What are Families?

- The Political Reality: Why Definitions Are Important
  - Family
  - Fictive Kin
    - Nonrelatives whose bonds are strong and intimate
  - Domestic Partners
    - Heterosexual or homosexual unmarried couples in long-term committed relationships

Families

- Images and ideals of the American family
- The mythical American family
- A new framework for understanding families
Images And Ideals

• **The Family as Haven:**
The family provides a safe-haven from the threats and dangers of the modern world.

• **The Family as Fulfillment:**
The family provides satisfactions unattainable through other social arrangements.

• **The Family as Encumbrance:**
A negative image of the family in which components of family life are viewed as inhibiting self-expression and personal freedom.

• **Images and Reality:**
Relations amongst family members are highly idealized and can lead to disappointment, guilt, or anger when reality falls short of expectations.

The Mythical American Family

**Myth of a Stable and Harmonious Family of the Past:**
Families of the past are idealized as being more stable and happier than today’s families. However, the family has faced adverse problems throughout history.

**Myth of Separate Worlds:**
The image of the family as haven emerged out of the belief that work and family roles were mutually exclusive. However the family is deeply imbedded in social and economic structures.
The Mythical American Family

- **Myth of the Monolithic Family Form:**
  Alleged ‘typical’ family: 1) a nuclear unit, 2) consisting of a mother, father and children, 3) has a sexual division of labor with a breadwinner father and full-time wife and mother. In reality this describes only 10% of American Families.

- **Myth of a Unified Family Experience:**
  Assumes that all family members have common needs, interests, and experiences. In reality each member experiences the family differently.

The Mythical American Family

- **Myth of Family Consensus:**
  Idealized image of the family that assumes families operate on the principles of harmony and love.

- **Family Decline as the Cause of Social Problems:**
  The suggestion that recent changes in family patterns is a primary cause of contemporary social problems.

A New Framework for Understanding Families

- **The Sociological Perspective:**
  - Focuses on the structural sources of family life
  - There is a close relationship between families and the larger society that shapes them
  - Social inequality is a key determinant of family diversity.
The Sociological Imagination

Comparative Perspective — Looking at other societies around the world or looking at a culture historically to see how others organize their social life and respond to its challenges

Ethnocentrism - The assumption that society’s way of doing things is always the best way
- Example: Comparative Infant Mortality Rates

The Sociological Imagination

An Empirical Approach — Answers questions through a systematic collection and analysis of data
- Quantitative Methods - Focus is on collecting data that can be measured numerically
- Qualitative Methods - Focus is on narrative description with words rather than numbers to analyze patterns and their underlying meanings

The Sociological Imagination

Theory — A general framework, explanation, or tool to understand and describe the real-life world
- Macro Level of Analysis - A general framework that attempts to understand societal patterns
- Micro Level of Analysis - A general framework that focuses on personal dynamics and face to face interaction
The Sociological Imagination

• An Overview of Family Theories
  - Structural Functionalism
  - Conflict Theory
  - Feminist Theory
  - Social Exchange Theory
  - Symbolic Interaction Theory
  - Developmental Theory
  - Life Course Perspective
  - Systems Theory

Family Theories

• Structural Functionalism
  - Macro Theory
  - Suggests that all social institutions including the family exist to fill a need in society

Family Theories

• Conflict Theory
  - Macro Theory
  - Emphasizes issues surrounding social inequality, power, conflict, and social change
Family Theories

- Feminist Theory
  - Macro Theory
  - Gender is the central concept for explaining family structure and dynamics

Family Theories

- Social Exchange Theory
  - Micro Theory
  - Individuals are rational and their behavior reflects an evaluation of costs and benefits

Family Theories

- Symbolic Interaction Theory
  - Micro Theory
  - Focuses on the social interaction between family members and other groups, concerned with the meanings and interpretations that people have
Family Theories

- Developmental Theory
  - Micro Theory
  - Family and family members go through distinct stages with its own set of tasks, roles, and responsibilities

Family Theories

- Life Course Perspective
  - Micro Theory
  - Examines how individuals lives change as they pass through the events in their lives, recognizing that many changes are socially produced and shared among a cohort of people

Family Theories

- Systems Theory
  - Micro Theory
  - Family members, and the roles they play make up a system, and this system is larger than the sum of its individual members
Families and Social Change

- A Snapshot of American Families Today and How They Have Changed
  - Specific Changes
  - Meanings and Implications

Families and Social Change

- Family Change as a Political Issue
  - Conservative Perspective

![Figure 1.2: Models of Family Change](source)

- Cultural and moral weakening
- Family breakdown, divorce, family decline
- Further absence, school failure, poverty, crime, drug use

Families and Social Change

- Family Change as a Political Issue
  - Liberal Perspective

![Figure 1.2: Models of Family Change](source)

- Changing economic structure
- Changing family and gender roles
- Diverse effects: poor versus productive children
Families and Social Change

- Family Change as a Political Issue
  - Feminist Perspective

**Figure 1.2:** Models of Family Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feminist</th>
<th>Models</th>
<th>仍未翻译</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of cooperation among community, family, and work</td>
<td>Families where adults are stressed and overburdened</td>
<td>Children lack sufficient care and attention from parents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The State and Family Policy

- Selective Programs - Persons need to meet some eligibility requirement to qualify for benefits
- Means-tested Programs – People have to be below a certain income to qualify for a social program
- Universal Programs - Social and economic programs that are available to all persons or families
  - Progressive Taxation - Those who earn more pay a higher percentage of their income in taxes

The State and Family Policy

- An Example of Selective Family Policy
  - Welfare Reform
    - Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
      - The principal cash welfare program Formerly known as Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC)
Themes of This Book

• Families Are Both a Public Social Institution and a Private Personal Relationship
  – Families of Orientation - The family into which you were born

Themes of This Book

• Families Are Both a Public Social Institution and a Private Personal Relationship
  – Families of Procreation - The family you make through partnership, marriage, and/or with children

Themes of This Book

• Families Are Both a Public Social Institution and a Private Personal Relationship
  – Human Agency - The ability of human beings to create viable lives even when they are constrained or limited by social forces
Themes of This Book

• Social Inequality Has a Powerful Influence on Family Life
  – Example: Ideology of “Family” Shapes Perceptions of Immigrant Children

Themes of This Book

• Family Policies Reflect Historical, Cultural, Political, and Social Factors
  – Government Regulation

Themes of This Book

• Family Policies Reflect Historical, Cultural, Political, and Social Factors
  – The Absence of Policies
Themes of This Book

- Understanding Families in the US Requires a Comparative Perspective
  - Example: Adolescence Among the Maasai