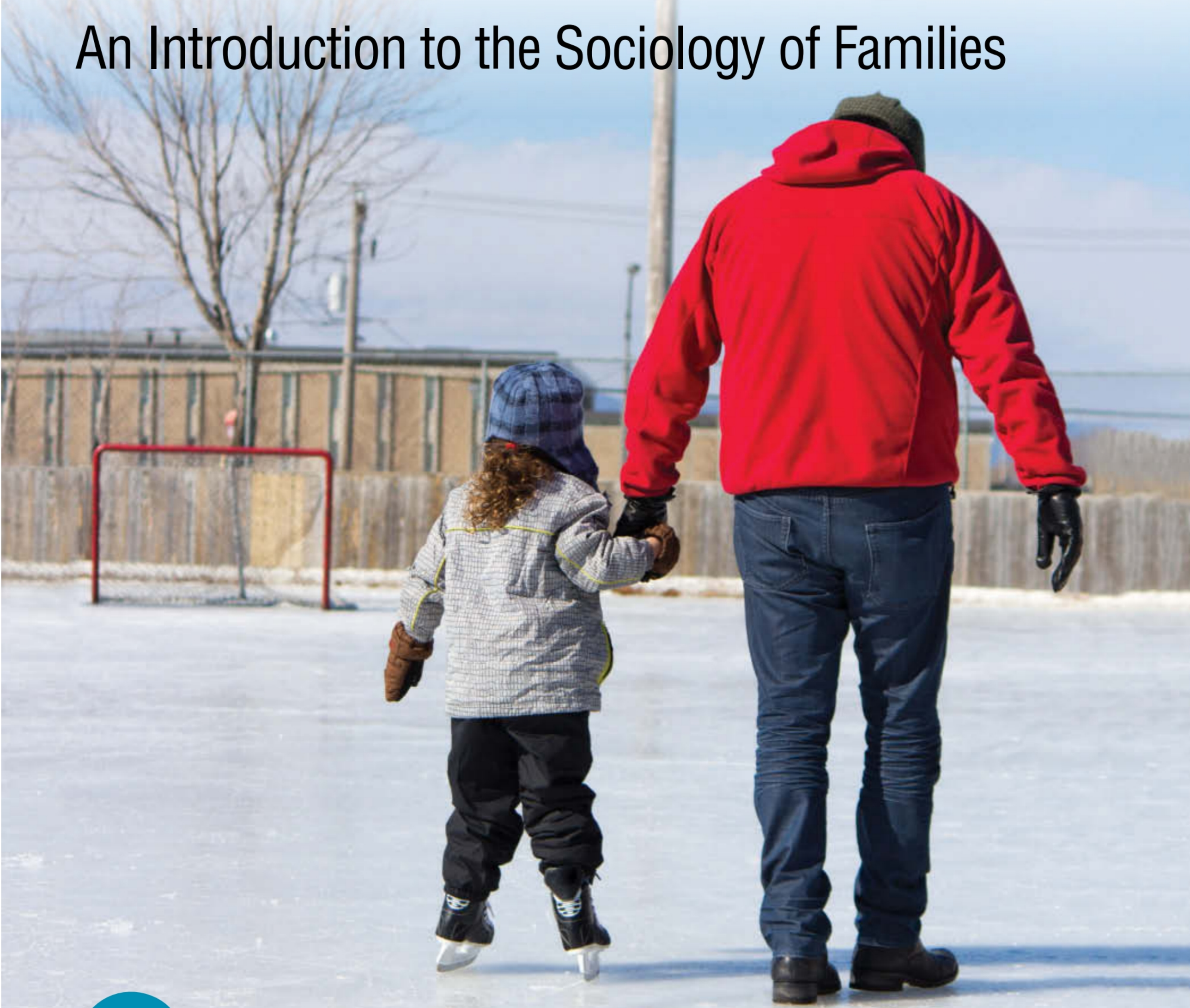
# CLOSE RELATIONS | 6th Edition

## An Introduction to the Sociology of Families



Susan A. McDaniel | Lorne Tepperman | Sandra Colavecchia

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## *An Introduction to the Sociology of Families*

SIXTH EDITION


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# Brief Contents

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# Contents

# Preface

As can be imagined, discussing Canadian family lives and variations is challenging. That said, this sixth edition of our text has remained the same in its essential focus. Readers have agreed with our approach, which is to stress family processes over structure, diversity over uniformity, and reality over myth. This is a Canadian book, rooted in sociological research from around the world and reflecting concerns of the twenty-first century. It continues to cover the most important topics in the family literature and, as before, ends with a look at the future of families. As in previous editions, we are grateful to anonymous reviewers who have suggested ways to enhance this sixth edition of *Close Relations: An Introduction to the Sociology of Families*. We have followed their helpful suggestions. We also brought aboard a third author for this new edition, Sandra Colavecchia.

## APPROACH

As recently as 40 years ago, books on the family were often simple "how-to" guides to family life. Sometimes called "matching, hatching, and dispatching" books, they often had chapters with titles such as "Dating and Courtship" and "Family and You." This approach seemed reasonable decades ago, since the ways in which people lived in families tended to be a little less diverse than it is now, and the diversity that did exist was not much portrayed nor celebrated in family texts. The supposed uniformity of families of four or five decades ago, on closer inspection, did not really exist. There are still books like this today, however, which tend to "sell" the so-called traditional North American way of family life. But, of course, shifting patterns and demands of work in postmodern societies create new kinds of family relations and forms, as we explore in this new edition.

Far more interesting than the regularities in close relations are the variations in family processes, forms, and structures. Twenty-first-century Canadian families are remarkably diverse. It was largely in response to this reality that we wrote the first edition of this text, and then revised it substantially with updated data and new insights about families in subsequent editions, and again in this edition. This text sets itself the task of being different from other family books in use today. Its focus is on applications and theory: what works for families, for us as individuals, and for society. Several themes continue to characterize our text.

- Families are immensely varied and characterized more by processes than by the forms they take.

- Family is becoming more, not less, important to us as individuals and to society as a whole. Recent research and theory have clearly shown that family health affects individual health and longevity and the population health of entire countries. Yet we are at a point in history when more Canadians are questioning how they might be defined by their intimate relationships and family ties and what these relationships will look like.
- Old expectations about family may no longer work. New solutions to family problems, based on what is known from family research, are offered here.
- There is a constantly changing interplay among families, school, and work. Family is both part of the problem and part of the solution, as shown in this text in a variety of ways.
- Historical changes and cross-national comparisons help us to better understand and interpret families today.

Throughout this text, we look at families as plural and diverse. We focus on families in terms of what they do rather than the shape they take.

## CANADIAN CONTENT

Speaking of diversity, this is a Canadian book intended primarily for Canadian students and classrooms. Although some findings based on American, European, or Asian research apply to Canadian situations, others do not. Our laws and policies are different, as are our histories, traditions, values, norms, and customs relating to family and marriage. At the same time, it is difficult to write a text based entirely on Canadian research. It must be noted, however, that both the volume of research on families in Canada and the scope of the topics covered have expanded enormously in recent years. To be useful, a Canadian text should rely on Canadian research and then incorporate findings from abroad. Thus, we attempt here a careful triangulation, using research from Canada, the United States, and the world. On the one hand, we try to offer international comparisons wherever they are important. On the other hand, we do not draw attention to the nationality of a finding if we think that doing so adds nothing to understanding the research on families.

## WHAT'S NEW?

Throughout the book, we've added coverage of the role of disability in families and issues facing Indigenous families. We continue to discuss cultural variations among families (including cultural influences on mate selection, attitudes toward marriage and family, relations between parents and children, and so on). Chapters 4, 7, and 10 have been significantly revised to reflect current trends in intimate relationships, gender and labour, and family transitions. We've also retained and updated our discussion of media and its impact on the family, as well as the effects of population aging

on families and our discussion of feminist theory. And of course, we've updated discussion, statistics, and references throughout the text and added new graphics, figures, and tables where appropriate.

## FEATURES

Each chapter begins with a chapter outline and learning objectives. Throughout the chapters, figures and tables cover key current data on the topics, erroneous beliefs, international findings, major Canadian findings, and key statistics. Each chapter includes a number of boxes that contain interesting facts and observations drawn from other studies. Study tools at the end of each chapter include a chapter summary, key terms with definitions, critical thinking questions, and an annotated list of relevant internet sites.

Chapter 1 begins with an exploration of the variety of interesting shapes and processes of families and family-like relationships. We explore competing definitions of family and how families are seen through theoretical lenses. We also consider different research approaches to family work and what they enable us to see.

Chapter 2 opens the door to what we now know about families in the past. It offers an exciting glimpse of family diversity from a historical perspective, including more on Indigenous families. This discussion provides context for today's debates.

Chapter 3 explores how families begin by taking a look at dating and mating. A renewed emphasis on ethnic and other cultural differences is offered here; attention is also paid to same-sex dating.

In Chapter 4, we examine close relations today and the changes that have taken place in intimate partnerships, living arrangements, families, childbearing, and sexuality.

There follows, in Chapter 5, a discussion of ways of being close, in which we consider points of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, particularly in relation to communication, trust, and sex.

People sometimes think of real family life as beginning with the entry into parenthood—a time fraught with many new changes and challenges. That is the subject of Chapter 6. In this chapter, we also propose several approaches to parenting that are supported by research and offer some solutions to parenting problems.

In Chapter 7, we discuss the intersections between paid and unpaid labour and address the challenges faced by Canadians attempting to juggle paid work with the caregiving of children and ill, injured, disabled, aging, and dying family members.

An understanding of violence and stress in families, the topic of Chapter 8, is crucial if we are to solve or even ameliorate these problems. We describe some of the contexts in which stresses occur for families, including poverty, racism, alcoholism, and the particular challenges faced by Indigenous families. We also give attention to policies that attempt to reduce the negative situations with which families must cope.

In Chapter 9, the trends, myths, causes, and consequences of relationship dissolution and divorce are considered. Evidence that contradicts some of what is commonly said about the fragility of close relationships is presented.

Chapter 10 explores the varied family changes that occur when individuals transition from their families of origin to their own relationships, living arrangements, and families. Transitions have become more numerous, both during childhood and adulthood, due to the increasing instability of intimate partnerships and social change in how people view personal fulfillment, sexuality, and intimate and family relationships.

Chapter 11 takes a glimpse at families of the future, emphasizing how families create their own futures, influenced by both the opportunities and the constraints of society.

## SUPPLEMENTS

These instructor supplements are available for download from a password-protected section of Pearson Canada's online catalogue (www.pearsoncanada.ca/highered). Navigate to your book's catalogue page to view a list of the supplements that are available. Speak to your local Pearson sales representative for details and access.

*Test Item File*. This test bank in Word format contains more than 700 multiple-choice questions, 70 short-answer questions, and 30 long-answer questions that correspond to the text. Designed to test students' comprehension of the material, this supplement contains the relevant page numbers for each question along with the correct answer for each multiple-choice question.

*PowerPoint Slides*. This practical set of PowerPoint slides outlines key concepts discussed in each chapter and includes selected tables and figures from the text. The slides have been specifically developed for clear and easy summary of themes, ideas, and definitions.

*Learning Solutions Managers*. Pearson's Learning Solutions Managers work with faculty and campus course designers to ensure that Pearson technology products, assessment tools, and online course materials are tailored to meet your specific needs. This highly qualified team is dedicated to helping schools take full advantage of a wide range of educational resources, by assisting in the integration of a variety of instructional materials and media formats. Your local Pearson Canada sales representative can provide you with more details on this service program.

# Acknowledgments

The decision to prepare a sixth edition of this text, though welcome, came when all three authors were deeply involved in other projects. So, time spent working on this new edition was not as relaxed as we might have imagined or hoped for. Instead, this edition demanded intense work, for we resolved to continue improving the text even though our time was limited.

To achieve this goal, we relied on a team of research assistants to help us, and we were lucky to get excellent support from them. Our first thanks go to doctoral student Sophia Jaworksi and freelancer Nicole Meredith, who helped us update and upgrade the sixth edition by collecting and drafting new materials for inclusion. Thanks also go to Maja Jovanovic, who provided additional research assistance. We also thank undergraduate Teodora (Teddy) Avramov, who provided new materials and excellent help with the editing. These fine assistants gave us a huge leg up in the revision, and we thank them for helping so enthusiastically. Thanks also go to Jeffrey Bingley, master's student, at the Prentice Institute for Global Population and Economy, University of Lethbridge, who helped greatly with this edition. We thank him with enthusiasm.

We also want to thank the people at Pearson for their wonderful support from beginning to end—starting first with acquisitions editor Keriann McGoogan, who was helpful and supportive throughout. Rachel Stuckey, who oversaw the revision, made insightful comments and repeatedly shepherded us back toward efficient completion. Thank you, Rachel, for your help and patience. Thanks also to Susan Broadhurst and Seilesh Singh, who skillfully copyedited and proofread the text. Your help is much appreciated.

Finally, we are grateful to those colleagues who acted as anonymous reviewers for this edition, including:

| | |
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| Kathleen Moss | Carleton University |
| Kristin Ross | Camosun College |

We hope our readers, new and old, will enjoy this edition of the text. Please let us know what you think about it.

**Susan A. McDaniel,**
University of Lethbridge

**Lorne Tepperman,**
University of Toronto

**Sandra Colavecchia,**
McMaster University

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# Chapter 1

## Families and Family-Like Relationships

### Definitions, Theories, and Research

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## CHAPTER OUTLINE

- Introduction
- The Importance of Family
- What Is Family?
- Defining the Family
- Murdock: Three Relationships
  - Census Family
  - Household versus Family
  - Process-Based Definitions
- Common Elements of Family Life
  - Dependency and Intimacy
  - Sexuality
  - Protection
  - Power
  - Violence
- Kinship, Clan, and Community
- New Ways to Understand Family Diversity
- Theoretical Approaches to Understanding Families
  - Theories of Family over Time

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1 Learn different ways to define family.

2 Identify the three key relationships in a nuclear family.

3 Understand the connection between household and census family.

4 Learn the advantages of a process-based definition of family.

5 Define the common processes-based elements of family life.

6 Recognize the importance of intimacy and dependency.

7 Recognize how sexuality is regulated and protected in families.

8 Compare different theoretical approaches to family life.

9 Examine the contributions to theory after functionalism.

10 Consider the life course approach to family life.

## INTRODUCTION

Among our deepest and most enduring human needs is to have someone close who understands and loves us and in whom we can confide and trust. In an uncertain and insecure world, we seek solace and hope in close relations, whatever form they might take.

Families belong to a group of relationships we characterize as "close," including intense friendships, love affairs, and long-term social or work relationships. These relationships are characterized by a strong attachment or bonding between the individuals. Not all family members feel strongly attached or bonded to each other. However, what people commonly imagine when they think of the word *family*—what the word *family* evokes in our culture—is attachment, sentiment, and emotional intensity. For most of us, families provide our most important relationships, our first connection to the social world, and a connection that remains important throughout our lives.

This text explores the changing dimensions of family relations and the ways in which they affect and are affected by school, work, society, and, perhaps most importantly, social changes. We examine the diversity of close relations and consider how families may be becoming more rather than less important in our lives.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY

Some people point to the upsurge in lone-parent households, increases in the number of children born outside legal marriage (Statistics Canada, 2012c), and high but declining divorce rates (Kelly, 2010) as evidence that the family is in trouble. At the same time, public opinion polls consistently find that family life is important to Canadians (Angus Reid, 1999; Vanier Institute of the Family, 2004)—perhaps increasingly important. Since the legalization of same-sex marriages in Canada in 2005, there have not been many polls asking Canadians about their views of families. Nonetheless, it is clear that despite negative trends in marriages, the majority of young Canadians still consider having a spouse and children an important aspect of their lives (Bibby, 2009).

People continue to value families because they provide emotional support and economic security in sharing resources. Perhaps most importantly, families give us grounding in an increasingly uncertain and chaotic world. The familiarity of family can be reassuring and, throughout our lives, gives us the confidence to explore new things.

## WHAT IS FAMILY?

Many people think of families as groups of people related through marriage, blood, or adoption. Yet is that description contemporary enough? Is it inclusive enough?

To some people, the answer seems obvious. They propose that the word *families* should be used only to describe "traditional families." Fifty-eight percent of Canadians feel that a traditional family—with one husband, one wife, and children—is the ideal (Bibby, 2004). Yet families have varied in form throughout history, still vary from one society to another, and are different in societies like Canada and the United States. There is, in this sense, no traditional family.

In this text we examine the ways in which families are now viewed and lived. We see that family changes are closely tied to events in society and to what is seen as a social problem or concern.

## DEFINING THE FAMILY

People tend to think that when they talk about family, everyone is talking about the same thing. "How's the family?" someone might ask, referring perhaps to one's spouse and possibly children. "I'm taking time now to have a family," says a woman to her co-worker. "My family came from the Ukraine," says another. A person with

## What Is Family?

Other things may change us, but we start and end with family.

—Anthony Brandt

Families are like fudge—mostly sweet with a few nuts.

—Author Unknown

To us, family means putting your arms around each other and being there.

—Barbara Bush

We cannot destroy kindred: our chains stretch a little occasionally, but they never break.

—Marquise de Sévigné

The family. We were a strange little band of characters trudging through life sharing diseases and toothpaste, coveting one another's desserts, hiding shampoo, borrowing money, locking each other out of our rooms, inflicting pain and kissing to heal it in the same instant, loving, laughing, defending, and trying to figure out the common thread that bound us all together.

—Erma Bombeck

Family life is a bit like a runny peach pie—not perfect but who's complaining?

—Robert Brault

What greater thing is there for two human souls than to feel that they are joined—to strengthen each other—to be at one with each other in silent unspeakable memories?

—George Eliot

A family is a unit composed not only of children but of men, women, an occasional animal, and the common cold.

—Ogden Nash

*Source:* www.quotegarden.com/family.html

human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) says, "My family are those around me now who support me." Immigration policy refers to "family reunification," where the concept of family has shrunk to include only close blood relatives and spouses and now includes fewer relatives. What do these images of family have in common? How differently do we see family?

Answers to questions about family are far from only academic. How family and other close relations are defined matters to us personally—to our values, our dreams, our hopes as individuals, and our identities.

Definitions are important also for our rights under the law and our claims to pensions, schools, child support, and many other social resources (Turner and West, 2014).

Debates rage about whether cohabiting spouses should have the same rights as married spouses, about parental rights for gays and lesbians, and about the financial responsibilities and the rights (to custody, access, and so on) of divorced people. Let's look now at some definitions of family.

## MURDOCK: THREE RELATIONSHIPS

For many years, sociologists used as a benchmark George Murdock's (1949: 1) definition of family as

> a social group characterized by a common residence, economic cooperation and reproduction [including] adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, own or adopted, of the sexually cohabiting adults.

By this definition, three basic relationships—co-residence, economic cooperation, and reproduction—must all be present to qualify a social group as a family. Murdock's definition excludes many groups that most of us consider families: childless married couples, for example, and single parents and their children. Same-sex unions are excluded, as are married couples who are separated. Celibate couples, according to Murdock, cannot be a family even if they have children, live together, and share other kinds of intimacy. (This means questioning a couple about their sex life to find out whether they and their children make up a family.) Two sisters who live together cannot be a family, according to Murdock. Thus, Murdock's definition does not seem to allow for the variability that exists among families living in Canada today.

## Census Family

Because the approach to defining family discussed previously is so limiting, Statistics Canada (2011a), the official census and survey agency for Canada, takes a much more inclusive approach. Statistics Canada defines family, for the Census, as comprising a married or a common-law couple (a couple can be opposite sex or same sex) with or without children, or a lone parent living with at least one child in the same dwelling. Married or common-law couple families with children refer to a family with at least one child age 24 or younger who is present in the home. This definition also includes children from either a current or a previous union, but excludes children who might have a permanent residence other than that of their parents at the time of the Census.

This definition is better, since it includes a wider variety of people. However, it still misses many groups that consider themselves families and are considered families by others outside of their household. This being so, many researchers have changed their focus to households for practical purposes.

## Household versus Family

Market researchers and census-takers often try to sidestep difficulties of definition by focusing on "households" as though they were "families." Doing so allows us to talk about changes in households and imply changes in close relations without necessarily addressing changes in families or family life. Yet this approach also presents problems. As pointed out by Eichler (1997), many families live in separate households but maintain ongoing family relationships. The prime example is divorced

families in which custody is joint or shared (Smart and Neale, 1999); the divorced parents and their child(ren) form at least one family and maybe more. For other trends in Canadian families, see "Six Trends for Canadian Families" on page 8.

A "household" may contain only one person or many unrelated members—roommates, boarders, or residents in a group home. Or it may contain a **nuclear family**, an **extended family**, or multiple families (e.g., co-ops, group homes, or families sharing living space to save money). Sharing living accommodations among generations is, as we shall see, a growing trend in Canada. Occasionally, these arrangements involve multiple families—parents, for example, with their parents or with their adult children's families. Conversely, a family may spread across many households, even households located in different countries. However, usually it is thought, whether true or not, that families and households coincide, resulting in "family households."

In the United States, family households are officially defined by the Bureau of the Census as married couples with or without children younger than 18 years or one-parent families with children younger than 18. As we shall discover, this definition may be problematic in that it excludes growing numbers of cohabiting couples. Family households also comprise other households of related individuals (e.g., two sisters sharing a household or a parent living with a child older than 17 years). Non-family households contain unrelated individuals or people who live alone. Canadian definitions from Statistics Canada and other official data-gathering organizations are similar but tend to be broader and more inclusive.

## Process-Based Definitions

The Vanier Institute of the Family (2013a) uses a function- or process-based definition of family in Canada. This definition looks at the functions families perform, such as providing emotional, financial, and material support to its members, care of each other, transmission of cultural values, and personal development. In using this type of definition, the Vanier Institute is defining families in terms of their main shared processes, rather than in terms of structural features that they may not—and increasingly do not—share. The United Nations (2016) uses a similar approach to defining families.

In Canada, serious consideration has been given to the question of what family is and what families are. The question has been taken up by family researchers, the Vanier Institute of the Family, and the Canadian Committee for the International Year of the Family, on which one of the authors of this book (McDaniel) served. The conclusion is that ultimately families are defined not by the shape they take but by what they do (Vanier Institute of the Family, 2013a). As Moore Lappé (1985: 8) puts it:

> Families are not marriages or homes or rules. Families are people who develop intimacy because they . . . share experiences that come . . . to make up their

> uniqueness—the mundane, even silly, traditions that emerge in a group of people who know each other. . . . It is this intimacy that provides the ground for our lives.

Over the past few decades, a broad process-based definition of family has become accepted by most Canadians (see Angus Reid, 1999; Vanier Institute of the Family, 2000, 2004, 2013a, 2016). Much of current Canadian family law and policy reflects the move toward inclusion of families that are diverse but similar in their processes, if not their structures (Kronby, 2010).

As one example, in 2003, Alberta passed the Adult Interdependent Relationships Act. The law defines relationship as "a range of personal relationships that fall outside of the traditional institution of marriage" (Alberta Justice, 2002). By doing so, it amends several statutes as they relate to people in non-conjugal relationships and recognizes financial and property benefits and responsibilities attached to these relationships.

Governments as well as various other organizations are trying to keep up with societal changes in the family. However, some groups oppose inclusive definitions, saying that changing the definition of family changes the nature of family itself. The diversity of families is controversial and continues to be a political issue, with groups squaring off in various levels of government. In 2016 alone, the family definition debate was part of a very divisive U.S. election. This and concerns in other countries led the United Nations Human Rights Commission to state that it is "not possible to give the concept (of family) a standard definition" (United Nations, 2016), and European policy vacillated on whether to validate or criminalize child marriage among arriving refugees, with human rights law being used both to support and to oppose such measures (BBC News, 2016; Charter, 2016; Parusel, 2016). Gay and lesbian families have also become a touchstone in the United States in many contemporary debates about what is and is not a family and what rights and entitlements those who are deemed family ought to have.

Remember that Statistics Canada, in its definition of census family mentioned earlier, includes same-sex families. Same-sex couples have had the option of legal marriage across Canada since 2005 and in several provinces prior to that. Similarly, immigration and growing ethnic diversity have challenged the ways in which we define family forms and maintain and connect in close relations. From the perspective of immigrants, the changing ways in which Canadians define and view family can also be challenging, and change tends to create stress between generations. How changes and adjustment are negotiated when differing cultural groups enter neighbouring space is the subject of acculturation theory. Overlapping interests in the definition of family matter greatly when policies and legislation are being planned, and these definitions may differ by cultural group.

How family is defined and thought about is a weather vane for social ideas and ideologies. The kind of research done in the study of families reflects the concerns of the day. We shall explore this idea in more detail later in this chapter.

## Six Trends for Canadian Families

- The number of common-law couple families increased 18.9 percent between 2001 and 2006, more than five times the increase for married-couple families. And from 2006 to 2011, the number of common-law couples rose again by 13.9 percent, more than four times the 3.1 percent increase for married couples (Statistics Canada, 2012a).
- In 2011, there were more census families that consisted of couples without children (44.5 percent) than those with children (39.2 percent; Statistics Canada, 2012a).
- Lone-parent families headed by men increased by 16.6 percent since 2001.
- In 2011, children age 4 years and younger were more likely to have a mother in her forties than they were in 2001.
- The proportion of children age 14 years and under who lived with common-law parents increased from 12.8 percent in 2001 to 16.3 percent in 2011.
- More young adults ages 20 to 29 years in 2011 were living in the parental home compared to 2001.

*Source:* Statistics Canada. 2012. *Family Portrait: Continuity and Change in Canadian Families and Households in 2006*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada. Catalogue no. 97-553-XIE.

# COMMON ELEMENTS OF FAMILY LIFE

The social groups we think of as families typically share many features, and that commonality can help us begin to understand the nature of families. Because families are extraordinarily diverse in the twenty-first century, it is difficult to generalize about them. However, it is possible to focus our attention on some common processes.

## Dependency and Intimacy

All close relations have in common attachment and some dependency or interdependency. This is not unique to families; most close friendships and social or work relationships also include a degree of emotional dependency, based on familiarity and expectations of reciprocity. However, family relations are special in that they tend to include long-term commitments, both to each other and to the shared family.

## Sexuality

Adult partners within families typically have, or are expected to have, a long-term, exclusive sexual relationship, whereas among circles of friends or co-workers, sexual relations are expected to be either absent or of short duration. In families, sexual relations are allowed and expected between spouses but banned between other family members (e.g., parents, children, and extended family members). Norms of sexual propriety are much stronger in families than they are in friendship or work circles.

Taboos against sexual exploitation of children exist to prevent sexual relations with a family member other than a spouse. Nevertheless, sexual abuse of children and elders does occur within families, as we know.

## Protection

Effective families keep their members under guard against all kinds of internal and external dangers. There is a clear cultural expectation that families will try to protect their members. Parents and relatives are supposed to keep children safe from accidents and household dangers, and away from drugs, alcohol, predators, and other forms of harm. As well, spouses are supposed to protect one another, and adult children are supposed to protect and help their parents. All this is an ideal. In reality, family members often fail to protect each other enough, and worse, some people neglect, exploit, or abuse family members. Others overprotect, hovering over children so the child has little independence. However, those who break the cultural rules face criticism and disapproval.

## Power

Households and families are small social groups whose members spend time together and depend on each other to fill both economic and social needs. There are large differences in power, strength, age, and social resources among members. Ideally, the more powerful family members protect the less powerful ones. However, it is this imbalance in power that makes **patriarchy**—control of the family by a dominant male (typically, the father)—a central fact in the history of family life in most known societies. Simply put, men have dominated because they possessed and controlled more of the resources. And, in much of family law and policy, this domination over family by men was seen as a right, occasionally even a duty.

Families have been seen historically in practice and occasionally in law as men's places of domination and control. The often-heard phrase, "A man's home is his castle," reflects this. As we will see in this text, feminist scholarship and theory have taken us a long way in understanding the multiple ways in which patriarchy has shaped, and continues to shape, families.

## Violence

Likewise, families—though idealized as peaceful and loving—are also marked by violence, perhaps to a higher degree than any other groups based on close relations. Violence has always existed in families, but in recent decades reports of violence within families have grown and received much more public and policy attention. The increase is likely the result of more reporting rather than an increase in violent acts. In fact, domestic violence against women has decreased since 2004 (Statistics Canada,

2016a). While a decrease is evident in the overall Canadian population, the rates of family violence among Indigenous people remains high. Usually the assailant is a spouse or boyfriend. As well, researchers estimate that one girl in four and one boy in ten is sexually abused before the age of 16, often by friends or relatives. Perhaps violence is more common in families than in other close relations precisely because, for many, the family is a place of intense emotions. Its patriarchal structure also is a contributing factor. Also, proximity makes it easy to inflict violence behind closed doors, and some family members are young or otherwise vulnerable and cannot easily escape.

## KINSHIP, CLAN, AND COMMUNITY

So far, we have focused on families as they exist normatively in our own dominant culture. However, families vary from one society to another, just as they vary within our own society. In many societies, families exist within larger social networks—in kinship groups and clans—and we cannot understand how nuclear families function unless we also understand their place in these larger networks and in the community at large. The members of the household, whatever form that may take—for example, husband and wife, parent and child, brother and sister—are integrated into a larger web of kin—uncles, aunts, cousins, grandparents, grandchildren—and their lives cannot be understood without reference to this larger web.

A **kinship group** is a group of people who share a relationship through blood or marriage and have positions in a hierarchy of rights over the property. The definition of a kin relationship varies among societies; kin relationships may also influence where the members live, whom they can marry, and even their life opportunities.

Some societies count relationships through the male line, so that any individual's relationships are determined by his or her father's relationships; we call such kinship systems **patrilineal**. Others count relationships through the female line; these are **matrilineal** systems. Still others count relationships through both lines; they are **bilateral kinship systems**.

The Canadian approach is mildly patrilineal, but of course this is not the case for all recent immigrants. In a patrilineal system, a woman has historically taken her husband's family name, not the reverse, and this name is the one that passes to the children. However, this is not the case everywhere in the West. In Quebec, for example, the law prevents women from taking their husband's name on marriage. And some couples invent new names by hyphenating their names or choosing a new last name that everyone takes. There are also examples of men taking their wives' last name on marriage.

Our family system overall tends to follow the Western pattern, in which property is also typically inherited along the male line. Where families settle down is traditionally determined by the husband's job, not the wife's, although this is changing as more women in families become the main earner. However, our society also has certain

matrifocal characteristics. Because women have been defined as the primary **kin-keepers**—the people who maintain family contacts—children tend to have stronger ties with their mother's kin than with their father's kin (Rosenthal, 1985; Thomson and Li, 1992: 15). Children also tend to preserve closer contacts with their mothers when the parents grow old (Connidis, 2001). When parents of grown children live separately, fathers are less often visited, called, and relied on than are mothers.

## NEW WAYS TO UNDERSTAND FAMILY DIVERSITY

In this text, we will propose repeatedly that some of the older ways of understanding family life do not serve us well in a diverse, fluid, and increasingly global society such as Canada. As a result, we have adopted some new approaches to studying family life.

The life course approach is one way of studying family change. The pioneering study by Glen Elder of children in the Depression (Elder, 1992) opened the door to this approach to studying families. This life course perspective follows families and individuals over time, studying a variety of social and interpersonal dynamics of close relations (linked lives) and how these change throughout lifetimes (Bengston, Biblarz, and Roberts, 2002; Hofferth and Goldscheider, 2016; McDaniel and Bernard, 2011; Thomson, Winkler-Dworak, and Kennedy, 2013). Over time, families change—change is the nature of families—to meet new needs, such as the arrival, care, or departure of children; aging; and other life course changes. These changes have effects on the entire family system: on relations between spouses, parents and children, and siblings; and on the family's relations with the "outside world," such as parents' changing relations with their employers and their careers (Kruger and Levy, 2001; Martinengo, Jacob, and Hill, 2010; McDaniel and Bernard, 2011; McDaniel et al., 2013). More on this later in the chapter.

One newer approach recognizes that, within any given family, different members have different interests and experiences. Because different family members often have different interests, it is often inappropriate to speak of "the family" as though it has a single interest and acts in a unified way. Gazso and McDaniel (2010b, 2014) have used a similar approach by interviewing multiple members of families who by choice are living in low-income circumstances. Much family research in the past was done from a male perspective (Eichler, 2001; Giddens, 1992; Luxton, 1997). Instead, what do family life and changes in close relations among adults look like from the viewpoint of children, for example? Markedly different, as we are now discovering (Mason, Skolnick, and Sugarman, 2003; McDaniel, Gazso, and Duncan, 2016). Children live in many and varied kinds of families while still dependent, and changes in family are happening both earlier and later in their lives than occurred for children in times past. Looking at the changes in close relations among adults from the viewpoint of children gives us a new and important vantage point on families. For example, adults tend to worry that divorce is negative for children, and it can be at times, but some children see advantages in having more than two parents.