

Sociology of Marriage and Family

Marianne Ryan-Go Navada (2011)

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Marriage, Family, and Traditions

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Sociology is an academic discipline that seeks to explain group behavior. Sociologists focus on patterns of behavior demonstrated by a group for a period of time. The emphasis on **group, patterns, and institutional effect** differentiates us from psychology. Psychologists generally provide an individualistic assessment of behavior, but sociologists concern themselves with a sustained behavior demonstrated not by one person but by a collective. Given this analytical framework, sociologists find answers to questions regarding social phenomenon by looking at environment. For example, in 2009, the United States (US) fertility rate (the average number of children born to a woman in a lifetime) is 2.1, in Switzerland, 1.5, and in Venezuela, 2.5.¹ A sociologist would argue that environmental forces whether this pertains to the law, cultural norms and beliefs, economic issues, politics, gender roles, religion, possibly explain these differences. Notice how the causal factors are beyond the individual—they are social. This example uses women in specific countries as a group, but keep in mind that groupings exist even *within* these national boundaries. These differences can occur either longitudinally (different time frames) and cross culturally. So in the US, an American family existing in the 1920s will exhibit dissimilar patterns compared to a contemporary American family. Even within families in the 21st century, an upper class family, for example, will experience a different trajectory than one from a working class family.

Keep in mind that sociologists rarely deal with absolutes. We always think in terms of probabilities. Based on the fertility rates mentioned above, women from Venezuela generally have more children than women from the US, but this does not mean that all Venezuelan women have more children than American women! For example, we find that divorce rates are correlated with age of marriage. Couples that marry at a younger age tend to have higher divorce rates. This does not mean that couples who marry before the average age of marriage will divorce. This just means that the probability of divorce decreases as age of marriage increases.

Myths and Cultural Constructs

¹ Source: [World Bank Data](#)

Myths permeate our collective understanding of marriage and families. Some of the myths may include:

- Women before were oppressed and powerless and contemporary Western women have more power in the household.
- Divorce was uncommon.
- Society valued marriage and this is not the case anymore.
- Marrying for love leads to satisfactory marriages.

The persistence of these myths relate to our social definition of traditional marriage and families. “Traditional” is a concept that society uses very casually, yet very few define what exactly this means. In contemporary US society, when we talk about the “traditional” American family, what one is referring to is the 1950s family. This entails a male head of household, a housewife, children, and home ownership. The question for us is, why the 1950s? Why not the 1920s? Why not 1830s? The point is that what we define as traditional, as a society is culturally motivated. Meaning, tradition is not about the “oldest” practice; rather, what we value as traditions in the US are highly strategic points in time. Very rarely will you encounter an American defining “traditional American family” as the one practiced by George Washington in the eighteenth century, wherein the households for the elites included their slaves. The 1950s family requires a robust economy. Even if politicians and moralists advocate a traditional family, this is difficult to achieve when most families need **dual-incomes** to survive. It takes a certain income level and job stability to maintain and one-income household. One of the conundrums of contemporary American politics involves the glorification of the “traditional” American family while cutting back social services that help families achieve these goals.

Defining the Family

The concept of cultural construction, applied to families show that societies in different points in time and across culture have defined “family” in many ways. Families can be **monogamous** (a marriage system in which people are only allowed one spouse) or **polygamous** (a marriage system in which men and/or women are allowed to have one spouse at a time.) Even these labels can be deceiving. In the US for example, a majority of marriages might be monogamous, but sexual relations might extend these boundaries, either covertly or with consent. The US census defines a family as “a group of two people or more (one of whom is the householder) related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together; all such people (including related subfamily members) are considered as members of one family.”² Note how the census does not place great importance on sex, but the current debate on gay marriage shows that some Americans find sexuality as an integral part in defining what a family composes of. In sociology we stay away from defining which types of families are right or wrong; rather our goal is to understand why families change. Why are outcomes different? How do families function?

² [US Census](#)

Cultural relativity refers to a way of thinking that acknowledges differences in cultural beliefs. For sociologists, research work assesses the circumstances that engender certain practices without making any moral judgments. We look for outcomes and patterns. Moreover, a more analytical understanding of our own practices reveals the complexities of our own social practices. For example, in the US, we consider monogamy the norm, but this term is used quite loosely. We expect people to be monogamous when agreed upon by the people in the relationship, but people can have different partners at different points in their life. The prevalence of cheating, of course, makes the issue more complicated. What we practice in the US is public monogamy. If it is illegal in the US to practice polygamy but not cheating or having sexual relations with a person other than a spouse or a partner, then what does that say about marriage? Data on infidelity is always difficult to collect, but author and researcher, Peggy Vaughan finds that 10% of “married people say that they have had sex outside their marriage” in a given year, while some surveys show that “two-thirds and higher” have affairs.³ In a study conducted by the University of Vermont, 98% of men and 80% of women “reported having imagined a sexual encounter with someone other than their partner.” Interestingly, “majority of people who discover a cheating spouse remain married to that person for years afterward.” For sociologists, what is of interest regarding infidelity is that outside factors are a better predictor of one’s probability of cheating: opportunity. Regardless of how happy or satisfied a couple may be, temptation and opportunities negate a happy relationship. Technology has allowed us to expand these opportunities to unprecedented levels. Studies show that Facebook and other online social networking sites are becoming a variable in explaining divorce.⁴

In the US, polygamy is socially more accepted than **polyandry** (woman having more than one husband). In fact, polyandry has entered the American psyche through popular culture: TV series and reality shows. Polygamy, however, is illegal in the US, even in Utah. According to the Utah Office of the Attorney General, as of 2011, “Polygamy is illegal in Utah and forbidden by the Arizona constitution. However, law enforcement agencies in both states have decided to focus on crimes within polygamous communities that involve child abuse, domestic violence and fraud.”⁵ Religion plays an important role in defining polygamous families in the US and the utilitarian benefits are rarely discussed. Another polygamous group in the US is the Somali refugee immigrants. What is interesting about their story is that a man who comes here in a polygamous marriage is made to choose a wife. As a result, the divorced wife/wives and her children now have a single-parent

³ Carey, Benedict, and Tara Parker-pope. 2009. “Marriage Stands Up for Itself.” *The New York Times*, June 28 (<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/28/fashion/28marriage.html>).

⁴ “Facebook fuelling divorce, research claims. 2011.” *The Telegraph*. (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/facebook/6857918/Facebook-fuelling-divorce-research-claims.html>).

⁵ “Utah Attorney General - Mark Shurtleff - Utah Attorney General - Mark Shurtleff - Protecting Against Polygamy.” (<http://attorneygeneral.utah.gov/polygamy.html>).

household. In fact, Somali men residing in the US most often choose to have only one wife since maintaining a family with one wife is already financially taxing.

<http://youtu.be/d4yjrDSvze0>

Video 1-1: Polyandry in Asia (4 min.)

What are the economic benefits of polyandry in these harsh regions? Why would a wife marry brothers instead of choosing two strangers to marry?

<http://tlc.discovery.com/videos/sister-wives-tour-the-brown-family-home.html>

Video 1-2: Polygamy in the US (3:08 min.)

Can the same economic and rational arguments be explained when analyzing polygamy among the Mormons? Why? Why not? I chose this segment in the TLC series to highlight the importance of a house—the physical structure, in determining family size. Real estate prices and land availability, whether or not one lives in a crowded urban center or the suburbs, influence decisions regarding how many children a couple decides to have. The average American single-family home has increased from 983 sq. ft. in the 1950s to 2,349 sq. ft. in 2004 (see **Error! Reference source not found.** and Image 1-2).⁶ A combination of a booming real estate market until the early 2000, the availability of cheap consumer goods, and land development all contribute to the builder manufactured McMansions. Average home also depends on the region and cities. In short, where one lives in the US and population density shape a family.

⁶ “Behind the Ever-Expanding American Dream House : NPR.”
(<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5525283>).

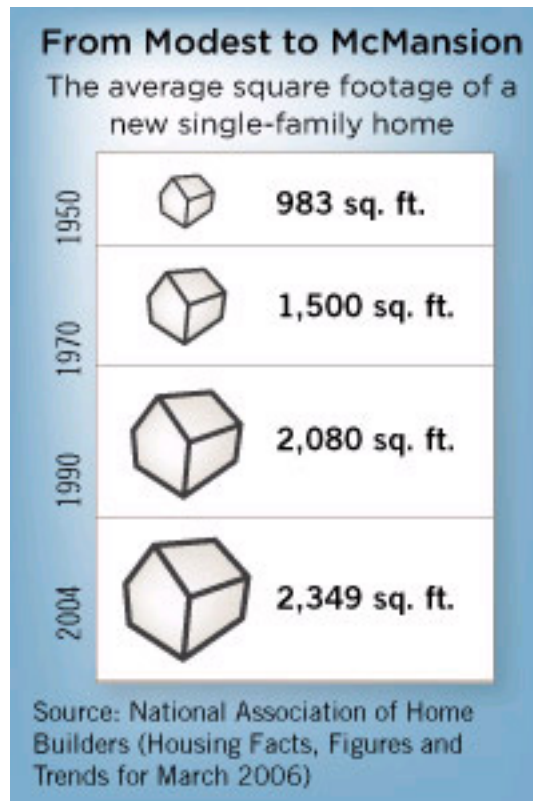


Image 1-1: Average Square Footage of American Homes, 1950 to 2004

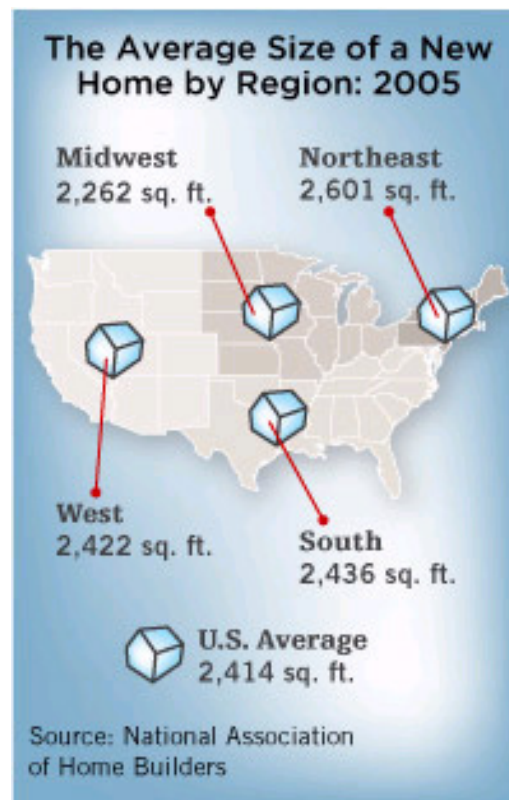


Image 1-2: Average Square Footage of American Homes by Region, 2004

The average square footage of the American house also testifies to our country's status as a first-world industrialized nation. It takes an element of distribution of wealth in a country to reach the level of standard of living middle and working class Americans enjoy. The photo book *Material World*, best captures the cross-national differences of household possession. Juxtaposed are two houses, one in a rural part of Uttar Pradesh, India and the other a suburb in Pearland, Texas (see Image 1-3 and Image 1-4).⁷ Compare the number of children, their possession, and the role of religion in families. The average square footage of the American house also testifies to our country's status as a first-world industrialized nation. It takes an element of distribution of wealth in a country to reach the level of standard of living middle and working class Americans enjoy. The photo book *Material World*, best captures the cross-national differences of household possession. Juxtaposed are two houses, one in a rural part of Uttar Pradesh, India and the other a suburb in Pearland, Texas. Compare the number of children, their possession, and the role of religion in families.

⁷ "NOVA | World in the Balance | Material World | PBS."
(<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/worldbalance/material.html>).



Image 1-3: A Family from Pearland, Texas USA



Image 1-4: A Family from rural Uttar Pradesh, India

The photos attest not only to differences, but also similarities. Societies may interpret marriage and family differently, but all societies have some concept of marriage and family, or element of **kinship** ties. These ties refer to networks that are derived from genealogical origins that are either biological, historical, and cultural. This is an important question in understanding families and society: why is it that all societies have these kinship and marriage ties? This is a question that we will attempt to answer later on.

Family and Social Change

Sociologists concern themselves with social change and what has led to certain practices. When and why, for example, did we start requiring couples to follow legal traditions to be considered married? Why can't two, three, or more people who want to be together declare themselves married without the sanction of the state? As a democratic society, we like to think that marriages and families are highly intimate relationships based on individual needs, but sociologists would argue that decisions about marriage and families are subject to the public sphere. Decisions regarding when one decides to marry, whom they decide to marry, how many children a person will have, are rooted in our economic, political, and cultural systems. We may think that these decisions are emotional, but sociologists provide a rational explanation to these decisions. Contrary to the American ethos that in a free society, we can do whatever we want free of social constraints, our most intimate decisions are bounded and limited. For example, legally, heterosexual men and women can marry whoever they want in the US, but pause for a second and think: what are the chances of a working class man who has a crush on the actress Cameron Diaz, for example, of meeting her and even getting a chance to ask her on a date in person? Yes, it's possible that they might meet each other, but the odds are low. They gyrate in different social circles. In that aspect, our choices have already been severely limited by our social standing. This is a very simplistic example, but it embodies the social structures that shape our most intimate relations.

It's important for us to gain a historical understanding of how the Western family has evolved in order to fully analyze contemporary issues. The readings glean from cross-cultural examples. But the cultures of Greeks, Romans, Christianity, and Medieval Europe are the foundations of Western and American civilizations. In looking at history, remember that every generation seems to lament the lost of innocence of the younger generation. Your grandparents were probably nostalgic of their childhood when your parents were growing up, your parents horrified of how the youth behaved during your generation, and probably you have a glorified memory of your childhood as you watch kids nowadays. Each generation feels that the next one is not living up to the past (Kertzer 1991). Sociology reminds us that judging what is better or worse leads to subjectivity and to not confuse a change in ideas with degradation of ideals. These two are not always the same. Coontz highlights this point when he discusses the 1920s, and the collective fear with the advent of birth control. Societies were not always accepting of what we consider normal nowadays.

Sociological Perspectives

In sociology, we refrain from moral judgments regarding the right or wrong about families. Rather, we analyze outcomes and causalities. We answer the why and how questions, instead of proposing what a “good” family should look like. Sociologists try to practice objectivity in their analysis, and to achieve this goal sociological perspectives are utilized. Sociological perspectives provide a framework in which to assess situations.

- **Functionalism:** explain situations in terms of social functions and gains. There is a social gain given particular family arrangements and practices. In explaining group behavior, functionalism focuses on group roles and cohesion. Dysfunction happens when groups fail to perform given tasks and expectation.
- **Rational-Choice:** works under the assumption that people act rationally (Becker 1996). In looking at family, rational-choice theorists focus on a cost-benefit analysis. Patterns emerge as a result of calculated understanding of what one gets and has to expend to maintain a relationship. This is also referred to as **exchange perspective** (Cherlin 2009).
- **Conflict:** analyzes situations in terms of power struggle. Certain social phenomenon occurs because one group benefits. This framework focuses on inequality, whether this is between families or within families, such as the power dynamic between husbands and wives, parents and children, or between siblings. A subset of conflict perspective is **feminist perspective**. Inequality between men and women mostly concerns feminist perspective.
- **Symbolic Interactionist:** assess within and between family interaction and the role of symbols in communication. Unlike rational-choice perspective, symbolic interactionist presents a more complex view of interaction. Staying away from a cost-benefit analysis, symbolic interactionists are concerned with the process of interpreting symbols and the way people communicate. For example, a mother may act differently with her children when the husband is present. Researchers using this perspective analyze the change, the reason for the change, and the effects. Another example is housework. The level of cleanliness of a house is usually attributed to the woman’s work or lack thereof. A man “helps out” with the housework. It is a tacit understanding that the woman is in charge of the task. Symbolic interactionists analyze the language used to communicate and may assess how this contributes to gender inequality with household duties.

Important Concepts

Gender Roles and Sex

In sociology, it is important to distinguish between sex and gender roles. Sex refers to anatomical differences between a man and a woman, while gender roles are cultural constructs regarding how a male and female behave in society. These

constructs change through time and between cultures. In the US, women are still considered in charge of certain housework and occupations. There is nothing inherent about women and washing dishes, but household division of labor is still patterned on the notion that women are in charge of housework and men “help” out. This gender role has not change even though women are now an integral part of the workforce. Childcare is another example. In analyzing gender roles, a functionalist focuses on how clear division of labor can lead to a more stable society, while the conflict perspective highlights the inequality that emerges from women in charge of unpaid and legally unrecognized work at home.

Economic and Political Structures

Our readings argue that economic and political structures influence marriage patterns. Hunting and gathering societies, agricultural, and capitalist economic structures lead to specific marriage and family patterns. Monarchies, democracies, and dictatorships—political structures, engender specific patterns as well. The main catalysts for changes in the way families are organized are shifts in political and economic systems. Whenever societies adopt different economic and political ideologies, families change in the process.

Why Study the Family?

Public Policy

In the first part of the course, we discuss the historical trajectories of the Western family, but as we progress through the readings and we learn more about contemporary issues, I hope it will become clear why sociology is important for policy purposes. US society thrives on individualism. Our ethos centers on the belief that individuals are in charge of their destiny, and that regardless of family background, anybody can be whatever and whoever they want to be. Sociological findings challenge these notions. Family background is a good predictor of an individual's educational level, occupation, income, marriage longevity, and fertility, just to name a few. This means that based on statistical data, an individual's life is highly influenced by their family background, as un-American as that may sound. The issues mentioned above affect not only you and your immediate network, but also society in its entirety. Why? As mentioned by Coontz, society treats families as the social institutions that foster social order. The outcomes that families influence as mentioned above (educational levels, occupation etc.) have larger social effects, which concerns all of us. For this reason, society gives the government some power in shaping our families. In the early 2000s, when Congress reauthorized the welfare reform law under the Bush administration, the president included a \$150 million yearly budget on “promoting marriage” among the poor (Cherlin 2010). Politicians often make the case that poverty (see the Moynihan Report) is a direct result of a dysfunctional family and that to alleviate poverty, we need to fix the family. Notice how this panacea extends beyond improving employment opportunities.

Personal Reasons

Gaining a sociological understanding of marriage and family also allows us to make informed personal decisions. Knowledge is power. Being aware of statistical patterns allows us to situate our positions in society. Last, a sociological understanding of intimate relationships gives us a more sophisticated explanation of life patterns—why people divorce, why certain children are less likely to go to college, why certain people are more likely to be abusive. Having a more holistic explanation equips us with possible solutions socially and personally.

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Chapter 2: History of the Family

Navada, Marianne Ryan-Go. 2011. "History of the Family."

Chapter 2

The Social Context of Marriage

Marriage is one of the few **cultural universals**. Meaning, every known society to man has some concept of marriage—the union of individual/s recognized by society, which regulates inheritance, sexual rules, and child rearing responsibilities or what I call the three pillars of family function. Although societies vary in defining what constitute marriage and family, at least one of the three pillars of family function exist in these relationships globally. Coltrane and Collins (2001), in their seminal textbook on the subject explain the family as a **property system**.⁸ For the authors, family involves regulating three types of property: **sexual possession, economic property rights, and intergenerational property rights**

⁸ Coltrane, Scott, and Randall Collins. 2001. *Sociology of Marriage and Family: Gender, Love, and Property*. 5th ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

(40). Theoretically, this explanation follows the functionalist view of marriage and family. The family exists universally because it has a utility for those involved.

Sexual Possession

Marriage and families are subject to regulations, whether formally or informally. Formal rules involve legally defined sanctions and rewards (i.e. going to jail or paying a fine) while informal rules usually involve social stigma and rejection (your friends will stop talking to you). Belonging to a family means regulating who you can and can't have sexual relations with. These rules vary culturally, but the point remains: family, as an institution regulates sexual possession. In the United States, **incest** is illegal in all states. But as Sagarin (1977) explains, defining what constitute incest is beyond the biological—it is cultural.⁹ He states:

“The main problem appears to be that the term incest has come to include prohibited sexual relationships between people whether they proscription derives from a close genetic or marital tie. For legal purposes, the penal codes of the various states of the United States do not distinguish a relationship between a father and daughter from one between stepfather and stepdaughter. It would be logical to expect that the meaning of the act is entirely different to both participants, depending on whether a consanguineal tie is known or believed to be present. This might not hold for an extremely young girl how does not yet understand the difference between father and a stepfather, but even for such a girl, the act would come to have a different meaning in retrospect (126).”

Moreover, the incest taboo prohibits sexual relations between people given a certain relationship, but how close this relationship should be varies. All European countries allow first cousin marriages, including Canada. In the US, twenty-five states prohibit first cousin marriages, but six allow it under certain circumstances.¹⁰ Restrictions focus on age and reproduction. For example, in Maine, first cousins can marry if they obtain a certificate of genetic counseling and in Wisconsin, if a woman is 55 or older, or one is unable to reproduce. Thus, the fears of birth deformity govern our rules regarding incest.

Royal families in ancient Egypt, Peru, and Hawaii and the rich landowning class in the Roman Empire encouraged sibling marriages in order to keep inheritance within the family (Bixler 1982; Middleton 1962). Moreover, in ancient Egypt, since royalty was governed by **matrilineal decent**, or authority was handed down to the female line, “marriages contracted between brothers and sisters were merely an expedient for shifting succession from female to the male line,” which

⁹ Sagarin, Edward. 1977. “Incest: Problems of Definition and Frequency.” *The Journal of Sex Research* 13(2):126-135.

¹⁰ Refer to the [National Conference of State Legislatures](#). Twenty states allow cousin marriage, but North Carolina, although it allows first-cousin marriage, does not allow double cousin marriage. This occurs when two siblings marry another set of siblings from another. Their children are referred to as double cousins.

meant that the king secured his legitimacy by having his son marry his daughter (Middleton 1962: 609). Although we have historical evidence that these marriages occurred, historians remind us to take these circumstances into context. Cleopatra's marriage to her brothers Ptolemy XII and Ptolemy XIII is cited as evidence of the Ptolemaic incest, but historians believe that Cleopatra's marriages were not consummated (Bixler 1982).

Biological explanations for the prohibition of consanguineous relations highlight two main reasons to explain the incest taboo: 1) intimacy during infancy leads people to not be sexually attracted to each other and 2) In-breeding between consanguineous partners leads to birth deformities. For sociologists, these explanations prompt us to ask: if birth defects are the main reason for the rejection of incest, then why is it still illegal for non-sanguine relations to be considered incest (a stepmother and son, for example). Moreover, in cases of sperm siblings, wherein an anonymous sperm donor can spawn multiple children for different artificially inseminated mothers, are these children then committing incest if they have sexual relations even though legally, they are not considered siblings? These issues reflect the cultural underpinnings of incest taboo. In short, incest is not instinctive. One of the difficulties in researching on incest is that the stigma prevents people from discussing the topic openly. A breakthrough documentary "Incest: The Last Taboo?"¹¹, chronicles the lives of couples who are involved in such relationships. Genetic sexual attraction (GSA) refers to the sexual attraction between consanguineous relatives that meet each other for the first time as adults. GSA highlights how society shapes patterns of social attraction. Currently, incest taboo includes biological and cultural kin and this documentary questions these social norms.

http://current.com/groups/on-current-tv/92517806_incest-the-last-taboo.htm

Video 2-1: Incest: The Last Taboo? (44:47 min)

Marriage and family patterns not only dictate sexual partners, but sexual possession may indicate power in the family structure. For example, societies that practice **polygyny** (man has more than one wife), rather than **polyandry** (woman has more than one husband), are more likely to have a **patriarchal** or male-dominated society. Sexual possession, thus, can be **unilateral** (one partner has possession, but the other does not), or it can be **bilateral**, wherein both partners have sexual rights over the other (Coltrane and Collins 2001: 48-49). Bilateral sexual possession usually occurs in Western societies. This is why society tends to be critical of adultery and infidelity. However, extramarital affairs do not necessarily lead to divorce.¹² So even though the US is associated with bilateral sexual

¹¹ *Incest: The Last Taboo? Current*. (http://current.com/groups/on-current-tv/92517806_incest-the-last-taboo.htm).

¹² Carey, Benedict, and Tara Parker-pope. 2009. "Marriage Stands Up for Itself." *The New York Times*. (<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/28/fashion/28marriage.html>).

possession, bilateral sexual possession does not seem to strongly define most marriages. Stated aptly by Friedrich Engels, “what prevails in human society is monogamy tempered by adultery and prostitution”(Melotti et al. 1981).

Economic and Intergenerational Property Rights

Aside from sexual and bodily possession, marriage also involves material possession. In fact, historically, economic and political reasons dictated marriage partnership. According to Coontz:

“During the eighteenth century the spread of the market economy and the advent of the Enlightenment wrought profound changes in record time. By the end of the 1700s personal choice of partners had replaced arranged marriage as a social ideal, and individuals were encouraged to marry for love. For the first time in five thousand years, marriage came to be seen as a private relationship between two individuals rather than one link in a larger system of political and economic alliances. The measure of a successful marriage was no longer how big a financial settlement was involved, how many useful in-laws were acquired, or how many children were produced, but how well a family met the emotional needs of its individual members.” Coontz, Stephanie (2006). *Marriage, a History: How Love Conquered Marriage* (pp. 145-146). Penguin. Kindle Edition.

We have more than enough historical evidence to show that for the elites and commoners, practical and rational reasons shaped marital decisions. Whether this is to extend and protect property for future generations, people preoccupied themselves with very different considerations when choosing marriage partners. Marriages were family affairs that required one to think of the family’s well being. For functional theory, the incest taboo combined with the economic and political protection needed for survival led to **exogamy**, or marrying outside of one’s own kinship networks, community, or familial groups. Marriage also allowed individuals to legitimize their heir in order to safeguard property rights for their posterity.

Understanding the origins of the family and the cultural practices involved provide us a framework in which to analyze how environmental changes affect the family and our intimate relations. I have provided some sample questions on Table 2-1: Analytical Framework.

Table 2-1: Analytical Framework

Sexual Possession	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are the negotiated sexual practices?• How did these practices emerge?• How closely are these practices followed?
Economic/Intergenerational Property	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How does a family subsist?• Where and how does a family get its resources?

Power Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are some families more powerful than others? In what way? • Who has control <i>within</i> the family? How is control measured?
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Economic Structures

We will be looking at four economic structures, 1) hunting and gathering 2) agricultural and feudal 3) industrial and capitalist 4) post-industrial, to explain how economic patterns influence family relations. Economic determinism refers to a theoretical framework that looks at economic structures to explain social behavior.

Hunting and Gathering

Hunting and gathering societies are subsistence foragers. Unlike agricultural societies, the group relies on wild and existing plant and animal life for food. As a result, they are nomadic, since after exhausting the resources in one area, they move to forage on another piece of land. Hunting and gathering societies still exists today in parts of Latin America and Africa, mostly living in marginal forest mountains and desert environments. Researchers hypothesize that hunting and gathering societies can make up between twenty to two hundred people, but the majority of the groups have fewer than fifty people. Hunting and gathering societies are generally **egalitarian** and resources are communally owned. Theoretically, an economic system that does not allow accumulation of wealth will produce a more equal society. Think about it: money allows us to hoard wealth. The inability to store food for long periods of time and a barter system restrict the amount of wealth one can accumulate.

Economic systems affect family relations through **division of labor**. In 97% of hunting and gathering societies, the males dominate hunting, while in 60%, females are solely responsible for gathering. In 40% of hunting and gathering groups, women dominate the task of gathering. The smaller body size and agility give women an edge in performing these duties. Women are also mainly responsible for food processing, production of leather goods, clothing, and house construction. In short, the women in hunting and gathering societies play a significant role in sustaining the family. Analogical to contemporary times, women in hunting and gathering societies contribute to household maintenance beyond childcare and housework—in contemporary terms, these are “working” women. It is sometimes easy to underestimate this point, since hunting and gathering societies typically do not rely on currency. But in these societies, females are indispensable and irreplaceable to the survival of the household. Without them, chances for starvation increases. Thus, egalitarianism extends to gender relations; women’s vital economic role allow for a more evenly distributed power relations in society and within families.¹³

¹³ I want to distinguish between indispensability and importance. Power relations in labor relations are defined by job dispensability, with positions that are easily

Another way to assess women's role in society is through fertility rates. While women in foraging societies have, on average, 5.4 children, agriculturalists have 6.6 (Bentley, Goldberg, and Jasienska 1993: 274). The authors also show that 50% of hunter-gatherers are nuclear and only 17% live with extended family. A common misconception people have is that "earlier" families were relatively larger than today's average size, since grandparents lived with grandchildren and that **fertility rates** are higher without birth control. This is just not true. First, people did not live long enough to see their grandchildren and mortality rates for hunting and gathering societies are high. Fertility rates are also lower for foragers compared to **sedentary societies**. The harsh nomadic lifestyle and limited food supply make it difficult to sustain a large family. Complex economic structures show that it is misleading to assess family relations from a simplistic understanding of "early" and "modern" families. This linear assessment fails to take into account economic and social patterns. Our knowledge of hunting and gathering societies confirm that unequal social relations have not always existed. Moreover, women played a vital role in providing for the family. Hence, cultural/social factors and not biology led to the "traditional" male breadwinner role.

Online Reading 2-1: Hunting and Gathering Societies¹⁴

<http://www.economist.com/node/10278703>

Recommended link: http://anthro.palomar.edu/subsistence/sub_2.htm

Agricultural Societies

Researchers analyzing the shift from hunting and gathering to farming consider technological change, demographic and environmental pressure, and gender (Roth 2006) as the main reasons why societies moved from a foraging to

replaceable as lacking power. This can mean emotional or financial dispensability. In the social sciences, it is less subjective to measure material and financial dependence than emotional ones. Take for instance a contemporary household with a male breadwinner and a female housewife. If the male breadwinner leaves the family, the alternative would be some form of outside assistance to help the woman and child/children with their financial needs, given that the family does not have a sizeable savings. This might entail public assistance or she takes on the breadwinner role. In a different scenario, if the housewife leaves the family, the man might resort to hiring a babysitter to take care of the children. I am not at all implying that the care of a biological mother is comparable to a paid babysitter. This is not the point. The central issue is that if a housewife leaves, the family is still self-sufficient, but if the breadwinner leaves, the family no longer is. This is how power is defined. This is not a question of quality of care or lifestyle, but of self-sufficiency. We will discuss the dynamics of power relations in a 1950s household in the latter chapters.

¹⁴ 2007. "Hunter-gatherers: Noble or savage?" *The Economist*, (<http://www.economist.com/node/10278703>).

sedentary culture. The advent of the plow culture, use of animal power, and a more sophisticated irrigation system allowed societies to cultivate land, harvest crops, and domesticate animals. Using archaeological and ethnographic evidence, Roth (2006) argues that division of labor, with women in charge of plant-processing activities initiated the cultivation of food produce (527). The shift to agricultural economies meant a shift to the dynamic division of labor present in hunting and gathering societies. While gathering was conducive to women's smaller body mass, farming, even with the use of tools and animal power necessitated brute strength. In short, women's household duties retreated to the home; their responsibilities concentrated more on domestic household duties and away from food cultivation. This shift also partly explains the increase in fertility rates.

So far, we have discussed families in the European context and treated the region as a homogeneous entity. Researchers remind us however, that agricultural societies are quite diverse (Kertzer 1991). A common myth that permeates agricultural societies is the prevalence of large **extended families**. According to Laslett (1977, 1983), this was not the case for northwest Europe. Researchers distinguish between the a) northwest, b) west/central c) Mediterranean d) eastern parts of the region (Kertzer 1991: 159). The **nuclear family** dominated the northwest region, wherein compared to the rest of Europe, wherein women married later in life (25 years on average) and worked outside of the household prior to matrimony.

The southern part of Europe, in comparison, had more complex extended households in the 18th and 19th century. Research shows that "people lived in households containing two or more component conjugal families (160)." Social scientists attribute the extended household to the **sharecropping economy**¹⁵ and **ecological environments** that required societies to diversify their economies (161). In the Western Alps, for example, "multiple family households provided the labor power to divide the family work force switching between agriculture and pastoralism¹⁶ (161)." Distinct ways in which labor is organized among agricultural societies shape households. Aside from northwest Europe, the household serves as the **unit of production** in an agricultural society. In contemporary terms, your household acts as the main employer.

Industrial Societies

The transition from agricultural to industrial societies meant a shift from household labor to **wage labor** and the **automation of production**. According to Lobao and Meyer (2001), in the early 1900s, one out of three Americans lived on farms and by 2000, only 2% of the population were involved in farming and 90% of household income came from non-farming sources (103-4). Instead of producing their own food, people now had to rely on wages to buy food. Smaller living quarters, labor uncertainty, the need for formalized education to participate in the

¹⁵ Sharecropping refers to an agricultural system in which the landowner rents his land to tenants in exchange for a share of the crops produced on the land.

¹⁶ Part of an agricultural economy concentrated on raising livestock.

workforce meant that not only did people marry later in life, but that the nuclear family dominated most household structures. It was no longer functional to have an extended family. The family became less important as a source of financial support. People now looked to corporations and business enterprises for survival. In agricultural societies, children learned their trades from their parents, but in an industrial economy, schools institutionalized learning and the acquisition of skills. Table 2-2: Number of Children Born to British Couples, shows the changes in the number of children among British couples. Notice how more than 60% of couples around 1860 had five or more children. Around 1925, however, 88% of couples had zero to four children.

The industrial household, compared to the agricultural household economic unit serves less financial function and acts more as an emotional support network. Yes, the household itself still serves as an economic unit wherein the members share resources and divide labor, but the family members rely more on outside institutions, such as education, church, public and private entities to survive. This does not mean that the family is less important. Rather, the social function of a family, as a social institution continues to evolve. The industrial household also exacerbated the separate sphere between men and women that emerged in the agricultural society. As men left the fields and the home to find work outside of the household, women dominated the household responsibilities. Women were charged with the moral glue that held the family together. While men dominated paid work, society expected women to find satisfaction in their role as caregivers while relying on the man for subsistence.

Table 2-2: Number of Children Born to British Couples¹⁷

Number of Children Born to British Couples Married around 1860 and around 1925		
	Percentage of Marriages	
Number of Children Born	Marriages around 1860	Marriages around 1925
0	9	17
1	5	24
2	6	25
3	8	14
4	9	8
5	10	5
6	10	3
7	10	2
8	9	1
9	8	0.6
10	6	0.4
10+	10	0.3
Total	100	100

Post-Industrial

Post-industrial economies specialize in providing services, innovation, and research and development. While industrial societies manufacture consumer goods (producing clothes, manufacturing steel), **service-oriented industries** dominate a post-industrial economy. Services offered rely less on physical skills and demand more specialized and skilled mental labor, an architect, engineer, financial analyst, for example. Theoretically, the diminishing social importance of physical strength will lead to gender equality in the workplace and household, but this remains to be seen. Currently, the post-industrial economy and advanced communication technology engenders a global economy, wherein competition for jobs is no longer limited to a certain geographical region. We will discuss the current state of families in a global economy in the latter chapters.

Political Determinism

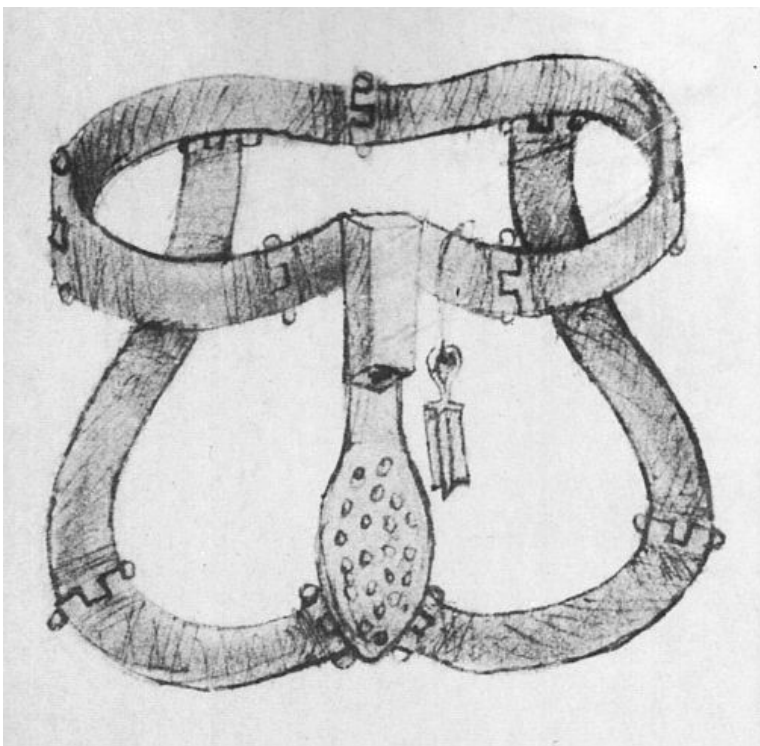
Sociologists take into account that although gender roles are culturally constructed, biological differences cannot be completely ignored. Specifically in

¹⁷ Source: Royal Commission on Population, Report (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1949), p. 26.

highly militarized societies, physical strength gives men an advantage. According to Coltrane and Collins:

“Where there is constant fighting and all the males are armed, men tend to be organized very strongly and females are subordinated. This particularly takes the form of **patrilineal family** (inheritance in the male line) and the **patrilocal** household or community (the woman leaves home to live with her husband’s kin). This family form is predominant in agrarian societies, especially in the military classes, but it also occurs in many horticultural and pastoral societies.

On the other hand, even in relatively militarized societies the women may be in a stronger position. This occurs whenever the kinship system is matrilineal (inheritance passed through the mother’s rather than the father’s line) and especially **matrilocal** (wives stay at home with their kin and are joined by their husbands). Such matrilineal and matrilocal systems are not very common, but where they exist, they split up men’s resources: their kin and property are in one place and their home is in another (2001: 79).”



The authors remind us that although militarization and war favor men, lineage and residence patterns mitigate the effects. The importance of political alliances through marriage in politics results to the treatment of sex as a property (85). The **politics of virginity** is the sexual protection of women’s sexual behavior. Protection usually means restriction of freedom, from clothing, life-decisions, and mobility. When women’s virginity is prized in a society,

women tend to be restricted. Figure 2-1: Chastity Belt from the "Bellifortis", a late 14th Century Book on Military Technology, is an example of ways to restrict women’s movement.

Figure 2-1: Chastity Belt from the "Bellifortis", a late 14th Century Book on Military Technology

Measuring Women's Power

For the conflict perspective, power distribution dictates behavior. For family sociology in particular, women's power in society shape our families. For example, a woman who decides to pursue higher education and a career will most likely make different familial decisions to one who goes straight from high school to the work force. Table 2-3: Gender and Power shows the proposed causality between social patterns and women's social power. Power for women is measured by control over childbirth, the body, and the freedom to decide on partners. The ability and opportunity to work outside of the household expand these powers.

Social Patterns	Outcomes
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Indispensability of women's labor in the work force.2. High demand for women's labor in the work force3. Matrilineal descent4. Matrilocal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Female choice over fertility• Choice of marriage partner• Freedom to divorce• Control over premarital and extramarital sex• Female household authority• Local and political power
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Surplus male labor2. Low demand for women's labor3. Increased social role of a male-dominated state4. Patrilineal descent5. Patrilocal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Male control over women's fertility• Low female authority• Low political power• Physical oppression (legal or tacitly accepted)

Table 2-3: Gender and Power¹⁸

Diversity in American Families

Our discussion of American families has centered on European traditions and patterns. It is fallacious to think that the families of African, Asian, and Native American, and Latin American descent experienced similar trajectories—they did not. The text will provide a short historical analysis of African-American families. We will explore the different ethnic and racial groups in the latter chapters.

African American Families

Slavery left a long-lasting legacy among African American families. With high rates of divorce and single-parent families, in 1965, US Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, then a sociologist, wrote the Moynihan Report or ["The Negro Family: The Case for National Action."](#)¹⁹ Moynihan argues that the deterioration of the African American family is directly responsible for poverty, unemployment, and crime in African American neighborhood and communities. Moynihan highlights the absence

¹⁸ Modeled after Coltrane and Collins (2001: 71).

¹⁹ Link provided.

of fathers as the missing lynchpin of African American families and is dubious of the ability of a female-headed household to provide the needs of a stable family. The fragmented African American family Moynihan claims, is a result of slavery, Jim Crow laws, and urbanization. In essence, the prosperity of a community depends on the resiliency of the family. Sociologist Edward Franklin Frazier (Frazier 1966) traces the roots of the female-headed African American household to slavery. Slavery meant that family members could be sold to a different slaveholder. Since men fetched a higher price in the slave market, fathers would be separated from their wives and children. See Image 2-1: The Parting--Buy Us Too, which shows a father who has just been sold and the mother and child begging to be bought by the same slave master

Even with the fragile familial ties, African American slaves during slavery and after emancipation had a strong sense of family. With that said, compared to White



women, female slaves were still more likely to be single mothers, either as a result of the short life expectancy of men or the men sold to a different master. However, one of the criticisms of Moynihan's thesis is the singling out of single mothers and overlooking the larger legal and structural problems that Blacks experienced, such as being deprived of education and discrimination to explain poverty. Moynihan, in his analysis, simplifies the marital patterns during slavery. Read the two-page essay from "[Slavery and the Making of America](#)" ([PBS](#)), which explains the regional differences among Black families and the role of extended families during slavery.

Image 2-1: The Parting--Buy Us Too²⁰

²⁰ Library of Congress: <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/93503990/>

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The 20th Century Family

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Chapter 3

Low birth rates for married couples, increased divorce rates, premarital sex, and cohabitation—these issues concern conservatives and traditionalists in the 20th century and the present. In the US, the family becomes less a source of economic and political resource and instead acts as the source of emotional support for its members. Companionship, love, and emotional and sexual satisfaction are now the cornerstone of marriages and families. In the 1920s, the US experienced its first American sexual revolution. The widespread availability of birth control, consumer culture, and a hedonistic lifestyle characterized the Jazz Age. The flappers probably best symbolize this lifestyle (Video 3-1: The Flappers (6:24)). It is important to note that the women's movement that emerged in the twenties is quite distinct from the sixties the feminist ideals of today. The women's suffrage aligned itself with the prohibition movement and ignored labor and economic issues (Coltrane and Collins 2001), even though women were an integral part of the workforce (Image 3-1: Accounting Office, Brooklyn, NY (1925).)²¹

²¹ Photo from: http://www.officemuseum.com/photo_gallery_1920s_1930s.htm

Video 3-1: The Flappers (6:24)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3svvCj4yhYc>

In 1880, 8% of marriages ended in divorce and by 1920s, it was 18%.²² It is important to note that although divorce rates increased, marriage rates have not dipped dramatically (Figure 3-1: Divorce and Marriage Rates from 1920 to 1995), which show that the general population still believed in marriage as an institution, but what people expected to get out of a marriage has fundamentally changed.



Image 3-1: Accounting Office, Brooklyn, NY (1925)

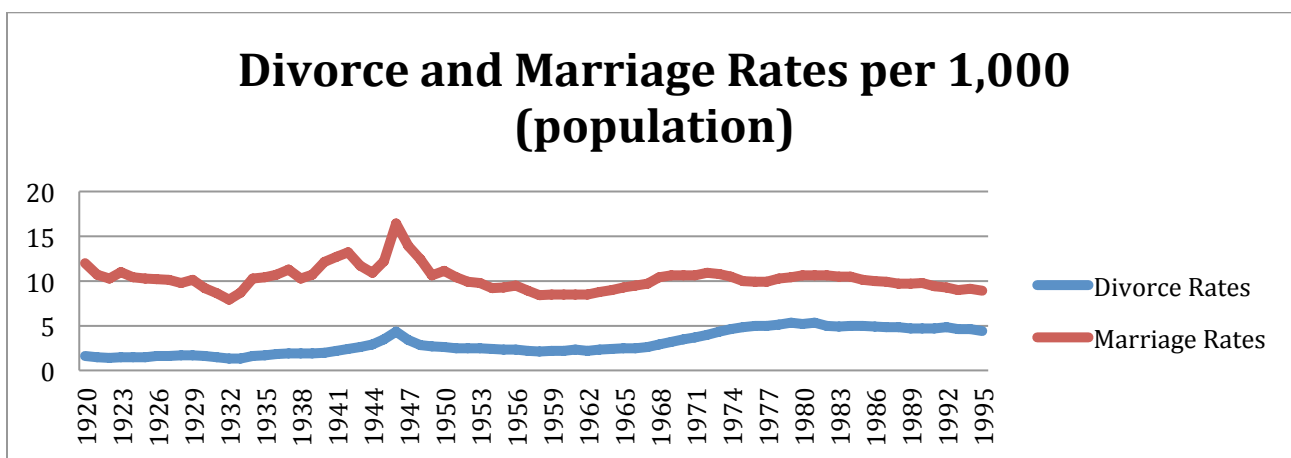


Figure 3-1: Divorce and Marriage Rates from 1920 to 1995²³

²² Visit this site for more information on women in the 1920s:
<http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/historyonline/us24.cfm>

²³ From the Historical Statistics of the United States
(<http://hsus.cambridge.org/HSUSWeb/toc/hsusHome.do>)



Image 3-2: Women Picketing the International Amphitheater in Chicago, where Woodrow Wilson Delivers a Speech, October 20, 1916.²⁴

Marriage rates, however dipped during the Great Depression and rebounded again during World War II. High unemployment rates discourage couples from getting married. It takes certain resources to ask someone to decide to marry. Divorce rates did plateau during the Great Depression, since family needed to pool their resources together for survival. Another momentous change, of course, was WWII. Although marriage rates increased during the war, a similar trend did not occur during other wars, such as Vietnam or the Korean War. The economic factors seem to have more reliable predictable capabilities than political ones (Coltrane and Collins 2001). The increased marriage rates and economic prosperity led to the **baby boom** in the 1950s. Suburbanization and policies such as the GI Bill allowed white working-class Americans the financial ability to support a one-income household.

The average American experienced economic prosperity from the 1950s to the 1970s, but from then on to the present, the economic mood, especially for the working class is one of uncertainty. The US emerged a lone economic and political superpower after WWII, but the Cold War, satellite wars in Vietnam and Korea, and the economic competition posed by Germany and Japan, challenged the US' hegemonic power. Aside from international changes, the automation of production and deindustrialization put the middle and working class in a precarious position. Women now make up 50% of the labor force, up from 38% in 1970. This increase in representation is a consequence not just of necessity for some, but a cultural shift in gender attitudes. According to a Pew Research (2009), 75% of Americans reject the

²⁴ <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/suffrage/nwp/tactics.html>

idea of women reverting to their 1950s role as homemakers.²⁵ Participation in the labor force profoundly affects decisions regarding motherhood and marital decisions. In 1940, the average population per household was 3.67 and by 2010, it decreased to 2.59.²⁶ Longer life expectancy and the skill-based labor market are also factors that contribute to these changes. With people living longer and educational expectations more demanding, men and women put off marriage at a latter age. In 1890, the estimated median age at first marriage for women is 22 for women and 26.1 for men. In 2003, the median age for women is 25.3 and 27.1 for men.²⁷

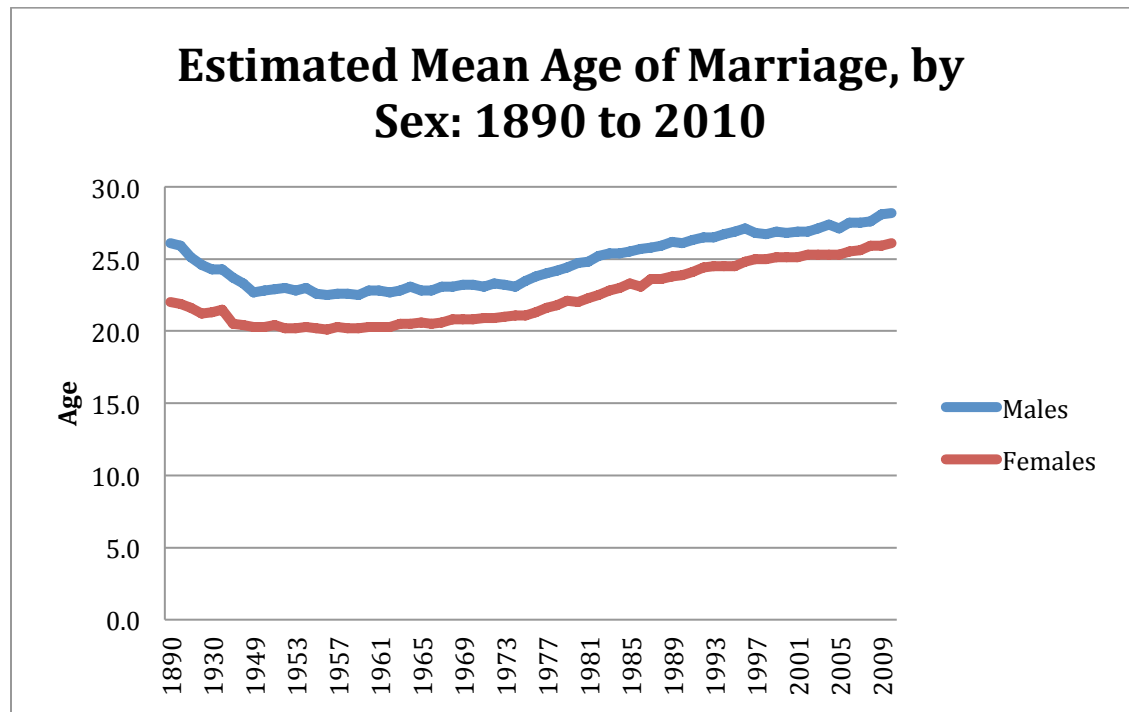


Figure 3-2: Median Age of Marriage from 1890 to 2010²⁸

²⁵ <http://pewsocialtrends.org/2009/10/01/the-harried-life-of-the-working-mother/>

²⁶ From the US Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March and Annual Social and Economic Supplements, 2010 and earlier.

²⁷ US Census Bureau, Annual Social and Economic Supplement: 2003, Current Population Survey, Current Population Reports, Series P20-553, "America's Families and Living Arrangements: 2003."

²⁸ Notes: Figures for 1947 to present are based on Current Population Survey data. Figures for years prior to 1947 are based on decennial censuses. A standard error of 0.1 years is appropriate to measure sampling variability for any of the above estimated median ages at first marriage, based on Current Population Survey data. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March and Annual Social and Economic Supplements, 2010 and earlier.

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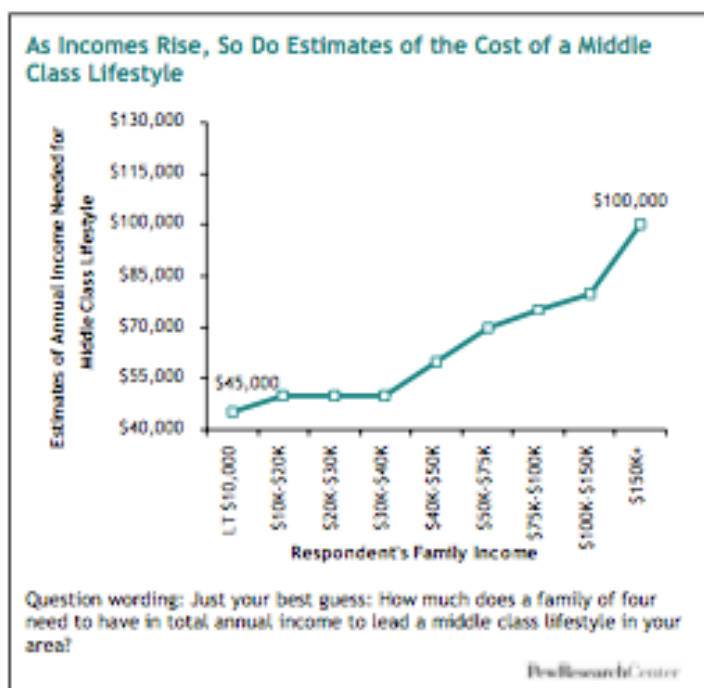
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Social Class, Work, and the Family

Navada, Marianne Ryan-Go. 2011. "Social Class and Work."

Chapter 4

Most Americans classify themselves as middle class, but a closer look shows that different people perceive what it means to be middle class differently. Measuring one's social economic status (SES) involves taking into account income, wealth, level of education, and occupational prestige. Aside from wealth (total dollar amount of assets), what one does to acquire wealth is taken into account. This is one of the reasons why defining SES is never straightforward. A person working as a secretary in an office may technically occupy a **white collar** job, but a truck driver with a **blue collar** job, might earn a higher salary. In terms of social prestige and level of education, however, the office worker might have a higher degree of schooling and garner more respect from society.



The Pew Research Survey (2008) shows that as one's income rises, so does their perception of how much one's annual income should be to achieve a middle class lifestyle (Figure 4-1: Income and Perception of Middle Class Lifestyle from Pew Research Center). This of course does not take into account geography. Cost of living in Manhattan, NY is relatively higher than other American cities, for example. Other sociological categories, such as race, gender, age, level of education, and geographic

Figure 4-1: Income and Perception of Middle Class Lifestyle from Pew Research Center

region also influence how much one thinks an average middle class income entails (Figure 4-2: Perception of Middle Class Income). Males tend to expect more money from being a middle class than women, and people between 30-49 years of age tend to require more money to be middle class. Earning potential and expenses affect these perceptions.²⁹

Another way to think about social class is through **life chances**. Conceptualized by sociologist, Max Weber, life chances refer to opportunities that people have in order to provide material goods and quality of life. For example, the child of two middle class parents with doctorate degrees might not have the same material possession as a family whose parents won the lottery, but the child of the university professors will probably be more cognizant of how to apply to the top colleges and Ivy League universities. This shows that although money might provide you a certain level of comfort, but won't always allow you to enter certain social networks. Different levels of SES and social class might conflate with each other, but they are still useful categories when understanding the family. When talking about SES, what we will be referring to are **ideal types**. This refers to "a hypothetical model that consists of the most significant characteristics, in extreme form, of a social phenomenon (Cherlin 2009: 113)." Although these groupings can conflate with each other, this does not invalidate their usefulness in social analysis.

Income Inequality

Income inequality has steadily increased from the 1980s. In Figure 4-3: Income Distribution, the income of the top 5% in the country has increased dramatically, but the bottom 60% has not seen the same benefits. For conservative economists, however, this is not really a cause for concern. For those who adhere to classical capitalist ideology, concentration of wealth benefits society since wealth will trickle down eventually to the rest of society through job creation. Of course, concentration of wealth in the US does not mean that rich Americans have to invest in the US, but the hope is that with tax breaks and corporate-friendly laws, the rich will invest their money domestically and not abroad. Figure 4-4: Tax Rates, looks at tax rates for low and high earners 1960s to 2004. All income groups have seen a decrease in taxes, but the highest 0.01% and 1% of taxpayers have seen the most decrease. Globalization and the increased returns in emerging markets such as China have questioned some of these policies. Do the rich invest their money back in the US? Capitalism does always coincide with nationalistic sentiments. In fact, these two are probably mutually exclusive in the United States. As former CEO of Hewlett Packard and 2010 Republican California Senate Candidate, Carly Fiorina stated: "there is no job that is America's God-given right anymore (San Francisco Chronicle, 1/9/2004)." With global competition and profits as the end goal, investors are not obligated to invest in their own country. Income inequality continues to widen in

²⁹ Here is an article that sums up difficulties in defining the middle class:
<http://www.factcheck.org/2008/01/defining-the-middle-class/>

the US. Regardless of whether or not one agrees with the social benefits of income inequality, the divide between the rich and the poor affects the low, working, middle, upper-middle, and the upper class family.

Median Incomes Vary Widely Within Middle Class	
	Median family income
Total	\$52,285
Gender	
Men	\$58,102
Men under 50	\$56,162
Men 50+	\$61,017
Women	\$47,334
Women under 50	\$54,670
Women 50+	\$41,614
Race/Ethnicity	
White, non-Hispanic	\$56,295
Black, non-Hispanic	\$46,849
Hispanic	\$39,363
Age	
18-29	\$38,493
30-49	\$65,529
50-64	\$61,542
65+	\$34,512
Work status	
Retired	\$38,455
Employed	\$60,121
Not working	\$38,919
Education	
College grad	\$75,198
Some college	\$57,083
HS grad or less	\$39,765
Neighborhood type	
Urban	\$52,205
Suburban	\$54,945
Rural	\$47,768
Region	
Northeast	\$49,860
Midwest	\$57,290
South	\$49,280
West	\$54,229
Note: Figures are grouped median estimates based only on respondents in each category who identified themselves as belonging to the middle class. Hispanics are of any race.	
PewResearchCenter	

Figure 4-2: Perception of Middle Class Income

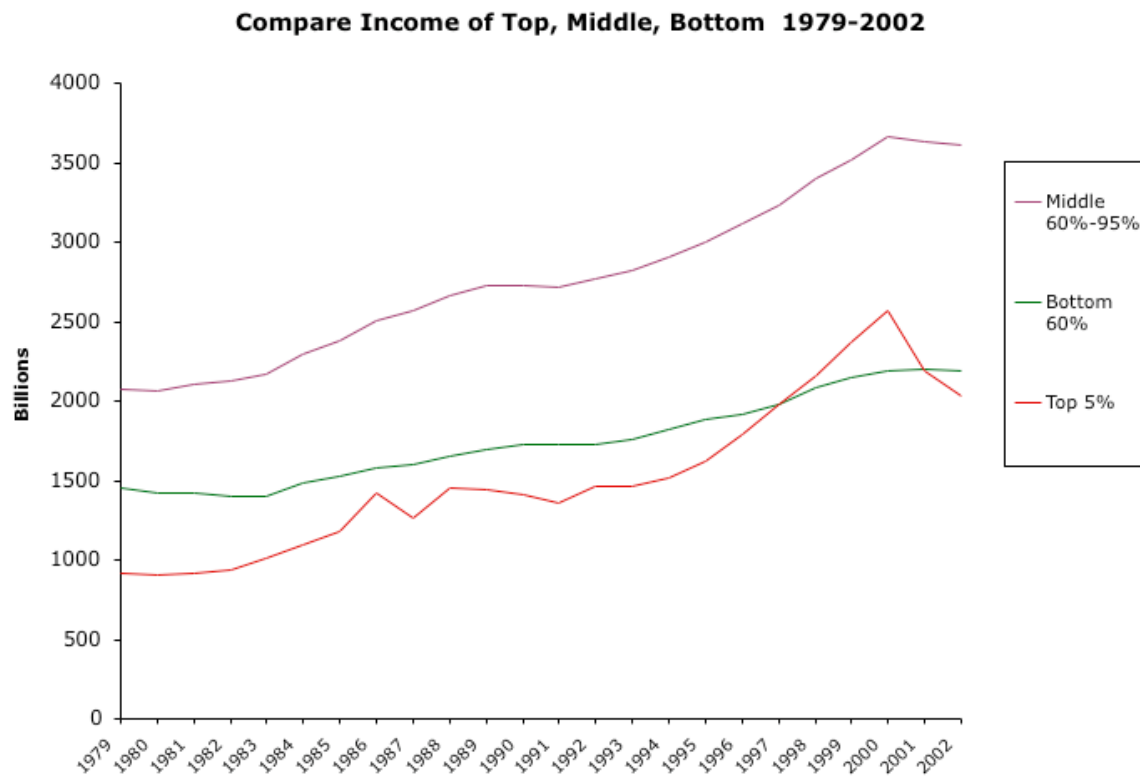
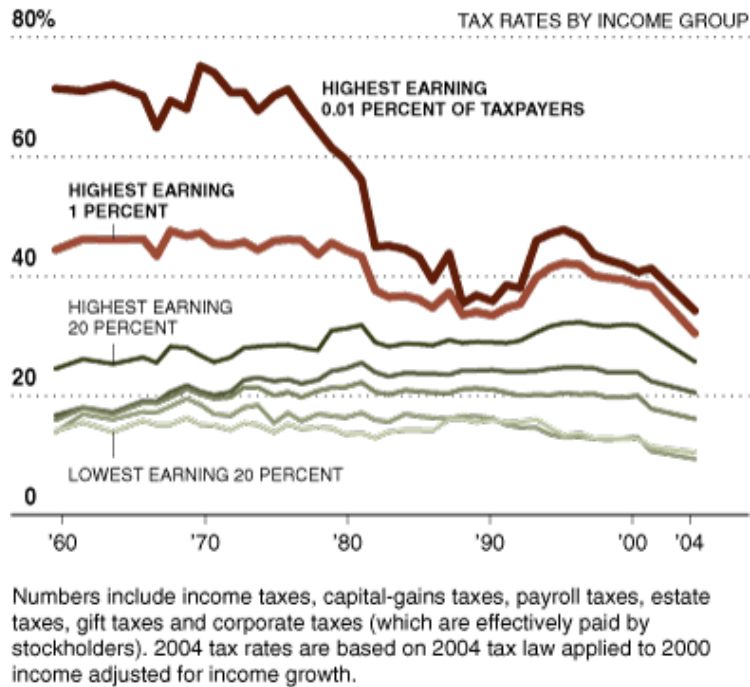


Figure 4-3: Income Distribution³⁰

³⁰ From <http://visualizingeconomics.com/>

Lower Taxes for the Highest Earners

Since the 1960s, the total federal tax rate has fallen for low earners, risen for relatively high earners and fallen significantly for very high earners.



Source: Thomas Piketty and Emmanuel Saez

THE NEW YORK TIMES

Figure 4-4: Tax Rates³¹

The Class Structure

In this section, we will attempt to create an ideal type for the lower, working, middle, and upper class and discuss the social patterns associated with the group.

Poor/Working Poor or Lower Class

General Characteristics:

- Make minimum wage or a bit above.
- Live in neighborhoods with poor performing school districts and high crime rates.
- Have higher rates of unemployment.

³¹ From <http://www.nytimes.com/>

- Low levels of educational attainment, most likely a high school diploma or less.

Working Class

General Characteristics:

- Make a bit above minimum wage. Income covers basic needs, such as clothing and housing.
- Occupy blue collar or pink collar jobs (low paying office jobs usually held by women).
- Have 9 to 5 jobs.
- Jobs are vulnerable to market changes.
- Have a high school degree, some college, or college degree.
- Can afford to send their children to community college or state college.

Middle Class

General Characteristics:

- Earn more than subsistence level and have enough for vacation and leisure expenses.
- Have a college education or more.
- They can afford to pay for their children's college education.
- Have more professional and managerial jobs, such as financial analysts, nurses, or lawyers. These jobs are most likely more fulfilling than working class jobs and lead to careers.

Upper Class

General Characteristics:

- Business owners and professionals. Husbands are heads of companies, and wives are either housewives, involved in charitable events, or are professionals themselves.
- People belonging in this category have acquired wealth that allows them to invest their money.
- Occupy prestigious position in society.
- Have college or professional degrees.

In a post-industrial economy, skilled labor is in demand and unskilled labor, which requires less education, are more vulnerable to the vicissitudes of the economy. Figure 4-5: Unemployment Rates by Educational Attainment and Figure 4-6: Unemployment Duration by Educational Attainment show that changes in vulnerability to the economy is especially stark for less than high school and high

school graduates. The graphs also indicate that with a lower level education, the more time a person will be unemployed. Figure 4-7: Average Yearly Earning by Education, shows that women yield lesser dollar returns for their education than men. The average American makes on average, the same as a person with an AA degree or some college. Cherlin (2009) states that in the 1930s, religion was an important determinant for marriage partners, but currently, although religion is still a significant factor, people with the same level of education are more likely to marry each other (119). This is referred to as **assortative marriage**—the tendency of people to marry people belonging to the same social group. It is taboo in the US to talk about class, since ideologically, the country prides itself on social mobility. Moreover, the availability of credit makes it easy to pretend to belong to a higher social class. However, research on marriage patterns shows that **hypergamy**, or marrying higher than one's social class, rarely happens. People of different social class gyrate in different social circles, whether this is school, country clubs, or sports. It's possible that the internet might change this pattern. Internet sites and online groups are more porous, but this trend remains to be confirmed by research.

Unemployment Rates by Educational Attainment

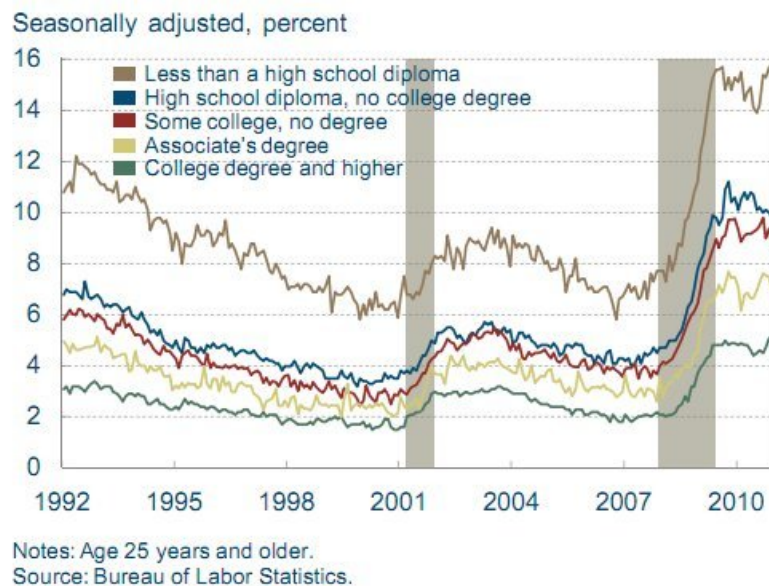
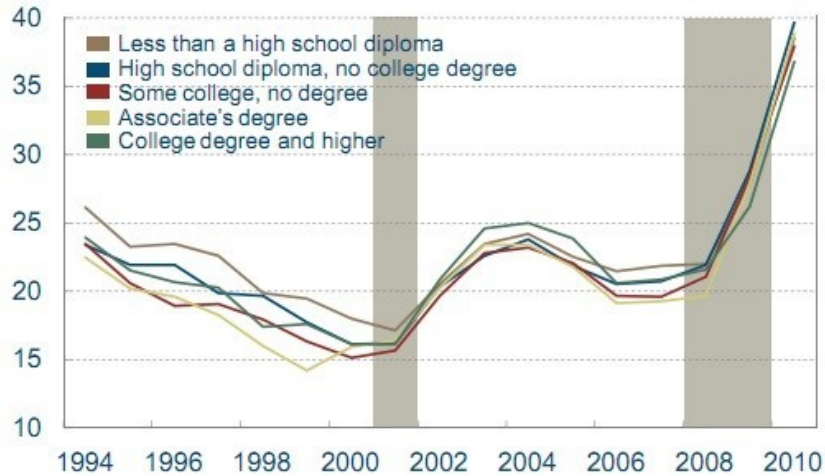


Figure 4-5: Unemployment Rates by Educational Attainment

Unemployment Duration by Educational Attainment

Average number of weeks unemployed



Note: Age 25 years and older.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Figure 4-6: Unemployment Duration by Educational Attainment

Median Earnings for Workers Aged 25 and Over by Educational Attainment, Work Status,: 2007

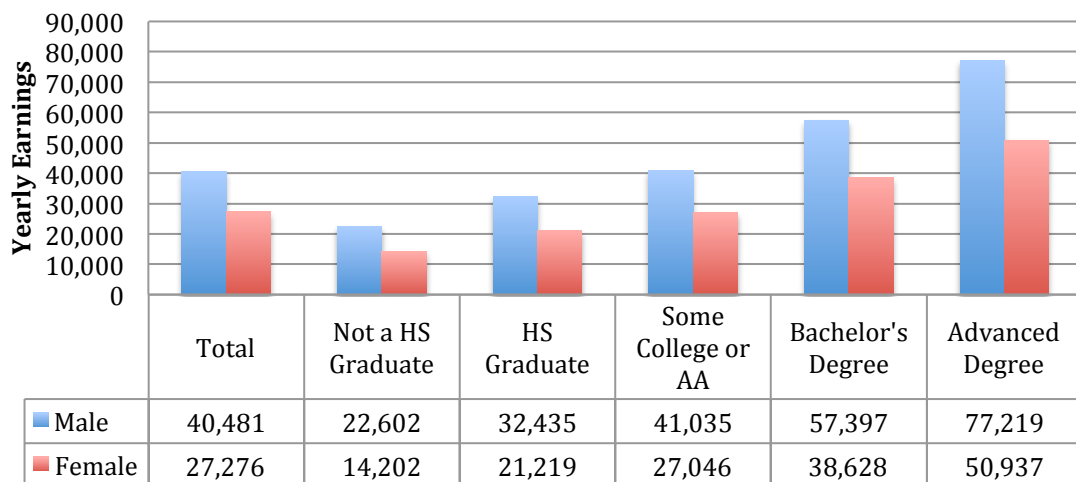


Figure 4-7: Average Yearly Earning by Education

Patterns for the Lower Class, Working and Middle Class

Although social class groupings are not perfect, their classifications do show patterns in terms of age of marriage, size of household, and divorce rates. Working class people generally marry at a younger age. The lower class marries at a lower rate than other social groups. As marriage becomes more and more a status symbol of personal and economic success, people from the lower class are less likely to feel that they are ready for marriage. Children of working class parents marry during the early or mid-twenties and for middle and upper class, age of marriage is generally in the mid or late twenties. Why? According to Coltrane and Collins (2001), since the working class is less likely to go to college and less likely to prepare for a career, there is little incentive to put off marriage (175). As their middle class counterparts are preparing for college and planning their careers, the working class hold full time jobs. Careers for the middle and upper class provide fulfillment and without these, the working class seek happiness and a sense of self through marriage and family (175).

Another reason cited for the early marriage of working class children involves the strict home life. Most working class parents tend to be stricter than middle and upper class parents and as a result, their children are eager to leave the home. This is an incentive to marry. Notice how for the middle and upper class, leaving home means leaving for college and not necessarily starting a full-fledged adult working life. The early marriage and limited professional goals lead to early childbirth as well for working class women. This shows that social class greatly affects one's life course. Children of the working class reach adult life quicker than the middle and upper class. Generally working class culture fosters a traditionalist and moralistic attitude (185). In many ways, the nature of their jobs and the attitude it requires translate to how they run the household. Working class jobs necessitate conformity and obedience, and these are the values taught to their children. While middle class parents teach their children to explore and search for self-identity, the working class fosters discipline and fear of authority. The attitudes are not just limited to the household. Even schools reflect similar attitudes. In Bowles and Gintis' (1977) seminal work on education and social class, the authors argue that aside from learning occupational skills, different types of schooling train people to be either laborers or managers. Low-income schools foster an attitude of conformity that leads to a docile workforce, while elite schools teach their students to think outside of the box and occupy leadership roles. This debate regarding school and work addresses the concerns over the US educational system. Is it possible that low achievements in American schools are a result of family background rather than school administration? What is the role of the family and the school in society? Can the school make up for the shortcomings of the family, or are schools only reinforcing family social stratification? Education plays an important role in understanding the family, since for American society education is the great equalizer. Regardless of one's family background, a general consensus exists that

access to education can overcome the shortcomings of the family. Sociologists of education challenge this idea.

Parenting and Social Class: The Ongoing Debate

Using ethnographic method, sociologist Lareau (Lareau 2002) compares and contrasts the types of childrearing working and middle class, and Black and White families. She claims that social class plays a larger role than race in defining the types of childrearing techniques these parents adopt. Lareau states:

"I demonstrate that parents differ by class in the ways they define their own roles in their children's lives as well as in how they perceive the nature of childhood. The middle-class parents, both white and black, tend to conform to a cultural logic of child rearing I call "concerted cultivation." They enroll their children in numerous age specific organized activities that dominate family life and create enormous labor, particularly for mothers. The parents view these activities as transmitting important life skills to children. Middle-class parents also stress language use and the development of reasoning and employ talking as their preferred form of discipline. This "cultivation" approach results in a wider range of experiences for children but also creates a frenetic pace for parents, a cult of individualism within the family, and an emphasis on children's performance.

The childrearing strategies of white and black working-class and poor parents emphasize the "accomplishment of natural growth." These parents believe that as long as they provide love, food, and safety, their children will grow and thrive. They do not focus on developing their children's special talents. Compared to the middle-class children, working-class and poor children participate in few organized activities and have more free time and deeper, richer ties within their extended families. Working-class and poor parents issue many more directives to their children and, in some households, place more emphasis on physical discipline than do the middle-class parents (748-749)."

Laureau does not make any value judgments regarding the different strategies, and nor does she provide a longitudinal analysis on how these types of childrearing affected these children as adults.

Scholars agree (Chin and Phillips 2004; Lareau 2002) that middle class children tend to lead more organized lives than their working class counterparts. Chin and Phillips look at how parents of different social class background organize their children's summer activities and conclude that like Lareau, middle class children tend to have more organized lives; meaning, middle class parents tend to include their children in organized activities such as camps and other formal activities. However, organization does not necessarily stem from social class, but parents' circumstances, which includes family income, parental time, and parental knowledge, and also "children's preferences and temperaments (187). Thus, although a family may have the characteristics of a middle class family, financial

resources and time are still important variables that can affect how parents decide on their children's activities.

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Race and Ethnicity

Navada, Marianne Ryan-Go. 2011. "Race and Ethnicity."

Chapter 5

Defining Race

For sociologists, race is a **social construct**. I present the dynamics of defining race in my introduction to sociology book as such:

"When Barack Obama (1961) won the 2008 presidential election in the US, he was considered the first Black president. Actress Halle Berry won the Oscar best actress category in 2002; society considered her the first Black woman to win the award. What these two have in common is that even though one of their parents is White, they are still categorized by society as racially Black. The US' *one drop of blood rule* states that anyone with a trace of African ancestry is considered Black. Keep in mind that blood has nothing to do with race—there is no such thing as blood type A White or B Asian. But the use of the term "blood" signifies how as a society, we associate race with biology. The idea of White being an exclusive race also has political consequences. The fear of a White minority is a result of the one drop of blood rule. Imagine if people with Obama and Berry's race were considered White instead of Black—wouldn't that increase the number of Whites in the country? This just goes to show that the racial make-up of a country is very much influenced by how we define the categories." Notice how race has very little to do with culture. A persona who is racially Asian who grew up in Brazil and is now an American, for example, probably has little cultural ties with an Asian who grew up in Thailand. In contrast to race, ethnicity deals more with culture and shared ancestry. As I state in my introduction to sociology text, "While race refers to phenotypes, ethnicity refers to non-phenotypical traits that relate to culture, shared ancestry, language, and beliefs.

Kurdish, Cuban, Italian, Hmong are all examples of ethnicity. Notice how in most cases, ethnicities are tied to **nationalities** or **citizenship**, but not all ethnic groups belong to a specific country or have a country. The Kurds are an example. The Kurdish people inhabit a region that are internationally recognized as belonging to Armenia, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Turkey.”

Even though race and ethnicity are social constructs, this does not take away their importance in our society in terms of grouping people into categories. Society tends to interchangeably use race and ethnicity, but for research purposes, it’s important to distinguish between the two.

As

Figure 5-1: Media Net Worth of Households, 2005 and 2009, shows, some ethnic and racial groups fair more than others.

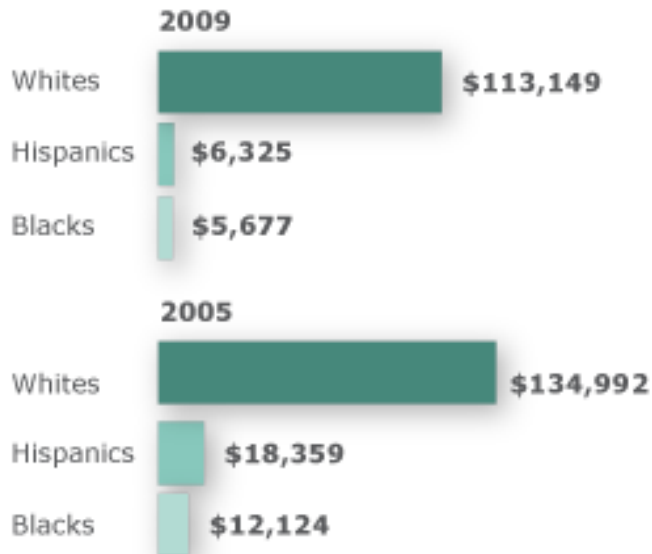
The graph shows that although the three groups decrease in net worth of households from 2005 to 2009, Blacks and

Hispanics significantly have lesser net worth than Whites. “The median wealth of white households is 20 times greater than that of Black households and 18 times greater than that of Hispanic households, according to a Pew Research analysis of newly-available data from a 2009 government survey. These ratios are the largest in the quarter century since the government first published such data. From 2005 to 2009, median wealth fell by 66% among Hispanic households, 53% among Black households and 16% among white households.”³²

Point: Although the US Census does not consider Hispanic and ethnicity and not a race, Hispanics is used when comparing Blacks and Whites. This is evident when answering forms. If you check Hispanic, the form has a follow up question of whether or not the person is White or Black Hispanic.

Median Net Worth of Households, 2005 and 2009

IN 2009 DOLLARS



PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Figure 5-1: Media Net Worth of Households, 2005 and 2009

³² From the Pew Research Center <http://pewsocialtrends.org/2011/07/26/wealth-gaps-rise-to-record-highs-between-whites-Blacks-hispanics/>

Asians occupy an interesting position in American society in terms of their social class position. According to the Pew Research Center, “In 2005 median Asian household wealth had been greater than the median for white households, but by 2009 Asians lost their place at the top of the wealth hierarchy. Their net worth fell from \$168,103 in 2005 to \$78,066 in 2009, a drop of 54%. Like Hispanics, they are geographically concentrated in places such as California that were hit hard by the housing market meltdown. The arrival of new Asian immigrants since 2004 also contributed significantly to the estimated decline in the overall wealth of this racial group. Absent the immigrants who arrived during this period, the median wealth of Asian households is estimated to have dropped 31% from 2005 to 2009. Asians account for about 5% of the U.S. population.”³³ Another important factor to take into account is level of education. Among the racial and ethnic groups, Asians have the highest level of college education, wherein more than 50% of Asians have a college degree. The lowest is for Hispanics at a little above 10%. See Figure 5-2: College Attainment by Race, data from the US Census Bureau. It’s important to distinguish between various ethnicities in the Hispanic community. Notice how Cubans in particular, but also Puerto Ricans, have higher educational attainment than Mexicans. In fact, Mexicans seem to be pulling the average educational attainment for Hispanics. This disparity also persists when it comes to income (Reimers 1984). Hence when looking at data on Hispanics, it’s important to distinguish between ethnic groups since they can be vastly different in terms of social attainment. In general Cubans and White Hispanics generally fare better than other ethnic groups and non-White Hispanics.

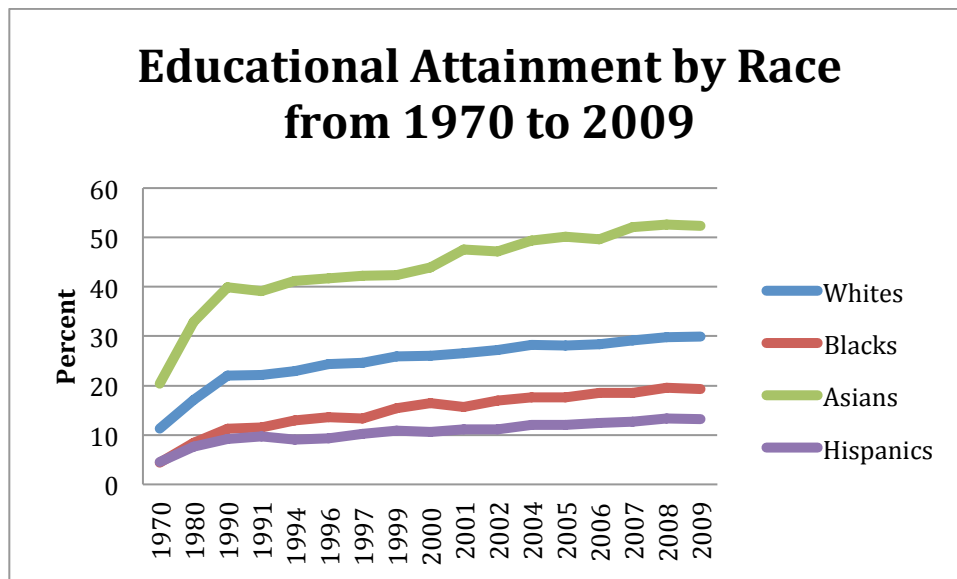


Figure 5-2: College Attainment by Race

³³ Ibid.

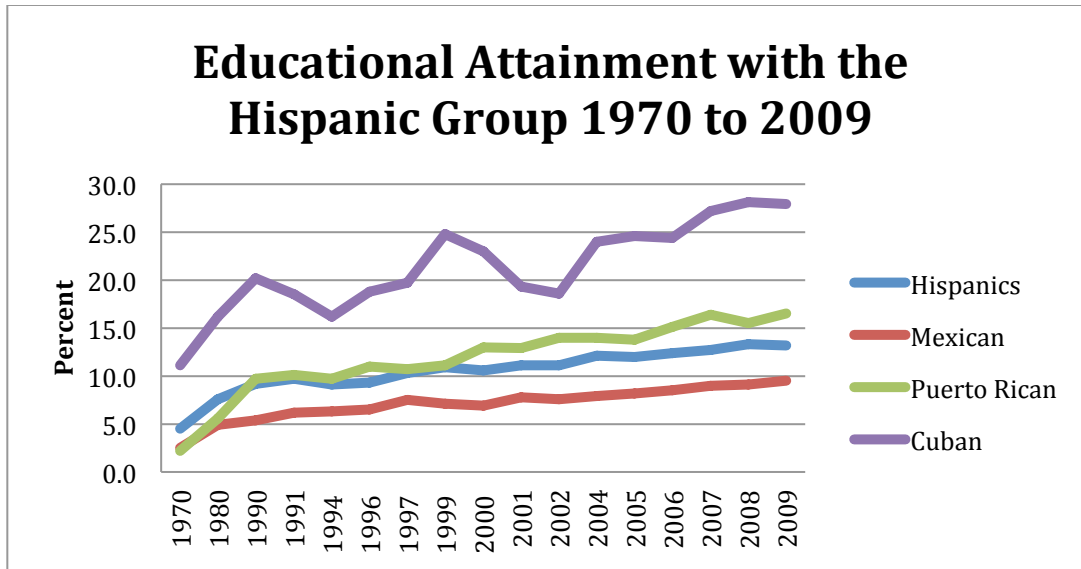


Figure 5-3: Educational Attainment within the Hispanic Group from 1970 to 2009

Like Hispanics, the lumping of Asians into one category, or **pan-ethnicity** also presents some problems when it comes to statistical analysis. East Asians and South Asians generally have higher educational attainment and income than Southeast Asians. Pan-ethnicities, such as Hispanic, Asians, Africans, and Europeans make it easy for society to comprehend different immigrant populations. It would be fallacious to think that Greeks and Germans are “the same” when referring to Europeans or that the Chinese and Indians from India belong to one group, but this is exactly what pan-ethnicity does.

In analyzing various ethnic groups in the US, migration history plays an important part. Cubans and Vietnamese, for example, settled in the US mostly as refugees. African-Americans were forced to be slaves. On the other hand, the fact that the US annexed part of Mexico in the 1800s and the proximity of the US to the Mexican border have led to migration patterns distinct from Puerto Ricans and Cubans. In our analysis of Hispanics, we will focus mostly on Mexicans since they are the majority Hispanic population in the US. See Figure 5-4: US Hispanic Origin, 2010.

Keep in mind that these social groupings, race and social class are not mutually exclusive. Although studies either try to control for the effect of each variable, these two categories are equally powerful in predicting social outcomes.

U.S. Hispanic Population	
BY COUNTRY OF ORIGIN, 2010	
Mexican	31,798,000
Puerto Rican	4,624,000
Cuban	1,786,000
Salvadoran	1,649,000
Dominican	1,415,000
Guatemalan	1,044,000
Colombian	909,000
Honduran	633,000
Ecuadorian	565,000
Peruvian	531,000

Figure 5-4: US Hispanic Origin, 2010

African Americans or Blacks

In the 2011 Presidential primary bid, candidates Michele Bachmann and Rick Santorum endorsed “The Marriage Vow.” In the original version, the vow claims that “Slavery had a disastrous impact on African American families, yet sadly a child born into slavery in 1860 was more likely to be raised by his mother and father in a two-parent household than was an African-American baby born after the election of the USA’s first African-American president.”³⁴ Highly criticized for misrepresenting slave conditions for families, Bob Vander Plaats, president and CEO of The Family Leader removed the reference to slavery. Plaats’ glorification of slavery and families misrepresents how slavery functioned in the US. Professor Hunter of Princeton University wrote a rebuttal and an explanation as to why she thinks as a country, we have a collective amnesia regarding slavery. Following is an excerpt from her piece:

“...this was not a harmless gaffe; it represents a resurfacing of a pro-slavery view of “family values” that was prevalent in the decades before the Civil War. The resurrection of this idea has particular resonance now, because it was 150 years ago, soon after the war began, that the government started to respect the dignity of slave families. Slaves did not live in independent “households”; they lived under the auspices of masters who controlled the terms of their most intimate relationships.

Back in 1860, marriage was a civil right and a legal contract, available only to free people. Male slaves had no paternal rights and female slaves were recognized as mothers only to the extent that their status doomed their children’s fate to servitude in perpetuity. To be sure, most slaves did all that they could to protect, sustain and nurture their loved ones. Freedom and the love of family are the most abiding themes that dominate the hundreds of published narratives written by former slaves.

Though slaves could not marry legally, they were allowed to do so by custom with the permission of their owners — and most did. But the wedding vows they recited promised not “until death do us part,” but “until distance” — or, as one Black minister bluntly put it, “the white man” — “do us part.” And couples were not entitled to live under the same roof, as each spouse could have a different owner, miles apart. All slaves dealt with the threat of forcible separation; untold numbers experienced it first-hand.

Among the best-known of these stories is that of Henry “Box” Brown, who mailed himself from Richmond, Va., to Philadelphia in 1849 to escape slavery. “No slave husband has any certainty whatever of being able to retain his wife a single hour; neither has any wife any more certainty of her husband,” Brown wrote in his narrative of his escape. “Their fondest affection may be utterly disregarded, and their devoted attachment cruelly ignored at any moment a brutal slave-holder may think fit.”

He had been married for 12 months and was the father of an infant when his wife was sold to a nearby planter. After 12 more years of long-distance marriage, his wife and children were sold out of state, sundering their family.

Slave marriages were not granted out of the goodness of “ole massa’s” heart. Rather, they were used as tools to keep slaves in line and to increase profits. Many slaves were forced to marry people they did not choose or to copulate like farm animals — with masters, overseers and fellow slaves.

³⁴ Adelle M. Banks. 2011. “Conservative ‘Marriage Vow’ pledge drops slavery reference.” (http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/religion/conservative-marriage-vow-pledge-drops-slavery-reference/2011/07/12/gIQA5ibjAI_story.html).

Abolitionists and ex-slaves publicized excruciating details like these, but the world view of pro-slavery apologists like James Henry Hammond, a senator from South Carolina, could not make sense of motivations like Brown's. "I believe there are more families among our slaves, who have lived and died together without losing a single member from their circle, except by the process of nature," than in most modern societies, Hammond claimed. Under the tutelage of warm and loving white patriarchs like himself, slave families enjoyed "constant, uninterrupted communion."

Hammond's self-serving fantasy world gave way to reality during the Civil War, as slaves escaped in droves to follow in the footsteps of Union Army soldiers. Although President Abraham Lincoln had promised that he would not interfere with slavery in states where it already existed, he and his military commanders were faced with the unforeseen determination of fugitives seeking refuge, freedom and opportunities to aid the war against their masters. Gen. Benjamin F. Butler developed a policy of treating slaves as "contrabands" of war, inadvertently opening the door for many more to flee. In early August 1861, Congress passed the First Confiscation Act, which authorized the army to seize all property, including slaves, used by the rebellious states in the war effort.

"Contrabands" became the first beneficiaries of a government appeal to military officers, clergymen and missionaries to marry couples "under the flag." The Army produced marriage certificates for fugitive slave couples solemnizing their marriages, and giving legitimacy to their children for the first time. But it was not until after slavery was abolished that marriage could be secured as a civil right. Despite resistance from erstwhile Confederates, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1866, which extended the right to make contracts, including the right to marry, to all former slaves.

Why does the ugly resuscitation of the myth of the happy slave family matter? Because it is part of a broad and deliberate amnesia, like the misleading assertion by Sarah Palin that the founders were antislavery and the skipping of the "three-fifths" clause during a Republican reading of the Constitution on the House floor. The oft-repeated historical fictions about Black families only prove how politically useful and resilient they continue to be in a so-called post-racial society. Refusing to be honest about how racial inequality has burdened our shared history and continues to shape our society will not get us to that post-racial vision."³⁵

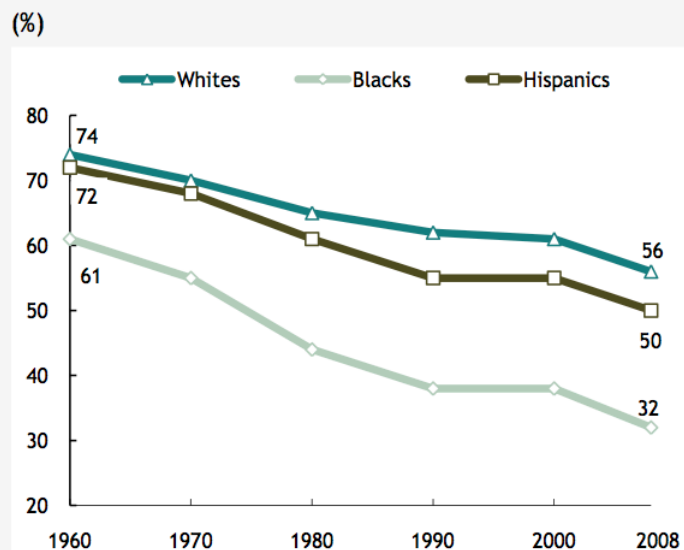
The US is culturally an individualistic society. Society attributes our successes and failures to our own personal achievements and shortcomings, and conveniently neglects the importance of family and race in shaping our adult life. For example, when talking about Bill Gates, the media attributes his success to his programming skills and entrepreneurial spirit. Gates dropped out of Harvard to start Microsoft. It is easy to forget that Gates came from a highly educated upper class family. Gates' father is a prominent lawyer who is a partner in a law firm and his mother had a college degree, which was very uncommon in the 1950s. She served as a board member in a couple of organizations and is credited for helping her son start off the business aspect of Microsoft. My goal is not to diminish Gates' success, but to highlight that although impressive, Gates story is not a simple rags to riches. Whether we like it or not, family influences what we become at some level. This is not always 100%, but it's important enough that researchers consistently see statistically significant effects.

³⁵ Hunter, Tera W. 2011. "Putting an Antebellum Myth About Slave Families to Rest." *The New York Times*, August 1 (http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/02/opinion/putting-an-antebellum-myth-about-slave-families-to-rest.html?_r=1&hp).

Marriage Patterns

In understanding the effects of what it means to be an African American man or woman in the US, it is not enough to take into account slavery and the blatant injustice that happened. Discrimination did not end after slavery. Institutional discrimination, such as the Black Codes (1800-1866), which restricted basic civil rights for African Americans, and Jim Crow (1876 and 1965) laws. Even after the illegalization of the institutional discrimination, this does not mean that individual discrimination stopped. Moreover, enacting laws that make it illegal to discriminate does not erase the centuries of consistent inequality. If your parents were not allowed to go to school or received unequal schooling, sociology of family would argue that this has grave ramifications for children's educational achievement as well. During the 1960s, African Americans experienced gains in employment, income, and wealth (Cherlin 2009: 143), but the economic downturn in the 1970s stunted growth, especially for African-American men. Hence, it is not exactly discrimination that held African-Americans back in the 70s, rather, according to Wilson (1987), deindustrialization of the US disproportionately disadvantaged the working-class Blacks, since after they worked mostly in the manufacturing sector. Blacks slowly migrated to the North as the agricultural sector in the south declined and they landed mostly manufacturing jobs. As the US lost its

Current Marital Status by Race and Ethnicity, 1960-2008



Note: Ages 18 and older. Hispanics are of any race. Whites and blacks include only non-Hispanics.

Source: Pew Research Center calculations of Decennial Census and American Community Survey data

Figure 5-5: Marital Status by Race and Ethnicity, 1960 to 2008

dominance of the manufacturing sector to Asian countries and Germany, blue-collar jobs were shipped abroad. What has happened in the 1970s and that continues today is a polarization of the African-American communities between the very poor and the middle class, and also the increased polarization of the country as a whole, between the working class and the middle class. When I discuss race and social class with my students, there is bound to be one student who will say that laziness explains poverty among racial groups. Sociologists take issue with this explanation for a couple of reasons.

- How does one measure if a racial group is lazy?
- Sociology in general deals with structural causes. To claim that people are lazy means society needs to find a way to "cure" laziness.

Wilson's argument regarding the plight of Black men shows that deindustrialization strongly predicts lowered unemployment rates for Black men. In fact, Wilson argues that employment rates for Black men in the 1950s were higher than in the 80s. These low unemployment rates for Black men have large implications for their marriage prospects. Figure 5-5: Marital Status by Race and Ethnicity, 1960 to 2008, shows the sharp decline of marriage rates for Blacks. Although the three groups showed a decline in the proportion of married adults, for African Americans, the percentage dropped from 61% in the 1960s to 32% in 2008. Blacks are also more likely to be single parents. In the same Pew Research, "27% of White adults and 33% of Hispanics were living with a spouse and one or more children. This compares with only 17% of Black adults (9)." ³⁶

Comparing the marriage patterns between Blacks and Whites, Bennett et al. ³⁷ identify three diverging marriage patterns between the two groups:

1. Lower proportions of Blacks marry than Whites
2. The proportion of women who ever marry has declined substantially across cohorts for Blacks but modestly across cohorts Whites.
3. While increased education is associated negatively if slightly, with the probability of ever marrying among Whites, it is associated positively among Blacks. ³⁸

Using the 1985 Current Population Survey (CPS), the dataset involved detailed information of 60,000 randomly sampled households in the US. According to the authors, the three patterns above are a result of the marriage squeeze, economic status, and out-of-wedlock childbearing.

Marriage Squeeze

According to Bennett et al, "declining marriage rates of both white and Black and white women are commonly attributed to a marriage squeeze. One aspect of the squeeze relate to that fact that, at some age, women begin to outnumber men in the population. The sex-ratio imbalance occurs several years earlier in the life among Black women than among white women, in part reflecting not only a male-female ratio at birth among Blacks that is lower than that among whites but also the relatively high rates of death and incarceration for young Black men (700-701)."

Economic Status

In the past decades, Blacks and those with lower levels of education (both Blacks and Whites) have seen a higher increase in unemployment rates and also lower annual earnings. African Americans are polarized between the middle class and what social scientists call the "underclass". "This is an urban population that is lacking in skills, education, and employment, is permanently excluded from the

³⁶ 2010. *The Decline of Marriage and Rise of New Families*. Pew Research Center.

³⁷ Bennett, Neil G., David E. Bloom, and Patricia H. Craig. 1989. "The Divergence of Black and White Marriage Patterns." *American Journal of Sociology* 95(3): 692-722.

³⁸ As indicated in the abstract on page 692.

mainstream labor market, and has little hope of upward mobility. Typical avenues of advancement are closed off to this group because structural changes in the postwar economy have entailed declining employment prospects, especially in the manufacturing sector, in central cities where Blacks are concentrated (708)."

Bennett et al claim that the underclass rely more on kin networks and extended families for their support system, since these relationships tend to be more "stable". Marriage is thus seen as a less reliable institution than existing networks. These explanations take on a rational approach to marriage. Weighing their options, marriage seems a risky venture for the Black underclass.

Hollywood blockbuster movies have provided us with a somewhat unrealistic view of marriage patterns. Think of *Pretty Woman*, wherein a prostitute marries a billionaire, or the 1997 romantic comedy, *Fools Rush In*, where a one night stand leads to marriage and a happy ending. Data shows, however, that marriage rates, especially for Black men and women, are highly correlated with employment status. Table 5-1: Employment Status, Race, and Probability of Marriage, 1980-85, show that the probability of an Black man who is employed year-round to marry is 0.7 while for a White man, the probability is 0.97. Meanwhile, for Black men who experienced spells of unemployment, the probability of marriage is 0.36 and for Whites, 0.88—a 0.52 difference. The dating scene is a marriage market (Coltrane and Collins 2001) and part of a person's "value," especially for men, is the ability to provide. Women also enter the marriage market with achievements deemed worthy by their partners and in contemporary society, an educated woman is likely to marry a man with similar educational achievement.

Table 5-1: Employment Status, Race, and Probability of Marriage, 1980-85³⁹

Race and Gender	Employed Full-Time Year Round	Some Spell of Unemployment
Black		
Black Males	0.7	0.36
White Males	0.97	0.88

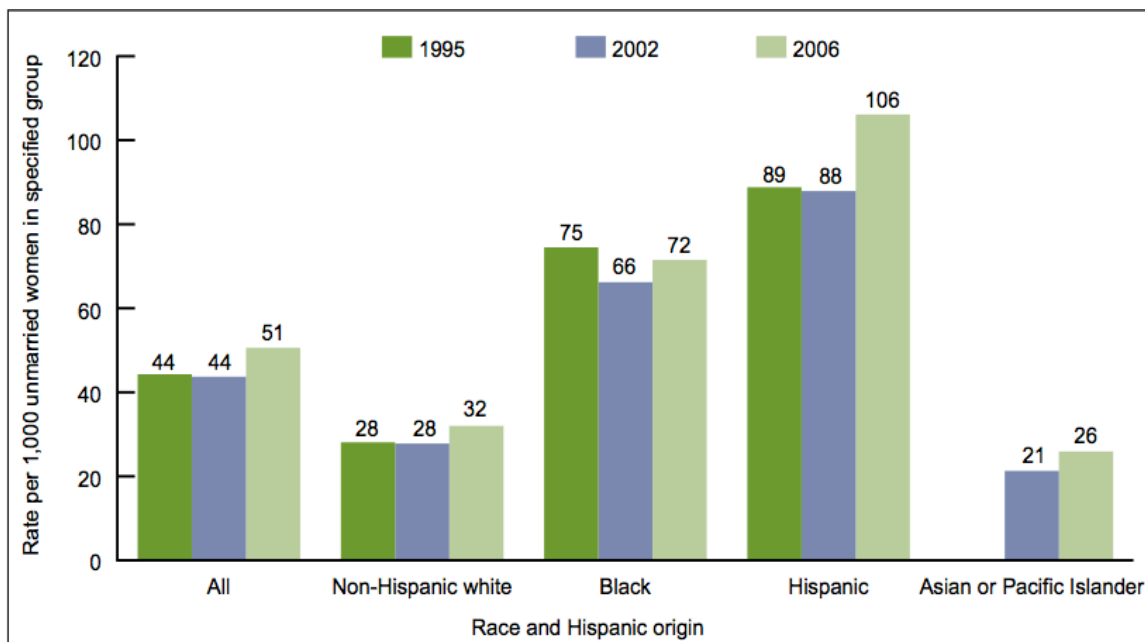
Out-of-Wedlock Childbearing

Bennett et al. argue that a "woman who has an out-of-wedlock birth is less likely every to marry than one who does not (711)." The percent of women who had a non-marital childbirth the US has increased from less than 10% in the 1940s to 38% in 2007.⁴⁰ Compared to non-Hispanics Whites, Blacks have a higher non-marital childbirth, but non-White Hispanics have the highest rate of childbirth from unmarried women. Asians and Pacific Highlanders have the lowest rate (See Figure 5-6: Birth Rates for Unmarried Women by Race and Hispanic Origin, 1995, 2002,

³⁹ Probabilities are conditional on being never married at the beginning of the year. From pg.709 of Bennett, Neil G., David E. Bloom, and Patricia H. Craig. 1989. "The Divergence of Black and White Marriage Patterns." *American Journal of Sociology* 95(3): 692-722.

⁴⁰ Center for Disease Control and Prevention, NCHS Data Brief. No. 18, May 2009. <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/unmarry.htm>

and 2006.) Although the rate for Black women is higher, it has slightly decreased, while the rate has increased for Whites from 28 to 32. Non-marital first birth for Blacks is concentrated among the underclass. Parental education significantly affects a female's chances of having a child outside of marriage. If a female's mother has less than a high school education, the chances increase significantly, for both Whites and Blacks (see Figure 5-7: Black Women, Percentage of Premarital First Birth and Mother's Educational Level, 1982. Figure 5-8: White Women, Percentage of Premarital First Birth and Mother's Educational Level, 1982.) According to Bennett et al., aside from employment and earning potential, "future goals" influence fertility patterns (712). A woman who has specific and long-term career plans is less likely to have a child at a young age and out of wedlock. Highly educated Black women are more likely to marry than those with less than high school diploma. On the other hand, for Whites, "there is a negative, if slight, association between education and marriage among white women (716)."



NOTE: Rate for Asian or Pacific Islander women is not available for 1995.
SOURCE: CDC/NCHS, National Vital Statistics System.

Figure 5-6: Birth Rates for Unmarried Women by Race and Hispanic Origin, 1995, 2002, and 2006.

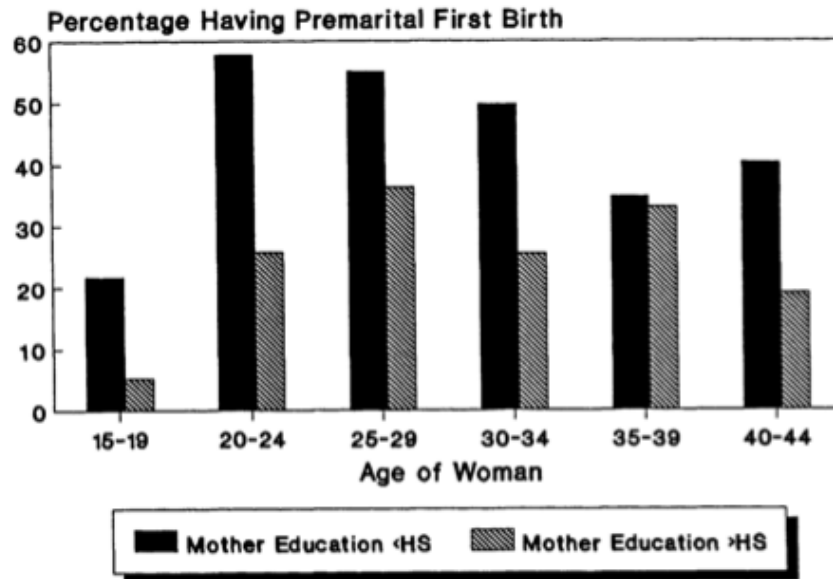


Figure 5-7: Black Women, Percentage of Premarital First Birth and Mother's Educational Level, 1982.⁴¹

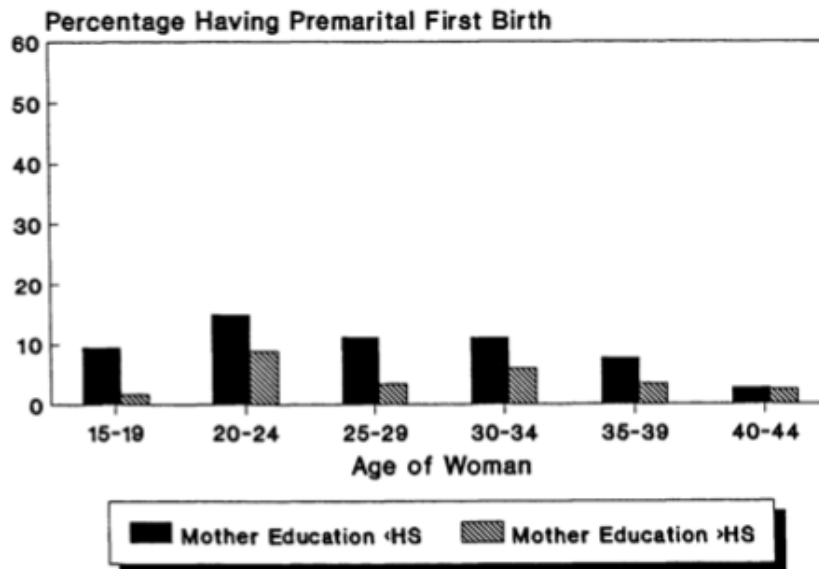


Figure 5-8: White Women, Percentage of Premarital First Birth and Mother's Educational Level, 1982.

⁴¹ Both Figures are from pg. 713 of Bennett, Neil G., David E. Bloom, and Patricia H. Craig. 1989. "The Divergence of Black and White Marriage Patterns." *American Journal of Sociology* 95(3): 692-722.

Public Assistance and African Americans

In the debate regarding Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), those who advocate eliminating assistance for single-parent households argue that help only encourages people to have children out of wedlock. Hence, if society eliminates these programs, women will be forced to marry their child's father, regardless of the quality of the relationship. I originally had the part on public assistance as part of the social class chapter, but decided to place it under race after repeatedly hearing student comments regarding "welfare queens" and recipients of public aid as primarily African Americans and Hispanics, that these women consciously have children in order to receive support from the government, and that these families are continuously on welfare for the rest of their lives.

TANF was established in 1996 as part of the US Social Security Programs, which under President Franklin D. Roosevelt during the Great Depression.⁴² The first laws that were established involved old age and unemployment safety nets. This has then been expanded to include aid for dependent children and child welfare, those with disabilities, and families in need. Some of the programs that are deeply embedded in the national psyche that emerged from the Social Security Programs are Medicare, National School Lunch Program, and Earned Income Tax Credit. In terms of family assistance, President Clinton signed into law "The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (P.L. 104-193)," which overhauled the welfare system. The law made it mandatory to require recipients to work or participate in on-the-job training or community service. Under individual state purview, families "who receive assistance for five cumulative years...will be ineligible for cash aid." The law aimed to foster responsibility and wean recipients from the system, while giving individual states more flexibility in determining eligibility and time limits to receiving aid.⁴³ One of the main goals of the law was to alleviate the number of government aid recipients by promoting marriage. The previous system was believed to undermine marriage since it allowed women to live independently with their children (Bitler et al. 2004).

Snippet 5-1: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

Advocates of the family claim that having the government step in to assist single mothers disincentivize them from marriage. Bitler et al. investigate this issue in "The Impact of Welfare Reform on Marriage and Divorce." Using vital statistics data (marriage and divorce) from 1989 to 2000 and regression analysis, the authors analyze the role of welfare reform in shaping marriage patterns. They find that "The Personal

⁴² Here is the official United States Social Security Administration document on this [history of the welfare system](#).

⁴³ For a detailed explanation of the law, visit the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) and US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) site. <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/abbrev/prwora96.htm>

Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (see Snippet 5-1: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) does not promote marriage (233), but it did decrease the divorce rates. Deducing from their findings, the authors hypothesize that as a result of the reforms, “welfare reforms may have different effects on single persons than on married persons. Because welfare reform encouraged or required more work, single women may have been less likely to get married because their earnings rose or the independence effect [the independent effect refers to how being independent financially is a disincentive for marriage] dominated for these women. For married women, welfare reform may have increased the number of hours they would have to work if they divorced, thereby discouraging divorce. In addition, welfare reform may have introduced considerable uncertainty about the future and made people less likely to change their current marital status...(233).”⁴⁴

In my years teaching this course, discussions on welfare seem to always lead to this question: does welfare make women who use the system have more babies? Students who answer affirmatively to this question, as evidence, point usually to “a friend’s friends” who strategized to have more babies to get more aid. The argument is highly flawed, since anecdotal evidence fails to consider group behavior and does not make use of controlled social science analysis. One person saying they will have more babies to receive more welfare does not equal to causation. Social scientists have yet to provide a clear-cut answer to this question. There are many reasons that can affect a person’s choice to have a child illegitimately and pinpointing that it’s welfare assistance that leads to fertility patterns for single women presents some challenges. In “Does Welfare Bring More Babies?” published in *Public Interest* ⁴⁵ Charles Murray⁴⁶ attempts to answer the question. Murray is a libertarian political scientist. In 1991, citing that 22% of live births to white women are from single mothers, he proposed abolishing welfare all together to discourage illegitimacy. In his 1996 piece, exploring the effects of welfare on illegitimacy, however, Murray acknowledges that evidence is inconclusive as to whether or not welfare makes people have more babies.

⁴⁴ Note how these authors take on a rational approach in their analysis. People are assumed to act rationally in making choices.

⁴⁵ Murray, Charles. 1994. “Does Welfare Bring More Babies?” *Public Interest*. Retrieved August 12, 2011 (<http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/detail?accno=EJ484423>).

⁴⁶ Murray is a Harvard and Massachusetts Institute of Technology trained political scientist. He is most famous for his book with Richard J. Herrnstein, *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life*, which argues that intelligence is predicts much of social success, such as income and job performance. In terms of race, the authors contend that genetics plays a difference in measuring intelligence, with some races, more advantaged than others. The book is controversial work rebutting their thesis have been published since. For a full bio of Murray:

<http://www.aei.org/scholar/43>

Temporary Assistance For Needy Families by Race (2003-2004)

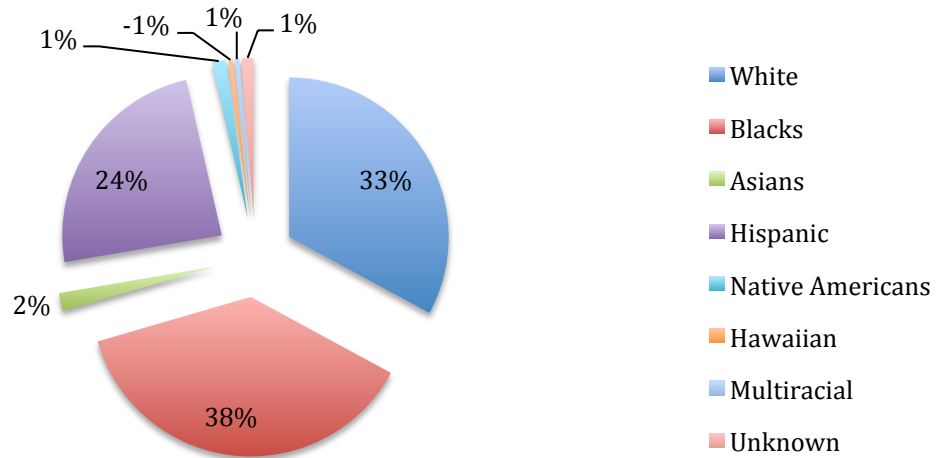


Figure 5-9: TANF by Race⁴⁷

Table 5-2: US Population by Race, 2010

2010 US Census Race and Ethnicity

Race	Percentage
White	72.4
(Includes those who claim to be White Hispanics or Latino Americans)	
Black or African Americans	12.6
Asian	6.2
Two or more races	4.8
American Indian or Alaskan Native	2.9
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.9
Some other race	0.2

The Middle Class Black Family

⁴⁷ From the US Department of Health and Human Services
<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/character/FY2004/tab08.htm>

Black middle class families generally consist of two-parent households. According to Cherlin (2009), “since the 1960s, the “number of relatively prosperous blacks, whom observers tend to call the “black middle class,” has expanded substantially (152).” So far, the discussion presents a homogenous black group in the US; this is not the case. Black immigrants from the Caribbean distinguish themselves from African-Americans. Sub-Saharan African immigrants (these are mostly recent immigrants and not from slave families) enjoy higher than average income, wealth, and levels of education compared to descendants of blacks slave families. This point is crucial, since the circumstances or the “push or pull” of migrants matter in determining their success in the US. People arriving in the country with visions of the American dream or with a student visa for a Doctorate do not necessarily have a shared experience with a black American whose family has lived in the country for generations.

Mexican Americans

Note that “Mexican” is not necessarily a race, at least according to the US Census. Mexican can be considered either a nationality or an ethnicity. As discussed previously, to avoid an overgeneralization Latinos, I have narrowed the analysis to Mexicans, since they make up the majority of the Hispanic population in the US (see Figure 5-4: US Hispanic Origin, 2010). Among the Hispanic population, Mexican-Americans have the highest total fertility rate (TFR). This “is the average number of births that a woman would have over her lifetime if current birthrates were to remain the same (Cherlin 2009: 156).” The TFR for Puerto Ricans is 2.2 and 1.6 for Cubans, which Cherlin notes is lower than non-Hispanic whites (156).

Culture

Mexican-Americans are more likely to have stronger ties with their family compared to blacks and whites. The definition of family is extended beyond the home, to include godparents (marriage and birth), which are religious ties (Rothman, Gant, and Hnat 1985: 201). Rothman et al. state that **familism**, or the close ties to family, can cause “negative stresses” especially when family members have conflicting values, such as parents demanding certain outcomes from their children. Mexicans and even non-White Latinos are often compared to their Asian counterparts in educational achievement and socioeconomic status. As Figure 5-2: College Attainment by Race and Figure 5-3: Educational Attainment within the Hispanic Group from 1970 to 2009 show, Hispanics have the lower educational level than the rest of the groups and Mexicans in particular have the lowest educational achievement among Hispanics. In comparing Mexicans with other racial groups and Hispanics, it’s important to note that migration patterns play an important role in shaping children’s development. Mainstream debate on immigration tends to focus on culture and nationalities, and fail to take into account the SES status of immigrants in their country of origin. It is unwise to compare an immigrant from Mexico, for example, who arrived to the US with a work visa to work at a prominent hi-tech firm in Silicon Valley, to a migrant worker who was contracted to work as a farmer in the agricultural sector. These two individuals had competing life chances in Mexico and would continue on in the US. Feliciano’s (2006) scholarly comparing

educational expectations of **second generation** (this refers to children of immigrants who were born in the US or arrived at an early age), brings the issue of how SES status of migrants, before and after they have migrated, affect child potential success. An important concept to keep in mind when analyzing immigrants is selectivity. “Immigrants self-select”, and potential migrants take into account the resources it takes to migrate. According to Feliciano, literature on the subject remains divided on whether or not immigrants in general represent the best of the lot or the very poor (283), but the overall findings show that “pre migration status influence educational aspirations.” This means that even if immigrants arrive in the US with very little resources, if in their home countries they were upper middle class, the children of this group will have higher chances of completing college. Arguments like these posit that race is but a secondary factor in determining success; rather, SES status carry with it certain cultural attitudes that transcend race.

Asian Americans

According to Cherlin (2009), “less has been written about Asian American families than about African American and Hispanic families because of their modest numbers prior to the 1965 immigration act (161). Asians and Pacific Islanders make up roughly 7.2% of the US population according to the 2010 census (see Table 5-2: US Population by Race, 2010). The American psyche associates Asians mostly with East and Southeast Asians, for a reason, since US involvement in Asia, mostly involves these regions, from the colonialization of the Philippines, Vietnam War, and Japan after WWII. Asia, like other continents of the world, is quite diverse. South Asians, Indians and Pakistanis for example, do not exactly fit the stereotypical Asian-American, but they are a part of Asia. Asians are lumped together as the model minority, since they seem to enjoy relatively high household incomes, occupy professional positions, and have higher educational levels than whites. In Figure 5-10: SAT Mean Scores of College Bound Students, 2010, Asians receive the second highest score in critical reading and writing, below Whites, but score highest in math. Researchers use figures like these when referring to Asians as the **model minority**. Coltrane and Collins (2001) note that selective migration partially explains these statistics, but “native-born Asian Americans also have extremely high levels of educational attainment (231).” In terms of marriage patterns, Asians are more likely to marry outside of their race than other groups. “In 2008, 9% of whites, 16% of blacks, 26% of Hispanics, and 31% of Asians married someone whose race or ethnicity was different from their own.”⁴⁸ Miscegenation, or the intermarrying of different racial groups is slowly being accepted by American society.

⁴⁸ Pew Social and Demographic Trends, “One-in-Seven New US Marriages is Interracial or Interethnic. June 4, 2010.
<http://pewsocialtrends.org/2010/06/04/marrying-out/>

Race/Ethnicity	
SAT—Critical reading	
All students	501
White	528
Black	429
Mexican American	454
Puerto Rican	454
Other Hispanic	454
Asian/Pacific Islander	519
American Indian/Alaskan Native	485
Other	494
SAT—Mathematics	
All students	516
White	536
Black	428
Mexican American	467
Puerto Rican	452
Other Hispanic	462
Asian/Pacific Islander	591
American Indian/Alaska Native	492
Other	514
SAT—Writing	
All students	492
White	516
Black	420
Mexican American	448
Puerto Rican	443
Other Hispanic	447
Asian/Pacific Islander	526
American Indian/Alaska Native	467
Other	492

Figure 5-10: SAT Mean Scores of College Bound Students, 2010⁴⁹

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NOTE: Data are for seniors who took the SAT any time during their high school years through March of their senior year. If a student took a test more than once, the most recent score was used. The SAT was formerly known as the Scholastic Assessment Test and the Scholastic Aptitude Test. Possible scores on each part of the SAT range from 200 to 800. The critical reading section was formerly known as the verbal section. The writing section was introduced in March 2005.

SOURCE: College Entrance Examination Board, *College-Bound Seniors: Total Group Profile [National] Report*, selected years, 1986-87 through 2009-10, retrieved September 14, 2010, from <http://professionals.collegeboard.com/data-reports-research/sat/cb-seniors-2010>. (This table was prepared September 2010.) Visit: http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10_151.asp

Divorce

Navada, Marianne Ryan-Go. 2011. "Divorce."

Chapter 6

Divorce rates in the US have sharply increased in the late 60s, but have since decreased in the 80s onwards (see Figure 6-1: Divorce Rates from 1950 to 2000).⁵⁰ According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDCP), the divorce rate is 3.4 per 1,000 of the US

population while the marriage rate is 6.8 per 1,000. These numbers usually lead to the conclusion that 50% of marriages in the US end in divorce. This is where numbers require analysis. To say that 50% of marriages end in divorce is misleading. One has to take into account length of marriage, when a couple was married, and remarriage. People nostalgic of the 1950s family might point to the low divorce rates to claim the decade's superiority, but remember that the couples that divorced in the 60s, could have married in the 50s. In calculating divorce the divorce, the COMMON MISTAKE is to do this:

$$\frac{\text{Number of Divorces Occuring}}{\text{Number of Marriages Occuring}} * 1,000$$

It is better to use this equation:

$$\frac{\text{Number of Divorces Occuring}}{\text{Total Number of Marriages in a Population}} * 1000$$



Source: Monthly Vital Statistics Reports

Figure 6-1: Divorce Rates from 1950 to 2000

⁵⁰ <http://www.bsos.umd.edusocy/vanneman/socy441/trends/divorce.html>

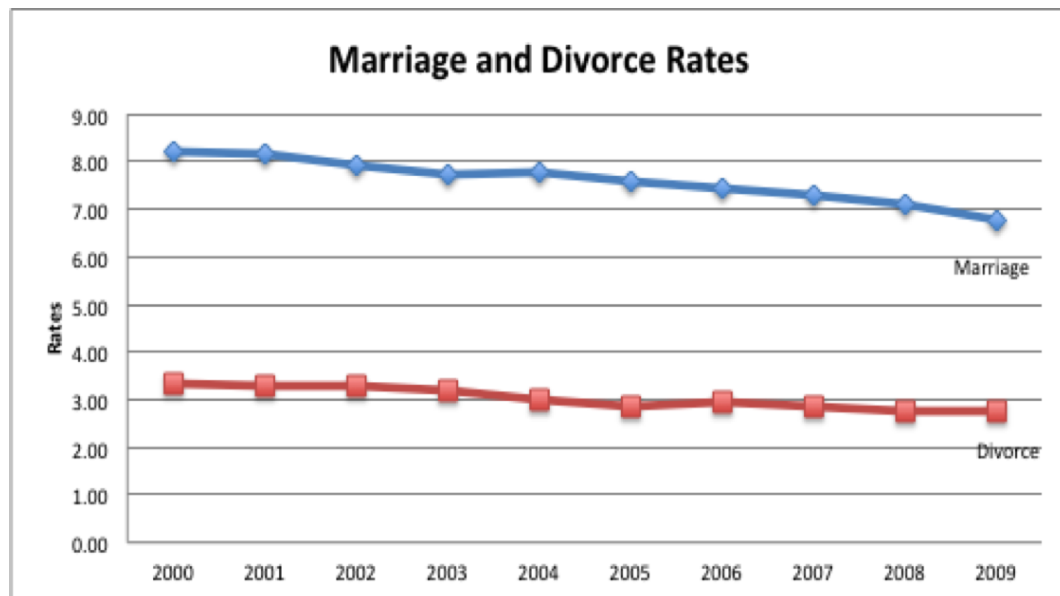


Figure 6-2: Marriage and Divorce Rates, 2000-2009, from CDCP, National Marriage and Divorce Trends

Why do People Divorce?

A question that usually comes up from my students when I teach a marriage and family course is: “if my parents are divorced, are my chances of getting a divorce in the future higher than people whose parents are not divorced?” What students are referring to is intergenerational divorce. If geneticists study how genes are transferred from parents to children, sociologists attempt to understand the causal relationship between parents’ marital experience and their children’s. To understand the causal factors of divorce, it is important to take into account the confounding variables involved. Confounding variables refer to the relationships, other than parents’ divorce status that causes divorce. Figure 6-3: Hypothesis for Individual Variables provides a visual rendering of the causal relationships of individual-level variables. Meaning, these are variables particular to an individual that can affect one’s chances of divorce. In the illustration, for example, the age of marriage affects one’s chances of divorce. People who marry early in life, in their teens or even in their twenties, are more likely to divorce than those who marry in their forties. This of course can be explained in various ways. One can argue that people who decide to marry at a latter age are more self-assured and settled, but there is also the fact that, taking into account life expectancy, the older couple will have less chances of divorce, since their time together is limited. Social scientists have explored these variables in trying to understand divorce rates. We will try to focus on a few of these variables. Go over the explanatory variables and see if you can hypothesize as to why these variables affect divorce rates.

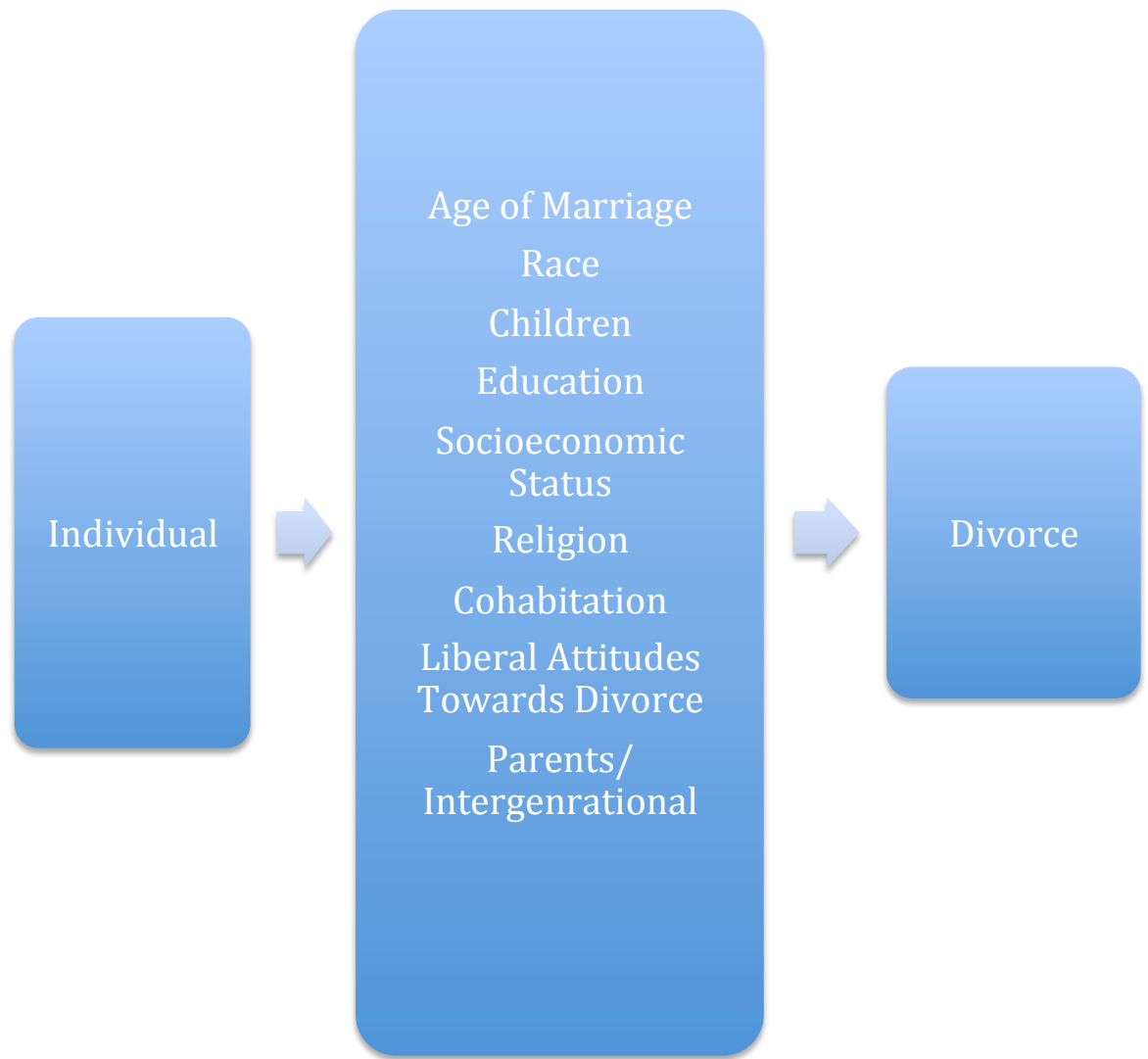


Figure 6-3: Hypothesis for Individual Variables

Aside from individual factors, there are also macro-level explanatory reasons that social scientists hypothesize affect divorce rates. In Figure 6-4: Macro-level Factors that Affect Divorce Rates, social scientists explore the effect of economy, laws, and cultural shifts in assessing divorce rates. Making it legally difficult or expensive to obtain a divorce, for example, can decrease divorce rates. In the US, a couple with irreconcilable differences can legally divorce. Couples wanting to bind their marriage to more stringent guidelines, however, can opt for a **covenant marriage**, which as of 2011, is legal in three states, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Arizona. With its roots in Judeo-Christian teachings, the covenant marriage movement in the US was a reaction to the increasing divorce rates. A covenant marriage is harder to dissolve than a regular marriage and only certain guidelines can a court grant a divorce. Economic times also influence a couples' decision to separate. Studies show that economic uncertainty lowers divorce rates. Here is an article from Time Magazine that succinctly explains why (see Online Reading 6-1: "Do Tight Times Make Close Marriages?

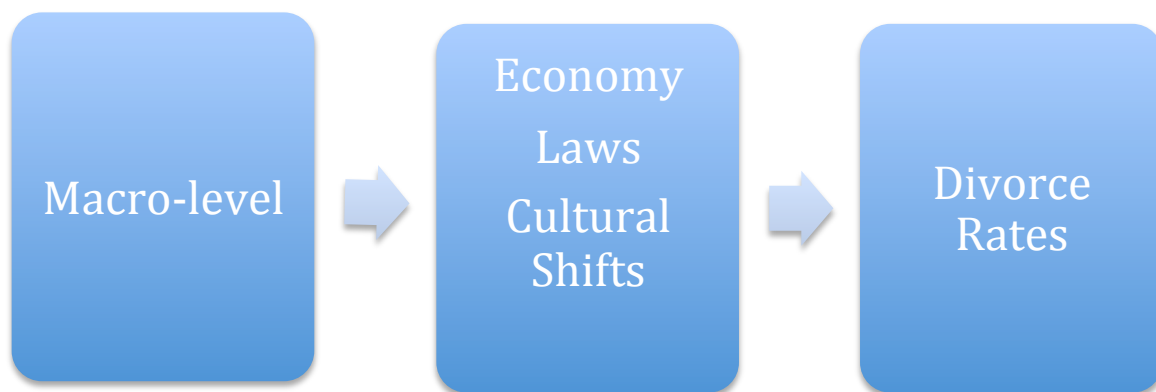


Figure 6-4: Macro-level Factors that Affect Divorce Rates

Do Tight Times Make Close Marriages? ("Time Magazine," Heartland).

By Belinda Luscombe Tuesday, February 8, 2011.

Most partnerships, business or personal, are easy when money is easy. The lucre seems to take the sting out of any disagreements, and, frankly, the cost of disharmony is too high. But according to a new [report](#) from the National Marriage Project, the Great Recession hasn't necessarily been thinning out the ranks of the married.

The survey of 1,197 married Americans aged 18–45 found that about a third of people reported that the economic downturn had been hard on their marriages. For an almost equal number of people, however, the financial strain had brought them closer. And according to the report, adorably titled "The Survey of Marital Generosity," about 38% had put the brakes on the divorce they were considering before the thin times hit. (**More on Time.com:** [How to Make Marriage Work: Treat It Like a Business](#))

This may be due to some old-fashioned shoulder-to-the-wheel, pull-together, family-comes-first, stick-to-it-iveness on the part of the married couple. Or it may simply be that divorce and life after divorce are huge financial hits. Several august oracles (including, maybe, [this magazine](#)) predicted that the recession would increase divorce. But so far, [that hasn't been true](#).

Meanwhile in China, which has been undergoing a sustained economic boom, [divorces have shot up](#). Mind you, money isn't the only influence in a marriage's demise. The divorce laws in China have been loosening up and women have been gaining more economic freedom than they had been accustomed to, two factors that usually lead to more splits.

As a measure of national well-being, the divorce rate is a double-headed beast. A high rate of divorce can lead to a lot of economic and family instability, especially in countries or communities where women have little access to education or wealth. On the other hand, an extremely low level of divorce can mean that people are stuck in abusive marriages, especially — you guessed it — in countries where women have little access to education or wealth. (**More on Time.com:** [What Your Brain Looks Like After 20 Years of Marriage](#))

Similarly, divorces that are delayed for financial reasons can be good or bad news. If people find a way back to happiness by sitting through the hard times together, so much the better for them, their wealth and their children. But if economic strains are making an untenable domestic situation even more perilous, and even harder to escape from, this can have very serious — even tragic — consequences.

Link: <http://healthland.time.com/2011/02/08/do-tight-times-make-close-marriages/>

Online Reading 6-1: "Do Tight Times Make Close Marriages?"

Income and Divorce

Women's financial position affects a couple's decision regarding divorce. From a rational perspective, spouses deliberate on the financial outcomes of divorce and economic implications of separation. In "Dollars, Dependency, and Divorce: Four Perspectives on the Role of Wives' Income." The author (Rogers 2004) uses event history and panel statistical analysis from the dataset, Marital Instability Over the Life Course (1980-1997) to test the association between a woman's economic independence and divorce. To measure economic independence, Rogers looks at a wife's dollar income and the percentage of wife's income relative to total household income. Rogers outlines four competing models regarding economic independence and divorce (see Figure 6-5: Rogers' Models for Wives' Actual Income and Probability of Divorce). Here are the four competing models Rogers analyzes:

Economic Partnership

The economic partnership model, according to Rogers, posits that, "wives' contributions lower the risk of divorce by alleviating economic distress (63)." As wives' income increases, the likelihood of divorce decreases. Aside from stress, this relationship is especially relevant when "marital assets, such as ownership of home or land, reduced the risk of divorce, especially in marriages of moderate or longer duration."

Economic Independence

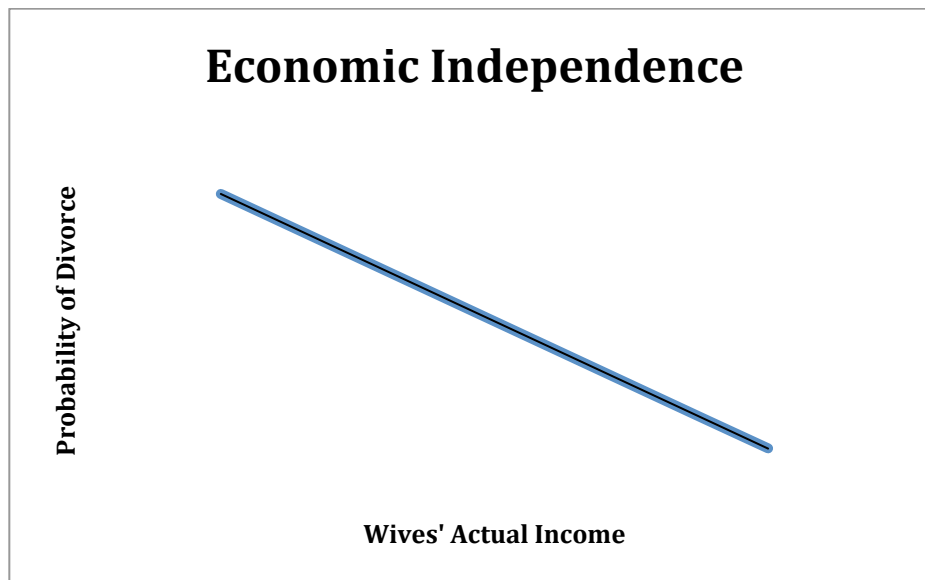
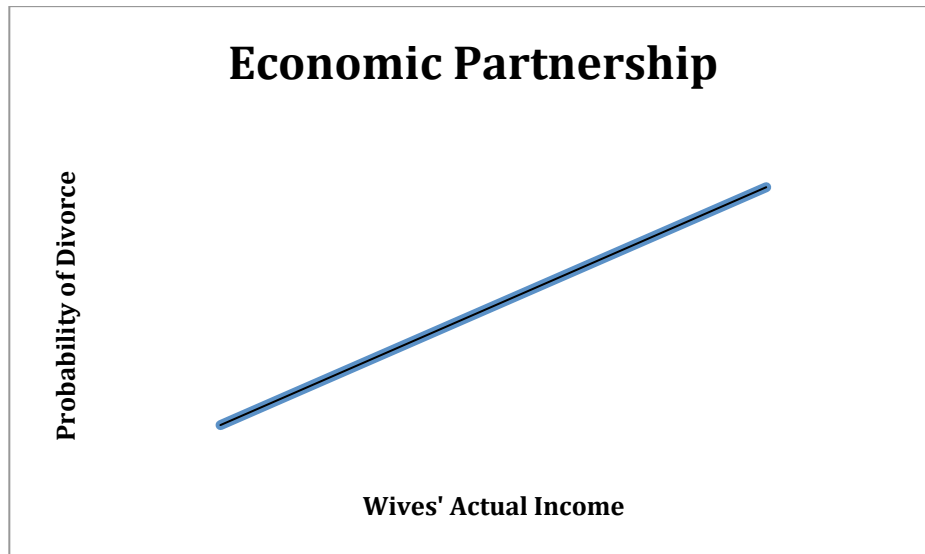
Economic independence predicts that as wives' income increases so are the chances of divorce. According to Rogers, the "resulting resistance and pressures from wives to renegotiate gender arrangements in the marriage may be associated with conflict...increases in wives' economic resources may not only provide wives with the resources to leave those marriages, but also increase their dissatisfaction with traditional marital arrangements...the association between wives' resources and divorce also may be moderated by the quality of the marital relationship such that wives with more resources are most likely to divorce if marital happiness is low (60)."

Equal Dependence

Economic dependence takes into consideration wives' economic power in the household. The "inverted U-shaped curve" indicates that for this perspective, "risk of divorce is highest when wives' economic contributions are similar to those of their husbands...because this is the point at which mutual obligations are weakest. Economic dependence of either spouse should lower the risk of divorce because there is a great sense of economic obligation between spouses (61)." In other words, either if either a wife contributes a little or much more to the household income, the chances of divorce are lower since there is more dependence either from the wife or the husband. When men and women contribute equally, women's commitment changes (62).

Role Collaboration

Role collaboration indicates a U-shaped curve, the opposite of equal dependence, wherein likelihood of divorce is lowest, when wives contribute equally to the household income relative to the husbands'. In this perspective, "economic dependence of either spouse increases the risk of divorce...this perspective suggests that as wives have more resources and spousal contributions are more balanced, marital stability is enhanced because similarity in resources facilitates greater equality and common experiences in spouses' lives, thereby increasing affection in the marital relationship (62)."



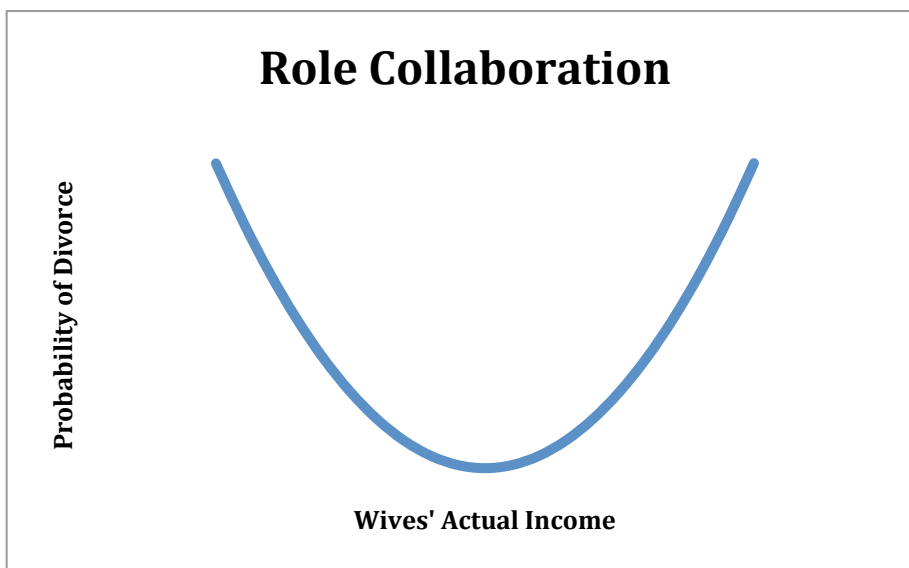
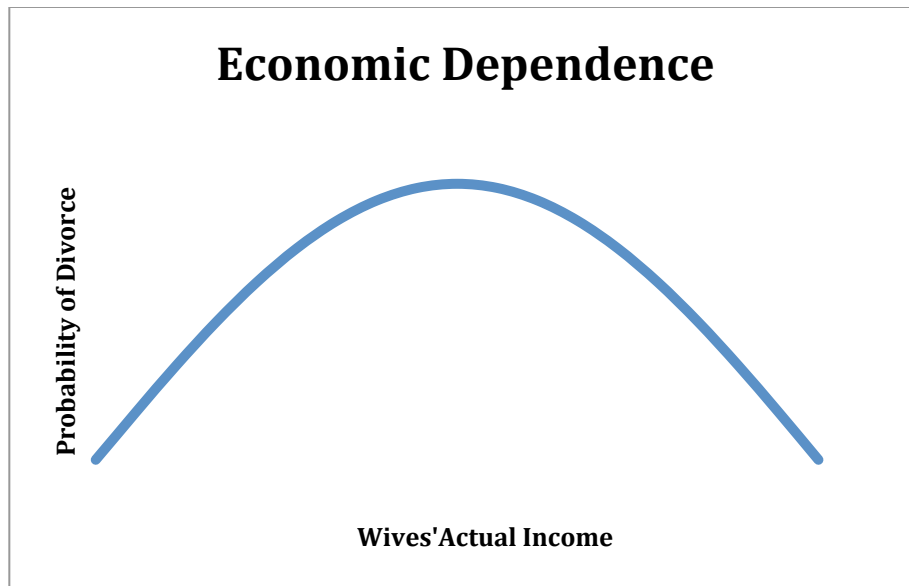


Figure 6-5: Rogers' Models for Wives' Actual Income and Probability of Divorce

Results

Rogers' (2004) findings show five important points:

1. The equal dependence model has the strongest predicting quality. In Rogers' analysis, the highest risk of divorce occurred when wives "contributed 50% to 60% of the total family sources (71)."
2. In assessing the relationship between income and divorce, marital happiness needs to be taken into account. Rogers shows that although the equal

dependence pattern manifests in different levels of happiness, couples who have low happiness are the most vulnerable to wives having income parity and divorce.

3. Rogers (2004) data also shows that “wives’ percentage of income was positively associated with the odds that husbands as well as wives would initiate a divorce. Similar economic resources may give both spouses the freedom to initiate divorce because their economic obligations to each other are low, and also because they may be confident that their spouses can provide for themselves economically (72-3).”
4. The findings also show some support for the “economic independence” model, wherein if wives’ income was measured in dollars, the more income a wife generates the higher the risk of divorce.

Children and Divorce

The presence of children influences how parents handle separation. In assessing the effects of divorce on children, scholars distinguish between short and long-term effects. In “Parental Conflict and Marital Disruption: Do Children Benefit When High-Conflict Marriages Are Dissolved?” Using mother-child data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (1988), Morrison and Coiro examine children between 4 to 9 years in two-parent families and again analyzed their mother-rated behavior 6 years later (627). Controlling for pre-existing levels of child behavior problems, some of the parents examined the second time were now divorced. The researchers ask the question: “do children benefit when high-conflict marriages are dissolved, but do they show elevated problems when the couple was less conflictual before separation? And how do children fare when their high-conflict parents remain together? (627)” In assessing behavioral problems in children as a result of divorce, it is important to take into account behavioral problems *before* the divorce and measure changes. Morrison and Coiro found that “factors associated with divorce itself, such as parental absence, changes in custody and relationships, and decline in parents’ psychological well-being, explain increases in children’s behavioral problems over and above the effect of predissolution parental quarrels. Nonetheless, we found that prior reports of high levels of marital conflict have a large and statistically significant adverse effect on children’s behavior problems...the adverse effect of frequent marital quarrels is larger than the deleterious effect of separation and divorce (635).” It seems that children whose parents decide to stay together but fight frequently experience more behavioral problems. An important point to take into account in this study is that the authors use the Behavior Problems Index to measure behavioral problems and this index relies on mothers’ report of the “frequency and types of behavior problems manifested in the last 3 months (629).” It’s possible that mothers’ stress plays a factor in reporting behavioral problems. The authors do acknowledge that since the children were not examined into adulthood, their research does not have the answer regarding long terms effects of conflict and divorce

Long Term Effects of Divorce

Paul R. Amato, a sociology professor at Penn State University has written extensively on divorce and intergenerational effects. Following is a review of his work on how having divorced parents affect a person's own divorce outcomes. Amato analyzes the intergenerational transmission of divorce.⁵¹ His research seeks to explain *how* parental divorce influences offspring divorce. Data consistently shows that "parental divorce increases the risk that offspring will see their own marriages in divorce (628)." Using Levinger's model to explain the causal effect, Amato argues that, "parental divorce sets in motion a series of events and processes that affect each of these general determinants of offspring marital instability (628-9)." **Current literature** suggests parental divorce affect children in three ways: life course and socioeconomic variables, divorce attitudes, and interpersonal behavior problems (see Figure 6-6: Causal Model of Parental Divorce, Mediating Variables, and Offspring Divorce by Amato (1996)). Parental divorce, as the diagram shows leads to younger age of marriage, higher likelihood of cohabitation, lower levels of education and lower income, especially for custodial mothers, which are indicators of higher divorce rates. Literature also shows that "after marital disruption, mothers tend to become less traditional in their attitudes about family life and more oriented towards paid employment...by serving as role models, employed, divorced mothers communicate nontraditional views to their daughters (630)." In terms of attitudes regarding divorce, children of divorced parents are "more pessimistic about the chance of life-long marriage and evaluate divorce less negatively than do other young adults (631)." Amato tests these causal relationships and finds it is unclear if causality can be truly established among the variables (632). Amato notes:

"For example, liberal attitudes towards divorce could be a cause or a consequence of cohabitation. Similarly, the wife's full-time employment could be a cause or a consequence of interpersonal behavioral problems. Rather than estimate the causal linkages among the explanatory variables, the present study has a more modest, but realistic, goal: to determine the extent to which the three types of mechanism (life course and socioeconomic variables, attitudes, and interpersonal behavior problems) individually and collectively mediate the association between parental divorce and offspring divorce (632)."

⁵¹ Amato, Paul R. 1996. "Explaining the Intergenerational Transmission of Divorce." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 58(3):628-640.

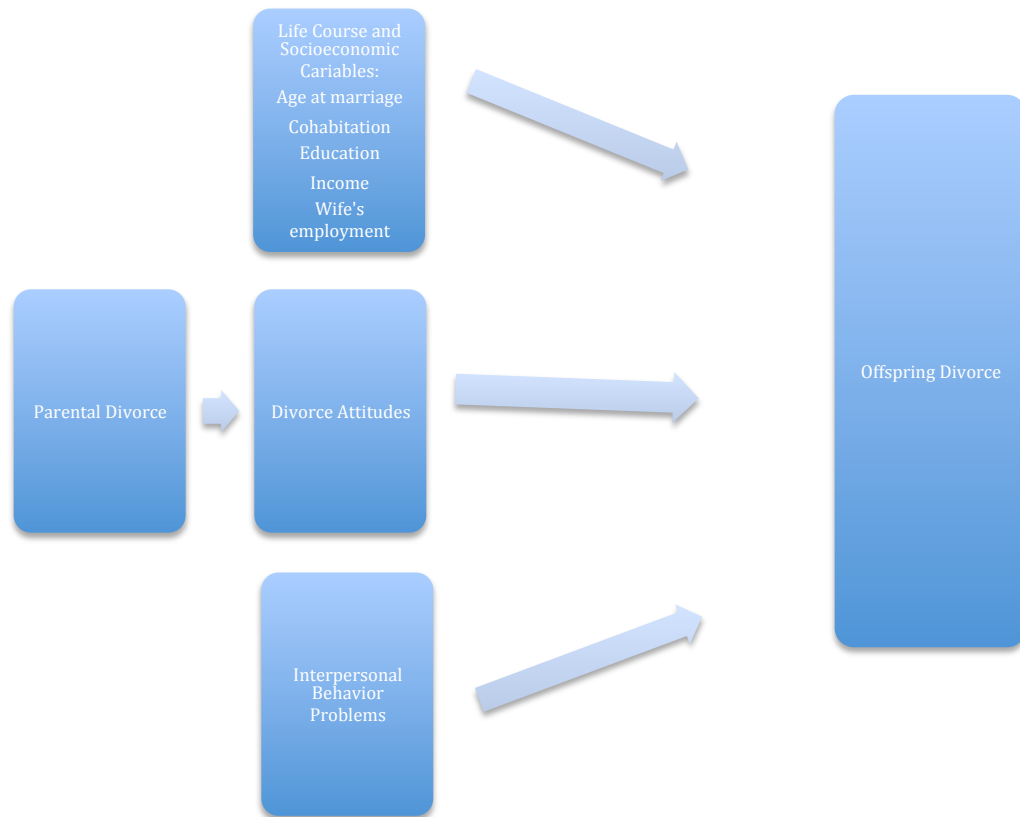


Figure 6-6: Causal Model of Parental Divorce, Mediating Variables, and Offspring Divorce by Amato (1996)⁵²

⁵² Ibid. p. 629.

The study finds that the risk of divorce increases when the parents of two spouses are divorced (see Figure 6-7: Parental Divorce). Their data shows that people's liberal attitudes towards divorce do not increase the risk of divorce significantly. The author concludes that, "the impact of parental divorce appears to operate largely through spouses' interpersonal behavior. Offspring whose parent divorce, compared with those whose parents remained continuously married, are more likely to have an interpersonal style marked by problematic behavior (problems with anger, jealousy, hurt feelings, communication, infidelity, and so on), and these interpersonal problems, in turn, increase the risk of divorce...These findings are consistent with the notion that adult children from divorced families are exposed to poor models of dyadic behavior and may not learn the skills and attitudes that facilitate successful functioning within marital roles...In Levinger's terms, therefore, parental divorce increases the risk of offspring divorce, not by weakening barriers to leaving the marriage, nor by increasing alternatives to marriage, but by making the relationship less rewarding (638)."

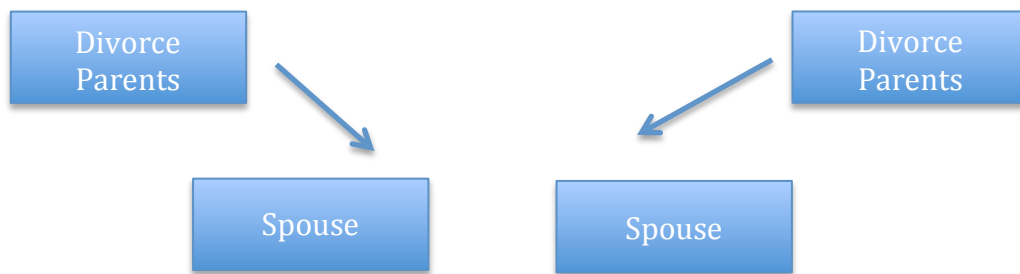


Figure 6-7: Parental Divorce

Works Cited

- Amato, Paul R. 1996. "Explaining the Intergenerational Transmission of Divorce." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 58(3):628-640.
- Morrison, Donna Ruane, and Mary Jo Coiro. 1999. "Parental Conflict and Marital Disruption: Do Children Benefit When High-Conflict Marriages Are Dissolved?" *Journal of Marriage and Family* 61(3):626-637.
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