

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **HUMAN INTIMACY, RELATIONSHIPS, MARRIAGE, AND THE FAMILY**

#### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

After study of this chapter, the student should be able to:

1. Explain how one's own family experience affects their view of the family in society.
2. Discuss the transition from child-centered to adult-centered families.
3. Explain how Cox and Demmitt's definition of the "family" differs from the definitions such as those developed by the U.S. Census Bureau, Geles, the New York Court of Appeals, Auhagen and Salisch, and Beutler.
4. Differentiate between families and households.
5. Discuss the six family functions.
6. Describe the nuclear family.
7. Know the characteristics of single-parent families and why we see an increase in them.
8. Understand how and why the American family structure has changed. Know the various structures of the American family.
9. Explain what Cox and Demmitt mean when they say that family changes are characterized by continuity. Discuss the principle of uniqueness within commonality.
10. Explain why the family is called the "shock absorber" of society.
11. Describe the relationship between family membership and personal health.
12. Understand intimacy. Know the definition, the six processes, major components, and models of intimacy.
13. Define the term socialization. Explain why socialization is so important to young children.
14. List three unique characteristics of the American family.
15. Describe the family's transition from a unit of production to a unit of consumption.
16. Present an overview of African-American, Hispanic, Asian-American, American Indian, and Alaska Native families. Understand what "diversity" means in the American family.

#### **CHAPTER LECTURE OUTLINE**

##### **I. Introduction**

- A. Everyone has personal beliefs about marriage and family because every person has grown up in a family, making objectivity impossible. The bias of the authors is to supply information that helps to improve intimate relationships. The chapter is an overview of contemporary family characteristics. One of the most important changes that has occurred in the modern American family seems to be from child-centered to adult-centered. Each individual should evaluate their own attitude about changes

taking place in the American family to help in making the best possible decisions about intimate relationships.

## II. Family: The Basic Unit of Human Organization

- A. The term *family* is used in the broadest possible sense. It is defined as whatever system a society uses to support and control reproduction and human sexual interaction. This broad definition avoids conflict over meaning of changes currently taking place in family. Other definitions of family are extremely narrow.
1. The U.S. Census Bureau defines family as a group of two or more people related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together. The census bureau defines household as all persons who occupy a housing unit.
  2. Richard Geles defines family as a social group and institution that possesses structure made up of special functions such as breadwinner, child rearer, and so on, and that includes interaction between these positions.
  3. New York State Court of Appeals said that family can be defined by examining factors like “exclusivity and longevity” and level of emotional and financial commitment.
  4. Mary Ann Lamanna and Agnes Riedman define family as a relationship in which people form an economic unit, are attached to the group, and commit to the group over time.
  5. A national opinion poll reveals that 98% of Americans define family as a married couple living with children.
  6. Ivan Beutler’s definition of family must include ties across generations that are established by the birth process.
- B. **Family Functions.** The family serves both society and the individual. Sometimes there is conflict between social and individual needs. For the family to remain a viable social institution, it must meet the needs of society as well as the individual family members. In the past, the family has handled a broad range of functions. The following functions are necessary for maintenance of society:
1. Replacement of dying members
  2. Production and distribution of goods and services
  3. Conflict solution and maintaining order within family and larger society
  4. Socialization of children into society
  5. Individual goals must be harmonized with values of the society
  6. Establishment of procedures for intimacy and emotional gratification

As society grows more complex, social institutions are formed that assume the primary responsibility for some past family functions. For example, families are no longer production units as most goods and services are produced outside family in formalized job settings. However, the family is still an economic unit because it demands goods and services. In addition, although courts and police maintain external order, the family is still primarily responsible for maintaining order within its own boundaries. As a result, the American family has full responsibility for only two of the primary functions:

1. Providing continuing replacements for individuals so that society can continue to exist.
2. Providing emotional gratification and intimacy to family members and helping them deal with emotional crises, so they grow in the most fulfilling manner possible.

We have seen the family’s functions change over time and can expect them to continue to change. This does not necessarily mean the family will disappear. The family’s secret of survival over centuries has been its flexibility and adaptability. Family is a process rather than an unchanging system.

## III. The American Family: Many Structures and Much Change

- A. *A free and creative society offers many structural forms by which family functions, such as child rearing, can be fulfilled.* There is a myth that one family structure represents all American families.
1. The nuclear family that has a mother, father, and children is different from the single-mother-headed family of just a mother and her children.
  2. The single-parent family has been one of fastest growing family structures during the past decade; it tends to be temporary since the single parent usually remarries. The large increase is related to the high divorce rate and, to a lesser extent, a greater social acceptance of unwed mothers. Divorce is a good example of changing family structure.
  3. In a blended family, the family begins as a nuclear family, becomes a single-parent family, and, in

many cases, becomes a reconstituted or blended family when the single parent remarries. Even in a stable relationship, structure usually changes over time. Increased life expectancy in America has in itself caused great changes for the family as more and more generations of family members are alive at one time. Modern America is remarkably tolerant of multiple forms of intimate relationships. Industrialization and affluence have made it more possible to consider alternative lifestyles and marital forms—gender roles are less rigid, it is no longer considered disgraceful not to marry, individuals are no longer obligated to have children, divorce is more acceptable, and there is a greater acceptance of homosexual relationships. Individuals must now make their own choices about lifestyles, marriages, and families. The idea that love will make decisions for us is a source of much disappointment. A major risk in opening up personal choice is that mistakes will be made; the price of a more open system is a greater need for rational examination of alternatives and improved decision making skills.

### IV. **Change within Continuity and Uniqueness within Commonality**

- A. While family life has changed, the core of the family has remained the same for generations. However, amongst this continuity is a vast array of unique family forms. Grasping this idea helps to understand the American family.
- B. The interpretation of diverse data will help clarify the two principles of change within continuity and uniqueness within commonality. Currently, one divorce for every two marriages occurs in a given year, which is up from one in every twelve in 1900. Some use this to support the contention that the American family is in real trouble. Others suggest that Americans have better marriages and more fulfilling family lives as they no longer put up with the dissatisfactions of empty marriages. Despite the high divorce rate, family permanence has continued at about the same level for the past century. Families are having fewer children, but continue to have and rear children as in the past. Recent changes in family life appear deviant only when compared to what people were doing in the 1940s and 1950s. Aside from those years, today's couples would appear normal. Perhaps the biggest change of all is the increasing acceptance of various forms of intimate relationships.

### V. **Family: A Buffer against Mental and Physical Illness**

- A. Family becomes increasingly important to members as social stability decreases and people feel more isolated and alienated. Indeed, the healthy family can act as a buffer against mental and physical illnesses.
  - 1. The family is the stable point in an ever-changing environment. The family serves as an anchor against the storm of change. The family can be a source of security and a protective shield against environmental pressures. Of course, the family must be healthy and strong to act as a shock absorber.
  - 2. As families become smaller, intimate relationships within the family have become more intense, more emotional, and more fragile. The family is, in a sense, a hothouse of intimacy and emotionality. It has the potential to do either great good or great harm to its members. Within this setting, most of us will achieve our closest intimacy with other persons. Such feelings lead to improved communication, which tends to be therapeutic. Good communication can also help toward better life adjustment. Studies indicate that married men and women are generally happier and less stressed than unmarried.
- B. **The Need for Intimacy.**
  - 1. Seeking physical, intellectual, or emotional closeness with others seems to be a basic need of most people. Ideally, emotional closeness is more easily found in families. According to Kieffer, intimacy is the experiencing of the essence of one's self in intense intellectual, physical, and/or emotional communion with another human being.
  - 2. Intimacy combines six processes: communication of personal feelings, acceptance of personal limitations, respect for personal feelings, affirmation of one another, sharing of hurts and fears of being hurt, and forgiveness of errors. These must include the characteristic of empathy.
  - 3. The primary components of intimacy are choice, mutuality, reciprocity, trust, and delight. Two people make a choice to like one another and establish a closer relationship. It must be mutual for an intimate relationship to develop. Reciprocity means that each partner gives to the relationship and to the other person, sharing confidences and feelings back and forth. Sharing nurtures acceptance and trust, which, in turn, increases the sharing and eventually leads to the delight in

one another.

4. B. J. Biddle suggests that intimacy must be considered on each of three dimensions: breadth, openness, and depth. Breadth describes the range of activities shared by two people. Openness implies that the pair shares meaningful self-disclosure with one another. Depth means that partners share really true, central, and meaningful aspects of themselves. Kieffer adds to Biddle's three dimensions the idea of intellectual, physical, and emotional realms of action. In addition, she reminds us that intimacy is a process, not a state of being.
5. In the past, intimacy was partially maintained throughout one's life by the geographical and physical proximity of the family. As a result of changes in economic patterns and geographic mobility, many people have found intimacy more difficult to achieve. Today there are different opportunities for fulfilling intimacy needs. Marriage is no longer seen as the only avenue to intimacy. Kieffer suggests a patchwork intimacy where most people are involved in many intimate relationships of varying intensity.

## **VI. The Family as Interpreter of Society**

- A. The attitudes and reactions of family members toward environmental influences are more important to the socialization of family members than environmental influences themselves. The family is the main avenue for socialization of young children. More working mothers mean that preschool, child-care programs, and television are assuming more influence over American children. Without socialization by adults, children are unable to internalize society's rules, mores, taboos, and so forth. People who fail to be socialized are known as sociopaths or psychopaths.
  1. The social learning theory, defined as learning by observing other people's behavior, stresses importance of modeling in learning. Parents and other family members are the most significant models for young children.
  2. Families are greatly influenced by social problems. Each family is likely to have opinions about events that may lead the family to take certain actions. Social change and controversy touch the family or its members. The family's reaction to social change may be more important than social change itself. The family's reaction serves to teach children values and are often the most important values in people's lives.

## **VII. Unique Characteristics of the American Family**

- A. The American family has given its members relative freedom in mate and in vocational selection. There is also relative freedom within the family due to high standard of living, physical mobility, lack of broader familial responsibility, and pluralistic society. American families enjoy high economic standards and abundant personal possessions. Such affluence increases the amount of education one receives and the need for decision making. Along with this freedom comes responsibility and the freedom to make mistakes. In addition, American families have extensive private character.

## **VIII. Family: The Consuming Unit of the American Economy**

- A. Family is the basic economic unit in American society. The Industrial Revolution removed much of the economic production from the family home into factories and offices. The family's economic well-being came to be subject more to whim of the anonymous marketplace than to the industry of the individual. The family is the consuming unit of agricultural and industrial output. As a result, production in the household (housework) is largely unpaid and unrecognized even though the family still provides services to its members. The idea that the family is a consumer is important to the health of the economy. When consumer spending drops, the economy suffers. Thus, the family is an economic foundation block of American society.

## **IX. American Families: A Great Diversity of Types**

- A. America is made up of a wide diversity of peoples, thus creating a diversity of family types. Although the American dream of social "melting pot" is often espoused, the principle of homogamy is dominant in most relationships. The principle of homogamy states that people are attracted to others who share similar objective characteristics such as race, religion, ethnic group, education, and social class. In other words, "like tend to marry like." Rather than a melting pot, America resembles "tossed salad" with numerous ethnic family groups.

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- B. African American Families.** African Americans make up the largest minority group in the United States until they were surpassed by the Latino population in 2003. There is no single type of African American family. Past literature has focused on African American families being near or beneath the official poverty level. The most important economic story of the last 40 years is the rise of middle class. The improved economic conditions are partly attributable to higher educational attainment. Other than in economic areas, the black family has become stronger with a decline in unwed births and a rise in children living in two-married-parent families.
- C. Hispanic Families.** In 2010, Hispanic families comprised 16.3% of the American population with the most rapid growth especially in the border states of California, Texas, and Florida. The Hispanic population increased by 43% between 2000 and 2012. The **fertility rate** is greater than found in the general population. The more recent immigrants are often entering the U.S. illegally, making an accurate count difficult. Lack of schooling and less English language ability have kept the Hispanic population from improving their economic position. The extended family plays a larger role in Hispanic life than in the other groups.
- D. Asian American Families.** In 1965, all discriminatory quotas against Asians were lifted. Such quotas originated in 1882 with the Chinese Exclusion Act. Since 1965, a large number of Asians have entered the United States. The 2010 census reported 4.7% of the population to be Asian. The major Asian groups in order of size are Chinese, Filipino, Asian Indians, Koreans, and Vietnamese. Asian Americans are now often perceived as a “model minority” because as a whole they are better educated, hold higher occupational positions, and earn more than the general U.S. population. More recent Asian immigrants are having more difficulty due to language and educational shortcomings.
- E. The American Indian and Alaska Native Population.** Census 2010 reported 0.9% of the U.S. population were American Indian or Alaska Natives. Seventy-nine percent of the respondents indicated a tribal affiliation, with the largest being Navajo, Cherokee, Latin American Indian, Sioux, Chippewa, and Choctaw. The largest Alaska Native tribal groups are Yup’ik and Inupiat. The majority of American Indians live in urban areas where they tend to be invisible and have more “fluid” networks of relationships. Those living on reservations fare less well, with high unemployment and insufficient health care.

## KEY TERMS

family  
households  
differentiation  
nuclear family  
structure  
reconstituted or blended family  
intimacy  
socialization  
sociopaths  
psychopaths  
modeling  
homogamy  
fertility rate

## CLASS PROJECTS

1. Ask students if they believe that the shift from child-centeredness to adult-centeredness has led to family decline. Have a discussion that explores both opinions.
2. Present a lecture on ethnic families in the United States. Resources might include: Mindel, C.H, Habenstein, R.W., & Wright, R. (1998). Ethnic Families in America: Patterns and Variations (4<sup>th</sup> ed.) Toronto: Pearson Education Canada; Aulette, J.R. (2002). Changing American Families. Boston: Allyn &

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Bacon; Hutter, M. (2004). *The Family Experience. A Reader in Cultural Diversity*. Boston: Pearson Education; Taylor, R. L. (2001). *Minority Families in the United States*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

3. Ask students to draw their present families. Collect the drawings and share them with the class. Have students point out various family structures.
4. Ask students to draw “the typical American family.” Collect the drawings and share them with the class. Although most will draw a nuclear (traditional) family, underscore the fact that there is no “typical American family.” Compare the “typical families” to the drawings of students’ families from #3 above.
5. Have students collect pictures of families that are depicted in magazine advertisements or create a matrix of the various family structures depicted on current television programs. Discuss the type of family structures most commonly depicted.
6. Have students discuss or debate the issues surrounding single-parent families. Are single-parent families evidence of a decline in the family structure or examples of shifts in other family issues (e.g., staying in a relationship in spite of abuse)?
7. Invite a cultural anthropologist to discuss cross-cultural variations in family structures.
8. Have students write a paper expanding on the idea of “change within continuity and uniqueness within commonality.” They can include historical research on the American family focusing on different social classes, race/ethnicities, and historical time periods. Students can then compare these findings to families today.
9. In a class discussion format, ask students if they think professional athletes or popular entertainment personalities have a moral responsibility to serve as role models for young children.
10. Develop a presentation or have a guest speaker talk about arranged marriages. Ask students to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the American practice of dating in the mate selection process versus the idea of arranged marriage.

### INTERNET ACTIVITIES

1. Research different structures of the American family. Discuss the costs and benefits of each kind. <http://www.polygamy.com/>; [http://www.helpguide.org/mental/blended\\_families\\_stepfamilies.htm](http://www.helpguide.org/mental/blended_families_stepfamilies.htm); <http://www.usa.gov/Government/Tribal/family.shtml>
2. Divide students into groups. Ask each group to prepare an oral report on a different ethnic family. <http://www.pbs.org/americanfamily/latino2.html>; [http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/facts\\_for\\_features\\_special\\_editions/cb12-ff01.html](http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/facts_for_features_special_editions/cb12-ff01.html); <http://www.asian-nation.org/model-minority.shtml>
3. A family member suffering from a mental disorder can put a strain on the family relationships. How can families cope with mental illness? [http://www.counselingcenter.illinois.edu/?page\\_id=172](http://www.counselingcenter.illinois.edu/?page_id=172)

### ESSAY/DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do Americans interpret the shift from child-centered to adult-centered families? Outline the two schools of thought about this change.
2. Compare and contrast at least three definitions of the family outlined in the text.

3. Discuss the functions of the family and their impact on the development of the individual.
4. Why do some experts believe that the family is losing its functions to other social institutions?
5. Is the American family on the verge of disappearing? What evidence can you cite to support your position?
6. Why has the single-parent family become one of America's fastest-growing family forms?
7. What are the advantages and disadvantages of living in a culture that has multiple forms of intimate relationships?
8. Discuss the six processes of intimacy.
9. What are the primary components of intimacy? How are these components related to one another?
10. What are the main points of B. J. Biddle's theory of intimacy? How does Kieffer extend this three dimensional approach to intimacy?
11. What is "patchwork intimacy?" Why do Cox and Demmitt suggest the development of ethics for this type of intimacy?
12. Discuss the importance of socialization in our lives. Include the necessity of the family, but also what takes over to socialize after the family.
13. What is modeling? Discuss the importance of formal and informal modeling from family and other role models in the socialization process.
15. The middle-class American family has characteristics that make it unique. What unique characteristics do Cox and Demmitt present?
14. How did the Industrial Revolution transform the family from a unit of production to a unit of consumption? How important is this new family role to American society?
15. The authors compare the American family to a "tossed salad." What is meant by this description? Is it a better description than a "melting pot?" Why or why not?
16. Discuss African American families. What characteristics are presented in the text about African American families?
17. Why are Hispanic families unique? Compare the Hispanic family to other American families.
18. Explain what Cox and Demmitt mean when they state that American Indian urban households are "fluid."