers, aiming to avoid replicating the harshness of their own upbringing, erred on the side of under-control in parenting. They allowed their children considerable freedom to find their own paths, sometimes to the detriment of the children. Some children of under-controlling parents ended up making serious mistakes in life, perhaps seeking attention or boundaries that were lacking at home. Research suggests that children raised by parents who strike a balance between support and moderate control are more likely to grow into responsible adults who contribute positively to society.

While it's essential for parents to respect their children's autonomy, it's equally important for them to assert authority and provide guidance. Parenting styles that combine authority with opportunities for children to negotiate their own decisions foster healthy development amidst the myriad distractions and choices children face daily.

Many parents grew up facing challenges like emotional, financial, or social struggles, and in some cases, abuse or addiction. Some were forced into caregiving roles at a young age, missing out on their own childhood experiences. As a result, they may enter parenthood hoping to fulfill the needs they missed out on as children themselves, creating a cycle where caregiving is passed down through generations.

Breaking this cycle of counter-caregiving is crucial. Even if parents didn't have supportive or controlling upbringing and have unmet childhood needs, their primary task is to provide for and nurture their own children and grandchildren. Seeking professional counseling can help parents recognize and address these issues, allowing them to heal and prevent unhealthy patterns from continuing. An apt metaphor for this situation is that "water flows downhill." Regardless of their upbringing, parents must focus on filling the cup of the next generation's needs. They should avoid relying on younger family members to fulfill their own needs, as this perpetuates an unhealthy cycle. It's a simple yet effective way to understand the importance of breaking harmful patterns in parenting.

Behaviorism

Behaviorism is a theory of learning that suggests children repeat behaviors that bring rewards while avoiding those that lead to punishment. This approach is particularly useful when parenting younger children who may not yet grasp complex reasoning. For instance, a four-year-old may not fully comprehend the dangers of playing near a busy street despite warnings. In such cases, parents often resort to methods like time-outs to discourage risky behavior. While spanking was once a common form of discipline, studies show that non-spanking approaches can be just as effective. However, despite changing attitudes towards spanking, it still persists in some families, often behind closed doors.

Understanding what motivates your child is key to effective discipline. Some children respond well to verbal cues or disappointed looks, while others may require more tangible rewards or privileges. Each child's preferences vary, so it's important for parents to tailor their approach accordingly. For example, Mrs. Peterson, a kindergarten teacher, found that a single Tootsie Pop could be more effective than multiple spankings or scoldings. By identifying what motivates your child, whether it's praise, privileges, or treats, you can reinforce positive behaviors and discourage negative ones.

Effective discipline involves connecting the consequence to the behavior. For instance, if a teenager breaks curfew, grounding them from social activities aligns with the natural consequence of their actions. Similarly, rewarding good behavior in public settings reinforces positive conduct.

Ultimately, the goal is to teach children to understand the consequences of their actions and to encourage positive behavior through appropriate rewards and consequences.

Table 5.2. Examples of Rewards and Punishments for Children

Table 5.2. Examples of Rewards and Punishments for Children

Possible Rewards	Possible Punishments
Verbal approval	Verbal disapproval
Verbal praise	Verbal reprimands
Sweets	Time out (in chair, bedroom, corner)
Playtime, friend time	Groundings (from friends, toys, driving, etc.)
Special time with parents	Chores
Access to toys	No access to toys
Money/allowance	Suspended allowance, small monetary fines
Permission	Denial of opportunities
Driving, outings with friends	Withdrawal of privileges

Source: Hammond, Ron, Paul Cheney, Raewyn Pearsey. 2021. Sociology of the Family. Ron J. Hammond & Paul W. Cheney. Retrieved

March 27, 2024 (https://freesociologybooks.com/Sociology_Of_The_Family/09_Marriage_and_Other_Long-Term_Relationships.php).

The Cognitive Model

One discovery about behaviorism is that it's most effective with younger children and should be supplemented with a cognitive approach as children grow older. The **Cognitive Model** of parenting relies on reasoning and explanation to persuade children to understand why certain behaviors are important. As children mature past the age of 7, they develop greater reasoning skills and can engage in more complex discussions.

The Cognitive Model offers a different approach for parents who feel uncomfortable with behaviorism, which they may perceive as bribery or coercion. However, it's important to recognize that when parents use rewards and punishments, their goal is typically to support the child's development and growth rather than selfish gain. It's crucial to understand that children, like adults, are motivated by rewards and seek to avoid punishment. For example, if a driver consistently speeds without consequences, they're likely to continue speeding. However, if they face the threat of losing their license after accumulating points, they may slow down to avoid the punishment.

The next stage in the parenting model is to gradually introduce children to responsibility and prepare them for adulthood. While parents may want to shield their children from failure, experiencing setbacks can be valuable learning experiences. Some parenting styles encourage children to learn from their own efforts, while others may involve more intervention in the learning process.

While no parenting approach works perfectly for every child, behaviorism and cognitive strategies can be effective, even when emotions override reasoning, especially with teenagers. These methods provide structure and guidance, even in emotionally charged situations.

Types of Parenting

Rescue parents are always stepping in to solve their children's problems. They might constantly assist with homework, ask teachers for special treatment, or shield their child from any possibility of failure. By doing so, they unintentionally erode their child's confidence and independence, making them feel incapable of handling things on their own. These children often grow up dependent and lack a sense of individuality.

Dominating parents exert excessive control over their children. They demand obedience and impose strict rules, often dictating their child's behavior, friendships, and activities. They may resort to humiliation or shame to enforce compliance, creating a dynamic where the child feels trapped and reliant on the parent's authority.

Mentoring parents, on the other hand, engage in more collaborative parenting. They allow their children to make minor decisions like clothing choices or hobbies while establishing clear guidelines for important matters like dating or technology use. They involve their children in decision-making and offer choices within

reasonable boundaries, fostering a sense of autonomy and responsibility. For instance, they might negotiate shared expenses for a car or explain the importance of sun protection while giving their child a choice in clothing options.

Parents often discover that even young children can contribute to household chores and tasks. When chores are presented as positive and rewarding activities, children can learn to assist their parents with housework and yard work. These practical skills are highly valuable in today's world, as employers often struggle to find teenagers and young adults with experience in fulfilling assigned tasks effectively.

Working together on these everyday tasks can strengthen the bond between parents and children, fostering emotional connections that may not develop when family members are simply engaged in passive activities like watching TV or playing on the computer. With more women participating in the workforce, there are increased opportunities for men and children to engage in house and yard work together. This collaborative approach to chores can be both a bonding experience and an opportunity for personal growth for both parents and children.

When we ask scholars about their childhood chores, and most commonly, they mention tasks like cleaning their rooms or helping in the kitchen. However, occasionally, students from farming backgrounds share stories of more demanding and complex work they did from a young age, highlighting the challenges and dangers associated with farming for children. Many students also work part-time to support themselves through college, and those who have developed strong work ethics and the ability to follow through on tasks tend to have more positive work experiences overall.

Parents aiming to raise their children to become responsible co-adults should understand what it means to be a co-adult child. Co-adulthood refers to the stage children reach when they are independent, capable of shouldering responsibilities and roles, and confident in their own emerging adult identities. On the flip side, dependent adult children, often enmeshed with their parents and family members, represent the opposite of co-adulthood.

A co-adult child is independent, but this independence doesn't negate the need for support and guidance. In fact, research on college-aged young adults indicates that many continue to rely on their parents well into their mid to late twenties. Psychologists suggest that the human brain fully matures around this age range in young adulthood.

There's an important aspect of parenting often overlooked: children also play a role in shaping their parents. It's amusing to reflect on how my wife and I, as newlyweds, debated over whether to save up for a pickup truck or a Ford Mustang. But when we learned we were expecting our first child, we found ourselves browsing minivans at a Dodge dealership. It was a surprising shift in our preferences driven by the anticipation of becoming parents.

The arrival of a newborn brings about significant changes for parents. Suddenly, there are constant demands to be met round the clock, every day of the year. While parents provide the essentials like bottles, diapers, and toys, it's the baby who dictates the feeding preferences and sleep schedule, especially in those initial months.

Babies condition parents to respond to their needs, teaching them how to hold, play, and interact based on the baby's cues.

Of course, parents also play a role in shaping the child's behavior. But babies effortlessly establish the rules of the caregiving dynamic by expressing happiness through smiles and giggles, or dissatisfaction through tears and cries. This dynamic of reward and punishment guides parents in understanding and meeting their child's needs.

This reciprocal socialization process isn't deliberate at first; it's a natural survival instinct. While parents bring their own upbringing, societal expectations, and expert advice into parenting, it's crucial for them to consider how their actions shape their child's sense of self-worth.

Self-worth & shame

Self-worth refers to how a child feels about their own strengths and weaknesses, as well as their value as an individual. While sociologists once emphasized the importance of self-esteem, today the focus is more on teaching children to appreciate their uniqueness and understand that nobody is perfect. Parents play a crucial role in instilling this balanced sense of self-worth in their children.

One harmful message parents can inadvertently send to their children is shame, which makes them feel worthless or flawed at a fundamental level. Unfortunately, many parents perpetuate shame-based parenting, which can lead to negative outcomes in children. **Shame** lies at the root of many addictions, as individuals who view themselves as permanently flawed are more prone to addictive behaviors. Unlike guilt, which involves remorse for specific actions, shame instills a pervasive sense of worthlessness. Previous generations often used shame as a tool for control, but parents today can break this cycle by fostering healthy self-worth in their children.

By avoiding shame and instead teaching children to learn from failures and mistakes, parents empower their children to embrace their uniqueness and value as individuals. This process of building healthy self-worth involves balancing strengths and weaknesses and learning from feedback and experiences. As children grow into adulthood, they carry this positive self-evaluation with them, enabling them to navigate life's challenges with confidence.

As parents, your views on self-worth directly influence your children. It's important to consistently express value and support to them, especially during times of disappointment. Encourage them to set reasonable goals and to view their efforts objectively, recognizing their strengths and weaknesses.

5.3 IMMIGRANT & REFUGEE FAMILIES

Recent research has shed light on the immigrant paradox, showing how immigrants often display remarkable resilience in overcoming challenges (Hernandez et al. 2012). Resilience, as described by Luthar and Cicchetti (2000) and Masten et al. (2006), refers to the ability to develop positively despite facing tough circumstances. Walsh (2006) views resilience within families as the capacity to bounce back and grow from difficult experiences, emphasizing the importance of finding meaning in adversity and having supportive relationships.

Immigrants and refugees encounter numerous challenges upon arriving in a new country, such as feelings of loneliness and isolation (Campbell 2008; Narchal 2012), financial struggles (Fuligni 2012; Parra-Cardona et al. 2006), and limited educational opportunities (Crosnoe 2012). Additionally, refugees often grapple with the aftermath of traumatic events, displacement, and resettlement stressors (Shannon et al. 2014; Weine et al. 2004). However, the resilience framework urges us to consider the strengths and protective factors that enable immigrant families to overcome adversity.

The **immigrant paradox** refers to the tendency for first and second-generation immigrants to outperform their U.S.-born counterparts in various aspects (Hernandez et al. 2012). This trend is evident in physical health, psychological well-being, and educational achievement. Fuligni (2012) identifies two factors that contribute to immigrants' success: strong motivation and a cultural emphasis on work and education, as well as strong family ties that provide support and guidance. Nonetheless, despite their lofty educational goals, immigrant families often face challenges accessing the resources and opportunities necessary for success. This review explores research on the strengths and resilience of immigrant families in the United States within these three areas.

Family Motivation

Aligned with a family resilience framework (Walsh 2006), immigrants are often strongly driven by the importance of family to work diligently and pursue education. Feeling connected to their family can offer a sense of belonging and social identity (Fuligni 2011). Moreover, maintaining a strong family identity contributes to overall well-being in minority communities, fostering a sense of purpose, drive, and significance (Fuligni 2011).

Family ties frequently serve as a driving force for immigration. For instance, in a study conducted with Latinx immigrants, the desire to reunite with family members emerged as a significant motivation for immigration (Campbell 2008). Other common reasons for leaving one's home country include aspirations for their children's education and future, a necessity to shield children from violence, and a quest for financial stability to ensure the family's basic needs are met (Solheim et al. 2012). This section explores the motivations

of immigrant and refugee families to strive for hard work and provide educational opportunities for their children.

Value of work

Throughout various studies, there is clear evidence that immigrant families prioritize hard work to support their loved ones. Not only is the opportunity to work hard for their families often cited as a reason for immigrating to the United States, but qualitative research also shows that immigrants take pride in contributing their best efforts to their families (Parra-Cardona et al. 2006; Solheim et al. 2012). Immigrant families endure challenges in their new country due to economic opportunities and the chance for their loved ones to move up socially (Valdez et al. 2013). In a study focusing on migrant workers, the demanding nature of long work hours and difficult schedules was acknowledged, but the opportunity to work and be self-sufficient was greatly valued (Parra-Cardona et al. 2006). Participants expressed satisfaction with having enough income for basic needs, a contrast to their previous experiences in their home country. Additionally, immigrant participants described imagining a brighter future as a coping mechanism (Parra-Cardona et al. 2008).

Data from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey indicate that the work habits of immigrant fathers vary depending on their level of English proficiency. Among immigrant fathers in families where English is spoken fluently, approximately 95% to 96% are employed to support their families, a rate similar to that of native-born American families (Hernandez et al. 2012). For immigrant fathers who are still learning English, over 85% are working to support their families. However, in Southeast Asian, Armenian, and Iraqi refugee families, this rate falls between 70-84%. This difference might stem from the fact that families from conflict-affected regions often face more challenges due to traumatic experiences, potentially leading to greater difficulties in functioning and finding employment.

Hernandez et al. (2012) observed that most immigrant families in their study had mothers who also contributed to the family's finances. Campbell (2008) highlighted the pride immigrant women take in their jobs, even if they are low paying. Many women exhibit entrepreneurial traits, engaging in traditional female roles such as baking and sewing to generate income. Their motivations are often rooted in their commitment to their families' welfare, viewing obstacles as hurdles to overcome rather than insurmountable barriers. In another study, a woman shared her pride in balancing work and family responsibilities while pursuing her GED, securing a new job, building a home with her spouse, and supporting her children's education (Parra-Cardona et al. 2006). Women also express support for their spouses and take pride in their partners' work ethic and sacrifices. For example, one woman in Parra-Cardona et al.'s (2006) study expressed pride in her husband's promotion at a factory, despite the challenging 70-hour work weeks and sacrifices he endured.

Children serve as a significant source of motivation for immigrants as they navigate challenges and adversity (Ayón & Naddy 2013; Valdez et al. 2013; Walsh 2006). Qualitative studies emphasize that the well-being of their children is a primary concern among immigrant workers, with parenting being their "central life

commitment" and a sacred duty (Parra-Cardona et al. 2008). Immigrant parents express a desire to fulfill their families' basic needs without sacrificing excessive time away from their loved ones. Southeast Asian adolescents, many of whom are children of immigrants, recognize their parents' sacrifices and affection through their efforts to provide for them (Zha et al. 2004). They understand that their parents aim for them to surpass their own achievements, viewing their parents' low-paying jobs as motivation to strive for better opportunities.

Value of education

Research highlights the significant value immigrant parents place on their children's education. In a study involving Mexican American undocumented women in South Carolina, mothers unanimously expressed their desire for their children to succeed academically (Campbell 2008). These mothers had sacrificed life in Mexico for the sake of their children's education. Many of them invested in their own education to become better role models and emphasized the importance of education to their children (Campbell 2008). Additionally, a longitudinal study revealed that immigrant children tended to have higher GPAs if their parents had prioritized education as a reason for immigrating, suggesting a potential impact of parental motivations on their children (Hagelskamp et al. 2010). Planning for their children's education was also found to bring satisfaction to immigrant parents (Parra-Cardona et al. 2006).

Despite facing initial challenges, first-generation immigrant adolescents often exhibit an advantage over second or third-generation children of immigrants, a phenomenon known as the immigrant paradox. Using data from the Educational Longitudinal Study, Pong and Zeiser (2012) discovered that first-generation immigrant students in 10th grade tended to have higher GPAs and more positive attitudes toward school compared to later generations. This trend held true across various racial and ethnic groups, including White, Latinx, Black, and Asian immigrant children. Family influence likely contributes to these outcomes as studies have shown a link between immigrant and refugee parents' aspirations and their children's academic performance. For instance, Pong and Zeiser (2012) found that parents' expectations were correlated with 10th-grade math achievement. In certain families, such as those of Hmong descent, higher levels of family conflict were associated with a greater likelihood of completing the first year of college, indicating parents' investment in their children's academic pursuits (Lee et al. 2009). Portes and Fernandez-Kelly (2008) discussed the strict parenting practices prevalent in immigrant families, which may diverge from mainstream parenting styles. However, they noted that these practices serve to protect children from negative influences in their immediate surroundings while maintaining cultural ties.

Value of a second language

While learning English poses a significant challenge for many immigrant children, research suggests that being bilingual can bring numerous benefits. Children raised in families that encourage learning two languages often experience advantages in academic performance, cognitive development, self-esteem, and family unity

(Espinosa 2008; Han 2012). However, it's crucial to recognize the importance of mastering English. In a study involving Latinx and Asian children, Han (2012) found that bilingual children proficient in English performed academically at levels similar to monolingual White children, after considering other factors. Conversely, bilingual children who were not proficient in English or did not speak both languages tended to perform at lower academic levels. Furthermore, first and second-generation bilingual children tended to perform better academically than third-generation bilingual students, adding to the evidence of the immigrant paradox.

Despite the potential stress involved, children of immigrants often take pride in their bilingual abilities and in their role as translators for their parents (Kasinitz et al. 2009). Additionally, speaking their native language enables children in immigrant and refugee families to maintain connections with extended family members and preserve their ethnic heritage (Costigan and Koryzma 2011; Nesteruk and Marks 2009). Espinosa (2008) recommends fostering rich language experiences in the native language during the first three years of life, followed by the introduction of a second language after the age of three.

ANALYZING FAMILY STRUCTURES

Success of Immigrants

1.Watch the following videos:

- Immigrant and Refugee Families by Ruben Parra-Cardona, Ph.D., LMFT (Duration: 14:13-14:52).
- Other Challenges Facing African Immigrants by Paul Orieny, Sr. Clinical Advisor for Mental Health, The Center for Victims of Torture (CVT)
- Strengths and Challenges by True Thao, MSW, LICSW

2. Write a response to the questions below, incorporating insights from the videos. Your response should be well-organized and supported with specific examples or quotes from the videos.

3. After watching the videos, reflect on your thoughts and feelings. Consider the following questions:

- What emotions did you experience while watching the videos?

- What new information or knowledge did you gain from the insights of the practitioners featured in the video?
- Did any aspects mentioned in either video resonate with your own experiences or observations of others?
- Which parts of the videos resonated with you the most? Why?

4. Be prepared to discuss your reflections in class or as part of a group discussion.

Family Connections & Identity

Fuligni (2011) proposed that due to challenges faced by immigrant communities in accessing resources, maintaining family and ethnic identity becomes crucial for immigrant families. Research by Ibanez et al. (2015) indicates that family bonds remain strong over time, especially among immigrant families experiencing significant stress, suggesting that families play a vital role in supporting immigrants adapting to a new culture. This family support and identity may help explain the immigrant paradox.

In Latinx families, the concept of "familismo" underscores the importance of family connectedness and obligation (Parra-Cardona et al. 2006). A qualitative study exploring parenting needs among Latinx parents found that "familismo" served as a strong motivator for adopting more effective parenting strategies (Parra-Cardona et al. 2014). Similarly, in Asian families, family cohesion is rooted in Confucian values (Walton and Takeuchi 2010). Among Black Caribbean immigrants, gatherings known as "liming" sessions reinforce family and cultural identities through storytelling (Brooks 2013).

The various aspects of family connectedness described above may act as sources of resilience, for both adults and children in immigrant families, including family cohesion, a sense of familial responsibility, and a focus on ethnic heritage.

Family cohesion refers to how emotionally close and supportive family members are to each other. Immigrant families tend to prioritize family connections, often including married couples and extended family members in their households more frequently than native-born families (Qian 2013). Statistics from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey show that 82% of children in immigrant families live with both parents, compared to 71% in native-born families (Hernandez et al. 2012). This emphasis on family cohesion, evident in both immediate and extended family structures, can offer protective influences for both children and adults.

In immediate immigrant families, strong family cohesion has been linked to positive outcomes for children and teenagers. Research on Latinx immigrant families suggests that family cohesion predicts children's social skills, self-efficacy, and protects against behavioral issues and alcohol use (Leidy et al. 2012; Marsiglia et al. 2009). Additionally, family cohesion may assist immigrants in coping with the challenges of adapting to a new country and culture. For instance, a study by Juang and Alvarez (2010) found that Chinese American youth who faced discrimination experienced feelings of loneliness and anxiety, but strong family cohesion helped alleviate these negative effects, especially for those experiencing high levels of discrimination. Similarly, among adolescent refugees from Cambodia who had witnessed significant violence, family support played a crucial role in protecting against mental health issues and risky behavior (Berthold 2000).

Immediate families play a crucial role in providing support during the transition to adulthood and parenthood. According to a study by Kasinitz et al. (2009), young adult children of immigrants are more likely than their native-born counterparts to reside with their parents. This living arrangement often allows them to pursue higher education without accumulating excessive debt and to save money for future home purchases. Additionally, immigrant adults frequently turn to their parents for assistance when they themselves become parents. Despite any prior criticisms, second-generation women often rely heavily on their mothers for support and guidance during the transition to parenthood (Foner and Dreby, 2011; Ornelas et al. 2009). Even when mothers are separated by distance, transnational phone calls serve as an important form of support (Ornelas et al. 2009).

Extended family members also play a significant role in supporting immigrant families. In numerous studies, extended family members offer crucial support during the initial period following migration, providing food, financial assistance, and emotional support until the newly arrived family becomes established (Ayón and Naddy 2013; DeJonckheere et al. 2014; Parra-Cardona et al. 2006). For instance, undocumented women in one study relied on extended family members to navigate the housing system and manage properties back in their home country (Campbell 2008). Social capital, described as a network of family and friends, is associated with life satisfaction and food security among immigrant Latina mothers (Raffaelli et al. 2012).

Extended family members also provide crucial support in child-rearing. In instances where immigrant mothers are separated from their own parents, they often rely on other extended family members, particularly in the immediate postpartum period (Ornelas et al. 2009). Grandparents and other relatives frequently assist in raising children, as observed among Eastern European immigrants and their US-born children (Nesteruk and Marks 2009). Moreover, in Hmong families residing in the United States, children may be sent to live with relatives to ensure their safety in potentially unsafe neighborhoods (Zha et al. 2004). Similar patterns are observed in other countries such as Vietnamese refugee families in Norway relying on kin networks to support troubled youth (Tingvold et al. 2012). Intergenerational ties are often maintained through sacrifices such as moving closer to relatives or sending children abroad to stay with grandparents (Nesteruk and Mark 2009). Grandparents frequently play a significant role in raising grandchildren, providing instrumental support, particularly in households where both parents work (Treas and Mazumdar 2004; Xie and Xia 2011).

Recognizing the importance of grandparents in immigrant families, researchers suggest further exploration of intergenerational dynamics in households with three generations (Foner and Derby 2011).

Family Obligation

Family identity encompasses a sense of duty toward relatives and striving to be valued and contributing members within one's family (Fuligni 2011). Immigrant adolescents and young adults from Filipino, Mexican, Latin American, and Central/South American backgrounds, even after accounting for socio-economic factors, exhibit a stronger sense of family obligation compared to European youth. They are more likely to report obligations such as assisting family, spending time with family, considering family members' opinions and desires, and supporting family (Fuligni 2011). While foreign-born students generally show higher levels of obligation than United States-born students, second and third-generation youth from Asian and Latinx backgrounds demonstrate a greater sense of obligation compared to those from European backgrounds. However, no significant differences in emotional closeness or conflict among ethnic groups were found. These levels of obligation are linked to adolescents' sense of ethnic identity, a topic explored further in this module.

Feelings of family obligation consistently correlate with academic motivations among Latinx and Asian immigrant children (Fuligni 2011). Immigrant children with a strong sense of family obligation tend to perceive education as important and useful, suggesting that family obligation may foster higher levels of school engagement beyond what socio-economic barriers and actual achievement levels would predict. However, no direct relationship between family obligation and academic grades was observed.

Parenting practices may contribute to the development of family obligation. A study by Zha et al. (2004) revealed that Southeast Asian adolescents perceived parental emphasis on proper behavior and academic success. For instance, one Cambodian participant mentioned constant messages from parents about the importance of education and staying away from trouble. Parents often conveyed the link between education and opportunities. These findings suggest that clear communication of family values by parents contributes to the academic resilience of immigrant children, possibly compensating for other challenges.

Family obligation is associated with the mental health of immigrant children. Research on Latinx families found that familism values are linked to lower rates of externalizing behavior (German et al. 2009). Additionally, family identity and obligation contribute to positive emotional well-being and personal self-efficacy in immigrant children (Fuligni 2011; Kuperminc et al. 2013). Feeling like a good family member mediates the relationship between helping at home and increased happiness among youth from Latino/a, Asian, and immigrant backgrounds, though increased helping may also lead to feelings of burden (Telzer and Fuligni 2009). A sense of fairness regarding family obligations predicts declines in psychological distress among Latinx immigrant youth (Kuperminc et al. 2013). Moreover, engaging in family assistance is associated with brain activation in the ventral striatum, suggesting a neurological benefit linked to decreased risk-taking (Telzer et al. 2013). Studies show lower instances of risky behaviors such as early sexual activity, violence, delinquency, and substance abuse among adolescent immigrant youth across various racial and ethnic backgrounds

(Hernandez et al. 2012; Kao, Lupiya, & Clemen-Stone 2014). Despite the challenges, immigrant youth often benefit from fulfilling family obligations.

Ethnic heritage

Developing a strong sense of ethnic identity within families and cultural communities can have a protective effect. For instance, research by Fuligni (2011) suggests that a robust ethnic identity contributes to academic motivation among immigrant children. Turney and Kao (2012) discovered that immigrant parents are more inclined to discuss their racial and ethnic traditions with their children compared to native-born parents.

Religiosity and spirituality, often intertwined with ethnic identity, rituals, and traditions, are significant protective factors in the immigrant paradox, particularly among Latinx and Somali youth (Mohamud and Areba 2016; Ruiz and Steffen 2011). In addition, involvement in religious communities serves as a vital means for children of Vietnamese refugees to connect with their ethnic heritage and develop cultural knowledge (Tingvold et al. 2012). For refugees, maintaining contact with individuals from the same ethnic background can offer protection. Geltman et al. (2005) found that Sudanese children without any contact with other Sudanese individuals were more likely to experience PTSD compared to those who had connections with Sudanese families.

In certain cases, adherence to traditions and cultural norms can be adaptive. For example, in a study by Fazel et al. (2012), maintaining ties to Somali culture was beneficial for Somali girls, whereas assimilating into the culture of the host country was advantageous for boys. Ethnic heritage emerges as a protective factor for many immigrants, although its impact may vary based on contextual factors such as gender.

Achieving Aspirations

Kasinitz and colleagues (2009) highlight instances of economic success among various immigrant groups. For example, children of Chinese and Russian Jewish immigrants in New York often have incomes comparable to those of White European Americans born in the United States. Similarly, West Indian immigrant families' children tend to have higher incomes than African American families born in the United States. Additionally, children of Dominican Republicans and South Americans typically have higher incomes than Puerto Ricans born in the United States.

However, Parra Cardona and colleagues (2006) present a contrasting view, noting that migrant workers often earn lower incomes compared to other impoverished groups, around $7,500 per year, despite their hard work. These families frequently face sudden relocations across the country without prior notice, resulting in disruptions to their children's education, as schools in new areas often lack bilingual support.

The reality of financial success in the United States often falls short of immigrants' expectations. Families from Mexico, for instance, find that the cost of living is higher than anticipated, hindering their ability to save as quickly as desired (Solheim et al. 2012). Surprisingly, a study of Latinx families found that higher levels of

education and skill were associated with lower life satisfaction, indicating a disparity between expectations and reality (Raffaelli et al. 2012).

Family obligations may act as barriers to achieving individual goals among young adults. For instance, some immigrants prioritize supporting their families financially over their own education, potentially hindering their academic pursuits (Solheim et al. 2012). This trend is particularly pronounced among first-generation immigrant young adults compared to second or third-generation individuals (Fuligni 2011). Immigrant youth who provide financial assistance to their families are less likely to complete a degree, indicating the impact of family obligations on educational attainment (Hagelskamp et al. 2010).

Educational attainment is influenced by parents' education levels upon immigration, underscoring the selective nature of the immigration process (Fuligni 2012). Immigrant households often possess higher educational qualifications than their counterparts in their home countries. For example, Black immigrant heads of household tend to have higher education levels than Black individuals born in the United States (Thomas 2011). Additionally, Chinese immigrant families typically have higher educational levels compared to other immigrant groups, contributing to better academic outcomes for their children (Zhou 2008). However, challenges exist, particularly for refugees, where parents' education levels can both serve as a protective factor and make them targets in violent conflicts (Montgomery 2010; Fazel et al. 2012).

While some studies control for **socioeconomic status** (SES), there are concerns about the real-world applicability of findings if SES strongly influences outcomes. Crosnoe (2012) addressed this by examining educational outcomes over time without controlling for SES. The results showed that White European American children of third-generation-plus families scored well above all other groups. Among high school students, second-generation Latinx students outpaced third-generation Latinx students; first-generation were in-between, but not significantly different from either the second- or third-generation. Among elementary students, third-generation-plus Latinx students scored above first- and second-generation immigrants but this gap decreased as the children reached fifth grade. Access to early education is limited for some immigrant groups, with socioeconomic barriers being significant factors (Hernandez et al. 2012). These challenges may vary across immigrant generations and communities.

Contextual Risks

Various factors contribute to the challenges faced by immigrant families, including local policies, neighborhood conditions, and discrimination. Lester and Nguyen (2015) found that areas with pro-immigrant policies and integration efforts had more diverse job opportunities for immigrants, leading to increased job stability and higher incomes during the Great Recession.

Immigrant families often settle in disadvantaged neighborhoods with limited resources and higher crime rates (Fuligni 2011; Zha et al. 2004). Schools attended by immigrant children may have poorer learning environments compared to those attended by non-immigrant children (Pong and Hao 2007; Pong and Zeiser

2012). Additionally, Southeast Asian adolescents felt their parents lacked resources to advocate for them in school due to social isolation (Zha et al. 2004).

Discrimination is another challenge faced by many immigrants (Kasinitz et al. 2009). Indian and Latinx immigrant children in New York reported experiencing more discrimination, affecting their access to local resources (Kasinitz et al. 2009). Discrimination in schools and communities can lead to negative mental health outcomes, such as depression and PTSD, among immigrant children (Ellis et al. 2008; Geltman et al., 2005). Even subtle discrimination and stereotypes can limit access to resources and impact long-term health outcomes (Fuligni et al. 2007).

The extent to which individuals adapt to their new culture, known as **acculturation**, can influence their access to resources and overall well-being. Adolescents and young adults who blend aspects of both their family's culture of origin and the new culture, while also being proficient in both languages, tend to adjust better than those who either cling solely to their original culture or fully assimilate into the new one (Kasinitz et al. 2009; Portes and Rumbaut 2001).

However, there can be challenges when there's a gap in acculturation between parents and their children. This mismatch can lead to conflicts within the family, turning family relationships into a risk factor instead of a source of support (Lee et al. 2009; Zha et al. 2004; Lazarevic et al. 2012). When parents and children have similar patterns of acculturation, it tends to benefit their relationships and the well-being of the youth (Portes and Rubaut 2001; Lazarevic et al. 2012).

In some cases, adapting parenting strategies to fit the demands of the new culture can positively impact the psychological adjustment of both mothers and fathers in immigrant families (Costigan and Koryzma 2011). However, the research also suggests that subsequent generations may not fare as well. As time passes and opportunities increase, there might be a decline in the strong sense of family identity that once provided protection, diminishing the benefits of these connections (Costigan and Koryzma 2011). Overall, these challenges underscore the importance of understanding and addressing the various contextual factors that influence the experiences of immigrant families in their new environments.

Resettlement & the Family

Over time, the discussion about immigrant experiences has evolved. Initially, it focused on simple group processes like assimilation, where individuals from one culture gradually adopt the norms of another culture. However, more recent discussions have delved into complex individual processes, such as intersectionality, which considers how various aspects of a person's identity intersect and influence their experiences. Despite these advancements, family dynamics have often been overlooked in these conversations.

As highlighted in our book, families play a crucial role in the resettlement process of immigrants. Falicov (2005) emphasizes that family relationships and ethnic identity are intertwined during resettlement, affecting each other in adaptive or reactive ways. Parents, grandparents, siblings, and children all impact one another's decisions regarding which aspects of their original culture to preserve and which to adopt from the new

culture. To better understand the complexities of immigrant families during resettlement, various theories from family and social science fields are employed. In the following section, we explore several of these theories and how they apply to immigrant families.

System theory

General **systems theory**, proposed by Von Bertalanffy in 1950, views families as cohesive units rather than just collections of individuals. According to this theory, a family is more than the sum of its parts, possessing its own unique characteristics, behavior patterns, and cycles that extend beyond the actions of individual family members. It emphasizes the interdependence and mutual influence among family members and subsystems, suggesting that studying one member alone is insufficient for understanding the family as a whole. To grasp patterns of adjustment in immigrant families, we must examine both the structure of the family unit and the processes occurring within it.

For instance, a study involving Vietnamese and Cambodian immigrant families collected data from both parents and children to explore how family processes contribute to conflicts over cultural values. The researchers discovered that clashes related to cultural differences were associated with conflicts between parents and children, which, in turn, led to weakened parent-child bonds and increased behavioral issues among adolescents (Choi et al. 2008). This illustrates a family pattern linked to resettlement that can only be fully understood when viewed at the level of the family system.

Unlike previous frameworks like structural functionalism, which assumed families always sought to maintain stability, general systems theory acknowledges that families also experience and promote change. While families typically strive for equilibrium, they may also initiate changes away from stability. This theory recognizes two tendencies within family systems: **morphogenesis**, which refers to the capacity for change, and **morphostasis**, which pertains to the inclination towards stability. When families relocate to a new country and must decide what aspects of their culture to retain and adapt, they navigate a balance between these two tendencies. Families actively assess their processes and establish goals, leading to changes when dysfunctional patterns are recognized and new processes are implemented to align with their objectives. Resettlement represents a significant example of the type of change a family system may choose or be compelled to undergo.

Human ecology framework

The **human ecology framework**, proposed by Bronfenbrenner in 1979, suggests that families interact within various environments that influence one another. These environments encompass personal factors (biophysical), immediate surroundings like family, neighborhood, and school (microsystem), connections between these immediate systems (mesosystem), larger social systems such as the stress caused by a family member's job (exosystem), and cultural values and societal structures like immigration policies (macrosystem).

For instance, in the context of a refugee family, factors like injuries sustained during persecution (biophysical), conflicts experienced while fleeing (microsystem), challenges faced by teachers with their own trauma (mesosystem), and lack of consultation with shelter residents regarding their needs (exosystem) can all impact the family's coping mechanisms.

By considering these various environments, the human ecology framework offers valuable insights, especially in cross-cultural contexts like immigrant families. For example, researchers can explore how Hmong immigrant families manage financial resources in the United States compared to their practices in Laos. This framework remains relevant across cultures, as it allows for the identification of needs, values, and environmental influences within each cultural context.

Furthermore, human ecology theory assumes that families are deliberate in their decision-making processes, striving to meet biological, economic, and psychosocial needs. As social environments become increasingly challenging in these areas, families may seek change, such as relocating to a new country. Recognizing their needs for resources and relationships, families engage in management strategies to meet these needs while adhering to their values and beliefs.

Double ABC-X stress model

The **double ABC-X model**, introduced by McCubbin and Patterson in 1983, explains how crises impact families. It suggests that the combination of stressors (A), the family's resources (B), and the family's interpretation of the event (C) determine how the family experiences the crisis (X). Each component of this model is influenced by the family's various environments, aligning with the principles of the human ecology framework. Importantly, the double ABC-X model emphasizes that there are multiple paths to recovery after a crisis, shaped by the family's internal and external resources and coping strategies.

This model holds relevance for immigrant and refugee families, who often undergo significant transitions during resettlement. Whether these transitions or the events leading to them are viewed as crises depends on factors such as other stressors the family faces (like employment, housing, healthcare availability, and family conflicts), the resources available to them (including socioeconomic status, family support, and access to community resources), and how the family interprets the situation based on their cultural and familial values.

Resilience framework

The **family resilience framework**, proposed by Walsh in 2003, focuses on how families endure and recover from difficult situations. It underscores how families come together to cope, relying on shared beliefs such as finding meaning in their circumstances, fostering hope, and drawing on spiritual support, as well as on family organization, including adaptable structures, unity, and access to social and economic resources. This framework also incorporates insights from the family lifecycle model developed by Carter and McGoldrick in 1999, which outlines how families navigate various stages and significant life events, each with its own

vulnerabilities and factors contributing to resilience. When applied to immigrant and refugee families, research using the resilience framework can shed light on their strengths and illustrate how they not only survive but also thrive amidst adversity.

Ambiguous loss theory

The family theories mentioned earlier can be widely relevant to immigrant and refugee families from various backgrounds. Many of these families share experiences of loss and trauma, and certain family theories are particularly suited to addressing these challenges. **Ambiguous loss theory**, proposed by Boss in 2006, explains the feelings of uncertainty experienced by immigrant families when they are separated, with family members being physically absent but psychologically present. This sense of ambiguity and separation often causes significant distress among these families (Solheim et al. 2015).

Critical theories

Critical theories offer valuable insights into understanding immigrant and refugee families. These theories suggest that our thoughts are shaped by power dynamics that are constructed by society and history. They emphasize both individual experiences and the influence of various social environments, aligning with the human ecology framework. Critical theories have roots in different academic fields and have made significant contributions to the social sciences. Among these, feminist theory, queer theory, and critical race theory have challenged prevailing social narratives. Scholars who adopt critical approaches strive to challenge social divisions and recognize how structural factors create inequalities.

Using critical theories in research involving immigrant and refugee families is particularly important because they aim to amplify the voices of marginalized groups. Researchers employing critical approaches actively seek out voices that are often ignored or oppressed, aiming to give them a platform. Since immigrant and refugee communities often face marginalization in their new societies, critical research methods can be used to advocate for these communities in collaborative ways.

Cultural values

Family theories offer valuable insights into understanding the complex process of family resettlement. As students, researchers, or clinicians, it's essential to carefully consider the values embedded in the theories we choose to apply. Here are some key points to keep in mind when evaluating potential theories.

Traditionally, ideas about the resettlement process place significant emphasis on the responsibility of immigrants and their families. This perspective suggests that because individuals and families choose to migrate, often seeking better opportunities, they should bear the primary responsibility for their success. However, this viewpoint is influenced by a cultural bias favoring personal responsibility and self-reliance.

While well-intentioned, it may not align with the beliefs and practices of immigrant communities. This bias towards personal responsibility stems from the notion of meritocracy, widely embraced in individualistic societies like the United States. Meritocracy assumes that success and possessions result from an individual's hard work and initiative in a fair society, attributing all privilege to personal efforts. However, this perspective overlooks the challenges immigrants face in adapting to a new environment without external support. Immigrant families arrive with aspirations for a better life and are willing to work hard, but navigating unfamiliar contexts, language barriers, and limited resources can be overwhelming without assistance from the larger society.

Immigrants often face challenges and feelings of loss, especially when they are part of visible minority groups in their new country (Abbott et al. 2000). Detailed studies with immigrant individuals have revealed that many of their initial interactions with members of the dominant group are perceived as condescending, marked by messages of superiority and discrimination (Muwanguzi and Musambira 2012). One significant way in which the reception and perceptions of local communities can negatively affect immigrants' resettlement experiences is through parent-school involvement and the academic achievement of immigrant children. Research consistently shows that parent-school involvement among immigrant families tends to be low (Kao 1995, 2004; Nord and Griffin 1999; Turney and Kao 2009). For example, Korean immigrant mothers often feel disempowered in their role and involvement with the school system due to issues related to their identity, cultural differences, and English language skills (Kwon 2012). Relying solely on traditional forms of parental involvement may overlook and underestimate the strengths and efforts of immigrant parents in supporting their children academically (Tiwana 2012). In conclusion, unexamined assumptions and expectations based on commonly held values can pose barriers to immigrant families' ability to thrive in a new society.

5.4 TECHNOLOGY & FAMILIES

As scholars studying families, we start by understanding what a family is, how it works, how family members interact, and how families fit into society. Then, we look at how technology, like phones and computers, is used by families to communicate and manage their lives. Technology helps family members talk to each other and take care of family responsibilities. This section looks at important ideas about families and includes new ideas about how technology affects them. Finally, we talk about two models that mix old ideas about families with the ways technology is used today.

In our discussion about how technology impacts our lives, it's important that we all have a common understanding of what we mean when we talk about families — it's a group of two or more people who are connected to each other, share similar values, and are committed to each other. They also share things like intimacy, resources, decision-making, and responsibilities.

Now, let's think about what families actually do. It might seem strange to question this since we all have experience being part of a family, even if our family situations have changed over time. Families are such a natural part of society that we often take their functions for granted. However, asking about their function helps us understand how families work and how they're influenced by technology.

Families serve different functions: they support each other as a group, take care of individual members, and contribute to society as a whole, including its culture. For instance, one common function is providing emotional support and taking care of each other's physical, mental, social, and sometimes spiritual well-being. Families also have a broader role in society by raising children and passing on cultural beliefs from one generation to the next, which helps maintain the well-being of their members in various aspects of life.

When we study families, it's crucial to see them as part of a larger picture, connected to the world around them. This is where the idea of families as open systems comes in. Think of a family like a living organism, where each member is connected and influenced by the others, as well as by outside factors. This perspective, called **family systems theory**, sees families as ongoing systems made up of interconnected members.

One important aspect of this theory is that the whole family is more than just the sum of its parts. Each family has its own unique qualities, strengths, and weaknesses. It's like a dynamic puzzle where information is constantly being shared through communication, affecting everyone involved.

Olson's circumplex model further explores how families operate through communication, closeness, and adaptability. Communication in families comes in many forms like talking, texting, or even just body language. How each person communicates and understands messages can vary, which can impact family dynamics. Closeness, or cohesion, is another key aspect. It's about finding the right balance between independence and togetherness within the family. Families need to be close enough to support each other but not so close that individual members feel suffocated.

In simple terms, families can be like either open or closed systems. An **open family system** is like a sponge—it's open to new experiences, it grows, and it changes over time. On the other hand, a **closed family system** is more like a sealed box—it avoids change and prefers to stick with the way things are.

Conflict is a natural part of family life, but what really matters is how families handle it. Healthy families are flexible—they can adapt to change and work through conflicts while still staying strong. When faced with something like a family member coming out as gay, an open family system accepts and supports them, adjusting to this new understanding of their identity. In contrast, a closed family system might struggle to accept anything outside of what they consider "normal," leading to a lack of communication and acceptance within the family.

Technology is another area where flexibility is important for families. An open family embraces technology and finds ways to use it that benefit everyone. But a closed family might resist using technology, seeing it as unnecessary or even harmful. Kevin Kelly talked about this in a podcast in 2018, using the example of the Amish community, who carefully decide whether to adopt new technologies like smartphones. They don't reject innovation outright but instead test it to see if it fits with their values and benefits the whole community.

Image Andrea Piacquadio on Pexels

Flexibility isn't just about big changes—it's also about making small adjustments every day. Whether it's negotiating screen time with a teenager or dealing with a major crisis like a natural disaster, families need to be flexible. This might mean showing compassion, communicating openly, or reorganizing responsibilities and resources to adapt to new situations.

In simpler terms, families don't exist in a bubble—they're influenced by the world around them, including their social environment, beliefs, and extended family. Social systems, like neighborhoods and schools, shape how families interact with others on a daily basis. Belief systems, such as traditions and values, guide how families live and what they aim for. Extended family members can also play a big role, passing on cultural norms and providing various types of support, which can be both helpful and sometimes stressful.

Families don't just react to outside influences—they also affect each other within the family unit. As they adapt to changes, they find a balance, much like how our bodies maintain stability when faced with stress. Families, being a close part of an individual's life, play a big role in shaping who they are and how they grow. Despite facing similar influences, each family responds in its own way. Factors like where they live, the time period they're in, and the resources available to them all play a part in shaping their experiences and well-being.

Patterns of communication

Family communication is how families connect and stay close. It's not just about talking—it's also about how families interact and share information through both words and actions, like gestures or expressions. Families also show love and care through traditions like celebrating birthdays or cultural holidays, which can be unique to each family. Every family is different, and one way they vary is in how they communicate. For example, some families talk a lot about various topics, while others might not talk as much and have more diverse opinions. Some families are open to outside influences, while others prefer to stick to their own ways.

Researchers Koerner and Fitzpatrick (2006) have a theory about family communication that looks at two main things: conversation and conformity. Figure 5.2 describes conversation is about what families talk about, while conformity is about how much they stick to certain values or beliefs. Families with low conversation might not talk much and might have limited topics, while those with low conformity might have a wide range of opinions and interests. Families with high conformity might be more protective, while those with high conversation might have more diverse viewpoints. In a nutshell, how families communicate can create different climates within the family, from protective to open and diverse, depending on how much they talk and how much they conform to certain ideas.

Figure 5.2. Family Types Based on Conversation and Conformity Orientations
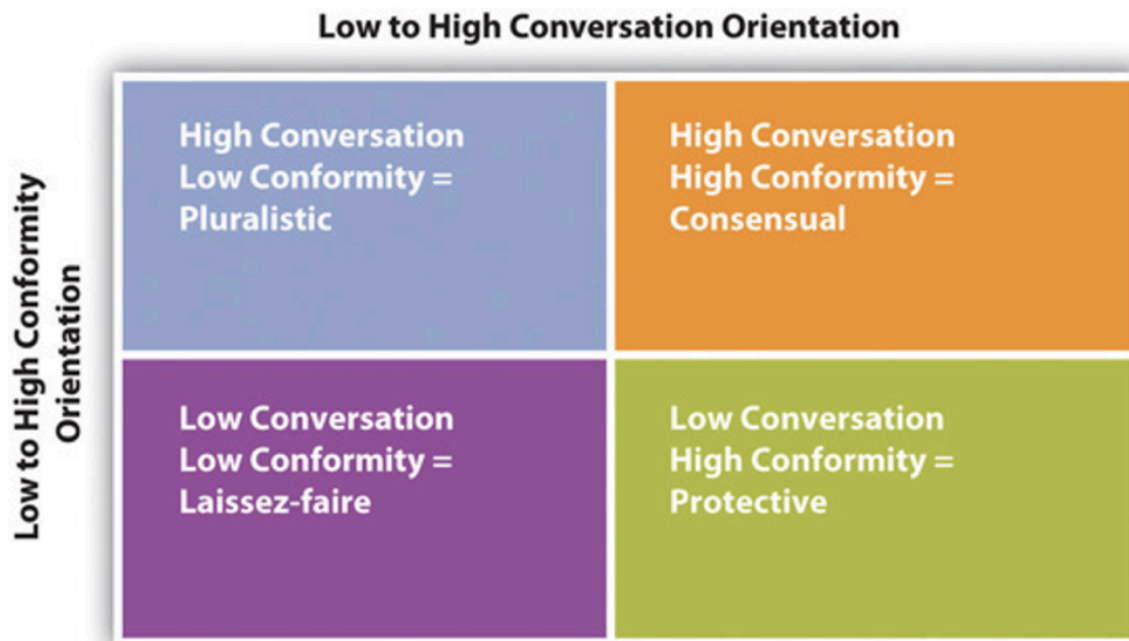
Family Types Based on Conversation and Conformity Orientations, Communication in the Real World, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

Source: Walker, Susan K. 2022. Critical Perspectives on Technology and the Family. University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing. Retrieved April 1, 2024 (https://open.lib.umn.edu/technologyfamily/).

Social networks of families

Social network theory comes from studying how people interact and share resources across different relationships. These networks aren't confined to specific institutions but are shaped by the connections between individuals. They're made up of links between people, and factors like the size and shape of the network, as well as how closely connected people are, play a big role. Social networks have power—they can influence how individuals and groups behave. The structure of these networks determines how information and influence flow within them, whether it's between individuals or across multiple connections, creating a bigger impact.

Moncrieff Cochran has applied this theory specifically to the role of parenting within families but its principles can be applied to other family dynamics too. It suggests that the broader social, structural, and relational aspects of a parent's life can affect a child's well-being, either through the parent's actions or directly on the child (Cochran 1990; Cochran et al. 1990; Cochran and Bassard 1979). Just like social network theory suggests, Cochran observed that it's through the connections and interactions within these networks that information and behavior models from society can influence parenting.

The people you connect with in your social networks are often influenced by factors like your cultural background, income, education level, and where you live. Christakis and Fowler (2009) refer to this as **situational inequality**. Another important factor is what motivates you to include certain people in your network—like shared interests or needs. Understanding these factors can help us figure out how to encourage people to join and participate in networks.

The interactions within social networks—whether they involve parents directly or happen indirectly—can affect how parents behave. For example, receiving support from others, whether it's practical help or emotional support, can influence parenting. Different aspects, like buffering stress, providing role models, teaching skills, offering direct assistance, and creating opportunities for interaction, can all play a part in shaping how parents behave.

Cochran's model provides a helpful framework for studying how parents' social networks, both online and offline, impact their parenting outcomes. This model encourages researchers to focus on both the process and structure of social relationships, recognizing their significance in understanding family dynamics. By adopting a network perspective, family researchers can explore additional aspects of parenting outcomes that arise from social network dynamics and can influence the child, such as parental growth and the parent-child relationship.

The internet serves as a powerful tool for information, communication, self-expression, and collaboration, potentially influencing the personal development of parents—for example, by providing validation of identity. Studying how online interactions affect parents can also reveal how these interactions might lead to benefits in offline settings, either directly for parents or indirectly for their children.

Couple and family technology framework

Hertlein (2012) presents a comprehensive model that examines how technology influences the dynamics of couples and families, including how they establish rules, roles, and boundaries, and interact with each other and the world around them (Hertlein 2018; Hertlein and Blumer 2013). This model combines insights from various theories, including family ecology, structural-functionalism, and interaction-constructionist theory.

The framework highlights unique aspects of digital communication, which Hertlein refers to as "vulnerabilities," that differentiate it from face-to-face interaction. These vulnerabilities include characteristics such as:

- **Anonymity**: presence online can be masked.
- **Accessibility**: easier, 24/7 access to the individual.
- **Affordability**: the lower cost for means of interaction and entertainment.
- **Approximation**: social presence, or the feel and representation of face-to-face interaction through text and sensory elements.
- **Acceptability**: of using technology as the format for relationship communication.
- **Accommodation:** enabling the individual to behave like their real vs. their ought self.
- **Ambiguity**: problematic behavior resulting from time spent online.

These aspects can affect how communication is perceived, how relationships are formed and maintained, and individuals' behavior within relationships.For example, children teaching parents how to use new technology like smartphones can lead to shifts in family roles. Couples may renegotiate what information they share about their relationship on social media, impacting relationship rules. A parent's distraction by work messages while helping with schoolwork at home can blur family boundaries. Additionally, technology can facilitate changes in family processes, such as initiating relationships through dating apps or maintaining intimacy through videoconferencing during times of separation.

Technology use by couples

Given that the majority of households in the United States now have internet access and own smartphones, texting has become a primary way for couples to communicate (U.S. Census Bureau 2021). This trend is especially prevalent in households with younger leaders, in urban areas, and across all income levels. Couples find texting efficient, easy, and convenient (Nylander et al. 2012). Through calls and texts, couples express affection, deepen intimacy, solve problems, and gather information. Factors such as the length of the relationship, how close the couple is, and their familiarity with using cell phones predict how positively and frequently they use these communication methods.

Social media also plays a role in how some couples communicate about their relationship and learn more

about potential partners (Vogels and Anderson 2020). Other technologies like videoconferencing, virtual reality, and augmented reality offer even more immersive ways for couples to connect. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a story about an elderly couple using FaceTime to stay in touch, even though one of them lived in assisted living. Some couples also use more sensory-mediated communication methods, such as cybersex, which involves activities like viewing pornography, sexting, and engaging in web-cam sex.

In a study involving college students, Hertein and Ancheta (2014) examined how technology is used in relationship initiation, management, and enhancement. They found that technology helps couples seek information, manage conflicts, reduce anxiety, and demonstrate commitment. Furthermore, technology can enhance relationships by adding excitement to sexual interactions and maintaining connection during periods of separation.

If a researcher asked you whether technology has affected your relationship, how would you respond? Would you want the researcher to clarify what they mean by "impact"? According to research conducted by Pew in 2014 (Lenhart and Duggan), couples generally viewed "impact" as something significant. Only 10% of couples who had been together for 10 years or more reported any impact from technology use, and in most cases, this impact was positive, leading to increased feelings of connectedness. However, younger age groups showed higher rates of impact, with 21% of individuals aged 18–29 reporting a major impact from technology.

A more recent study by Pew (Vogels and Anderson 2020) also found that couples didn't feel significantly affected by seeing others post about their relationships on social media. Although 81% reported seeing these posts, the majority (81% of this group) said it didn't affect their own relationships, and another 9% even felt better about their own relationships after seeing these posts.

Of course, there are drawbacks to using technology in relationships. Misunderstandings and differences in technology use are common. Sometimes, one partner may use devices or applications without including the other, leading to feelings of imbalance. Activities like video gaming, viewing pornography, or **phubbing**—ignoring a partner by focusing on a phone—can also lead to conflict. Additionally, technology may be used to assert power imbalances, such as by choosing to have difficult conversations or even breaking up online, or in extreme cases, through stalking, harassment, or withholding a partner's access to technology, as seen in cases of intimate partner violence.

Although Information and Communications Technology (ICT) can improve how efficiently couples communicate and feel connected to each other, it's evident that it can also lead to conflicts between them. Imagine a scenario where a couple faces a conflict. How might technology play a role in causing that conflict, and how does it affect the couple's relationship? Instances such as checking a partner's phone, keeping tabs on ex-partners through social media, or feeling insecure or jealous about the partner's social media activity are more commonly reported by younger adults and those in unmarried relationships. Hertlein and Ancheta (2014) identified common themes related to technology interference in couples' relationships, which will guide our discussion in this section. These themes are supported by the findings of other researchers who have explored how married couples use technology, such as Vaterlaus and Tulane's study in 2019.

Messaging through text or sexting may appear impersonal to some individuals, leading to a sense of

detachment from the communication process. A phenomenon known as phubbing in couples (also labeled PPhubbing, or Partner Phubbing), has garnered significant attention as a form of technoference (McDaniel and Coyne 2016). Research indicates that even among married and committed couples, more than half report that their partner gets distracted by their phone, with a similar number expressing discomfort with the amount of time spent on phones. Phubbing has been linked to various negative effects on couples, including decreased intimacy, reduced relationship and sexual satisfaction, a diminished sense of quality time, and negative impacts on mental health (Wang et al. 2017).

A study conducted with married couples in China (Chen et al. 2022) investigated the transmissive effects of phubbing, where one partner ignores the other after experiencing being ignored themselves. This behavior tends to spread within couples due to their interdependence and shared time. Interestingly, the study found that men were more likely to engage in phubbing when their wives did, but the reverse was not true, potentially due to gender role socialization. Additionally, the study highlighted the link between phubbing and relationship satisfaction, suggesting that lower satisfaction could contribute to increased phubbing.

Research in the U.S. indicates that women are more bothered by being ignored than men, particularly across various media platforms such as phones, social media, and video games. A study of long-term German couples revealed that phubbing behavior was more common among younger couples and was significantly associated with attachment anxiety. This suggests that couples with a more insecure attachment orientation may perceive phubbing as more detrimental to their relationship quality (Bröning and Wartberg 2022).

Couples may inadvertently avoid addressing issues by focusing on their phones or choose to discuss challenging topics through asynchronous text rather than face-to-face conversations. However, even the mere presence of a phone during shared time together can create a sense of distraction and interfere with feelings of intimacy (Turkle 2015).

Couples often find it easy for their partners to hide texts or sexts to others, as well as conceal online activities, including social media interactions like following an "ex." This behavior can spark concerns about infidelity, also known as "**digital jealousy**" (Eichenberg et al., 2017). However, it's important to note that defining infidelity involving the internet can be tricky, as described by Vossler (2016). Some common factors include efforts to maintain privacy, utilizing internet features for access and anonymity, and sudden discovery. Vossler's review suggests that the impact on couples of cyber-infidelity resembles that of offline infidelity, leading to partner distrust, relationship conflicts, and potential breakup.

Especially among younger couples, social media is often used to gather information about their partner's activities. Given that social media is a common platform for checking up on ex-partners, being aware of this behavior can lead existing partners to feel jealous or suspicious. However, it's essential to recognize that looking at a partner's phone or social media account without permission can breach boundaries and significantly damage trust. Regardless of age, commitment status, or other demographics, nearly three-quarters of couples (71%) agree that it's not appropriate for a partner to snoop through their partner's phone without their knowledge. Nevertheless, a significant portion (34%) of couples admit to doing so (Vogels and Anderson 2020).

The last challenge area for couples involves lack of clarity. As we've discussed, individuals vary widely in their access to, attitudes toward, comfort with, and skill in using technology. For instance, one partner may spend more time on their phone and frequently use social media, while the other may actively avoid social media altogether. Differences in texting habits, in particular, can lead to misunderstandings. For example, when a message isn't promptly returned or is replied to late or with vague wording, a partner may question the sender's intentions or misinterpret the message (Vaterlaus and Tulane 2019). Ambiguity in text messages and the use of emojis are common issues that can contribute to misunderstandings (Miller et al. 2017). When couples engage in significant discussions or conflicts via text (e.g., arguments, apologies), one or both partners may feel uncomfortable (Novak et al. 2016).

Most couples don't openly discuss social media use as a potential relationship concern, even though individual partners may have unspoken rules that need to be addressed. Digital jealousy doesn't seem to be tied to a specific platform and depends on how each couple defines cheating (Eichenberg et al. 2017). Through interviews with committed couples regarding their technology use integrated into daily life, researchers developed a process model outlining how boundaries and rules are negotiated (Pickens and Whiting 2020; Cravens and Whiting 2015). The definition of "committed" was determined by the couples themselves; researchers didn't impose any specific criteria regarding duration or status. Understanding this process can help professionals offer guidance to couples dealing with conflicts.

The suggested steps are as follows:

- Identify the online issue, including any past problems or inappropriate behaviors.
- Evaluate the online issue, considering implicit and explicit rules, as well as the level of agreement on these rules.
- Discuss the online issue openly, providing evidence, justifying behaviors, or explaining perspectives.
- Work towards resolving the issue through monitoring and effective communication, or explore potential consequences that could lead to ending the relationship.

Couples might consider asking each other:

- Are there any websites you think I shouldn't visit?
- Are there specific people or groups on social media that you're uncomfortable with me interacting with?
- Do you have any preferences regarding what information should or shouldn't be shared online about us or our relationship?
- How do you feel about pornography in the context of our relationship?

Couples' therapist Veronica Marin (2017) offers the following advice for relationships:

1. Prioritize spending at least 20 minutes a day of screen-free time together to make your partner feel

valued.

2. Discuss before posting anything about your relationship online.

3. Establish expectations for texting habits.

4. Interact online as you would in real life.

5. Avoid snooping on your partner's behavior; trust them unless there's a clear reason for concern.

6. Address any discomfort or issues promptly and rationally with your partner.

Family technology use

Researchers studying family dynamics and technology usage argue that the devices and apps families use can influence how family members interpret their interactions and shape their shared experiences. This, in turn, can reinforce family norms, values, and the sense of being connected. When used thoughtfully — and with an understanding of potential conflicts that may arise due to differences in comfort, skill, and perception of technology — media can play a positive role in strengthening family bonds.

Early research conducted by Padilla-Walker and colleagues (2012) explored the types of technologies used by families, specifically focusing on parents and their adolescent children, and how these technologies were linked to feelings of connectedness within the family. Connectedness, in this context, refers to the warm, loving, and positive relationships between parents and children or other family members. To measure connectedness, the researchers used items from the warmth/support subscale of the Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire-Short Version (Robinson et al. 2001). Participants rated statements such as "I have warm and loving times together with my child/parent" on a 5-point scale. The study found that cell phones, video games, and co-viewing media were significantly associated with greater family connectedness. However, email and social networking did not show a strong relationship with this outcome. Additionally, the researchers observed differences based on family characteristics, noting that parents with higher levels of education reported experiencing more connectedness related to their use of technology.

The authors suggested that watching media together as a family indicates shared interests and promotes open communication. When parents and children agree on what to watch, it can lead to a better understanding of each other's perspectives, fostering discussions during or after the program. These findings are consistent with Nathanson's (2002) research, which highlighted the role of co-viewing media in parents' ability to guide content and children's media exposure. Although a smaller number of teens reported playing video games with their parents, this co-playing was linked to stronger family connections. As discussed earlier, when children and parents engage together with media and technology, such interactions have the potential to bridge the digital gap and enhance family closeness.

Regarding email and social media, Padilla-Walker and colleagues (2012) found that these forms of communication were not associated with increased family connectedness. Email, being asynchronous, may feel less personal and more transactional, mainly used for sharing news and information. In our own research with over 1,500 families (Rudi et al. 2014), we found that the type of technology used varied among family

members. Email and social networking were more popular among extended family members, while texting, seen as a more intimate form of communication, was primarily used between parents and children and between co-parents. Since then, email usage and perceptions have remained relatively unchanged among family members.

In contrast, social media has seen significant growth in terms of usage and applications. While early research by Padilla-Walker et al. (2012) reported limited parent-teen interaction on social media due to restrictions in personal expression and the perception that it was mainly for interactions between friends, recent studies suggest that social media can indeed strengthen family connectedness. A review by Tariq and colleagues (2022) identified several studies on social media use and family relationships, with most focusing on parents and adolescents. However, the authors note a lack of research on whole family dynamics and motivations behind family members joining social media platforms. Additionally, there's a limited exploration of various social media applications beyond Facebook. For instance, adults' use of platforms like Instagram or TikTok may depend on whether their child uses it or if they know other users on the platform (Nouwens et al. 2017).

Earlier research conducted by Stern and Messer (2009) explored how individuals stay connected with their relatives. They found that email and cellphones were commonly used to communicate with relatives who were farther away, while face-to-face visits were preferred for local relatives. Interestingly, the frequency of contact did not necessarily reflect the level of closeness between individuals. Instead, people tended to choose communication methods based on the level of closeness they desired with their relatives. In simpler terms, individuals tend to use the available technologies in ways that they believe are most effective for maintaining their relationships. As we learn more about the capabilities of different technologies and understand the variations in individual preferences, skills, and access, we realize that the use of technology for family communication is often tailored to complement emotional closeness and geographical proximity.

Since 2012, and particularly with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, new technology has emerged as a significant tool for family communication: videoconferencing. Applications such as FaceTime, Skype, and Zoom have enabled real-time communication that goes beyond just voice or text, providing a more immersive experience. As noted by Lebow (2020), ongoing social science research will gradually uncover both the benefits and drawbacks of relying on videoconferencing for family communication during the COVID-19 pandemic. Families have faced considerable challenges, including loss, stress, and efforts to uphold family rituals and celebrations amidst the pandemic. Additionally, other factors influencing family dynamics during this time include addressing disparities in technology access and proficiency, as well as the broader impacts of supporting family members dealing with mental or behavioral health issues, such as facilitating access to support groups like AA meetings.

When it comes to technology use within families, research emphasizes the importance of clear communication about how devices are used. While we've explored how technology can enhance family communication and unity, focusing on communication also helps families establish shared rules about managing technology and device usage for the benefit of the whole family. However, establishing these rules may not be straightforward for everyone. As discussed previously, parents who feel more informed about the

effects of technology are more likely to establish guidelines or engage in authoritative discussions to determine safe and reasonable usage. Conversely, parents who lack confidence in their knowledge about technology may either enforce strict rules without discussion or take a more hands-off approach regarding their children's device use.

Children's own attitudes towards and compliance with family rules regarding screen time and device usage will vary depending on their age and influences from their broader social environment. As indicated by Lanigan's socio-technological framework, family technology rules are shaped by the attitudes, preferences, and behaviors of each family member. Therefore, discussions about family rules reflect the perspectives of all family members, with the goal of reaching shared understandings that meet the needs of everyone involved.

What are some strategies for achieving this, especially concerning screen time among family members? Let's consider the example of phones during dinner time. For many families, dinner is a time when everyone gathers together. It's a time for sharing food, catching up on the day's events, and perhaps engaging in important cultural or religious traditions. Therefore, it's concerning that phones have become a common distraction during mealtime, leaving family members feeling "alone, together," as described by Turkle (2015).

In 2016, Commonsense Media conducted a study to explore the impact of devices at the dinner table. The study surveyed 869 individuals from families with at least one child between the ages of 2 and 17. Of those surveyed, 807 reported having devices, 770 reported eating dinner together in the past week, and 362 reported using technology during dinner. Interestingly, only about half of the families who ate dinner together also used technology during that time, suggesting that many families consciously choose to keep phones away during meals. Although dinner was considered important by the majority of families with devices, it wasn't necessarily a time for discussing the day's events for most families. Only 19% reported using mealtime for this purpose, with activities like driving the kids in the car being more common. While about half of the families using devices during dinner felt that it made them feel disconnected, 25% believed that phones actually brought the family closer together, likely through sharing information and photos. This study highlights the complexities of an issue that can present challenges for families without clear technology rules, while for others, the solution may be as simple as keeping phones away during mealtime.

There are various tools and resources designed to assist families in managing screen time and promoting safe technology use while also facilitating mutual agreement on technology usage. One such resource is the Family Media Plan provided by the American Academy of Pediatrics (2024). This tool encourages parents and children to collaborate in creating a personalized plan based on the child's age. Together, they can select items from a comprehensive checklist to monitor the child's daily technology use. What are the benefits for families in creating their own plan using such a checklist? One activity prompts you to devise a media plan for three children of different ages, allowing you to compare their proposed activities and how they align with their developmental stages. It also encourages reflection on the family's ability to effectively monitor these actions. However, a critique of the Family Media Plan is its focus solely on children aged 18 and under, disregarding the challenges that parents themselves may face in managing their device usage, potentially causing distractions or unhealthy habits.

As we'll explore in the following chapter, the ability to self-regulate and establish boundaries is becoming increasingly important for adults as they navigate the demands of work and family life in our tech-driven world, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. A digital media nonprofit's family education platform suggests eight key elements that all families should consider:

1. Total screen time
2. Screen-free periods during the day
3. Screen-free family gatherings, such as dinner time
4. Avoiding phone use while driving
5. Limiting screens before bedtime
6. Addressing habits, like silencing phones to reduce the urge to check for messages
7. Creating a family agreement or pledge regarding technology use
8. Identifying activities for the family to enjoy together without screens.

While technology can sometimes cause distractions and conflicts within families, research shows that it also plays a significant role in promoting communication and strengthening family bonds. Nowadays, there is an abundance of applications and devices that facilitate collaboration, creativity, and communication among family members. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many families relied heavily on technology tools, particularly videoconferencing, as the primary means of staying connected with relatives, including those living far away due to factors like immigration, travel, or deployment. Additionally, video games can provide an enjoyable way for family members to bond, solve problems, and enhance cognitive skills, while also allowing parents to monitor their children's media consumption.

However, as families face increasing busyness and stress, and children become adept at using technology from a young age, parents may struggle to use technology in ways that foster meaningful connections and maintain family harmony. Additionally, disparities in access, time, and financial resources can create inequalities both within and among families. Given these challenges and other demands of daily life, families must adapt and find ways to incorporate technology into their lives while ensuring that it enhances, rather than detracts from, family connectedness and unity.

ANALYZING FAMILY STRUCTURES

Children of the Force

The Children of the Force podcast, a product of Al Nowatski and his children, Liam and Anna (now teenagers), started in 2016, arose from their shared interest in Star Wars. Episodes can be found at their website: childrenoftheforce.com. Select at least one of the episodes to listen to. You can also watch this interview with the family from 2022: https://youtu.be/8z2iknECiCM?si=cKEjKeKFzDEdaD3T.

Write a response to the questions below, incorporating insights from the podcast. Your response should be well-organized and supported with specific examples or quotes from the episode.

1. What does the activity mean to the family sense of closeness or cohesion? How does the activity serve as a platform for family communication, and as a demonstration of family flexibility?

2. How is Al asserting his role in the family? How are his children asserting their roles as children? How does the technology experience affect the execution of those roles, rules, and structure? How does it affect the processes of relationship maintenance and strengthening?

4. Consider the contribution of creating this podcast to each child's development over time. In what ways might it influence the sense of identity? Self-concept? Social awareness?

5. How might Al operate as a "learning hero" as one or both of the children build on the podcast experience to engage with their interests?

5.5 MAKING HEALTHY FAMILIES

Just being in a relationship doesn't guarantee happiness. We've all seen examples of bad relationships: think Cinderella and her stepsisters, loveless marriages, or friendships filled with constant disagreements (which even led to the term "frenemy"). For a relationship to bring happiness, it needs to be a good one. Studies have shown that having high-quality friendships is linked to increased happiness (Demir and Weitekamp 2007). But it's not just friendships that matter. Research suggests that having strong, positive relationships with parents as teenagers (Gohm et al. 1998) and as adults (Amato and Afifi 2006) can also boost happiness. Moreover, researchers have found that good relationships affect different aspects of well-being. Walen and Luchman (2000) looked at various relationships, like family, friends, and romantic partners, and found that both support and conflict in these relationships are linked to overall well-being, including life satisfaction and positive and negative feelings. Similarly, a study comparing college students from different countries found that social support was associated with greater life satisfaction and positive feelings, as well as lower negative feelings (Brannan et al. 2012).

It might seem obvious that good relationships lead to more happiness. But did you know they can also improve your health? Surprisingly, both the quality and quantity of your social connections can impact your health (Cohen 1988; House et al. 1988). Research suggests that having a larger social circle and strong relationships can be good for your health, while having few friends or poor-quality relationships can actually harm your health (Uchino 2006). One reason for this might be that friends and partners often share healthy habits, like exercising or avoiding excessive drinking. Plus, having social support can lower stress levels, which is linked to many health issues.

To help make your family happier, here are some simple strategies:

1. *Teach morality* – Helping kids understand what's right and wrong can make everyone feel better (Damon 2004).
2. *Celebrate successes* – When someone in your family achieves something, take the time to celebrate it together (Gable et al. 2006).
3. *Lean on extended family* – Besides parents, older siblings, grandparents, and other family members can all pitch in to help and make your family happier (Armstrong et al. 2005).
4. *Build family bonds* – Share jokes, remember good times, and talk about your family history to strengthen your connections (McAdams 1993).
5. *Forgive* – When someone in your family makes a mistake, try to forgive them instead of holding onto anger (McCullough et al. 1997).

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.whccd.edu/livingtogether/?p=97#oembed-1

"Robert Waldinger: What makes a good life? Lessons from the longest study on happiness" by TED is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

5.6 END OF MODULE MATERIAL

CORE INSIGHTS

The module on Family Life & Wellness provides a comprehensive exploration of the various factors influencing communication patterns and dynamics within families and communities. It begins by examining the role of socialization in shaping these communication patterns, emphasizing how cultural norms and societal influences contribute to familial interactions. Through an analysis of argument dynamics, learners gain insight into the complexities of familial relationships and the implications of conflict on communication and overall family cohesion. Additionally, the module studies the diverse structures and functions of families, highlighting their roles and processes within society, and evaluates the concept of parental investment, shedding light on its significance in fostering healthy family dynamics and child development.

Furthermore, the module investigates into the unique experiences of immigrant and refugee families, exploring the challenges they face in maintaining their cultural identity while adapting to new environments. Scholars examine the motivations driving migration decisions and assess the impact of these motivations on family dynamics, connections, and identity. Through an exploration of family obligation and strategies for achieving aspirations, students gain a nuanced understanding of the complexities inherent in immigrant and refugee family experiences. Moreover, the module addresses contextual risks faced by these families, such as socio-economic disparities and cultural barriers, and evaluates the process of resettlement and its effects on family dynamics and well-being. Finally, learners explore the influence of technology on family communication and relationships, as well as strategies for promoting healthy family dynamics through effective communication, conflict resolution, and boundary-setting.

RESOURCES

1. [Fair Fighting Rules](#) (Therapist Aid 2020)
2. ["I" Statements](#) (Therapist Aid 2017)
3. [Active Listening: Communication Skill](#) (Therapist Aid 2020)
4. [Assertive Communication](#) (Therapist Aid 2017)
5. [Relationship Conflict Resolution](#) (Therapist Aid 2013)
6. [How to Apologize](#) (Therapist Aid 2021)
7. [Parenting Quiz](#) (Hammond, Cheney, & Pearsey 2021)
8. [Has Parenthood Changed You?](#) (Hammond, Cheney, & Pearsey 2021)

9. [Single Parenting Assessment](#) (Hammond, Cheney, & Pearsey 2021)
10. [Fatherhood Patterns Assessment](#) (Hammond, Cheney, & Pearsey 2021)
11. [Motherhood Patterns Assessment](#) (Hammond, Cheney, & Pearsey 2021)
12. [Processing the Fatherhood & Motherhood Patterns Assessments](#) (Hammond, Cheney, & Pearsey 2021)

You can find more discussions on social relationships and health in Noba (http://noba.to/4tm85z2x).

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PART VI

MODULE 6: FAMILY CONFLICT & CRISIS

DISCLAIMER

The following module discusses issues of familial and relationship stress, abuse, and trauma. If you find any of the content distressing or triggering, please seek help from your academic institution's counseling or student support services and medical professionals.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this module, scholars will be able to:

1. Understand the dynamics and consequences of alcohol and drug abuse within families, including its impact on relationships, parenting, and overall family functioning.
2. Identify the signs and characteristics of relationship abuse, including domestic violence, intimate partner violence among immigrants and refugees, and the role of technology in intimate partner violence.
3. Analyze the various forms and effects of rape and sexual assault on individuals and families, including the psychological, emotional, and social impact on survivors and their support systems.
4. Recognize the signs and consequences of child abuse within family contexts, including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, as well as neglect.
5. Explore the factors contributing to divorce, including the odds and predictors of divorce, and examine the effects of divorce on children's emotional, social, and academic well-being.
6. Evaluate the challenges and dynamics of remarriage and stepfamilies, including the adjustment process for children and adults, co-parenting strategies, and the role of

communication and conflict resolution.

KEY TERMS & CONCEPTS

- Anger-excitation rapist
- Anger-retaliatory rapist
- Child sexual exploitation/abuse material (CSEM or CSAM)
- Corporal punishment
- Cyberstalking
- Divorce
- Domestic violence
- Family abuse
- Family instability
- Image-Based Sexual Abuse (IBSA)
- Intimate partner violence
- Intimate partner violence involving technology
- Marital entropy
- Nonconsensual Distribution of Intimate Images (NDII)

- Nonconsensual Intimate Imagery (NCII)
- Nonconsensual Pornography (NCP)
- Physical abuse
- Physical violence
- Power-assertive rapist
- Power-reassurance rapist
- Predatory phishing
- Psychological abuse
- Psychological aggression
- Rape
- Remarriage
- Revenge porn
- Sextortion
- Sexual abuse
- Sexual violence
- Stalking
- Stepfamilies

INTRODUCTION

This module addresses the difficult yet crucial topics of family conflict and crisis, focusing on issues such as alcohol and drug abuse, relationship abuse, rape and sexual assault, child abuse, and divorce. We begin by examining how substance abuse can destabilize family dynamics, leading to a cycle of conflict and dysfunction. The module explores the impact of alcohol and drug abuse on individual family members and the family unit as a whole, highlighting the challenges of coping and recovery.

Further, the chapter analyzes the devastating effects of relationship abuse, rape, and sexual assault, emphasizing the profound psychological and emotional trauma these experiences inflict on victims and

families. We also discuss child abuse, examining its various forms and long-term consequences for children and the broader family environment. Lastly, the module discusses the complexities of divorce, including the emotional and practical challenges families face during the separation process. By understanding these critical issues, readers can gain insights into the causes, effects, and potential resolutions of family conflicts and crises, fostering a deeper awareness and preparedness to address such situations.

6.1 ALCOHOL & DRUG ABUSE

Substance abuse is a significant issue affecting communities all across the United States, regardless of individual backgrounds or financial status. The cost of substance abuse to the nation is staggering, estimated at $700 billion annually, with substantial impacts on healthcare, crime rates, and workforce productivity (CDC 2015; NDIC 2011; USHHS 2014). With the increasing cultural diversity in the United States, it's becoming increasingly crucial to understand how substance abuse affects immigrant populations (Szaflarski et al. 2011).

The American Psychological Association (APA) describes **substance abuse disorders** as recurring patterns of alcohol or drug use that lead to significant impairment in various aspects of life. People with substance abuse disorders typically experience difficulties in controlling their substance use, face social problems, engage in risky behaviors, and may meet specific pharmacological criteria (APA 2013). Substance abuse disorders are diagnosed separately for each substance, including alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, stimulants, hallucinogens, and opioids. These diagnoses fall into five main categories: substance use disorder, intoxication, withdrawal, other substance-induced disorders, and substance-related disorders.

Substance abuse is a widespread issue that affects people from all backgrounds, including immigrants and refugees living in the United States. However, the process of resettlement adds layers of complexity to how substance abuse impacts these communities. Immigrants bring with them customs and habits related to substance use from their home countries, and they must navigate these practices alongside American customs. Moreover, limited employment and housing options can trap immigrants in neighborhoods where substance abuse is prevalent. Immigrants often face various stressors such as scarce job opportunities, financial responsibilities to their families, past traumatic experiences, and separation from loved ones, which may lead some individuals to turn to substance abuse as a way of coping. However, immigrants also benefit from protective factors like cultural norms and support from their families.

When immigrants first arrive in the United States, they generally have a lower risk of alcohol abuse compared to native-born citizens, even among those from the same ethnic background. However, studies have shown that the longer immigrants stay in the United States, the more their risk of alcohol abuse increases. This could be due to factors that immigrants share or because culturally appropriate assessments for substance use may be lacking in immigrant communities. Understanding substance abuse among immigrant and refugee populations in the United States is challenging due to the wide range of substances that can be abused, including alcohol, tobacco, illicit drugs, and non-prescribed prescription drugs, as well as the diverse backgrounds and cultures within these populations.

Substance use often serves as a coping mechanism for individuals dealing with past or ongoing trauma, stress, isolation, and uncertainty (Ezard 2012; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2014; Weaver and Roberts 2010). These factors can increase the risk of substance abuse and related disorders within immigrant

communities, especially considering the impact of cultural norms and acculturation stressors in the United States.

Many immigrants, particularly refugees, have experienced violence and trauma in their home countries and during resettlement, which can lead to mental health issues like PTSD, anxiety, depression, and others (Porter and Haslam 2005). Research indicates that exposure to trauma increases the likelihood of mental health disorders, which, in turn, can heighten the risk of substance abuse (Ezard 2012; Weaver and Roberts 2010). However, despite exposure to trauma, many immigrants and refugees abstain from substance use. For instance, a study of Cambodian refugees found low rates of alcohol use disorder despite high rates of PTSD and major depression disorder in the community (Marshall et al. 2005).

Immigrants also face stressors related to the resettlement process, such as finding employment and adapting to a new life, which can contribute to increased substance use (Organista 2007). Discrimination and unfair treatment in employment further exacerbate these stressors and are linked to alcohol and drug disorders (Gee, Delva, and Takeuchi 2007). Additionally, legal consequences related to substance use pose significant challenges, particularly for racial minority immigrants, leading to criminal charges and increased involvement with social services (Iguchi et al. 2005; Roberts and Nuru-Jeter 2012).

Cultural norms from the country of origin also influence immigrants' substance use behaviors, along with acculturation to American customs. For example, drinking patterns and prevalence in the home country are associated with alcohol abuse symptoms in immigrant populations (Cook et al. 2013). Moreover, acculturation to American lifestyles can further heighten the risk of substance abuse, particularly among adolescents (Pumariega et al. 2007). These factors underscore the complex interplay between culture, migration, and substance use among immigrant communities.

Despite facing various risk factors, immigrants often report lower rates of drug use compared to United States-born individuals (Hussey et al. 2007). This unexpected trend, known as the immigration paradox, challenges the assumption that difficult transitions to a new country increase the likelihood of substance abuse. For instance, research has shown that adolescents living in neighborhoods with a high concentration of immigrants tend to have lower rates of alcohol, cigarette, and marijuana use, compared to those in neighborhoods with fewer immigrants (Kulis et al. 2007). This suggests that the presence of immigrants in a community may serve as a protective factor against substance use among adolescents, despite higher levels of crime, poverty, and residential instability in such neighborhoods.

Although the immigration paradox doesn't apply uniformly across all immigrant groups (Hernandez et al. 2012), researchers are intrigued by these findings. Recent studies suggest that family support may play a significant role in explaining why immigrants generally exhibit lower rates of drug use compared to their United States-born counterparts.

Family involvement and cohesion play crucial roles in protecting immigrants from substance abuse (Bacio et al. 2012; Kam 2011; Prado et al. 2009; Pumariega et al. 2007). For instance, researchers investigating neighborhood influences on substance use hypothesized that strong family bonds were the primary protective factor against substance abuse. According to general family and ecological systems theories, family members

influence each other through regular interactions, which may be especially significant for newly arrived immigrant families who rely on each other for support.

Parenting style is another important protective factor. Studies on Latinx adolescents have shown that parenting style patterns are linked to adolescent alcohol use. Permissive parenting, characterized by lenient rules and low discipline, was associated with increased alcohol use among adolescents, while authoritative parenting, which combines high expectations with warmth and support, was not linked to increased risk of alcohol use (Driscoll et al. 2008).

Moreover, the overall family environment can influence substance use. Family functioning has been found to impact identity formation, with adolescents in immigrant families experiencing higher levels of identity confusion being more likely to initiate cigarette and alcohol use (Schwartz et al. 2008). This suggests that positive family functioning acts as a protective factor against initiating drug and alcohol behavior. Notably, pre-immigration family cohesion has also been associated with lower drug use among young adults (Dillon et al. 2012).

The parent-child relationship is particularly significant in the transmission and prevention of substance abuse. When mother-adolescent distress is high, the risk of drug use among adolescents increases (Farrell and White 1998). In immigrant Latinx families, conflicts between parents and children predict lifetime alcohol use and binge drinking behaviors (Marsiglia et al. 2009). It's important to consider that not all families immigrate together, and separation experiences can also impact substance use. For instance, when there is separation between mother and child, adolescents face an increased risk of drug and alcohol use (Mena et al. 2008). Another type of separation, related to ambiguous loss, occurs when parents are unable to care for their children due to financial, health, or substance abuse issues (Mena et al. 2008).

In addition to facing numerous challenges related to displacement, immigrants coming to the United States may encounter additional legal hurdles if their substance use comes to the attention of immigration authorities. Substance use can have serious consequences, potentially leading to denial of entry into the United States or deportation. Immigration laws categorize substance use into three main types: abusers, addicts, and individuals convicted of drug-related offenses (Mautino 2002). Determining whether someone falls into these categories can be challenging, but for immigrants, convictions related to drug offenses often result in deportation. Furthermore, individuals classified as "abusers" or "addicts" may be deemed "inadmissible," meaning they are ineligible to immigrate to the United States or obtain a temporary visa (Mautino 2002). Importantly, even without a drug-related conviction, immigrants can be deported if the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) determines them to be an "abuser" or "addict," typically based on admitting to using illegal substances at least once in the past three years (Mautino 2002). Drug convictions, whether inside or outside the United States, related to possession, transportation, or trafficking of illegal substances, can lead to deportation or being labeled as inadmissible (Mautino 2002).

Substance abuse prevention and intervention programs are widely available in the United States for both teenagers and adults. However, very few of these programs are tailored to specific ethnic groups, and none address the unique challenges faced by refugees due to conflict-related displacement. In this section, we explore

the obstacles to substance abuse treatment among immigrants and refugees, offer suggestions for professionals providing such treatment, and highlight programs that have attempted to overcome these barriers.

Various barriers hinder immigrant and refugee populations from accessing substance abuse treatment. There is a pervasive stigma surrounding substance abuse, especially considering the potential legal repercussions for immigrants identified as drug abusers. Even when individuals seek treatment, they often encounter a shortage of culturally relevant evidence-based treatments and trained providers from diverse immigrant and refugee backgrounds. Additionally, services available in the immigrant's language may be limited, further deterring them from seeking help. For instance, a study by Arfken, Berry, and Owens (2009) revealed that Arab Americans faced stigma and language barriers, preventing them from accessing appropriate treatment. In underserved communities lacking adequate healthcare resources, immigrants may also opt out of treatment due to a lack of information and concerns about how laws and policies affect them (Moya and Shedlin 2008).

Furthermore, there is a dearth of culturally appropriate assessments for substance use. Most assessments for alcohol abuse, for instance, inquire about the frequency of alcohol consumption. However, individuals from different countries often consume beverages of varying potencies and sizes. Effective measures need to adapt to these differences, considering the type of beverage consumed, portion sizes, and cultural drinking habits. For instance, assessments that inquire about alcohol consumption over the past seven days may not be culturally appropriate for individuals from rural Mexico, where heavy drinking primarily occurs during seasonal celebrations (WHO 2000).

6.2 RELATIONSHIP ABUSE

Family abuse refers to the physical, sexual, or emotional mistreatment or harm inflicted by one family member on another. It's important to recognize that such behavior is unethical, immoral, and against the law. Abuse typically involves powerful individuals exerting control over those who are less powerful, such as young children who should be protected by older family members from harm, including both family members and outsiders.

While it's often said that abuse can be passed down through generations, it's important to recognize that this doesn't have to be the case for everyone. While some studies suggest that a significant number of abuse survivors may become abusers themselves, this isn't a predetermined outcome. Many survivors are determined to break this pattern by marrying non-abusers and taking extra precautions to protect their own children.

In 1989, the United Nations established a set of guidelines known as the Convention on the Rights of the Child. These guidelines have influenced the development of civil and criminal laws in many countries to safeguard the well-being of children. The convention emphasizes the importance of protecting children from various forms of harm, including physical and mental violence, neglect, exploitation, and sexual abuse, especially when under the care of parents, legal guardians, or other caregivers.

While these rights are not universally binding and may not always be enforced with criminal penalties for violations, they serve as well-designed, internationally developed guidelines aimed at protecting children. Investing governmental funds in social, educational, and criminal justice laws to uphold these rights is crucial for the well-being of children worldwide, including in the United States. It's important to note that similar safeguards could also be applied to the rights of women and men.

Abuse can take various forms and can happen within any family relationship. Abuse can occur between partners, known as intimate partner violence, but it can also happen between a parent and child (child abuse), adult children and elderly parents (elder abuse), or even among siblings. Breiding et al. (2015) outline the following types of abuse:

1. **Physical abuse** involves using deliberate physical force to cause harm, such as scratching, pushing, hitting, or choking.
2. **Sexual abuse** entails forcing someone to engage in sexual activity against their will, which can include sexual assault or rape. It's essential to recognize that being in a marital relationship doesn't give anyone the right to demand sexual activity.
3. **Psychological abuse** refers to aggressive behavior aimed at controlling another person, which may involve threats, manipulation, or bullying.

Interestingly, neglect is the most common form of abuse between parents and children. Neglect happens when a family fails to meet a child's basic needs like food, emotional support, healthcare, or education (DePanfilis 2006). In real life, characters like Harry Potter's aunt and uncle or Cinderella's stepmother could face neglect charges.

ANALYZING FAMILY STRUCTURES

The Stepmother

Stepfamilies have unique challenges, especially when children are still present in the home when remarriage occurs. It happens more consistently with stepmothers than it does with stepfathers because of the traditional cultural role and expectations of women as nurturers in families.

1. Research the subject stepmother.
2. Share two major themes that emerge surrounding the unique nature of this role, and what imagery or descriptors come to mind with this title.
3. Discuss what cultural influences contribute to these themes (such as the portrayal of stepmothers in movies, etc.).

"The Stepmother" by Katie Conklin, Lemoore College is licensed under CC BY 4.0

Abuse within families is a complex issue influenced by various factors. Some common characteristics shared by abusers include poverty, stress, and substance abuse, but abuse can occur in any family. People may stay in abusive relationships for reasons like feeling helpless, believing the abuser will change, experiencing shame or guilt, or being economically dependent. These factors all contribute to the complexity of the situation.

Children who experience abuse often exhibit unhealthy behaviors such as self-destructive actions, withdrawal, or aggression. They may also struggle with depression, anxiety, or academic performance. Research shows that abused children may have higher levels of stress hormones in their brains, which can hinder brain development, lower stress tolerance, weaken immune responses, and lead to lifelong learning and memory difficulties (Middlebrooks and Audage 2008).

Domestic violence

Domestic violence poses a significant social challenge in the United States. It refers to violence occurring between household or family members, particularly spouses. Family sociologists have coined the term **intimate partner violence** (IPV) to encompass violence within various types of relationships, including unmarried, cohabitating, and same-sex couples. It's worth noting that healthcare and support personnel, researchers, or victims may use these terms interchangeably to refer to the same general issue of violence, aggression, and abuse.

Women are primarily affected by intimate partner violence. Studies estimate that approximately one in five women have encountered some form of IPV in their lifetime, compared to one in seven men (Catalano 2007).

Intimate partner violence can manifest in various ways, including physical violence like punching, kicking, or other methods causing physical harm, sexual violence such as rape or coerced sexual acts, threats, and intimidation that imply physical or sexual abuse, as well as emotional abuse which undermines another's self-worth through verbal assaults or controlling behavior (Centers for Disease Control 2011).

Typically, IPV begins with emotional abuse and may escalate into other forms or combinations of abuse over time (Centers for Disease Control 2011). Moreover, intimate partner violence encompasses stalking and technological violence, also known as cyber aggression. Technological violence involves the use of communication platforms or electronic devices like cameras to harm victims or control their actions (Watkins 2016).

Numerous individuals have encountered intimate partner violence (IPV). It's crucial to acknowledge and raise awareness about IPV through such data. However, there are shortcomings in both reporting and collecting information. For instance, there's a lack of comprehensive data on IPV against transgender individuals. Nonetheless, analysis from diverse sources suggests that IPV is 1.7 times more prevalent among transgender individuals compared to cisgender individuals.

Globally, more than 130 women are killed by their intimate partners every day. The UN Office of Drugs and Crime highlighted that women bear the brunt of gender inequality, discrimination, and negative stereotypes, rendering them more susceptible to intimate partner and familial violence (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2018).

The nature of violence differs considerably based on gender. In 2010, among incidents of IPV involving physical aggression against women, 57 percent solely involved physical violence, while 9 percent included both rape and physical violence, and so forth (CDC 2011). Conversely, IPV patterns for men demonstrate that almost all (92 percent) instances of IPV involve physical violence, with less than 1 percent involving rape alone or in conjunction (Catalano 2007). "About 1 in 5 women and about 1 in 7 men report having experienced severe physical violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime." In the second panel, the text reads, Figure 6.1 describes about 1 in 5 women and 1 in 12 men have experienced contact sexual violence by an intimate partner, and 10 percent of women and 2 percent of men report having been stalked by an intimate partner.

Perpetrators of IPV often aim to foster dependence to exert power and control over their victims, undermining their sense of self-worth.

Figure 6.1. Intimate Partner Violence in the U.S. (CDC 2012)

Source: Conerly, Tonja R., Kathleen Holmes, and Asha Lal Tamang. 2021. *Introduction to Sociology 3e*. Houston, TX: OpenStax.

IPV disproportionately impacts various demographic groups. Native American and Alaskan Native women experience higher rates of IPV compared to other racial groups (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2017). Moreover, the rate of IPV for Black women exceeds that for White women, and these rates have remained relatively stable over the past decade.

Accurate statistics on IPV are challenging to ascertain, as more than half of nonfatal IPV cases remain unreported. Victims typically disclose abuse after enduring it for at least two years (Carlson et al. 1999). Additionally, diverse research methodologies and categorizations hinder the acquisition of comparable or corroborative data. For instance, some studies may focus solely on physical and sexual violence, resulting in fewer reports of IPV compared to studies encompassing psychological abuse, stalking, and technological violence.

Table 6.1. Reasons Abuse is Unreported (Catalano 2007)

Table 6.1. Reasons Abuse is Unreported (Catalano 2007)

Reason Abuse Is Unreported	% Females	% Males
Considered a Private Matter	22	39
Fear of Retaliation	12	5
To Protect the Abuser	14	16
Belief That Police Won't Do Anything	8	8

Source: Conerly, Tonja R., Kathleen Holmes, and Asha Lal Tamang. 2021. *Introduction to Sociology 3e*. Houston, TX: OpenStax.

Sometimes, abuse is reported to law enforcement by third parties, but victims may not confirm it. A study on domestic violence incident reports revealed that 29 percent of victims denied abuse even when confronted by the police, while surprisingly, 19 percent of perpetrators admitted to it (Felson et al. 2005). Reluctance

to report abuse stems from various reasons, as outlined in the table below, based on the National Criminal Victims Survey.

Intimate partner violence (IPV) affecting LGBTQ individuals tends to be higher compared to non-LGBTQ individuals. Statistics show that gay men report experiencing IPV in their lifetimes less frequently (26 percent) than straight men (29 percent) or bisexual men (37 percent). Similarly, 44 percent of lesbian women report experiencing some form of IPV in their lifetime, in contrast to 35 percent of straight women. Notably, a striking 61 percent of bisexual women report experiencing IPV, a significantly higher rate than other sexual orientations commonly studied.

Research on intimate partner violence against transgender individuals is still evolving, with limited studies currently available. However, ongoing investigations shed light on this issue. A meta-analysis of existing data revealed that 38 percent of transgender individuals had experienced physical IPV in their lifetimes, while 25 percent had encountered sexual IPV. Compared to cisgender individuals, transgender individuals were 1.7 times more likely to experience any form of IPV (Peitzmeier 2020).

College students are also susceptible to IPV. Psychological violence appears to be the most prevalent

Image by RDNE Stock project on Pexels

type of IPV among college students, followed by physical and/or sexual violence. High schoolers in dating relationships also face IPV, with 10 percent experiencing physical violence, 7 percent experiencing forced sexual intercourse, and 11 percent encountering sexual dating violence. Alarmingly, 7 percent of women and 4 percent of men who experience IPV are victimized before the age of 18 (NCJRS 2017). IPV victimization during young adulthood, including the college years, often leads to continued victimization into adulthood, potentially persisting throughout one's lifetime (Greenman and Matsuda 2016).

IPV Among Immigrants & Refugees

Around one in every three women (36%) and one in every four men (29%) in the United States report experiencing rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner at some point in their lives (Black et al. 2011). Among immigrants, rates of intimate partner violence (IPV) are even higher, ranging from 30% to 60% (Biafora and Warbeit 2007; Erez et al. 2009; Hazen and Soriano 2005; Sabina et al. 2014). Many incidents likely go unreported among immigrant and refugee communities due to challenges accessing social and legal services in the U.S., or because violence against women is culturally accepted in their home countries.

IPV has serious consequences for immigrant and refugee women and their families. Those who experience IPV are more likely to suffer from mental health issues, with Latina immigrants experiencing IPV being three times more likely to be diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) compared to those without such

experiences (Fedovskiy et al. 2008). Children who witness IPV are also at greater risk of experiencing anxiety, depression, PTSD, and aggression (Kitzmann et al. 2003; Wolfe et al. 2003). Tragically, IPV can even result in death, with immigrant women more likely to die from IPV compared to U.S.-born women (Frye et al. 2005). Undocumented immigrants face additional challenges, as their access to police and social services is limited, and accusations of abuse can lead to deportation and loss of custody of their children (Rogerson 2012).

Creating a universal definition of intimate partner violence (IPV) that encompasses the perspectives of diverse populations is challenging. Immigrants, refugees, and U.S.-born citizens come from various cultural backgrounds, ideologies, religions, and philosophies, all of which can influence how IPV is perceived. Even within the same culture or religion, family traditions and norms can significantly affect perceptions of IPV. Recognizing these diverse perspectives on IPV globally can help identify ideological tensions and better understand the factors contributing to IPV among immigrant and refugee populations.

The World Health Organization (WHO), a recognized agency of the United Nations, defines IPV as "behavior by an intimate partner or ex-partner that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviors" (2017). While the WHO offers a standard definition of IPV, the historical and current contexts of different countries shape their laws and influence individuals' and families' attitudes and behaviors regarding IPV. In each culture, social, political, religious, educational, and economic institutions endorse different implicit and explicit messages.

Examples from different countries illustrate the variation in perceptions of IPV, despite similar legal definitions:

- In South Africa, gender discrimination in a traditionally male-dominated society contributes to female objectification and discrimination. Many women feel unable to resist male directives, potentially hindering efforts to stop violence or leave abusive relationships. Financial control by men further complicates the situation, with around 50% of men reported to physically abuse their partners (Jewkes et al. 2002).
- In Colombia, "machismo" attitudes persist, reinforcing tolerance for men's violent actions while labeling even minor infractions by women as abusive. A government survey found that a majority of people would encourage reconciliation in IPV cases, and many were unaware of laws against IPV (Abramzon 2004; Segura 2015).
- In Zimbabwe, patriarchal community structures influenced by biblical texts appear to support male dominance. Women's behaviors in relationships are also shaped by religious and cultural beliefs. Some women oppose legislation aimed at reducing IPV because they believe it contradicts their religious teachings (Makahamadze et al. 2012).

These examples demonstrate how cultural contexts shape perceptions and responses to IPV. Understanding how national contexts and cultures influence the interpretation and acknowledgment of IPV is crucial.

The United States government holds a particular understanding of intimate partner violence (IPV) and

expects individuals living within its borders to respond accordingly. However, this perspective may not be universally shared by people from other countries. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) define four primary types of IPV (Breiding et al. 2015):

1. **Physical violence**: This involves the deliberate use of physical force with the potential to cause death, disability, injury, or harm. It encompasses various aggressive acts such as pushing, hitting, biting, and punching.
2. **Sexual violence**: This includes coercing someone into sexual acts against their will and any abusive sexual contact. It also covers manipulating vulnerable individuals into sexual acts when they may not fully understand the nature of those acts.
3. **Stalking**: This refers to a pattern of repeated, unwanted attention and contact that instills fear or concern for one's safety or the safety of others, such as family members or close friends.
4. **Psychological aggression**: This entails the use of verbal and non-verbal communication with the intent to harm another person mentally or emotionally or to exert control over them.

A single violent incident can involve one or all four types of violence; these categories are not mutually exclusive. IPV can occur in various types of relationships, including current and former spouses or non-marital partners.

The current research on intimate partner violence (IPV) in immigrant and refugee populations is often categorized by either the country or continent of origin. This approach has its merits, as it allows for the exploration of similarities and differences among individuals, couples, and families from similar regional, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds. Moreover, there is ample evidence indicating that perspectives on IPV vary worldwide (Malley-Morrison 2004), and organizing the literature based on these boundaries helps group people with potentially similar worldviews.

However, in our review, we won't organize the literature based on geographical demarcations. Instead, we'll emphasize shared experiences across groups of immigrants while also acknowledging experiences that are notably different. We'll highlight both common and distinct experiences among individuals from similar and diverse immigrant and refugee groups. Special attention will be given to findings that reveal unconventional or unexpected trends.

Although IPV has serious consequences for everyone, there are some unique aspects of IPV among immigrants and refugees. Specifically, abusive partners of immigrants/refugees have additional methods of control compared to couples born in the United States. For instance, the abusive partner may restrict contact with family members in the home country or refuse to allow them to learn English (Raj and Silverman 2002). These tactics limit social support and access to essential resources. Additionally, abusive partners may manipulate undocumented partners by threatening their immigration status (Erez et al. 2009; Hass et al. 2000). They might threaten to report the partner or her children to immigration authorities, refuse to file

paperwork for legal status, threaten to withdraw filed papers, or restrict access to necessary documents for legal status applications.

For both immigrants/refugees and individuals born in the United States, there are numerous factors that increase the risk of intimate partner violence (IPV). People who have experienced abuse during childhood, whether as victims of child abuse or witnesses to IPV between their parents, are more likely to experience IPV as adults (Simonelli et al. 2002; Yoshioka et al. 2001). Experiencing trauma in adulthood also increases the risk of perpetrating IPV: men who have been exposed to political violence or imprisonment are twice as likely to perpetrate IPV compared to those who have not (Gupta et al. 2009; Shiu-Thornton et al. 2005). Other risk factors for victimization or perpetration include high levels of stress, impulsivity, and alcohol or drug use by either partner (Brecklin 2002; Dutton, Orloff, and Hass 2000; Fife et al. 2008; Hazen and Soriano 2007; Kim-Goodwin et al. 2014; Zarza et al. 2009). Social isolation, poverty, and neighborhood crime are also associated with increased risk (Koenig et al. 2006; Zarza et al. 2009).

In addition to these common risk factors, immigrants face additional risk factors for experiencing IPV, as well as a crucial protective factor. We will explore each of these factors in detail here.

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is more likely to occur when an individual's social status changes due to immigration (Lau et al. 2006). When immigrants resettle, many men experience a decline in their previous occupational status and may no longer be the sole breadwinners for their families. Additionally, they may find themselves with less decision-making power compared to their partners. Such significant changes can lead to a loss of identity and purpose.

Changes in social status are linked to an increased risk of IPV. For instance, a study involving Korean immigrant men found that abuse towards wives was more prevalent in families where husbands struggled to adjust to life in the United States (Rhee 1997). Similarly, in a study of Chinese immigrant men, those who perceived a loss of power were more likely to hold tolerant attitudes towards IPV (Jin and Keat 2010).

Spending more time in the United States is linked to increased family conflict and intimate partner violence (IPV) (Cook et al. 2009; Gupta et al. 2010). Studies indicate that recent immigrants typically report lower levels of IPV compared to individuals in their home countries, U.S.-born citizens, or immigrants who have been in the U.S. for an extended period (Hazen and Soriano 2007; Gupta et al. 2010; Sabina et al. 2014). It's possible that the immigration process demands strong family cohesion, and families with effective coping skills are more likely to successfully migrate to the United States (Sabina et al. 2014). However, as time passes, ongoing stressors contribute to an increase in IPV.

Research indicates that individuals with higher levels of acculturation to the United States and greater acculturation stress experience more conflict, IPV, and acceptance of IPV in their relationships (Caetano et al. 2007; Garcia et al. 2005; Yoshihama et al. 2014). Acculturation is linked to less avoidance of conflict and more expression of feelings, which could partly explain the rise in IPV (Flores et al. 2004). While acculturation is associated with increased IPV, studies have also shown its protective effects. For instance, one study discovered that more acculturated women engage in more safety behaviors when facing IPV (Nava et al. 2014).

Rigid, patriarchal gender roles learned in one's home country are linked to increased acceptance of and

experience with IPV (Morash et al. 2007; Yoshioka et al. 2001). Disputes over conforming to gender roles are also tied to higher rates of IPV (Morash et al. 2007). For instance, a study found that a quarter of participants from Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Cambodian backgrounds believed that IPV was justifiable in specific role-based scenarios, such as cases involving sexual infidelity or refusal to fulfill household duties (Yoshioka et al. 2001).

Several protective factors can decrease the risk of intimate partner violence (IPV) across various populations, such as education, parental supervision regarding adolescent relationships, and effective conflict resolution strategies and satisfaction in adult relationships (Capaldi et al. 2012). However, research focusing on immigrant and refugee communities has predominantly examined one protective factor: social support. Social support from family, friends, and the community can shield immigrants and refugees from IPV. For instance, participation in one's cultural community was linked to decreased acceptance of IPV attitudes among East Asian immigrants (Yoshihama et al. 2014). Nonetheless, there are exceptions. A study involving 220 immigrant Southeast Asians discovered that those reporting higher levels of social support actually experienced more IPV compared to those reporting lower levels of social support (Wong et al. 2011). This might be attributed to social pressures within the community.

Survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV) often actively seek ways to prevent, minimize, or escape the violence and protect their families. Interviews with women from diverse backgrounds, including Latina, Vietnamese, South Asian, African immigrants, and Mexican immigrants, have revealed various coping strategies:

1. *Trying to go unnoticed*: Some survivors try to avoid confrontation by remaining quiet and still, hoping to prevent escalation (Yingling et al. 2014).
2. *Seeking support from family or friends*: Many survivors turn to loved ones for emotional support, resources, and assistance in navigating social services (Ting 2010).
3. *Finding solace in religion*: Prayer is a common coping mechanism for some survivors, providing temporary relief from the turmoil (Yingling et al. 2014).
4. *Attempting to appease the abuser*: Some survivors try to calm the abuser or comply with their demands to mitigate further harm (Brabeck and Guzman 2008).
5. *Ignoring, denying, or downplaying abuse*: Some survivors try to overlook or minimize the abuse they endure as a means of coping (Brabeck and Guzman 2008).
6. *Accepting fate*: Certain survivors resign themselves to their circumstances, believing in divine justice or karma (Ting 2010).
7. *Hoping for change*: Some hold onto hope that the abusive partner will change, either through personal growth or external intervention (Ting 2010).
8. *Seeking temporary refuge*: Survivors may lock themselves in a room or leave the home temporarily to escape abuse, albeit temporarily (Brabeck and Guzman 2008).
9. *Standing up to the abuser*: In some cases, survivors retaliate physically or verbally against the abuser as a

form of self-defense (Yingling et al. 2014).

10. *Seeking formal help*: Survivors may involve authorities, such as the police, or seek assistance from advocacy programs and shelters (Brabeck and Guzman 2008).

11. *Leaving the abusive partner*: When other coping methods fail, survivors may choose to leave their partners, often requiring careful planning and resourcefulness (Brabeck and Guzman 2008).

Studies indicate that survivors who employ a variety of coping strategies are more likely to successfully leave their abusive partners and seek help from various sources (Yingling et al. 2015). It's important to note that not all survivors opt to leave their abusive partners, and there are numerous factors influencing this decision. Additionally, survivors often adapt their coping strategies over time, initially relying on internal resources before seeking external support from family, friends, and professionals (Yingling et al. 2015).

It's worth noting that there are notable differences in how immigrant and refugee communities seek help. For instance, a study observed that Muslim immigrants were less inclined to contact the police compared to non-Muslim immigrants. This reluctance stemmed from fears of their spouses, reprisals from family members, and a desire to shield their partners. However, they were more likely to involve the police when neighbors or others intervened (Ammar et al. 2013).

Additionally, research indicates that Asian immigrants tend to underutilize mental health services compared to immigrants from other backgrounds (Cho and Kim 2012). For example, Japanese immigrants were less inclined than U.S.-born Japanese women to confront their partners, leave temporarily, or seek outside assistance. Moreover, those who did employ these strategies experienced heightened psychological distress, likely influenced by cultural taboos against such actions (Yoshihama 2002).

Receiving support from family, friends, and official social networks can greatly aid individuals in coping after experiencing IPV (Coker et al. 2002). However, immigrant and refugee women often hesitate to seek formal assistance, such as from police or shelters, preferring instead to turn to family and friends (Ingram 2007; Brabeck and Guzman 2008).

Many individuals may wonder why a survivor of intimate partner violence (IPV) would choose to remain in a relationship with someone who harms them. While some may decide to end such a relationship, many survivors opt to stay for various reasons, ranging from enduring love to practical necessity or intense fear, or even a combination of these factors.

Here are several reasons why an immigrant or refugee survivor might choose not to leave the relationship or seek outside help in dealing with it:

1. *Commitment to the relationship*: Many survivors feel a sense of duty and love toward their partner, even if they are sometimes mistreated.

2. *Hope for change*: Some survivors hold onto the belief that the violence will diminish or cease over time. They may think that external circumstances will become less stressful, that their partner will learn to stop being abusive, or that they will gain better control over the situation in the future.

3. *Parenting arrangements*: Victims may remain in the relationship for the sake of their children, wishing for them to have both parents present and supportive.

4. Economic security: The abusive partner may control the finances, leaving the victim without access to resources to support themselves or their children independently.

5. *Fear for safety*: Many survivors face genuine physical threats if they attempt to leave the relationship. The abuser may threaten to harm or kill them or their children if they try to escape. Moreover, when survivors do make attempts to leave, many perpetrators will escalate their threats and violence.

For instance, one Khmer immigrant survivor shared, "For me also, my husband says if I dare put him in jail, when he gets out, he kills me. Then, I ask him to get divorced. He says before getting divorced plan to buy a coffin beforehand. He just says like that." (quoted in Bhuyan et al., p. 912)

Family and friends play a crucial role in supporting women who have endured IPV, offering emotional backing, guidance about navigating systems, and advice on seeking help (Kyriakakis 2014). Regardless of background, survivors encounter significant obstacles when seeking help, including fear of the abuser and potential retaliation (Bhuyan et al. 2005). Yet, immigrant and refugee survivors face additional challenges in accessing informal and formal assistance for IPV due to factors like cultural norms from their country of origin, familial taboos, limited access to support networks, fear of deportation or losing custody, and a lack of services that are culturally sensitive and linguistically appropriate.

Cultural norms from survivors' native countries can influence their willingness to seek assistance. In many cultures, survivors and their families avoid seeking outside help because it could bring shame or dishonor to the family or community (Dasgupta and Jain 2007; Yoshihama 2009). For instance, Latina and South Asian immigrants/refugees may avoid seeking help due to the stigma associated with divorce and the importance placed on maintaining respect through honorable marriages (Bauer et al. 2000; Fuchsel et al. 2012). Similarly, Vietnamese immigrants/refugees may be deterred from seeking help by traditional values, gender roles, and concerns about facing discrimination (Bui and Morash 1999).

Furthermore, there may be internal family norms that discourage help-seeking. Survivors sometimes refrain from seeking help from their parents because they do not want their family to develop a negative opinion of their spouse. Additionally, they fear that their parents will experience distress or feel ashamed about the violence (Bhuyan et al. 2005). Women also report a taboo against discussing family issues with individuals outside the family circle, as well as concerns about gossip within the local immigrant community (Bhuyan et al. 2005; Kyriakakis 2014).

Families who live nearby can offer more support compared to those separated by long distances. For instance, women residing in Mexico often rely on their parents for practical assistance like finding a safe place to stay after experiencing violence (Kyriakakis 2014). However, when these women move to the United States, the support they receive from their parents in Mexico is mainly emotional (Kyriakakis 2014). Being far away from family can also make immigrants and refugees more dependent on an abusive partner for emotional and social

support, especially when they lack proficiency in the English language (Bhuyan et al. 2005; Denham et al. 2007).

Immigrants and refugees may not be aware of local services, such as social and legal aid agencies (Bhuyan et al. 2005; Erez et al. 2009; Moya, Chavez-Baray, Martinez 2014). Additionally, they may have doubts about accessing or finding these services based on their past experiences in their home countries. For example, in countries like Mexico, where the majority of the population lacks access to public social services, Asian and Latina immigrants often believe that no one is available to assist them (Bauer et al. 2000; Bui 2003; Esteinou 2007). Even if they are aware of these services and how they operate, language and cultural barriers can hinder seeking help or successfully navigating these resources (Bhuyan et al. 2005; Erez et al. 2009).

Language barriers present a significant challenge for community-based organizations and systems like the police to effectively communicate with survivors and their families and provide them with the necessary assistance (Yingling et al. 2015; Runner et al. 2009). Moreover, services, especially those tailored to the cultural needs of immigrant and refugee women, are not always readily available (Morash and Bui 2008). It is crucial for community-based organizations and mainstream service providers, such as the police, to undergo training that equips them with an understanding of the complexities of survivors' lives and enables them to recognize both common and unique aspects of intimate partner violence experienced by immigrant and refugee women (Messing et al. 2013). Additionally, service providers catering to immigrant and refugee women must develop an understanding of the socio-economic, cultural, and political backgrounds of these groups and utilize this knowledge to formulate programs and policies tailored to their specific needs.

Undocumented immigrants often hesitate to report crimes, including intimate partner violence (IPV), to the police due to fears of deportation or losing custody of their children (Adams and Campbell 2012; Akinsulure-Smith et al. 2013). These concerns have intensified with the implementation of programs like "Secure Communities," which cross-reference police-recorded fingerprints to determine immigration status. Even minor offenses can set in motion deportation proceedings for undocumented immigrants (Vishnuvajjala 2012). While many immigrants fear reporting IPV due to deportation concerns, some studies suggest that immigrant and refugee women are more likely to report IPV, especially if they are on a spousal dependent visa and if their abusive partner threatens immigration action (Raj et al. 2005).

The immigration process can render immigrant spouses/partners reliant on their abusive partners. For instance, those entering with an H1-B visa, which targets highly skilled professionals, have spouses eligible for an H-4 visa but cannot work or apply for permanent residency independently (Balgamwalla 2014). This dependency allows abusive partners to control their spouse's immigration status by withholding documents, refusing to file paperwork, or threatening to contact Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) (Balgamwalla 2014; Erez et al. 2009).

Reporting IPV can also affect child custody, as undocumented immigrants risk losing custody if accusations are brought against them. Moreover, accusing a spouse of IPV can lead to charges of failing to protect children from exposure to violence, potentially resulting in deportation and loss of custody (Rogerson 2012).

While some legal resources exist for undocumented IPV survivors, such as the protections under the

Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), access to remedies like the "U visa" is limited. These visas offer temporary legal status and work authorization to survivors married to U.S. permanent residents but are subject to an annual cap of 10,000, often falling short of the total demand (Modi et al. 2014; Levine and Peffer 2012).

Immigrants and refugees who are unemployed often rely on their partner to support themselves and their children, which may deter them from reporting any abuse that could endanger the relationship (Bui and Morash 2007). Gender norms in some cases discourage seeking education or employment, reinforcing dependency (Bhuyan et al. 2005). The majority of immigrant and refugee survivors have limited economic resources (Erez et al. 2009; Morash et al. 2007). When immigrant and refugee women have access to employment, it can lead to increased conflict within the couple due to added responsibilities, but it can also empower them to demand better treatment (Grzywacz et al. 2009).

Even in relationships affected by IPV, there are often positive aspects that survivors cherish. They may hold onto hope for these positive aspects, hoping to preserve the relationship. This inclination may be particularly strong for immigrants and refugees. According to IPV advocates, immigrant women facing abuse in an unfamiliar culture may find solace and familiarity in their relationship with the abuser (Sullivan and Orloff 2013). Relationships are complex bonds that cannot be easily disregarded, especially considering their history, which may predate immigration (Sullivan et al. 2005).

Throughout the ordeal of IPV, survivors constantly weigh the advantages and disadvantages of staying in the relationship. They make adjustments to alleviate immediate suffering and prevent future harm. Perpetrators also make choices and adaptations, and some are capable of making decisions that reduce or halt violence altogether. For a family relationship to be stable, both partners must prioritize actions that safeguard the physical, emotional, financial, and social well-being of all involved.

Witnessing IPV can be an extremely distressing experience for children. Those who witness IPV are more prone to mental health issues like anxiety, depression, and PTSD, as well as internalizing and externalizing problems (Kitzmann et al. 2003; Wolfe et al. 2003). While there's limited research specifically focusing on immigrant and refugee children's experiences of IPV or family violence (violence against themselves or witnessing violence towards another family member), it's evident that they are at a heightened risk of witnessing IPV. Many refugees are vulnerable to IPV and family violence because of their exposure to conflict and violence in their home countries (Haj-Yahia and Abdo-Kaloti 2003; Catani et al. 2008).

Studies involving children in conflict-affected regions emphasize the detrimental effects of IPV on children. It's found that family violence is an even stronger predictor of PTSD in children than exposure to war (Catani et al. 2008). In one study, among children who experienced war, a tsunami, and family violence, 14% identified family violence as the most distressing event in their lives (Catani et al. 2008). Immigrant and refugee children exposed to family violence encounter a unique set of challenges. They not only have to deal with the effects of family violence but also with the stressors of trauma and/or relocation.

IPV & technology

Cyberstalking, psychological abuse, restricting access to technology, and technology-facilitated sexual violence are all forms of **intimate partner violence involving technology**, known as tIPV (Duerkson et al. 2019). Cyberstalking may involve sending threatening messages, making online purchases or sales using the victim's identity, pretending to be someone else to communicate with the victim, or creating webpages or advertisements using the victim's information (Eichenberg et al. 2017). Actions like those listed can lead to feelings of isolation, humiliation, and fear. The features of the internet, texting, and social media platforms enable cyberstalkers to track their victims, access user preferences, and remain anonymous. By utilizing multiple online platforms for stalking, perpetrators create a sense of what Woodlock (2017) describes as "perpetrator omnipresence" (p. 592). Online stalking often persists over extended periods, making it challenging for victims to break free from the stalker's contact.

Technology-facilitated intimate partner violence (tIPV) is widespread among victims of intimate partner violence (Messing et al. 2020). A study examining records from IPV survivors between 2012 and 2016 found that 60–63% reported experiencing technology-related abuse (Messing et al. 2020). However, tIPV lacks a clear and consistent definition, and domestic abuse agencies may not fully recognize the power or potential of technology to inflict consequences on victims similar to those experienced in real life (IRL). To assess technology-based abuse, Messing et al. asked survivors questions like, "Has your partner used technology or social media to monitor your interactions with other people?" and "Has your partner used technology or social media to monitor your whereabouts?" They also inquired about harassment, stalking, impersonation, and threats by abusive partners using technology (Messing et al. 2020). While their quantitative analysis provided statistics, their qualitative analysis highlighted the subjective nature of online behavior, which can complicate assessment. For instance, some may view monitoring as stalking, while others perceive it as a neutral or caring action, such as ensuring safety after driving in dangerous conditions.

A survey of Canadian college students conducted by Duerksen et al. (2021) explored predictors of tIPV. Social media emerged as a prevalent medium for perpetrating violence due to its ability to facilitate various forms of harassment, although it also poses higher risks as it's more public. The researchers identified in-person harassment and technological disinhibition as predictors of tIPV. They suggested that rather than creating more aggressors, technology provides additional means for those predisposed to stalking and harassment, particularly for those comfortable with using technology (Duerksen et al. 2021).

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.whccd.edu/livingtogether/?p=103#oembed-1

The widespread prevalence of technology in IPV necessitates that agencies and professionals working in this field integrate information and communication technology (ICT) into their prevention and treatment strategies. The Canadian government recognizes technology-facilitated violence as a form of IPV, and guidance is available from other sources as well. Woodlock (2017) emphasizes the importance of addressing technology-facilitated stalking as a serious offense and developing effective practices, policies, and legal responses to combat the use of technology as a tactic for abuse (Woodlock 2017).

Cyber sexual abuse

Image-Based Sexual Abuse (IBSA), a term coined by Clare McGlynn and Erika Rackley, encompasses the non-consensual creation and distribution of private sexual images, including voyeurism, sextortion, and recordings of sexual assaults (Cyber Civil Rights Initiative 2024). Other terms for this abuse include cyber sexual abuse or cyber sexual violence.

Nonconsensual Distribution of Intimate Images (NDII) involves sharing private, sexually explicit images without consent, whether the images were obtained through hacking, hidden cameras, or originally shared consensually but later distributed without permission. **Revenge porn**, a deeply invasive and damaging form of abuse, involves the non-consensual distribution of intimate images. This malicious act is often carried out with the intent to humiliate, coerce, or extort the victim. The term revenge porn itself is controversial and misleading, as it implies that the victim did something to provoke the abuse and that the perpetrator's motive is solely personal revenge. In reality, motivations for this violation of privacy can vary widely, including financial gain, social status, or pure voyeuristic gratification.

Nonconsensual Intimate Imagery (NCII) or **Nonconsensual Pornography (NCP)** is often referred to as deepfakes or digital forgeries, involves digitally manipulated images that falsely depict individuals as nude or engaged in sexual acts. **Sextortion**, or sexual extortion, is the threat to distribute someone's real or synthetic intimate material without their consent to coerce them into complying with demands such as paying money, sending more explicit images, performing sex acts, or other actions against their will.

6.3 RAPE & SEXUAL ASSAULT

Rape is a form of violence perpetrated by individuals, often men, driven by power, anger, selfishness, and sadistic tendencies. It is a highly dangerous and destructive act. The rate of rape in a population can be measured as the number of reported rapes per 100,000 females in that population during a given year. According to data from 2019, the United States ranked 14th in terms of rape rates globally, with 13 other countries reporting higher rates.

Countries such as South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, Bermuda, and Sweden had higher rape rates than the United States, with South Africa having the highest rate at 132.4 reported rapes per 100,000 women. This means that approximately 13 out of every 100 women were reported as victims of rape in South Africa in that year. Research conducted by the United Nations Surveys on Crime Trends and the Operations of Criminal Justice Systems consistently identifies South Africa as the most dangerous nation globally, especially regarding crimes such as rape.

Figure 6.2 depicts in the United States, rape occurs frequently, and the country's rape rate places it among many other nations with high incidences of rape. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) compiles statistics on violent crimes reported to local police, although unreported crimes cannot be included. These statistics are summarized in reports available on government websites. Alaska has the highest rape rate among the states, while West Virginia is among the safest. Despite fluctuations over the years, rape rates in the U.S., including Alaska and West Virginia, have not returned to the lower levels seen in 1960. The reasons behind the high rape rates in the U.S., particularly in Alaska, are complex and have been extensively studied, involving religious, political, and sociological factors. Exploring this issue from a sociological perspective offers new insights into understanding and addressing this challenge.

Figure 6.2. Reported Rapes per 100,000 Population in United States, 1960-2018
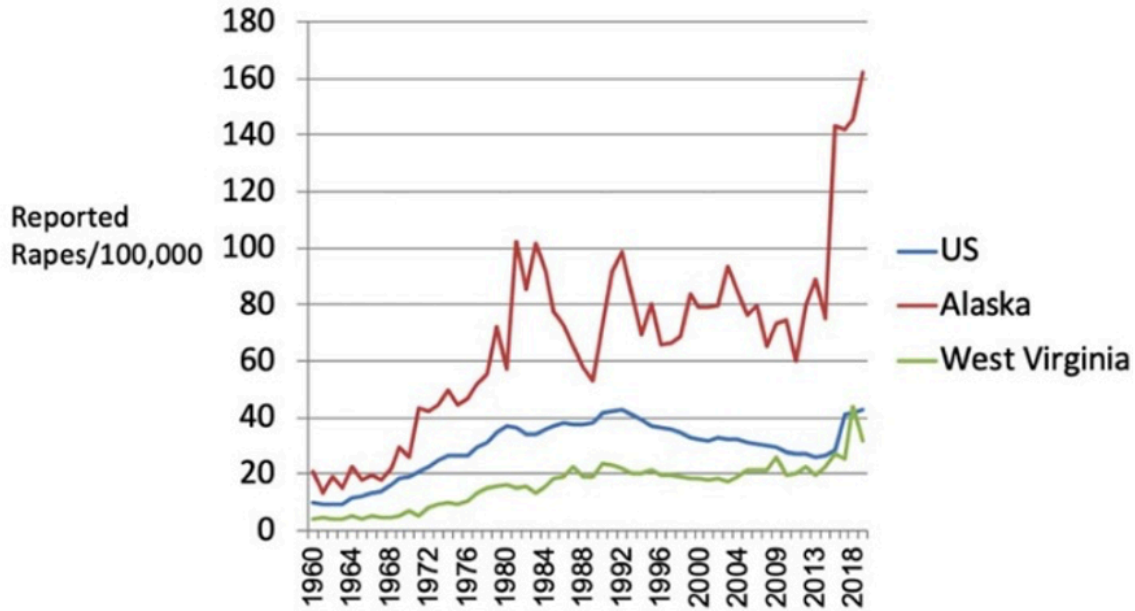
Retrieved July 28, 2020 from Disaster Center & FBI, Spears, C. L. 2019."Crime in Alaska 2018" and West Virginia Crime Rates.

Source: Hammond, Ron, Paul Cheney, Raewyn Pearsey. 2021. Sociology of the Family. Ron J. Hammond & Paul W. Cheney. Retrieved April 2, 2024 (https://freesociologybooks.com/Sociology_Of_The_Family/09_Marriage_and_Other_Long-Term_Relationships.php).

The National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC) is dedicated to preventing sexual violence and supporting individuals affected by it. They gather information from various sources, including the Bureau of Justice Statistics' annual National Crime Victimization Surveys (NCVS), to provide insights into addressing sexual violence. According to NSVRC's analysis of the 2015 and 2018 NCVS data, approximately 1 in 5 women in the United States (21.3% or an estimated 25.5 million) reported experiencing completed or attempted rape at some point in their lives. This includes instances of forced penetration, attempted forced penetration, or penetration facilitated by alcohol or drugs. Additionally, about 2.6% of men in the U.S. (an estimated 2.8 million) reported experiencing completed or attempted rape victimization.

The incidence of self-reported rape or sexual assault more than doubled from 1.4 victimizations per 1,000 persons aged 12 or older in 2017 to 2.7 in 2018. Based on survey data, it is estimated that 734,630 individuals were victims of rape (threatened, attempted, or completed) in the United States in 2018. Despite this increase in self-reporting, there was a decrease in reporting to law enforcement from 2017 to 2018. While 40% of rapes and sexual assaults were reported to police in 2017, only about 25% were reported in 2018 (NSVRC 2024). Additionally, according to data compiled from the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) in 2018, more than half of men and 41% of women who experienced sexual assault knew the person who attacked them (NCVS 2020).

Impact of rape

In this discussion, we'll explore rape through the lens of C. Wright Mills' Sociological Imagination, examining it from both personal and broader sociological perspectives. It's crucial to recognize that the responsibility for rape lies solely with the perpetrator and their individual choices. Rape, as defined, is fundamentally non-consensual. Throughout history, some have wrongly characterized rape as a form of sex. However, it's essential to distinguish that rape involves no consent, whereas sex involves mutual agreement. Typically, perpetrators use force or threats to coerce compliance.

Figure 6.3. Relationship of Sexual Assault Victim to the Perpetrator

Rape Victims' Relationship to the Perpetrator[F]
by victim sex

100%

● Men
● Women

52 41   51   15 14   13   3

Acquaintance   Intimate partner*   Stranger   Family member*   Authority figure*

Estimates not reported for men due to small sample size.

NVCS "2018 NCVRW Resource Guide: Sexual Violence Fact Sheet." Retrieved July 28, 2020 (https://ovc.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh226/files/ncvrw2018/info_flyers/fact_sheets/2018NCVRW_SexualViolence_508_QC.pdf).

Source: Hammond, Ron, Paul Cheney, Raewyn Pearsey. 2021. Sociology of the Family. Ron J. Hammond & Paul W. Cheney. Retrieved April 2, 2024 (https://freesociologybooks.com/Sociology_Of_The_Family/09_Marriage_and_Other_Long-Term_Relationships.php).
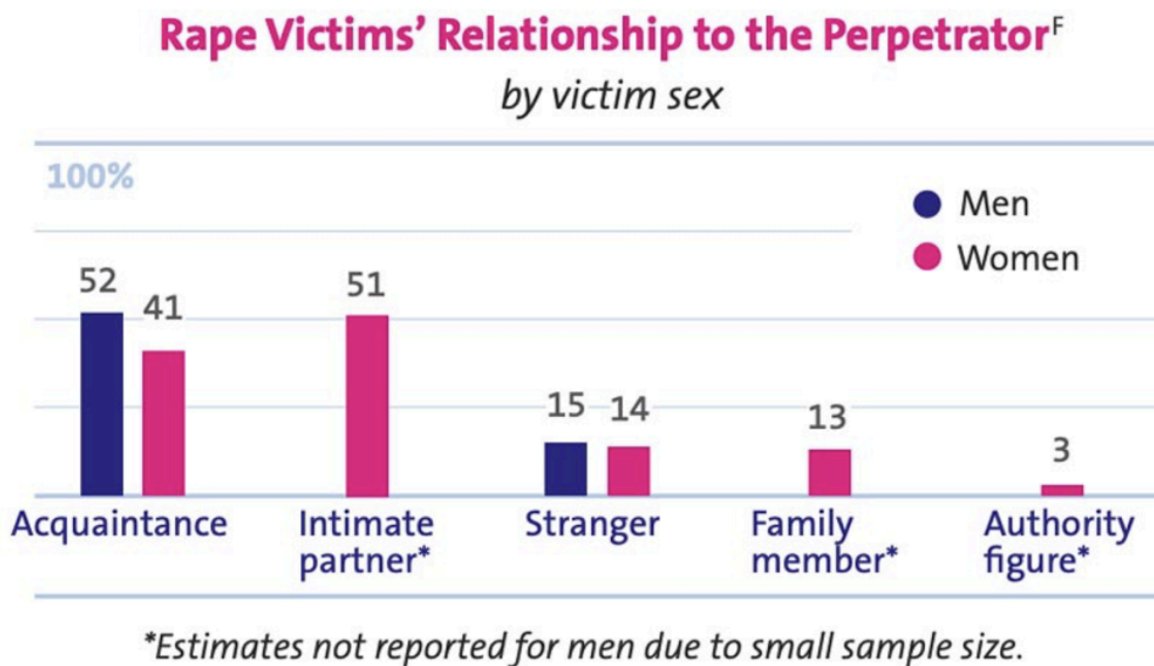
Rapists not only inflict physical harm on their victims but often exacerbate the trauma by verbally blaming them before leaving. This exacerbates the victim's recovery process, as many already struggle with self-blame. Research by Ullman et al. (2007) delves into the construct of self-blame and offers a model to aid survivors in their recovery. Additionally, studies like Murnen et al. (1989) have shown that many college students who are victims of rape tend to blame themselves.

It's unfortunate that many victims internalize blame, often expressing sentiments like "I should have..." as they navigate through grief and recovery. However, it's crucial for individuals within their support networks

to refrain from adding to this burden with intentional or unintentional blame. Just as you wouldn't blame a mugging victim for walking down the street alone, it's essential not to blame rape victims for the violence inflicted upon them. Unfortunately, defense attorneys and media reports sometimes contribute to victim-blaming narratives, while the families and friends of rape victims may also grapple with feelings of self-blame.

It's essential to recognize that violence can happen to anyone, regardless of their moral character. The notion that only good things happen to good people, known as "Just World Syndrome," is a myth worth examining. Ultimately, violence affects individuals irrespective of their moral standing, and it's vital to provide support and empathy to survivors rather than adding to their burden of blame.

On a broader social scale, we can gain insights into rape through scientific research, analysis of crime data, and interviews with perpetrators. By studying these factors, we can identify trends in the behavior of rapists and understand the underlying reasons for their actions. This knowledge helps us address the issue of rape at various levels of social intervention.

When considering the high rates of rape in the United States, several possible explanations emerge based on over three decades of research:

1. The implementation of rape prevention programs and the establishment of rape crisis centers have made it easier for victims to report incidents of rape and seek assistance. In the past, many incidents may have gone unreported due to the lack of accessible support services.
2. There has been an increase in substance use among both perpetrators and victims, which is closely linked to reduced inhibitions in men who might not otherwise engage in violent behavior towards women.
3. During the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, there was a cultural shift towards sexual promiscuity, moving away from abstinence. This shift may have contributed to a sense of entitlement among men regarding their sexual desires. Additionally, changes in societal values and expectations concerning masculinity, femininity, and sexual behavior may have played a role in shaping attitudes towards sexual predation.

Many rapists express feelings of victimization when they face arrest and accountability, with over six out of ten rapists in the US not facing prison time or guilty verdicts. These individuals often deny any wrongdoing and pose a danger to both themselves and society. Their actions disrupt the lives of others and demonstrate a focus on self-individualism rather than considering the well-being of the broader community. Moreover, they typically lack feelings of shame or guilt and often believe they are entitled to act without consequences.

Understanding this pattern of behavior is crucial in empowering individuals and communities to prevent and eventually eliminate rape from society. By refraining from committing sexual violence and promoting awareness of these issues, we can work together to create safer communities for everyone.

Rapists often target their victims' sexual parts as a means of exerting power, dominance, anger, and control. Both the FBI and experts in the field of Criminal Justice recognize that factors such as anger, power, sadism, and even sexual gratification serve as motivations for rapists to commit their attacks (Wikipedia 2024).

Greg Cooper, a former FBI profiler, developed a model categorizing rapists into four types based on their likelihood of harming the victim and their confidence in their use of violence (Hammond et al. 2021). The most common type identified is the **power-reassurance rapist**. This individual typically employs minimal to no violence during the assault and struggles with a weak sense of self and masculinity. For them, rape serves as a means to exert power, dominance, anger, and control over others. This type of rapist often feels inadequate in various aspects of life and resorts to rape in a misguided attempt to feel adequate.

On the other hand, the **power-assertive rapist** exhibits a very low self-esteem and seeks to validate masculinity through the act of rape. Although they may use minimal force or violence, their actions are driven by deep-rooted feelings of shame. Despite frequent offending, they fail to derive long-term satisfaction from their assaults.

The next two types of rapists pose greater danger. They typically have a more positive self-image and are prone to using violence. The **anger-retaliatory rapist** exhibits high levels of self-confidence, often to an excessive degree. They tend to belittle, degrade, humiliate, and punish the victim, even for actions the victim did not commit. For instance, if they had a bad day at work, they may take out his frustrations on another. This type of rapist is known for being brutal and overwhelming their victims, leaving them with little opportunity to resist. Essentially, they inflict their own life's problems onto the victim.

The **anger-excitation rapist**, although less common, is the most malevolent. They derive pleasure from causing pain to others and is willing to torture, kidnap, or even kill the victim for their own gratification. This type of rapist exhibits sadistic and predatory behavior, using their intelligence to meticulously plan and target unsuspecting victims. Greg Cooper has described this type as "evil" and representing "the dark side of humanity."

The FBI gathers data from police agencies across the United States for its Uniform Crime Report (UCR). Using information from 2018, the FBI also creates an annual Crime Clock (Figure 6.4), which estimates how frequently a specific crime, such as rape, might occur based on previous years' data. It's important to note that these estimates are based on reported crimes, not necessarily on the actual number of crimes that occurred. This means that the actual frequency of crimes could potentially be three times higher than what is reported. For example, if one reported rape occurs every 3.8 minutes in the U.S., there's a strong possibility that two additional rapes, which go unreported, also occur during that same time frame. This would result in a total of three rapes every 3.8 minutes in the United States. In simpler terms, it translates to approximately one rape happening every minute or so.

Figure 6.4. Crime Clock Statistics

2018 CRIME CLOCK STATISTICS

A Violent Crime occurred every	26.2 seconds
One Murder every	32.5 minutes
One Rape every	3.8 minutes
One Robbery every	1.9 minutes
One Aggravated Assault every	39.2 seconds

A Property Crime occurred every	4.4 seconds
One Burglary every	25.7 seconds
One Larceny-theft every	6.1 seconds
One Motor Vehicle Theft every	42.2 seconds

FBI UCR. 2018. Crime in the United States. Retrieved 29, 2020 (https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2018/crime-in-the-u.s.-2018/topic-pages/crime-clock).

Source: Hammond, Ron, Paul Cheney, Raewyn Pearsey. 2021. Sociology of the Family. Ron J. Hammond & Paul W. Cheney. Retrieved April 2, 2024 (https://freesociologybooks.com/Sociology_Of_The_Family/09_Marriage_and_Other_Long-Term_Relationships.php).

The Rape Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN), which operates as a prominent anti-sexual assault organization in the United States, offers valuable insights into the issue of rape. RAINN also provides support services for those affected by rape through their National Sexual Assault Hotline at 1-800-656-HOPE and an online chat hotline in English and Spanish on their website. Their definition of rape and sexual assault encompasses a wide range of non-legal terms, including sexual assault, rape, and sexual abuse. They emphasize that the legal definitions of these crimes may vary from state to state.

Table 6.2. Ways To Stand Against Rape Culture

1. Create a culture of enthusiastic consent.
2. Speak out against the root causes
3. Redefine masculinity
4. Stop victim-blaming
5. Have zero tolerance
6. Broaden your understanding of rape culture
7. Take an intersectional approach
8. Know the history of rape culture
9. Invest in women
10. Listen to survivors
11. Don't laugh at rape
12. Get involved

13. End impunity
14. Be an active bystander
15. Educate the next generation
16. Start—or join—the conversation

United Nations. 2019. "16 ways you can stand against rape culture" Retrieved July 27, 2020 (https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/ stories/2019/11/compilation-ways-you-can-stand-against-rape-culture).

Source: Hammond, Ron, Paul Cheney, Raewyn Pearsey. 2021. Sociology of the Family. Ron J. Hammond & Paul W. Cheney. Retrieved April 2, 2024 (https://freesociologybooks.com/Sociology_Of_The_Family/09_Marriage_and_Other_Long-Term_Relationships.php).

RAINN's website provides detailed definitions of various forms of sexual violence, including sexual assault, child sexual abuse, sexual assault of men and boys, intimate partner sexual violence, incest, and drug-facilitated sexual assault. In general, sexual activity is considered non-consensual if the individual is forced, threatened, unconscious, under the influence of drugs, a minor, developmentally disabled, chronically mentally ill, or believes they are undergoing a medical procedure. More information on these definitions can be found on RAINN's website.

6.4 CHILD ABUSE

Children are some of the most defenseless victims of abuse. In 2010 alone, there were over 3.3 million reports of child abuse, involving around 5.9 million children (Child Help 2011). Three-fifths of these reports are made by professionals like teachers, law enforcement personnel, and social services staff, while the remaining reports come from anonymous sources, relatives, parents, friends, and neighbors.

Child abuse can take various forms, with neglect being the most prevalent (78.3 percent), followed by physical abuse (10.8 percent), sexual abuse (7.6 percent), psychological maltreatment (7.6 percent), and medical neglect (2.4 percent) (Child Help, 2011). Some children endure multiple forms of abuse simultaneously. Parents account for the majority of perpetrators (81.2 percent), while other relatives make up 6.2 percent.

Among victims, infants (children less than one year old) are the most vulnerable, with an incident rate of 20.6 per 1,000 infants. This age group is particularly susceptible to neglect due to their complete dependence on caregivers for care. While some instances of neglect may not be intentional, factors like cultural norms, community standards of care, and poverty can contribute to unsafe levels of neglect. In cases where parents fail to utilize available public or private services despite needing assistance, child welfare services may step in (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2011).

Infants are frequently victims of physical abuse, especially through violent shaking. This form of abuse is known as **shaken-baby syndrome**, characterized by a set of medical symptoms such as brain swelling and retinal hemorrhage resulting from forcefully shaking or causing impact to an infant's head. The primary trigger for shaking is often a baby's cry. Parents, overwhelmed by their inability to comfort the baby, may resort to violent shaking out of frustration. Other stressors like economic hardships, unemployment, and dissatisfaction with parental responsibilities can also contribute to this type of abuse. While there's no official central registry for shaken-baby syndrome statistics, it's estimated that each year, around 1,400 babies suffer serious injury or die from being shaken (Barr 2007).

Child abuse is prevalent across all socioeconomic and educational backgrounds and cuts across ethnic and cultural boundaries. Just as child abuse often stems from the pressures experienced by parents, including financial strain, parents who demonstrate resilience to these pressures are less likely to engage in abusive behaviors (Samuels 2011). Young parents, especially teenagers, often struggle more to cope with these pressures, particularly the challenges of new parenthood. Teenage mothers, in particular, are more prone to abusing their children compared to older mothers. Conversely, as parents age, the likelihood of abuse decreases. Children born to mothers aged fifteen or younger face double the risk of abuse or neglect by the age of five compared to those born to mothers aged twenty to twenty-one (George and Lee 1997).

Physical abuse in children can take various forms, such as beating, kicking, throwing, choking, hitting with

objects, burning, or other methods. Even if the parent or caregiver did not intend harm, any injury inflicted by such behavior is considered abuse. However, physical contact characterized as discipline, like spanking, is not classified as abuse as long as it doesn't result in injury (Child Welfare Information Gateway 2019).

The use of physical discipline, commonly known as **corporal punishment**, is a contentious issue in the United States today. While some parents believe it's an effective way to address misbehavior, others view it as a form of abuse. According to an ABC News poll, 65 percent of respondents approve of spanking, and 50 percent admitted to occasionally spanking their child.

Cultural and educational background can influence attitudes towards physical punishment. Those living in the South are more likely to spank their children than those in other regions. Similarly, individuals without a college education are also more inclined to use spanking as a form of discipline (Gillespie 2018). Although 23 states officially permit spanking in the school system, many parents may object, and school officials must adhere to strict guidelines when administering such punishment (Gillespie 2018). Research indicates that spanking is not an effective disciplinary method and may lead to increased aggression in the child, particularly if they are spanked at a young age (Berlin 2009).

Drug and alcohol use significantly contribute to child abuse. Children raised by substance abusers face a threefold higher risk of physical abuse and four times higher likelihood of neglect compared to other children (Child Welfare Information Gateway 2019). Other factors increasing the risk of child abuse include social isolation, depression, low parental education, and a history of mistreatment during childhood. Alarmingly, around 30 percent of abused children go on to mistreat their own children later in life (Oliveros and Kaufman 2011).

The repercussions of child abuse extend to the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of the child. A large proportion of abused children experience injuries, poor health, and mental instability, with 80 percent meeting the criteria for one or more psychiatric disorders like depression, anxiety, or suicidal tendencies by age twenty-one. Additionally, abused children often struggle with cognitive and social difficulties. While not all victims exhibit behavioral issues, a majority do. Adolescents who were abused are 25 percent more likely to face challenges such as poor academic performance, teenage pregnancy, drug abuse, delinquency, and engaging in risky sexual behaviors that increase the risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases (Child Welfare Information Gateway 2006). These adverse outcomes not only impact the individual child and family but also burden healthcare, education, and criminal justice systems, making child abuse a societal issue that affects society as a whole.

Predatory phishing

According to the Cyber Civil Rights Initiative (2024), cyber sexual abuse of children and teens includes various harmful activities that exploit minors' online presence and digital interactions. **Child sexual exploitation/ abuse material (CSEM or CSAM)** refers to visual depictions of individuals 18 years or younger who are nude, partially nude, or engaged in sexual conduct, even if those individuals are now adults. The dangers of

predatory phishing also play a significant role in this abuse, where predators deceive minors into providing personal information or compromising images, which are then used for blackmail or further exploitation. This form of abuse not only infringes on the privacy and dignity of young victims but also poses severe psychological and emotional risks.

6.5 DIVORCE

Divorce is the legal ending of a marriage. Whether or not couples choose to pursue divorce can be influenced by various factors within society. Divorce, once a taboo topic, has become more common and accepted in modern U.S. society. In 1960, divorce rates were relatively low, affecting only 9.1 out of every 1,000 married individuals. However, by 1975, this number more than doubled to 20.3 and peaked in 1980 at 22.6. Over the past twenty-five years, divorce rates have steadily declined and are now similar to those in 1970 (Wang 2020). The significant increase in divorce rates after the 1960s has been linked to the liberalization of divorce laws and the changing societal dynamics with more women entering the workforce (Michael 1978). Figure 6.3 describes the decrease in divorce rates can be attributed to three likely factors: first, an increase in the average age at which people marry; second, higher levels of education among those entering marriage, both of which contribute to greater marital stability. Third, the overall decline in marriage rates also leads to a decrease in divorce rates. In 2019, there were 16.3 new marriages for every 1,000 women aged 15 and over in the United States, down from 17.6 in 2009 (Anderson 2020).

Divorce rates vary among different segments of the U.S. population. According to the American Community Survey (ACS), the Northeast and Midwest regions have lower divorce rates compared to the South, which generally has the highest divorce rates. This disparity can be attributed to higher marriage rates and younger ages at marriage in the South, while in the Northeast, lower marriage rates and delayed first marriages contribute to lower divorce rates (Reynolds 2020). However, there are exceptions to these general trends; for example, the District of Columbia has a high marriage rate but one of the lowest divorce rates (Anderson 2020).

Table 6.3. Divorce Factors

Divorce Factors

Protective Factors	Risk Factors
• Higher-levels of education	• Children before marriage
• Marrying at older age	• Co-habitation
• Parents remain married	• Live in a society accepting of divorce
• Member of religious group less accepting of divorce	

Source: Payne, Whitney. 2020. *Human Behavior and the Social Environment II*. Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Libraries.

Various factors contribute to divorce. Financial stress is a significant predictor of marital problems, with couples lacking a strong financial foundation being more likely to divorce. The addition of children to a marriage can exacerbate financial and emotional strain, particularly in the early years of parenthood. Research indicates that marriages face increased stress after the birth of the first child, especially for couples with multiples (Popenoe and Whitehead 2007). Additionally, declining marital satisfaction over time and diverging life goals between partners can also lead to divorce (Popenoe and Whitehead 2004).

Divorce tends to follow a cyclical pattern, with children of divorced parents being more likely to divorce themselves. Moreover, the likelihood of divorce increases significantly for children of parents who divorced and remarried. This may be attributed to a mindset learned from parental experiences, suggesting that a broken marriage can be replaced rather than repaired (Wolfinger 2005). Additionally, marriages where both partners have been previously divorced are significantly more likely to end in divorce (Wolfinger 2005).

Approximately 15 percent of married couples involve one partner in their second marriage while the other is in their first marriage. Additionally, about 9 percent of married couples are both in their second marriage (U.S. Census Bureau 2006). The vast majority of remarriages, accounting for 91 percent, occur after divorce, whereas only 9 percent occur following the death of a spouse (Kreider 2006). Most men and women remarry within five years of a divorce, with the median time being three years for men and 4.4 years for women. This trend has remained relatively consistent since the 1950s. The majority of individuals who remarry fall between the ages of twenty-five and forty-four (Kreider 2006). Additionally, statistics indicate that White individuals are more likely to remarry compared to Black individuals.

Remarrying, whether it's the second, third, or fourth time, often differs significantly from the first marriage experience. The process of remarriage typically lacks many of the traditional courtship rituals associated with first marriages. In a second marriage, individuals are less likely to encounter issues such as parental approval, premarital sex, or discussions about desired family size (Elliot 2010). A survey examining households formed through remarriage found that only 8 percent comprised solely of the remarried couple's biological children. Among households with children, 24 percent included only the woman's biological children, 3 percent had only the man's biological children, and 9 percent had a mix of both spouses' children (U.S. Census Bureau 2006).

Divorce and remarriage can be challenging experiences for both partners and children. While divorce is often seen as a solution to parental conflict, long-term studies suggest otherwise. Research indicates that although marital conflict isn't ideal for childrearing, divorce itself can be harmful. Children often feel confused and frightened by the instability divorce brings to their family life. They may even blame themselves for the divorce and try to reconcile their parents, often at the expense of their own well-being (Amato 2000). Surprisingly, only in highly conflict-ridden homes do children benefit from divorce by experiencing reduced conflict afterward. However, most divorces occur in homes with lower levels of conflict, and children from such households are more negatively affected by the stress of divorce than the unhappiness within the marriage (Amato 2000). Furthermore, studies suggest that stress levels for children don't necessarily improve when they gain a stepfamily through remarriage. Despite potential economic stability, stepfamilies often face interpersonal conflicts (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994).

The impact of divorce on children may vary depending on their age. School-aged children, for example, may find divorce particularly challenging as they can comprehend the separation but may struggle to grasp its reasons. Older teenagers may understand the conflict that led to divorce but still experience fear, loneliness, guilt, and pressure to take sides. Infants and preschool-age children, on the other hand, may suffer from disruptions to their routines that marriage once provided (Temke 2006).

The proximity to parents also affects a child's well-being after divorce. Boys who have joint arrangements with their fathers tend to show less aggression than those raised solely by their mothers, while girls who live or have joint arrangements with their mothers tend to demonstrate more responsibility and maturity than those raised solely by their fathers. However, the majority of children of divorced parents, nearly three-fourths, live in households headed by their mothers, leaving many boys without a father figure present (U.S. Census Bureau 2011). Nonetheless, research suggests that a strong parent-child relationship can significantly enhance a child's adjustment to divorce (Temke 2006).

Despite experiencing divorce, children haven't been discouraged regarding their views on marriage and family. Blended families, formed through remarriage, face additional stressors from combining children from previous and current relationships, as well as differences in disciplinary approaches. Surveys conducted by researchers from the University of Michigan have found that a large majority of high school seniors still place great importance on having a strong marriage and family life, with many believing in the likelihood of lifelong marriage (Popenoe and Whitehead 2007). These attitudes toward marriage and family have continued to increase over the past twenty-five years.

ANALYZING FAMILY STRUCTURES

Happiness & Divorce

Research and review findings regarding the concept of divorce and happiness.

1. Share your source and summarize your findings in a few sentences.
2. Does divorce increase happiness? Discuss why or why not.
3. Discuss how a conflict theorist would explain the function of divorce in society.

"Happiness & Divorce" by Katie Conklin, Lemoore College is licensed under CC BY 4.0

Odds of divorce

Firstly, the likelihood of divorce isn't high among today's married couples since they typically stay together. Secondly, it's crucial to understand that while the national divorce rate may seem daunting, your personal risk of divorce depends largely on your own actions within your marriage. You and your partner have significant
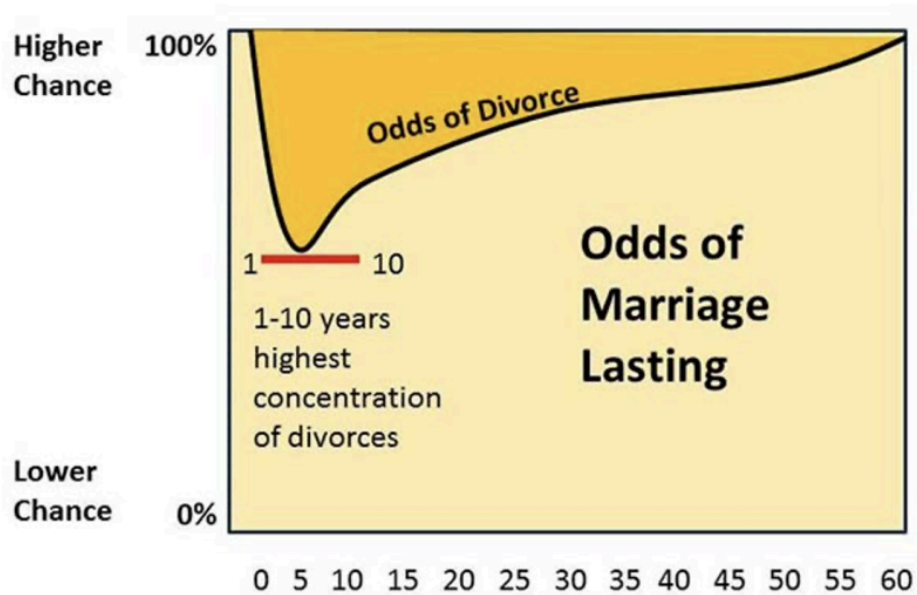
control over your marriage's quality and outcome. How you nurture it, shield it from various stresses like health or financial issues, and actively maintain it play a vital role.

Researchers in the field of family science describe **marital entropy** as the idea that without ongoing care and improvements, marriages can deteriorate over time. Rather than being overly influenced by reports of national divorce rates, investing in activities like a weekend getaway to reignite romance and reinforce commitment is a more effective strategy against marital decay. Taking proactive steps to enhance your marital satisfaction has a greater impact than most other factors contributing to divorce.

It's also worth noting that the longer a couple stays married, the less likely they are to divorce. The initial years of marriage involve significant adjustments, particularly in establishing a unified relationship where both partners negotiate various aspects like finances, intimacy, social interactions, emotions, intellect, physicality, and spirituality. Figure 6.5 describes by around years 7-10, many couples have settled into their roles and agreements. Despite the possibility of divorce at any stage, the accumulation of shared experiences such as having children, building wealth, gaining social recognition, and navigating life's challenges together often makes divorce less appealing, even when certain aspects of the marriage aren't ideal (refer to Levinger's Model in Table 6.4).

When using social exchange theory to understand why couples either stay married or get divorced, we delve into how spouses weigh the costs and benefits, rewards and punishments, or pros and cons in their decisions. Social exchange theory suggests that society is built on continuous interactions among individuals who aim to maximize rewards while minimizing costs. Although similar to conflict theory in some assumptions, Social exchange theory emphasizes the interactive nature of these assumptions. Essentially, it views humans as rational beings capable of making informed choices when they understand the pros and cons.

Figure 6.5. Estimated Odds of Marriage Lasting

Estimated Odds & Editions Of Statistical Abstracts and Vital Statistics Reports No 49 and Advance Reports of Final Divorce Statistics Retrieved June 9, 2014 (http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhsr/nhsr049.pdf).

This theory employs a simple formula to gauge decision-making processes:

(REWARDS – COSTS) = OUTCOMES

or

(What I gain – What I sacrifice) = My decision

In 1979, Levinger and Moles discussed the rational choices made by spouses contemplating divorce or staying married in a chapter of a scholarly anthology. This discussion has come to be known as "Levinger's Model." Levinger's Model can be represented in the following formula:

(Attractions – Barriers) +/- Alternative Attractions = My decision to stay married or divorce

Refer to Table 6.4 below for an illustration of how Levinger's Model elucidates the choices people might make and their perceived rewards and costs.

Levinger's Attractions represent the positive aspects or rewards of being married. These are the benefits or magnets that marriage brings, such as gaining social status, building wealth together, raising children together, enjoying sexual intimacy, and receiving emotional support and stress relief from one's spouse. On the other hand, Levinger's Barriers represent the negative aspects or consequences that may arise if a married individual decides to get divorced. These could include losing all the attractions of marriage, experiencing a decline in social status, dividing assets, managing co-parenting from a distance, facing changes in sexual intimacy, and losing the emotional support and stress relief provided by marriage, even if the marriage is unhappy.

Levinger's Alternative Attractions, on the other hand, are the tempting or appealing factors that a married person might find attractive if they were to pursue a divorce. These could include the sense of freedom and independence that comes with being single again, financial independence from the ex-spouse and sometimes reduced financial responsibilities towards children (a perspective often observed among men who share custody but may have lower financial obligations), experiencing relief from parenting duties when the children are with the other parent, freedom from unwanted sexual demands, the possibility of finding new romantic partners, and escaping from stressful situations within the marriage.

Let's focus on the last two rows of Table 6.4. They demonstrate how a simple formula can help us understand whether a couple is likely to stay married or get divorced. In the Stay Married formula, both the Attractions and Barriers are high, while the lures are low. In Social Exchange terms, this means there are numerous rewards in the marriage along with significant obstacles that would make divorce challenging. Moreover, there are few tempting factors pulling a spouse away from the marriage.

Conversely, the divorce formula paints a different picture. Here, attractions are low, barriers are low, and lures are high. Essentially, there are minimal benefits from being married, few perceived obstacles to divorce, and strong attractions outside the marriage enticing a spouse to leave. It's logical to expect satisfied couples to align with the stay married formula, while dissatisfied ones might lean towards the divorce formula. However, it's essential to note that these formulas merely describe the state of the relationship and cannot predict the

couple's actions. Some couples with a divorce formula may remain married for years, while others with a stay married formula may become dissatisfied and start considering alternatives.

One key concept in social exchange theory that sheds light on couples' decision-making processes is equity. Equity refers to a sense that interactions are fair to both individuals and others involved. For instance, why is it that in couples where both partners work full-time, men typically don't contribute as much to housework and childcare as their wives? Research suggests that it often comes down to perceptions of fairness or equity. This could be because the wife views household chores as her responsibility, disagreements arise when she tries to involve her partner in these tasks, or she perceives him as incompetent. Consequently, even though the arrangement may be unequal, the couple may perceive it as fair (Pleck 1985).

Table 6.4. Levinger's Model of Rational Choice in Divorce

Attractions – Magnets = Rewards that stem from being married	Barriers () +/- Walls = Punishments or losses you'd face if you divorced. You'd have to climb over these walls if you divorced.	Alternative Attractions Lures Away From Your Marriage = Something attractive that you could obtain if you were unmarried.
Positive social status	Loss of positive status and gain of new negative-status stigma of being divorced	Liberated status with freedom to explore relationships with others
Wealth accumulation	Division of wealth (at least by half)	Opportunity to be disentangled from family costs
Co-parenting	Co-parenting with ex-spouse — never truly free from this role	Shared custody, alleviating some degree of burden of parenting
Sex	Much less availability and predictability of sexual partner	Possibility of new sexual partner
Health support and stress buffer	Loss of health support and additional stress from divorce process	Different types of stressors and relief from pre-divorce stresses
Stay married formula ↑ attractions	↑ barriers	↓ lures
Divorce formula ↓ attractions	↓ barriers	↑ lures

Table 6.4. Levinger's Model of Rational Choice in Divorce

Levinger, G. and O.C. Moles. 1979. Divorce and Separation: Context, Causes, and Consequences. Basic Books
Source: Hammond, Ron, Paul Cheney, Raewyn Pearsey. 2021. Sociology of the Family. Ron J. Hammond & Paul W. Cheney. Retrieved April 2, 2024 (https://freesociologybooks.com/Sociology_Of_The_Family/09_Marriage_and_Other_Long-Term_Relationships.php).
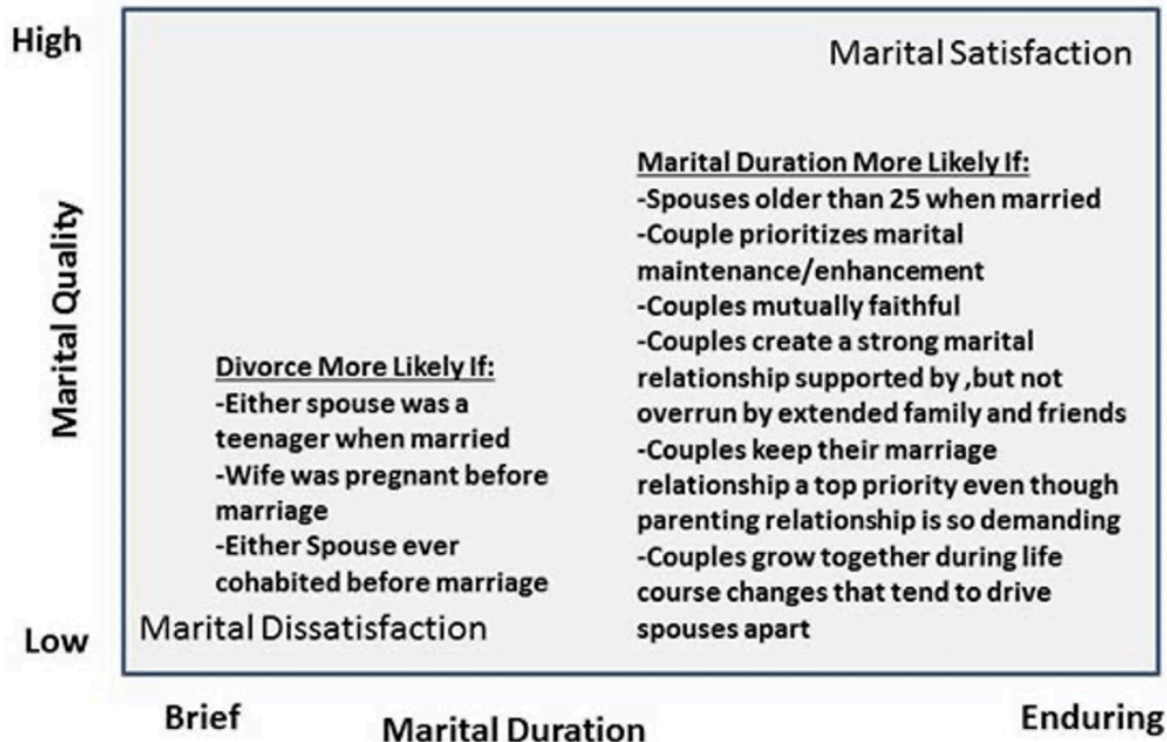
Predictors of divorce

Decades of research on divorce have identified several common factors that can increase or decrease a couple's likelihood of divorcing. However, before delving into these factors, it's important to acknowledge an uncomfortable truth: just as we all face the risk of dying as long as we're alive, being married means we're also susceptible to the risk of divorce. However, it's crucial to note that the presence of divorce risks doesn't necessarily determine the outcome of divorce.

Geography plays a significant role in divorce rates across the United States. Divorce rates tend to be lower in the Northeastern region and higher in the Western region. Nevada often stands out with the highest divorce rates among all states, although it's frequently excluded from comparisons due to what's known as the "Vegas marriage" or "Vegas divorce" effect.

Historically, divorce rates have consistently been higher in the Western United States and lower in the Northeastern region. This variation in divorce rates is influenced by geography and the cultural norms prevalent in each area. Changing the cultural norms of a state is a more challenging task compared to making personal adjustments within one's own marriage.

Figure 6.6 illustrates some of the choices individuals can make within their marital relationships to decrease their risk of divorce. A significant portion of the factors contributing to divorce largely fall within an individual's control and choices. For instance, research suggests that delaying marriage until at least one's 20th birthday significantly reduces the risk of divorce. Interestingly, the optimal ages for marriage fall between 25 and 29, coinciding with the U.S. median age at marriage for both men and women. Conversely, getting married at a younger age, such as 15 to 19, poses a considerably higher risk of divorce. This is because individuals in this age group may face economic, social, and emotional disadvantages. Waiting until age 25 allows individuals to graduate college, prepare for employment, and develop emotional maturity, as supported by various scientific studies indicating that key social and intellectual capacities may not fully develop until around age 26. Additionally, marrying due to an unplanned pregnancy often increases the risk of divorce, even though many single mothers eventually marry the child's father.

Figure 6.6. Factors Associated with Divorce and Marital Satisfaction

Marital Satisfaction

High

Marital Quality

Low

Marital Dissatisfaction

Divorce More Likely If:
-Either spouse was a teenager when married
-Wife was pregnant before marriage
-Either Spouse ever cohabited before marriage

Marital Duration More Likely If:
-Spouses older than 25 when married
-Couple prioritizes marital maintenance/enhancement
-Couples mutually faithful
-Couples create a strong marital relationship supported by ,but not overrun by extended family and friends
-Couples keep their marriage relationship a top priority even though parenting relationship is so demanding
-Couples grow together during life course changes that tend to drive spouses apart

Brief   **Marital Duration**   **Enduring**

Source: Hammond, Ron, Paul Cheney, Raewyn Pearsey. 2021. Sociology of the Family. Ron J. Hammond & Paul W. Cheney. Retrieved April 2, 2024 (https://freesociologybooks.com/Sociology_Of_The_Family/09_Marriage_and_Other_Long-Term_Relationships.php).

Moreover, some individuals struggle to fully commit to marriage, maintaining a mindset of being available for a potentially "better" partner. This attitude reflects a cultural value that marriage is temporary, subject to change if a more desirable partner comes along. This notion is captured by Norval D. Glenn in his 1991 article, which highlights the cultural values influencing divorce risks.

Robert and Jeanette Lauer (2009), experts in family studies, conducted extensive research on long-lasting marriages and identified key factors contributing to marital endurance, such as viewing one's spouse as a best friend and having mutual liking for one another.

In dealing with irreconcilable differences, negotiation and acceptance play crucial roles in maintaining a happy marriage. Additionally, maintaining a positive outlook on the marriage is vital, as marital satisfaction can fluctuate over the years, especially during the initial adjustment period of the first decade of marriage.

Family scientists also draw from physics the concept of entropy, which suggests that without proactive efforts to nurture the marriage, it may deteriorate over time. Hence, investing in preventive measures to maintain the marriage is essential.

Despite negative media portrayals of marriage, it remains a preferred lifestyle for the majority of U.S. adults. From a social exchange perspective, marriage is viewed as desirable and rewarding, with individuals seeking to

maximize rewards while minimizing risks. Personal-level actions can be taken to mitigate the risk of divorce, as outlined in Table 6.5 below.

Table 6.5. Ten Actions Individuals Can Take to Minimize the Odds of Divorce

1. Wait until at least your 20s to marry. Avoid marrying as a teenager.
2. Don't marry out of duty to a child. Avoid marrying just because she got pregnant. Pregnancy is not a mate-selection process we discussed in the pairing-off chapter.
3. Become proactive by maintaining your marriage with preventative efforts designed to avoid breakdowns. Find books, seminars, and a therapist to help you both work out the tough issues.
4. Never cohabit if you think you might marry.
5. Once married, leave the marriage market — avoid keeping an eye open for a better spouse.
6. Remain committed to your marriage. Most couples have irreconcilable differences and most learn to live comfortably together in spite of them.
7. Keep a positive outlook. Avoid losing hope in your first 36 months — those who get past the three-year mark often see improvements in quality of marital relationship, and the first 36 months have the most intense adjustments in them.
8. Take the media with a grain of salt. Avoid accepting evidence that your marriage is doomed — this means being careful not to let accurate or inaccurate statistics convince you that all is lost, especially before you even marry.
9. Do your homework when selecting a mate. Take your time and realize that marrying in your late 20s is common now and carefully identify someone who is homogeneous to you, especially about wanting to be married.
10. Focus on the positive benefits found to be associated with being married in society while learning to overlook some of the downsides.

Source: Hammond, Ron, Paul Cheney, Raewyn Pearsey. 2021. Sociology of the Family. Ron J. Hammond & Paul W. Cheney. Retrieved April 2, 2024 (https://freesociologybooks.com/Sociology_Of_The_Family/09_Marriage_and_Other_Long-Term_Relationships.php).

Over the years, numerous studies have consistently found that individuals with a history of cohabitation (having lived together before marriage) are more likely to divorce. Cohabitation has been extensively researched, particularly in comparing cohabiting couples with married ones. Studies by Lawrence Ganong and Marilyn Coleman (2017) have shed light on this topic. Their findings consistently reveal that cohabitation and marriage are fundamentally different. People who cohabit often develop relationship patterns that later hinder the longevity of their marriages. In simpler terms, those who cohabit before marriage are at a higher risk of divorce compared to those who never cohabited.

As mentioned earlier, cohabitation is now more prevalent in the United States than ever before. Cohabitating couples differ from married couples in several ways although there are some similarities in their lifestyles. Both groups form and sometimes end relationships. However, cohabiters face more than double the

risk of relationship dissolution compared to married individuals as indicated by research conducted by Andrew J. Cherlin (2008).

Cherlin's research also highlights the unique aspects of cohabiting versus married couples. In summary, cohabiters often feel financially unprepared for marriage, have lower expectations regarding relationship satisfaction, and anticipate shorter relationships compared to married individuals. The main focus of Cherlin's work revolves around the impact of adult relationship stability on children.

Effects on children

Growing up with divorced parents doesn't necessarily mean you're worse off than children whose parents stayed married but created a harsh and unhealthy home environment. For many children and their parents, divorce can actually be a positive life change. Some children of divorce grow up to have very happy marriages themselves because they actively seek safe and compatible partners and are determined not to repeat the mistakes of their parents. However, having a parent who went through a divorce might increase the likelihood of divorce for many children.

Judith Wallerstein (2000) has been studying a clinical sample of children of divorce for nearly four decades. Her findings align with those of other researchers – children whose parents divorced are affected in various ways throughout their lives. Similarly, children raised in toxic home environments by parents who remained married also experience long-term impacts.

When a couple decides to divorce (or separates, for couples who were living together), it can bring significant changes to the stability of children's lives on multiple levels. Many of these children have experienced divorce more than once. When their parents divorce, children often feel responsible and may believe that they should try to reconcile their parents, like in the movie *Parent Trap*. However, in reality, children typically don't directly cause their parents to divorce – while they play a role, they are seldom the sole reason for it. Additionally, divorce itself brings about changes, which can be inherently stressful. Children may worry about abandonment, feel that their fundamental attachment to their parents has been disrupted, and struggle to reconcile their idealized view of family life with the reality of the situation. They become aware of tensions between their parents and may even become subjects of these tensions themselves.

Table 6.6. Core Guidelines for Divorcing Parents

1. Respect each other, get along, and come to terms with the nuances of co-parenting (both parents and their new partners will be at the kindergarten play).
2. Set up and maintain predictable routines, especially following mandates in the divorce settlement decree.
3. Take mediation and adhere to mediation guidelines.
4. Get professional help for children when needed.
5. Ensure the constant safety and well-being of your children.
6. Follow a mutually agreed upon divorce decree.

7. Help children remember the good times that happened before the divorce.

8. Expect children to act out in unexpected ways, and work with ex-spouse on being consistent and agreeing on how to discipline consistently. Encourage children to have a strong relationship with both parents.

9. Get your own professional help, and guard against your children becoming caregivers to you.

10. Take a co-parenting course to learn how to get along for the sake of the children.

Source: Hammond, Ron, Paul Cheney, Raewyn Pearsey. 2021. Sociology of the Family. Ron J. Hammond & Paul W. Cheney. Retrieved April 2, 2024 (https://freesociologybooks.com/Sociology_Of_The_Family/09_Marriage_and_Other_Long-Term_Relationships.php).

It's crucial to prepare children for the impending divorce. Listen to their concerns and provide reassurance. Make it clear to them that they are not to blame for the divorce, and both parents still love them and will continue to be there for them. Assure them that they will be taken care of to the best of your abilities. Demonstrate that despite the challenges of divorce, you and the other parent can work together to navigate through it. Show them that you are committed to fostering a positive relationship with the absent parent, and encourage them not to take on the burdens associated with the dissolved marriage, such as acting as messengers or intermediaries between parents. Table 6.6 outlines some fundamental guidelines for parents going through a divorce.

Remarriage & Stepfamilies

Remarriage occurs when a man and woman legally marry each other after ending a previous marriage. **Stepfamilies** are created when children from a previous marriage or relationship become part of a new family through remarriage. Stepfamilies can be formed in several ways: when one or both spouses were previously married, when one or both spouses cohabited before marriage, or when one or both spouses were single parents and bring children from their previous relationship into the new family. Stepchildren can be of any age. In cases where a current spouse had a significant emotional or legal relationship before, it results in a bi-nuclear family, where the family structure revolves around two primary adult relationships formed by the original adults who are no longer together.

Figure 6.7 illustrates various family structures in the United States and their impact on children's stability, particularly regarding poverty rates. In 2018, there were 29.5 million children living in unmarried homes (40%) and 44.2 million children living in married homes (60%). The figure also shows the percentage of children within each category living in poverty, with the highest poverty rates listed at the top of each list.

In married homes, the data reveals that children living with their original biological or adoptive parents who were still in their first marriage had the lowest poverty rate (8.2%), followed closely by children in homes with remarried parents (11.3%).

On the other hand, in unmarried homes, there is a clear gender trend, with the lowest poverty rates found
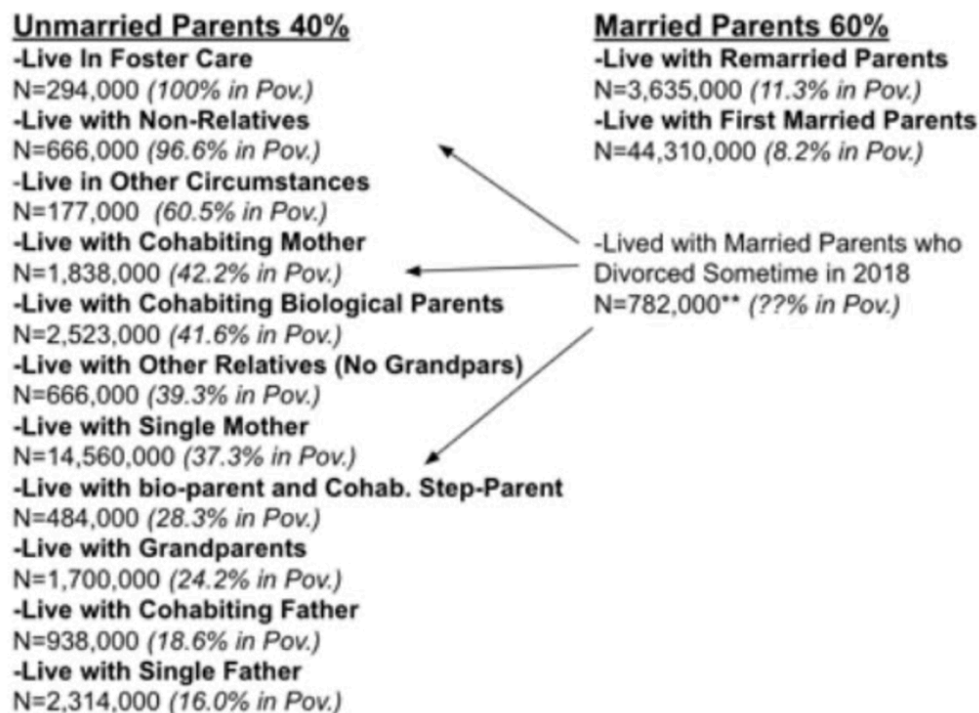
in homes with single fathers (16.0%) and cohabiting fathers (18.6%). Poverty rates increase as you move up the list, with the highest levels of poverty observed in homes with children living in formal foster care (100%).

The reasons behind these higher poverty levels in unmarried parent homes are multifaceted, including factors such as cohabitation, divorce, single motherhood, substance abuse, crime involvement, and incarceration, which are more prevalent among the less educated poor compared to the more educated middle and upper class. This highlights how the instability experienced by children due to the "Marriage Go Round" actions of parents in the U.S. is exacerbated by poverty.

Researchers in sociology and related fields often discuss the concept of **family instability**, which refers to disruptions in children's emotional and social bonds, relationships, living arrangements, and day-to-day lives resulting from changes in their parents' significant relationships. Figure 6.7 illustrates this instability tends to be more prevalent among low-income families and less common in middle-class and upper-class families.

In 2013, Alan J. Hawkins, Ph.D., a leading figure in family studies, published a book titled "The Forever Initiative: A Feasible Public Policy Agenda to Help Couples Form and Sustain Healthy Marriages and Relationships." Dr. Hawkins has dedicated over 25 years to studying the impact of mandated parenting classes on couples going through divorce. In some U.S. states, couples with children under 18 are required to take these courses when divorcing to learn how to co-parent effectively despite no longer being married. Dr. Hawkins assesses the effectiveness of these courses in helping families transition from one married household to two separate households while still sharing custody and care of their children. He also emphasizes the value of premarital education in promoting family stability and well-being.

Figure 6.7. Instability of U.S. Children (N=73,740,000)

Unmarried Parents 40%
-Live In Foster Care
N=294,000 (100% in Pov.)
-Live with Non-Relatives
N=666,000 (96.6% in Pov.)
-Live in Other Circumstances
N=177,000 (60.5% in Pov.)
-Live with Cohabiting Mother
N=1,838,000 (42.2% in Pov.)
-Live with Cohabiting Biological Parents
N=2,523,000 (41.6% in Pov.)
-Live with Other Relatives (No Grandpars)
N=666,000 (39.3% in Pov.)
-Live with Single Mother
N=14,560,000 (37.3% in Pov.)
-Live with bio-parent and Cohab. Step-Parent
N=484,000 (28.3% in Pov.)
-Live with Grandparents
N=1,700,000 (24.2% in Pov.)
-Live with Cohabiting Father
N=938,000 (18.6% in Pov.)
-Live with Single Father
N=2,314,000 (16.0% in Pov.)

Married Parents 60%
-Live with Remarried Parents
N=3,635,000 (11.3% in Pov.)
-Live with First Married Parents
N=44,310,000 (8.2% in Pov.)

-Lived with Married Parents who Divorced Sometime in 2018
N=782,000** (??% in Pov.)

American Community Survey. 2018. Table FAM1.B. Retrieved July 16, 2020 (https://www.childstats.gov/americaschildren/tables/ fam1b.asp); Number of Divorces. 2000-2018. Retrieved July 16, 2020 (https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/dvs/national-marriage-divorce-rates-00-18.pdf)

Source: Hammond, Ron, Paul Cheney, Raewyn Pearsey. 2021. Sociology of the Family. Ron J. Hammond & Paul W. Cheney. Retrieved April 2, 2024 (https://freesociologybooks.com/Sociology_Of_The_Family/09_Marriage_and_Other_Long-Term_Relationships.php).

Given the crucial role of family function and structure in maintaining stability, numerous studies have explored how stepfamilies form and navigate their complexities. Stepfamilies are often regarded as one of the most intricate family systems due to their multiple social arrangements over time, such as multiple marriages, cohabitation, or common-law arrangements. This complexity increases the need for robust boundary maintenance within these families. Figure 6.8 presents a diagram outlining various types of relationships and the associated complexities and boundaries they entail. Compared to other relationship categories depicted, a married couple with children typically experiences lower levels of social and emotional complexity.

Establishing good boundaries is essential for healthy family dynamics. The saying "Good fences make great neighbors" underscores the importance and benefits of maintaining healthy boundaries within families. In a nuclear family, effective boundaries act like fences, safeguarding the immediate family and regulating interactions with others as deemed appropriate. Within a nuclear family, healthy boundaries encompass several aspects:

- *Healthy sexual boundaries*: Reserved for the spouse or partners only.
- *Healthy parenting boundaries*: Parents take on the responsibility of caring for, nurturing, and providing structure to their dependent children.
- *Healthy financial boundaries*: Parents teach their children the value of work and independence over time.
- *Healthy emotional boundaries*: Family members respect each other's privacy and protect against intrusions from other family and friends.
- *Healthy social boundaries*: Friends and extended family members have their designated place, distinct from the intimacy shared within the immediate family.
- *Healthy physical boundaries*: Immediate family members have their own designated rooms, access to bathrooms, locks on doors and windows, and private space.
- *Healthy safety boundaries*: Older immediate family members protect the family from external threats and harm.

Maintaining these boundaries helps create a secure and harmonious family environment.

Couples who remarry without children, regardless of their previous marriage or cohabitation, typically experience less complexity. This is because there are no concerns about visitation disputes, child support, or holiday arrangements that often arise in remarriages with children. While there may still be issues regarding

alimony, they are not as intertwined with co-parenting arrangements as in cases of joint custody or non-custodial conditions.

Figure 6.8. Stepfamilies & Other Family Subsystems
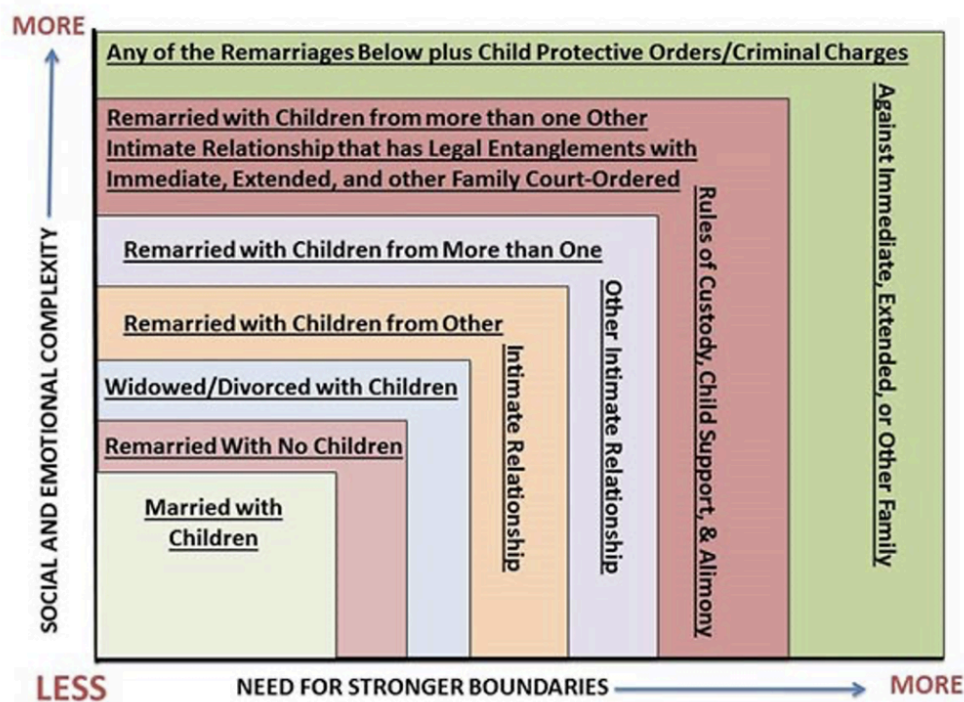
Source: Hammond, Ron, Paul Cheney, Raewyn Pearsey. 2021. Sociology of the Family. Ron J. Hammond & Paul W. Cheney. Retrieved April 2, 2024 (https://freesociologybooks.com/Sociology_Of_The_Family/09_Marriage_and_Other_Long-Term_Relationships.php).

For widowed or divorced individuals, boundary issues may become more pronounced, especially if they become reliant on others for financial or social/emotional support. Dependence can blur boundaries, particularly when single parents receive support from other adult family members or non-relatives. In contrast, intact couples who head the family unit and work together tend to maintain healthier boundaries. In many cases, adults who step in to assist children also provide support to single parents in various ways.

Remarried couples with children from previous relationships face additional complexity. The influence of the ex-spouse in co-parenting arrangements can encroach upon the boundaries of the remarried couple if not carefully managed. Scheduling in remarried families must be flexible to accommodate celebrations and events involving both the remarried couple and the ex-spouse's family. This flexibility is necessary as situations may not always go as planned, requiring both parties to adapt.

Furthermore, remarried couples with children from multiple relationships encounter even greater complexity and boundary demands. Legal entanglements from previous relationships, including custody arrangements, visitation schedules, and alimony agreements, add layers of scrutiny and complexity. Compliance with court orders becomes essential, with meticulous record-keeping required to demonstrate

efforts to adhere to legal obligations. However, perfection in meeting these obligations is unrealistic, and unexpected challenges may arise.

In cases involving criminal charges or child protective orders, the need for stronger boundaries becomes even more critical. Children must be safeguarded, and non-compliance with protective orders can result in legal consequences. Under such circumstances, supervised visitation may be ordered to ensure the safety of all parties involved. The involvement of the state in holding families accountable adds further intensity to these situations.

As many of you are aware, family relationships can become strained in various ways. This is especially challenging in remarried families where unresolved conflicts and boundary issues often persist. A significant model developed in the late 1970s sheds light on family dynamics by considering two key dimensions: family cohesion and family adaptability. Cohesion refers to the emotional bond among family members, while adaptability concerns the family's ability to adjust to changes in roles and

Image by Rene Asmussen on Pexels

relationships. The quality of communication within the family plays a crucial role in facilitating or inhibiting cohesion and adaptability (Olson 1976).

Olson's Circumplex Model is highly regarded for its diagnostic and therapeutic utility in understanding modern families. Healthy families typically exhibit moderate levels of cohesion, adaptability, and quality communication. Olson outlined extremes that families may experience, such as being disengaged or enmeshed. Disengaged families lack clear rules and leadership, while enmeshed families are overly involved in each other's affairs, often at the expense of individual identities.

Remarried families face unique challenges as they integrate previous family systems into new ones. Unlike the smooth transitions portrayed in TV shows like the *Brady Bunch*, *Full House*, *Modern Family*, forming stepfamilies involves complex adjustments. The goals of remarried couples forming stepfamilies are often similar to those of first married couples: providing for the needs of spouses, children, and pets; creating a secure home environment; enjoying life together with loved ones; ensuring financial stability; and raising children into successful adulthood.

Effective strategies for stepfamilies include acknowledging and addressing the grief and transitions experienced by all members. Stepchildren and remarried parents may carry lingering grief from past divorces or deaths. Although it may be tempting to overlook these emotions and focus on moving forward, it is essential to confront them. Research, self-help resources, and websites offer support for navigating grief and transitions within stepfamilies. Addressing grief can strengthen the bonds within the stepfamily and foster a sense of cohesion.

It's crucial for stepparents to focus on the functioning of their family rather than getting caught up in its structure. Whether you're a combination of his, hers, theirs, or anything else, what matters most is how well

the family operates. This includes ensuring that certain criteria are met and working effectively. It also means being able to adapt and accommodate when adjustments are necessary. A functional, adaptable, and cohesive family is better equipped to handle both everyday challenges and more significant stressors.

One valuable lesson from public educators that applies to stepfamilies is the importance of transparency. When assigning chores or administering discipline, it's essential to make the process clear to everyone and ensure fairness for all involved. If any biased processes are identified, it's crucial to address them openly so that all children understand the fairness of the rules.

In his book "The Intentional Family: Simple Rituals to Strengthen Family Ties," William J. Doherty emphasizes the importance of family rituals in building cohesion. These intentional efforts help connect family members and reinforce bonds over time. Especially in the early stages of forming a stepfamily, rituals like traveling together, celebrating birthdays and holidays, and engaging in shared activities play a vital role in fostering cohesion. While family reunions can be enjoyable and meaningful, it's important to recognize that not all family members may participate, and that's okay.

ANALYZING FAMILY STRUCTURES

Big Blend Theory

Watch the video, Parenting Strategies for Blended Families, and answer the following questions:

1. List three facts or main ideas in the video that you found interesting or important.
2. What was your reaction to the video?
3. Describe something left unanswered you would like to know more about, or what information was left out that might aide your understanding of the topic.
4. Did this video change any ideas or opinions you had before you saw it? Why or why not? If it aligns with your current thinking, describe how it broadened your understanding of the topic.
5. What strategies stood out the most that would support the healthy function of blended families?
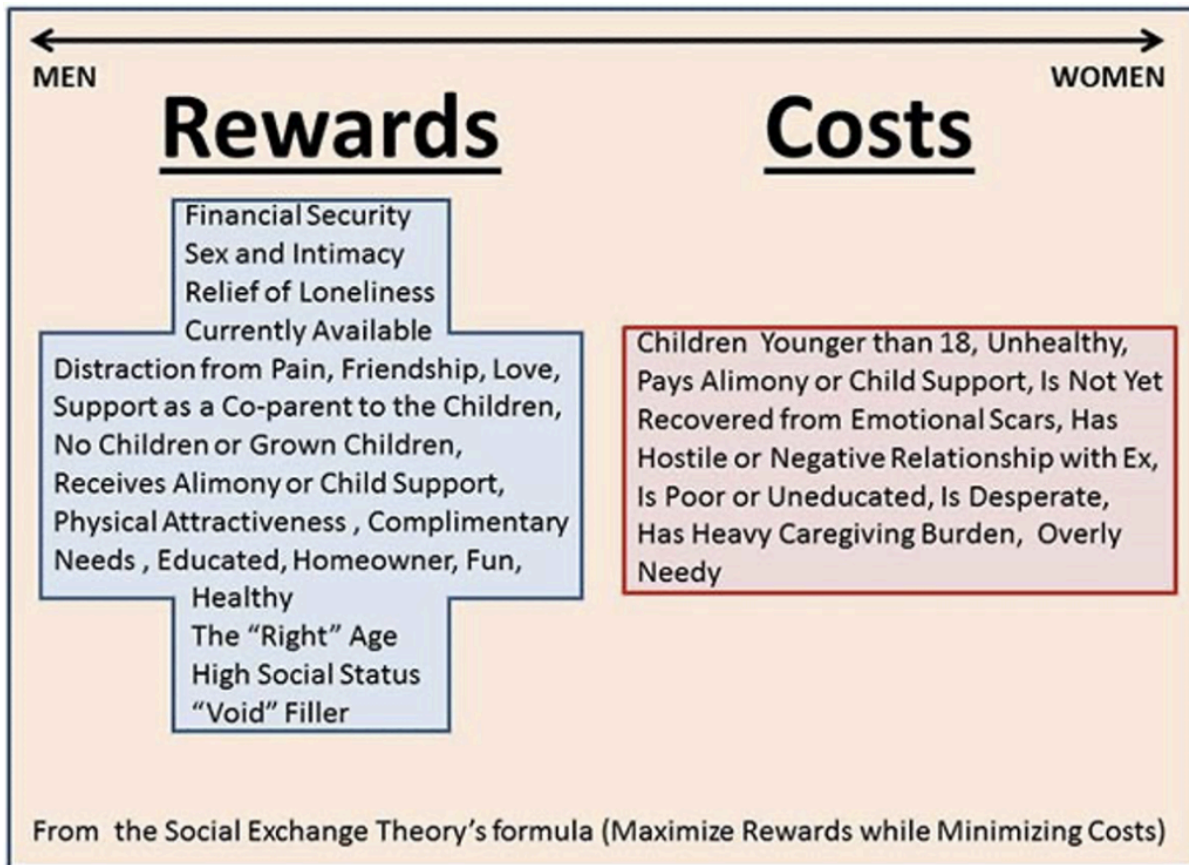
Stepfamilies often contend with unresolved issues from past marriages and family systems, which can affect cohesion. In such cases, it's essential to continue gathering as a family and address any concerns openly. The happiness of a stepfamily should not be solely determined by the least happy member. Despite the challenges, stepfamilies can be happy families with concerted efforts to navigate complexities and create positive memories. If stepchildren leave home with unresolved issues, it's important for the couple to accept their best efforts, focus on their relationship, and move forward together. While it's crucial to meet the needs of children living at home, ultimately, the husband and wife are the ones who will spend their lives together.

As previously stated, remarriage refers to when a couple gets married after one or both of them have been previously married. While some couples do divorce and then remarry each other, this is quite rare. More commonly, remarriage after divorce happens when the individuals are in their twenties. As people move into their thirties, forties, fifties, and beyond, the likelihood of remarriage decreases. Typically, men remarry sooner than women after a divorce.

Entering the dating scene after a divorce can be daunting, especially for those who have been out of it for a while. Many newly divorced individuals feel uncertain about their ability to navigate new relationships. This feeling is often justified because, during marriage, people tend to focus on their roles as spouses and parents rather than on developing dating skills. Men usually transition back into dating more quickly, seeking social and emotional connections with new acquaintances. On the other hand, women often have more extensive social networks and family relationships after divorce.

When searching for a new partner, individuals tend to seek someone with similar backgrounds and interests who they perceive as compatible. Remarriage seekers, however, apply a unique filter compared to those who have never been married. They aim to avoid repeating past mistakes and often look for qualities in a partner that their ex-spouse lacked. Like everyone in the marriage market, remarriage seekers try to maximize rewards while minimizing costs, as explained by social exchange theory. Figure 6.9 illustrates some of the rewards and costs that remarriage seekers typically consider. It's observed that men generally have more rewards when re-entering the marriage market compared to women. Additionally, the absence of children plays a role, contributing to why men tend to remarry sooner than women.

Figure 6.9. The Rewards and Costs Considered in Remarriage

Rewards — **Costs**

MEN ⟵ ⟶ WOMEN

Rewards:
Financial Security
Sex and Intimacy
Relief of Loneliness
Currently Available
Distraction from Pain, Friendship, Love, Support as a Co-parent to the Children, No Children or Grown Children, Receives Alimony or Child Support, Physical Attractiveness , Complimentary Needs , Educated, Homeowner, Fun, Healthy
The "Right" Age
High Social Status
"Void" Filler

Costs:
Children Younger than 18, Unhealthy, Pays Alimony or Child Support, Is Not Yet Recovered from Emotional Scars, Has Hostile or Negative Relationship with Ex, Is Poor or Uneducated, Is Desperate, Has Heavy Caregiving Burden, Overly Needy

From the Social Exchange Theory's formula (Maximize Rewards while Minimizing Costs)

Source: Hammond, Ron, Paul Cheney, Raewyn Pearsey. 2021. Sociology of the Family. Ron J. Hammond & Paul W. Cheney. Retrieved April 2, 2024 (https://freesociologybooks.com/Sociology_Of_The_Family/09_Marriage_and_Other_Long-Term_Relationships.php).

The "rewards" refer to desirable qualities that both men and women seek in potential partners. Among these, financial security holds significant appeal. Financial stability, encompassing adequacy, comfort, and even luxury is highly valued. Sociologists have long discussed the concept of relative deprivation, which refers to how we perceive our own advantages or disadvantages compared to others. Essentially, we gauge our circumstances based on past experiences and compare them to those of others.

For instance, a single mother with three children may find a potential partner attractive if he can alleviate some of her financial strain. Similarly, a middle-class divorcee with children may seek someone who can maintain their socioeconomic status. Conversely, a wealthy divorcee might prioritize finding a partner who can offer luxury.

When considering the importance of financial stability or any other desirable trait in a remarriage partner, it's crucial to understand the concept of "perceived advantage or disadvantage." Remarried individuals, like all of us, evaluate their current rewards in comparison to past experiences, and they do so subjectively, taking emotions into account. Some may prioritize companionship or trustworthiness over financial factors.

After divorce, both men and women experience a significant decrease in sexual activity compared to when they were married. The desire for sex and intimacy often drives individuals to seek out new partners. Loneliness

is a prevalent issue for divorcees. While men tend to quickly find dating partners and may fulfill their need for intimacy through dating, women may rely on existing relationships with children, family, and friends, which may not fully meet their emotional and social needs compared to a romantic partner.

As straightforward as it may seem, the availability of a desirable partner makes them more attractive. Someone who isn't deeply committed or engaged in a relationship is immediately open to interaction and potential relationship development. Many individuals seek out new partners as a way to cope with the pain and grief of divorce. There's nothing inherently wrong with this approach; healthy dating and connections can aid in the healing process. However, rushing into marriage during the still-recovering phase can be harmful. Once the emotional wounds heal, one may realize that they aren't compatible with their new partner after all. Second, third, and fourth marriages carry higher divorce risks compared to first marriages. You might have heard of "rebound relationships or marriages," which are often seen as hasty and ill-advised.

Both friendship and love are fundamental human needs. Adjusting to the absence of these connections, even if one has children, can be challenging. Adults often seek companionship and romantic love. For single parents with custody (and the few single fathers who have custody), finding a co-parent who can live with the family is highly desirable. Single parents want their children to have the influence of two parents and may actively seek out a mother or father figure for their kids. For both younger and older singles, the presence of children becomes a significant factor. Some younger divorcees may hesitate to enter a relationship with a single parent, while others may be open to it. Generally, having children under a divorced woman's care tends to lower the likelihood of her remarrying.

Physical attractiveness holds significance for many individuals who are considering remarriage. It may play a more prominent role for some compared to others. Similar to never-married individuals, divorced men also take physical attractiveness into account when selecting a new partner. However, they weigh it alongside other important attributes, considering their past marital experiences and challenges. When entering a marriage, it's beneficial for partners to have complementary needs. For instance, if one partner seeks care while the other desires to provide it, their needs complement each other. Some single individuals, particularly men, may actively seek to raise children, reflecting healthy motives. This desire for companionship aligns well with single mothers seeking co-parents. However, not all needs are complementary, and it's unrealistic to expect one person to fulfill all their partner's needs at all times.

Equity is a concept often used by remarried couples to evaluate their relationship's rewards and costs. It refers to the overall sense of receiving a fair deal considering all perceived benefits and drawbacks. While an outsider might perceive an imbalance in give-and-take, equity is subjective and varies between individual spouses. For example, a remarried woman may value her new husband's involvement with her children more than other contributions. Equity is fluid and can change as new needs arise or circumstances evolve within the family.

Educational attainment, such as having a college degree, often correlates with higher income and desirable traits in a potential partner. College graduates tend to exhibit traits like delayed gratification and have diverse family role expectations, making them more attractive in the marriage market. Additionally, owning a home, as

opposed to renting, provides benefits such as privacy, financial stability, and clear boundaries that contribute to the development of a remarriage and new family system.

When it comes to health considerations, older individuals, particularly women, often prioritize the current and future health of a potential partner. Caregiving responsibilities, especially for elderly individuals, can significantly impact relationship dynamics and future plans. While caregiving is common, it's seldom a desired role for potential mates. Women, in particular, may face challenges in finding new partners due to custody arrangements and caregiving responsibilities, which can affect their ability to engage in new relationships. Overall, finding a suitable partner involves considering various factors, including financial stability, health, and mutual compatibility, to ensure a successful remarriage.

6.6 END OF MODULE MATERIAL

CORE INSIGHTS

The module on Family Conflict & Crisis investigates the intricate dynamics and far-reaching consequences of various challenges that can disrupt familial harmony. Firstly, it explores the pervasive issue of alcohol and drug abuse within families, shedding light on how such substances impact relationships, parenting roles, and overall family functioning. From strained interpersonal dynamics to compromised parental abilities, the module uncovers the multifaceted effects of substance abuse on family life.

Moreover, the module equips learners with the skills to recognize and address relationship abuse, encompassing domestic violence, intimate partner violence among immigrants and refugees, and the insidious role of technology in perpetuating such abuse. The module also focuses on understanding of the signs and consequences of child abuse within family contexts, encompassing physical, emotional, sexual abuse, and neglect. By understanding the signs and characteristics of relationship and child abuse, learners gain insight into how to support survivors and combat these harmful patterns within familial and societal contexts.

Finally, the module considers the complex factors contributing to divorce, including predictors and odds, and examine the profound effects of divorce on children's emotional, social, and academic well-being. Learners also evaluate the challenges and dynamics inherent in remarriage and stepfamilies, delving into the adjustment process for both children and adults, effective co-parenting strategies, and the crucial role of communication and conflict resolution in fostering healthy family dynamics. Through an exploration of these critical topics, the module empowers individuals to navigate and mitigate the complex challenges that can arise within family units, fostering healthier and more resilient familial bonds.

RESOURCES

1. [Preventing Intimate Partner Violence Across the Lifespan: A Technical Package of Programs, Policies, and Practices](#) (CDC 2017)
2. [National Center for Victims of Crime](#) (NCVS 2024)
3. [Criminal Victimization, 2022](#) (U.S. Department of Justice 2023)
4. [Strengthening Relationships](#) (Love Languages 2024)
5. [Stronger Marriage Connection Podcast](#) (Utah State University 2010)
6. [National Stepfamily Resource Center](#) (NSRC 2024)

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