

Challenges to the Ideal Family Form

Family is not a static institution but one that is constantly being reworked, reshaped, reimagined and reenacted in complex and dynamic ways (Abbie Goldberg, 2010)

As Michael Sandel (2004) argued in his provocative essay, “The case against perfection,” as a society we are concerned about achieving perfection in many spheres of our lives, including ideal physical beauty enhanced through the use of surgery and drugs, athletic perfection created by performance enhancing substances, and “designer” babies produced through the application of new reproductive technologies. This concept of the pursuit of perfection can be extended to contemporary views of families as well. Just as our society has developed notions of perfect thighs, ideal faces, and endorsement-worthy athletes, it has developed a cultural image of a perfect or ideal family. Every society and historical era invents and legitimates a particular version of the family in terms of the identity of members, their rights and responsibilities toward each other and their children (Coltrane & Collins, 2001). In our own society, the concept of an “ideal” family form incorporates the traditional ideas about Dad as breadwinner and Mom as homemaker living with their children in a safe suburban setting surrounded by a manicured lawn and a white picket fence. The cultural embodiment of this “ideal” family is the nuclear family form consisting of two heterosexual parents who conceive and rear their biological children, and is the template against which other family forms are judged. According to a national survey in Canada, 80% of Canadians believe two married, heterosexual parents and their children constitute a family (Ipsos Reid Poll, September, 2010). Similar views prevail in the United States as well. Consider a US report *Counted Out: Same-Sex Relations and American’s Definitions of Family* by sociologist Brian Powell and his colleagues (2010) which also found that the most agreed-upon definition of a family was a husband, a wife, and their children. Fewer agreed that single-parent families, married couples without children, or cohabitating couples with children constituted a family.

Perhaps this notion has its roots in our distant past as anthropologist Meredith Small has noted:

There's something 'right' about a nuclear family, or so we think. Family, we're taught by culture and religion, 'should' be composed of a mother, father and at least two kids, preferably one of each sex. That ideal was recently underscored by finding a 4600-year-old mass grave in Germany containing thirteen individuals, many of them children. Poignantly, some adults were buried facing each other, with their arms entwined. But even more poignant, scientists from the University of Bristol and University of Adelaide used DNA analysis to link one couple with their two children, the oldest evidence of a nuclear family. This report tugs at our heart strings because it fits with what our culture has embraced as the definition of a family. As such, those bodies laid to rest together seem to confirm that the nuclear family is an ancient, and therefore evolutionarily selected, 'natural' human grouping (Small, December, 2008).

In spite of the fact that the heterosexual nuclear family is currently conceived of as both normative and ideal, and may have existed in ancient times, it is also true that it has been neither normative nor ideal in other times in human history. Even in our own contemporary society this particular family form is fast becoming less prevalent and coexists with a wide variety of other family forms. My goal of this book is to explore these other forms, which, in reality, reflect how many families in Western cultures live, and to explore not only the viability of these forms as contexts in which children are raised but to discuss their possible advantages as well. By fully embracing a range of family forms rather than presuming a single form is ideal, we can better align our social policies to support a diversity of child rearing environments. Both adults and children will benefit from our heightened appreciation of this rich array of family forms.

As a guide to the concept of the "ideal" family form that will be a recurring theme throughout the book, turn to Table 1.1 for a schematic summary of the contrasting ways in which the nuclear family form and other family forms differ from each other.

Table 1.1 Assumptions Underlying the "Ideal" Family Form versus Alternative Family Forms

| <i>"Ideal" family form</i> | <i>Alternative family forms</i> |
|----------------------------|--|
| Two parents | One parent, no parents, or multiple parents |
| Married | Cohabiting, planning to marry, staying single, or divorced |
| Heterosexual | Homosexual, bisexual, nonsexual, transsexual |
| Two biological parents | One or more social parent(s) through artificial insemination, surrogacy, adoption, foster care, or kinship (relative headed household) |
| Coresident | Part-time resident, shared custody, visitation access to children |
| One (male) breadwinner | Dual earner couple, job cycling in/out reverse role families (female as breadwinner; male as primary caregiver) |
| Child care only by parents | Childcare by parents and/or relatives, siblings, staff in child care centers or family day care homes, neighbors, members of childcare cooperatives, members of a collective community |

The Myth of the Historical Baseline

In spite of the current cultural endorsement of the nuclear family as the ideal family form, this has not always been the predominant family form or the ideal family form. We have constantly reinvented the ideal family form in response to changing historical circumstances. So why has this particular form emerged as the ideal family form today? Why has the nuclear family captured such attention and found so many champions? Part of the reason is that although change has characterized families over time, we have chosen a period in our history that we imagine or recall as being a particularly good period for families and then used this era as the baseline for comparisons with the contemporary state of the family. However, selection of a particular period in the past is a tricky business and typically misleading since it ignores the dynamic and changing nature of family forms. In fact, at numerous times in our past, many families failed to conform to the “ideal” family form even if at first glance they appeared to support it. Here is an example of how we can be led astray. It turns out that anthropologist Meredith Small’s discovery of support for the nuclear family in the mass grave in Germany was not clear-cut. Focusing attention on only the four related bodies that conformed to our ideal notion of the nuclear family and ignoring the other nine unrelated bodies is biased. As Small herself argued:

The presence of the other nine individuals underscores the fact that our ideas of the ‘ideal’ family are narrow, and just plain inaccurate. The thirteen bodies in that German grave are there not because they are a family per se, but because they were important to each other, connected in some way, either economically or emotionally, because that’s really what people do (Small, December 5, 2008).

Consider also the alternatives to the ideal family form that characterized families during the past two centuries in the United States. As legal historian Stephan Sugarman (2008) observed,

During times of slavery in America, slave couples were forbidden to marry. While slaves who were fathers worked, they were plainly not in the paid labor force, and mothers who were slaves were hardly allowed to remain at home to care for their young. Even for white families, it has been recognized for ages that the ‘ideal’ was not always possible. Sometimes the man of the house died young, say, in a farming or industrial accident, leaving his wife and children behind. Sometimes the mother died, perhaps in childbirth, and was survived by her husband and children. Widowers generally were expected to remarry, if possible, thereby creating a new stepfamily with the parents still playing traditional roles. Widowed mothers were encouraged to remarry as well, although this was understood to be less likely to occur. Moreover, in earlier days in America, when so many people were recent immigrants, a large share of the population was poor, and vast numbers lived on farms or were employed in factories. In those families, many women worked at jobs beyond childrearing at home. In addition, multigenerational living arrangements were common, with sons or daughters bringing their spouses into the family home to live with those who would become the grandparents of their children. Furthermore, as sharp downturns frequently struck the economy, there were many desperately poor families with no regularly employed members. And in some eras these families were consigned to live in communal ‘poorhouses’ or ‘workhouses,’ rather than their own homes. Additionally, even putting joblessness aside, throughout the first half of the twentieth century, candid observers recognized that considerable deviance from the preferred

societal norm was the reality. Some fathers simply abandoned their families, leaving their wives and children in miserable conditions. Some couples divorced, often to the considerable detriment of wives and children. Some unmarried women became mothers and sometimes lived with men who may or may not have been the fathers of their children (pp. 232–233).

Clearly, the concept of the nuclear family as a cultural ideal or a common family form is not supported by the historical record. Instead it is a relatively recent ideal that is centered in the 1950s. As Sugarman further observed:

By the 1950s, American law and policy, largely centered on a single vision of the ‘ideal’ family, composed of a married man, who worked in the paid labor force, and his wife, who spent most of her time in their home caring for their biological children. Americans were strongly encouraged to conform to that norm. Other groupings of adults and children – even if they were considered families by some people – were generally disfavored by the predominant social values (and by the public programs) of the time (2008, p. 232).

To idealize a particular family form that was championed in a single era and to assume that it is an ideal family form that is historically sanctioned is at least misleading or more likely downright inaccurate. Family historian Stephanie Coontz captured the central fallacy of our assumption about the historical longevity of the “ideal” family form in the title of her book *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (1992). In this myth-busting volume Coontz, by a careful historical tour of family forms over the last several centuries, documents not only that the “ideal” nuclear family form existed only briefly in the 1950s and 1960s but also that a wide variety of forms were common in our past. Moreover, Coontz underscores that the cultural endorsement of the 1950s family form is itself fraught with misconceptions. Yes, men worked, women stayed at home and looked after children and divorce rates were low, but all was not tranquil and peaceful in these supposedly ideal families. There was marital conflict, spousal and child abuse, maternal depression and despair, albeit masked by public displays of contentment and conformity that allowed the myth of this form of family to be perpetuated. Even the Nelson family who played the idealized nuclear family in the popular TV show *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* in the 1950s and 1960s were later revealed to be fraught with father–son conflict and resentment in real life (Weinraub, 1998).

Nor is it just legal scholars and historians who have warned against acceptance of this very parochial and historically misleading view of the ideal family. Family therapist Froma Walsh has eloquently noted that our conception of family is too narrow:

It is unfortunate when public discourse frames as ‘profamily’ those who adhere to the 1950’s nuclear family as the sole standard for healthy families while denouncing as ‘anti-family’ those who hold a pluralistic view. Abundant research shows that children can be raised well in a variety of family arrangements. We need to be mindful that families in the distant past and in cultures worldwide have had multiple, varied structures and that effective family processes and the quality of relationships matter most for the well-being of children (Walsh, 2006, pp. 31–32).

If our conception of family is too restricted and too exclusive, what should it be?

From Past to Present

In recent decades, new family forms have become more common and are challenging this definition of an “ideal” family. Many demographic and technological trends have contributed, among them the increase in divorce and remarriage, changes in maternal employment patterns, increased prevalence of same-sex parents, new routes to parenthood permitted by alternative methods of reproduction, new family models provided by Asian and Hispanic immigrants, and increased contact with family variations in other cultures around the globe. As we will see in this book, families with porous boundaries that allow a wide range of extended family and members of the community to contribute to caregiving and other responsibilities of family life were the historical norm and provide models for contemporary families as well. This book provides both an overview of some of these changing family forms and a critical examination of how they affect children’s social, emotional, and cognitive development.

Meet the Families

Let us introduce some families. Some meet the common definition of the “ideal” – nuclear – family, but many do not. Instead families come in many forms.

The Evans: The “Ideal” Nuclear Family

Ellen and Tom Evans are married and live in a suburban home in a safe neighborhood. They both have good jobs. Ellen is a nurse and Tom is a high school teacher. They have raised two biological children who are now teenagers. When the children, Mike and Lisa, were in elementary school, Ellen stayed home to look after them, and she returned to her nursing career when the children were in their teens. They viewed it as important to manage child-rearing by themselves without the use of child care or nannies. They enjoy material comforts beyond Tom and Ellen’s own European American, middle-class origins. Mike and Lisa, are good kids, doing reasonably well in school, who aspire to go to college and become successful professionals. The Evans represent the “ideal” American family, a standard against which other family forms are judged. As the Evans family illustrates, the assumption is that the ideal family form for successfully raising children should consist of two parents who are heterosexual, married, and residing in the same household. They are the biological parents of their teenage children and Tom is the major breadwinner especially when the children were young, while Ellen was the stay-at-home caregiver during the children’s formative years.

The Millers: The Dual Career, Outsourcing Family

Another family, the Millers, represents another version of the typical contemporary American family but one that nonetheless departs from the ideal family form. Even though Loretta Miller wanted to be a stay-at-home mom, she and her husband, Steve,

decided that they need two paychecks to manage financially. Loretta is a teller at the local credit union while Steve, a certified plumber, works for a national plumbing company. They reluctantly enrolled their children, two-year-old Stacey in child care and five-year-old Rick in an after-school program to make it possible for both parents to work, an adaptation to the economic demands of modern family life. Just as the wealthy as well as many poor families of the past have done, the Millers “outsourced” child-rearing assistance in the form of child care and after-school care.

Baker–Ashe: The Cohabiting Family

One of the fastest rising family forms is the cohabiting couple who chose not to marry but share a residence and raise children together. Elaine Baker and John Ashe are a typical contemporary cohabiting couple. They have lived together for five years and have two-year-old and four-year-old sons. Perhaps they will marry but for now they are content with their arrangement, except that their tax bill is higher due to their single tax filing status. They both work full time. Elaine is a dental technician and John is a real estate agent. As in the case of many families with small children, they rely on professional child care to attend to their children during the day since their extended family is too far away to offer aid with the caregiving duties. Elaine envies her African American coworker who relies on her extended kin to help out with child care.

The Winstons: The Single-Mother-by-Choice Family

Mary Winston and her seven-year-old son Sam represent another form of family increasingly found in many North American neighborhoods. Mary, a college educated 39-year-old account executive at an advertising firm is a single mother by choice. When she was 30, she decided to start a family but had no husband in her sights so decided to go ahead and start a family with the “help” of a friend. She enjoys being a parent but has no immediate plans to get married. Instead she relies on her parents and other relatives including her sisters and an older brother as well as friends and neighbors for child care advice and assistance with child rearing and child care. Her sister Janice is a regular member of the household and often moves in and takes over when Mary has an out-of-town business trip. Mary enrolled her son Sam in a community Little League team as well. Mary is a member of the national organization of like-minded women, “Single Mothers by Choice,” which offers support and opportunities to share with other older single mothers. Although Sam has only one mom, he has lots of other people who play an active “parenting” role in his life, especially his aunt Janice.

The Fuller Family: The Adolescent Mother Family

Not all single mothers arrive in this position by choice. Sometimes pregnancies are unplanned, especially among young women like Jackie Fuller, who dropped out of high school after her daughter Elle was born. Elle’s father, a high school senior, was

unable to provide much financial support and left the day-to-day caregiving to Jackie. Fortunately, Jackie eventually completed high school and now works part time to support herself and her daughter. Like many single mothers, she relied on government support to help her out financially and enrolled Elle in the local Head Start program. She expects to enroll in community college to improve her computer skills so she can be independent. Her extended family, especially her aunt and her mother often share in caring for Elle.

The Tremblay–Bailey Family: The Stepparent Family

For some, single motherhood follows divorce. Bethany Tremblay was a divorced single parent of six-year-old Eric for several years after her marriage collapsed. Then she met Oscar Bailey who was also divorced with joint custody of two children – nine-year-old Melissa and seven-year-old Frank. After a year of dating, they decided to marry and form a new combined stepfamily with their three children. Life is complicated for the new family but they are managing to coordinate their children's visits and stayovers with Eric's father and with Oscar's ex-wife who has custody of Melissa and Frank about half the time. These children have many parental figures in their lives as well as multiple sets of grandparents. Their arrangement is far from what is considered the "ideal" family form, but as we will see this type of family, including the children, can thrive in spite of the challenges and bumps that they encounter along the way.

Standish–McCloud: The Lesbian Parent Family

Down the block from the Evans and the Millers, the Standish–McCloud family resides. This family also has two children, Michele and Eric, but instead of a mom and dad, they have two mothers, Janice and Darlene. Janice is a sales representative for a pharmaceutical firm and Darlene is a librarian at an elementary school. They live in Vermont and have been married since 2009 and have been partners in a civil union since 2000. This couple achieved parenthood by adopting their children. Michele who is now 12 years old, was adopted from China when she was 2 years old, and 10-year-old Eric, her younger brother, was adopted from Russia when he was just six months old. Janice and Darlene have told their children about their origins and have bought books and videos to help them understand their cultural heritages. They have pictures of their birth parents in their house and plan to take a trip to see their birth place and meet their biological parents when their children are a little older. Janice's brother lives close by and he often comes to visit to play with the children and babysit to allow Janice and Darlene some time away from the children.

The Lewin Family: The Reverse Role Family

Meet the Lewin family who are unusual in a different way. Both Mary Helen and Todd are computer software engineers but after the birth of their daughter, Pamela, Todd became a full-time stay-at-home dad. Mary Helen continued to work

full time. They are pleased with the arrangement even though Todd initially got some strange looks from the mothers of the other toddlers at the playground and sometimes his former coworkers gently kid him about his choice to be a stay-at-home caregiver. However, that situation was short lived and now Todd is part of a neighborhood parent-toddler play group where parents exchange child-care advice and babysit for each others' children. Todd is also an active member of an on-line stay-at-home dads network, which has been a source of emotional support as well as practical parenting advice. Pamela has a close relationship with both of her parents. Todd enjoys his role as the primary caregiver, and Mary Helen is pleased to be moving up in her software company. The Lewins think that their unorthodox family arrangement is good for all of them, especially with the help of their neighborhood and virtual social networks.

The Darcys: The Assisted Reproductive Technology Family

Get acquainted with another family, the Darcys. After being married for nearly a decade but without any success in starting a family, Joan and Harry Darcy discovered that they could not have biological children due to some medical issues. Harry discovered that he had a low sperm count and Joan had a scarred uterus due to an earlier infection. So they decided to have children the new fashioned way with aid of the Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ART). They contracted with a trusted family friend, Chad, who agreed to be a sperm donor and a fertility clinic to provide a surrogate mother, Marion who received an egg from Joan. They now have three children using the same surrogate, Marion, and their sperm donor friend Chad. Both Marion and Chad are regular participants in the Darcy family; they often babysat when the children were growing up, continue to join family celebrations, and are regularly consulted on child rearing dilemmas and even some medical and school decisions. Their involvement clearly extends well beyond their biological roles in helping to start a family; they are integral partners in the life of the Darcy family. Both the Darcys and Marion and Chad are satisfied with the arrangement. It has made the parenting tasks less demanding for Joan and Harry and the children enjoy close relationships with all of these adults and love having lots of people to help them with their school work and teach them new things. Neither Chad nor Marion have children of their own but gain lots of pleasure in being part of the Darcy family.

The Dorados: The Extended Family

Maria and Jose Dorado are first-generation Mexican immigrants who live in Los Angeles, California. Maria works part time and Jose holds down two jobs – a daytime construction job and part-time evening work as a security guard – in order to support their four children, who range in age from 8 to 16. They live in a modest home on an urban street with lots of traffic and not much green space for recreation; they worry about the crime rate, homeless vagrants, and the gangs in their part of the city. In spite of their economic struggle, the Dorado family enjoys a high level of support from their extended family and community. Their home is located close to their jobs, and they are part of a tightly knit Mexican American community.

Many members of their extended family – grandparents, siblings, nieces, nephews, and cousins as well as nonkin compadres – live in the same neighborhood, and they frequently visit one another. They help a lot with money when things get tight, and, of course, look out for the children. They do most things together as a family such as taking walks, going to movies, socializing, and attending church. The older Dorado children sometimes serve as language brokers for their parents and experience a sense of pride and an increased sense of self efficacy as a consequence of helping their less language-proficient parents deal with tax officials or the educational and medical systems.

The Benningtons and the Winfields: The Intergenerational Families

As a rule in Western cultures, individuals of different generations often live separate lives. Unlike the Dorado family, many grandparents often reside in different parts of the country from their children and grandchildren. Many older people choose to live in “seniors only” residential settings where children – their own grandchildren or anyone else’s children – are not part of their daily lives. But older and younger generations need not live apart. Take Hope Meadows, for example, an innovative residential community in Illinois where multiple generations live in the same community and which explicitly encourages cooperation and contact across generations. Both Jennifer and Joe Bennington, a retired couple in their 70s with grown children who live in distant parts of the country, and Trish and Timothy Winfield, a couple in their mid 30s who are raising two adopted foster children are residents of Hope Meadows. This unusual residential program is a three-generation living arrangement in which children, parents, and seniors form a community that benefits all of the participants. In this community, seniors like the Benningtons are present and actively involved as playground supervisors, tutors, or crossing guards for the children of the community. Some are around just to listen to children and offer support and advice. Parents such as the Winfields benefit, too, by gaining support and wisdom from older and more experienced individuals in the same community. And the seniors feel useful, needed, and appreciated. This multigenerational community model is an example of how individuals at different life stages even though they are unrelated can form bonds and function as a child-centered cooperative community.

So far, we have met a diverse set of families and, with the exception of the Evans family, these families are departures from conventional views of the “ideal” family as two heterosexual parents who conceive and raise their biological children largely by themselves. A common characteristic that unites these other types of families is not only their clear violation of the traditional view of the nature of a family but the commitment to open or porous boundaries between parents and other individuals including extended family members, nonbiologically related community partners such as older children, friends, or mentors. This community-based cooperative model of caregiving can assume a variety of forms, but the argument is that it is a central aspect of alternative forms of family. So do the Evans, the “ideal” family, enjoy a better quality of life, tighter family bonds, and better adjusted children than the other families that we have met? The answer is not as simple as you might think.

A closer look at the Evans suggests that the traditional model of family is not necessarily the best one. When we examine the Evans family more closely, we find that Ellen and Tom are struggling to balance work and family obligations as they try to maintain their comfortable lifestyle. As in many “ideal” families, there are conflicts over the distribution of household labor. While Tom does some household chores, Ellen often feels that he does not do enough. She sometimes thinks that she is doing two shifts as Arlie Hochschild documented in *The Second Shift*, in which she argued that many contemporary mothers work a shift outside at a job as well as a second shift at home. Their closest relatives live in another state, and while they do get away for the occasional dinner or concert, without grandparents to step in, this means babysitters and more expense. They have acquaintances but few close friends in their suburban commuter community to whom they can turn for advice or help with their children. “It makes me sad that our kids don’t see their grandparents regularly,” says Ellen. “It’s like they hardly know them.” Although not divorced, Tom confesses that, “we have talked about it on and off but so far we are holding things together.” Ellen and Tom value family activities, but most of the time they do things separately from their children. “We each like to do our own thing, even though Mom and Dad want us to do stuff together, I’d rather spend time with my friends,” says 14-year-old Mike. The Evans, like many modern families are struggling to do it all by themselves and recognize that some extra help from grandparents or even neighbors might make family life more manageable. The Evans meet the definition of the “ideal” family but perhaps this form is not all that it is supposed to be.

Although there are lots of traditional and supposedly “ideal” families who are doing fine, many like the Evans are struggling. The example of the struggles experienced by this family argues for a reevaluation of alternative family forms to see what the Evans of our country can learn from these other models of family. As family historian, Stephanie Coontz (2010) has argued,

It would be a terrible mistake to delude people into believing that if we could only restore the family values and forms of the past we would not have to confront the sweeping changes America is experiencing in gender and age relations, racial and ethnic patterns, the distribution of jobs and income, and even our experience of time and space. There are many historical precedents of families and communities reorganizing themselves in response to social change. But these examples should inspire us to construct new family values and social support institutions rather than trying to recreate some (largely mythical) “traditional” family of the past (2010, pp. 46–47).

So the aim is to move beyond the Evans and see how other family forms can work to the benefit of parents and children alike. In this book, I will document that children who grow up in the other versions of family that I described are not necessarily suffering negative consequences but, in fact, may even be as well off as children in “ideal” families. The empirical evidence shows that children in these alternative families can thrive socially, emotionally, and intellectually. Part of the reason that children succeed in a variety of family forms is that families do not exist in a social vacuum nor do families function as isolated self-sufficient units. Instead, we need to closely examine, learn from, and endorse alternative family forms and recognize that caregiving and the responsibility for the socialization of children is a community-based cooperative enterprise. Parents are less physically and emotionally taxed by

having others available to share child-care responsibilities and to offer advice and guidance in the face of child-rearing challenges. And adults who form this network of caregivers and socializers benefit too. Adult caregivers who are active participants in cooperative family forms experience a heightened sense of self-worth and increased morale and receive affection and caring from their young charges. Even younger caregivers such as siblings benefit from their caregiving experiences. In light of the potential benefits of alternative family forms for children and adults, it is worth looking more closely at these family forms. In reality, as a society we have already moved beyond the ideal of the isolated, self-sufficient nuclear family, and all the forms of families introduced earlier rely on others to assist in the care and socialization of their children.

How Did We Get Here? The Changing Historical Context of Families

To understand how the myriad of family variations we have just encountered evolved, let's look at the demographic changes that have occurred in family life over the recent past. Central to the theme of this book is the view of the family as an institution that is not static but always changing and evolving. In recent years, there have been a variety of social changes in American society that have had a profound impact on families. According to Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), children and families are embedded in a "chronosystem," meaning that they are affected by changes that occur over time. American families today differ from American families in earlier times – even a decade or two ago – in a variety of ways.

One change is that more mothers are working outside the home. In 1968, only 20% of mothers with a child under five years of age were in the labor force; in 2002, this number was close to 60% and by 2011 nearly 64%. For mothers with children of all ages over 70% are now in the labor force (Current Population Survey, 2002; U.S. Bureau of Labor, 2009, 2012). This shift is especially profound among White women. Historically, African American women, often due to economic necessity have participated more fully in the work force (Lee & Mather, 2008). The sharp rise in the number of working mothers is, in part, influenced by the changing economic landscape that requires two paychecks to make ends meet. Even in the Evans household, our example of the "ideal" family, once the children reached adolescence, Ellen joined her husband Tom in the paid work force. At the same time, fathers are playing a more active role as caregivers for their infants and children in part as a response to the increase in maternal involvement in the work place. Recall the Lewin family, in which Todd is the main caregiver while Mary Helen is the family wage earner.

Another change is that couples are waiting until they are older before they get married and have their first child. Many couples such as the Baker–Ashe family are simply living together and raising children without taking the formal step of marriage.

Opportunities to become parents have also expanded. A century ago, the new routes to parenthood were not available to infertile couples, nor were the opportunities for same-sex couples to openly raise children. Infertile couples such as the Darcys or same-gender couples can now become parents through a variety of ART. Similarly, changing attitudes and laws permit single gay and lesbian individuals as

well as same-sex couples to adopt children. This was the pathway taken by Janice Stadish and Darlene McCloud, a lesbian couple who adopted children from other countries. The number of single-parent families has increased because more women are choosing to have babies without waiting until they marry. In 1960, there were 22 births per 1000 unmarried females; in 2002, the figure was 44 births (Children's Defense Fund, 2004). Today, births to unmarried women account for 41% of babies born in the United States (Child Trends, 2012a). As in the case of Mary Winston, an increasing number of unmarried women in their 30s are single mothers by choice, while others such as Jackie Fuller became a single mother in her late teens, an unplanned transition to motherhood.

Another reason that there are more single-parent households today is that the divorce rate has risen. Between 1960 and 1980, the divorce rate doubled. Although it has not risen since, demographers estimate that 40–50% of marriages today will end in divorce and 60% of these divorces will involve children (Amato, 2010). One third of children in the United States will also experience the remarriage of one or both of their parents, and 62% of remarriages end in divorce. As in the case of the Tremblay–Bailey stepfamily, more parents and children are undergoing multiple marital transitions and rearrangements in family relationships.

The Dorado family who migrated to the United States from Mexico represent the changing cultural diversity of the United States due to the waves of immigration that have resulted in new cultural perspectives concerning the form and functioning of families. Finally, due to advances in both cross-cultural work as well as our increased awareness of other cultures through travel, documentaries, and the increase in cross-country contact through the new media such as the Internet, we are reminded of the variety of ways in which families are organized around the globe.

In each chapter, as we discuss different family forms, we will examine the demographic changes in these forms so we can trace their fluctuating prevalence across different historical eras and explore how these changes in the family have affected parenting and child development. This will underscore that the assumption of an “ideal” family form is, in fact, a historical and cultural invention.

Beyond the Nuclear Family: The Interdependent Model of Contemporary Parenting

In spite of the endorsement of the nuclear family and its anointment as the model of the “ideal” family form, which operates as an independent socialization unit, the modern family is increasingly an interdependent family which relies on the cooperation of others to care for and raise their children. In light of the trends that we have just discussed such as the increase in mothers employed outside the home, the rise of nonstandard work schedules and the proliferation of single-parent families, it is increasingly difficult to “go it alone” and raise children without the cooperation of other individuals and institutions outside the family. As psychologist Jean Rhodes in her book *Stand by Me* (2002) notes, “middle-class parents have purchased adult contact and protection for their children through investment in after school programs, sitters, athletic clubs, music lessons, summer camps and even psychotherapy” (p. 13). Similarly, sociologist Arlie Hochschild in her recent book *The Outsourced Self*

(2012), documents how many aspects of contemporary family life – from renting a womb to employing a nanny to hiring a professional children’s party planner – have been turned over to nonfamily members. By restricting our focus only to the parent–child relationship, we fail to recognize other ways that parents actively manage their children’s social and intellectual opportunities outside the family and that other socialization agents influence children’s development. Parents actively facilitate children’s access to physical and social resources outside the family such as schools, religious institutions, social clubs, and sports activities (Furstenberg, Cook, Eccles, Elder, & Sameroff, 1999; Parke et al., 2003). They serve as regulators of opportunities for social contact with extrafamilial social and academic partners such as teachers, coaches, and play partners. They partner with outside agents and organizations and enlist their aid in the socialization of their children. Some parents such as the Evans purchase assistance in the form of babysitters and music lessons. Others, including the Millers, outsource child care to a local child-care center, while Jackie Fuller enrolled her child in the local Head Start program. The Dorado family relies on extended family members to help care for their children; the Winfields rely on older unrelated residents in their community to provide after-school supervision and homework assistance. In all forms of families, multiple players and social organizations are involved in children’s lives, even though the nature of the outsourcing varies across families. The key to understanding how different family forms succeed in raising well-adjusted children lies in a fuller appreciation of the roles played by these outside agents. For example, the success of the Millers, a family with two working parents, is highly dependent on their access to affordable and adequate quality child care and after-school care for their two-year-old and five-year-old children, while the Standish–McCloud’s brother who helps with child care makes life easier for these parents and their children. Or consider Mary Winston, a single mom, who is not athletically inclined. To ensure her son’s physical and social development she, enrolled Sam in Little League baseball so that coaches and peers could play a part in her son’s socialization into the world of sports. Although contacts with nonfamily sources such as peers, teams, and schools increases as children develop, parents remain important and continue to play an important regulatory role as gatekeepers and monitors of children’s informal and institutional social contacts, even in adolescence (Mounts, 2002) (Figure 1.1).

Many Forms of Shared Child Responsibility

In response to the decrease in parents’, especially mothers’, time available to care for children’s needs, a wide variety of institutions have emerged to share in the care and socialization of children. The proliferation of child-care centers, after-school programs, boys and girls clubs, and mentoring organizations is, in part, a response to the growing demand for assistance with the care, education, and protection of children. At the same time this represents the continuation of a long history of outsourcing family responsibilities to other institutions, such as schools for education and religious organizations for spiritual guidance and social support. Even the feeding role of the mother has been outsourced before: wet nurses were common among the wealthy in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In France, for example, Louis XIV had a wet nurse as an infant as did many wealthy families in Great Britain. In the

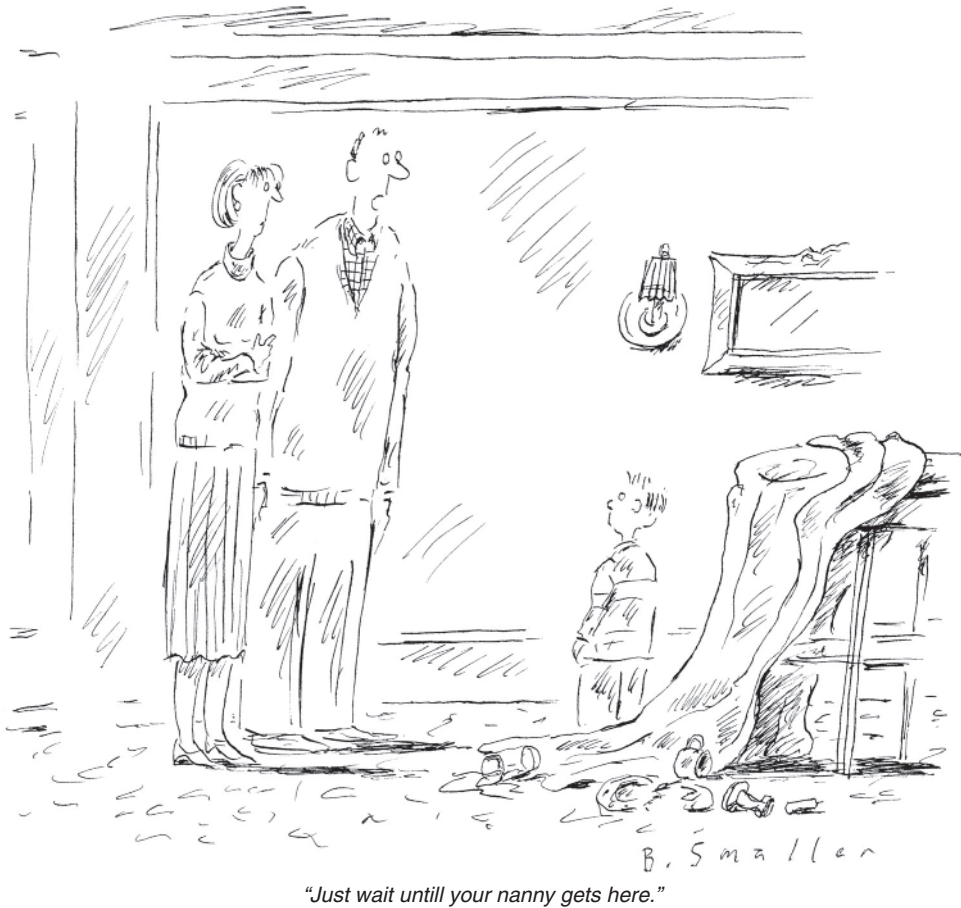


Figure 1.1 Outsourcing of parental responsibilities is increasingly common.

Source: Barbara Smaller, New Yorker.

United States, the outsourcing of nursing was widely practiced, especially in the southern states during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Even today, when breastfeeding has soared in popularity among new mothers in the United States, there has been a minor resurgence of wet nursing as well as cross-nursing, in which mothers breast feed one another's babies. Even some men who adopt newborns may turn to wet nurses so that their infants can reap the benefits of being breastfed. In response to this need, there are companies such as Certified Household Staffing in California that offer a variety of household help ranging from butlers and valets to nannies and even wet nurses. However, at \$1000 a week, professional wet nurses are probably out of range for all but the wealthy. For the less affluent, there are informal breast feeding sharing arrangements. According to one 29-year-old mother who has cross nursed with her California neighbor, "Breast milk is a communal commodity around here." In addition, she notes that cross-nursing brought her closer to her neighbor. "It takes female friendship to another level. You're trusting another person to nurture your child." And she adds that since she and her husband don't live near family, "It's also a way of building that village or community that a lot of us crave" (Lee-St. John,

2007). Another benefit is the fact that the infant may develop a close relationship with a “second mother,” much the way that godparents play a parental role in children’s lives. Nor is this the only form of biological outsourcing: The Darcys formed a family the new fashioned way; they accepted donated sperm and rented a surrogate mother’s womb as a way to overcome their fertility issues and become parents.

Although wet nurses and borrowed wombs are still relatively uncommon forms of outsourcing, there are many forms that parents engage in on a regular basis to meet the needs of their own schedules and obligations and to assist in the tasks of rearing and educating their children. As the case of the Darcys, the ubiquity of outsourcing is a reminder of how much contemporary families rely on others and how much these other institutions are part of the social and academic lives of children. The institutions and individuals who are part of the outsourcing network should not be viewed as competitive with families but rather as allies on behalf of children. As we will see, these outsourcing arrangements do not undermine family relationships and in some cases may even compensate for poor ties between parents and their children. Parents should be viewed as active partners with these other socialization agents who cooperatively provide the experiences that children need to develop and flourish.

Schools are a long-standing source of extrafamilial responsibility. For several centuries, families have increasingly relied upon schools for the education of their children. And the centrality of schools in children’s lives has increased. Children today spend more time in school than ever before – more hours each day and more days each year. Children in the United States now go to school an average of five hours a day, 180 days a year. In 1880, they attended school only about 80 days a year. Not only are children spending more hours and days in school, but they are beginning school at younger ages and staying until they are older.

In response to family needs, other forms of nonfamilial support have also become more prevalent. Because many parents often work full time, children may need somewhere to go after school, although approximately 26% of school-age children in the United States (over 15 million) are on their own after school (After School Alliance, 2009). After-school programs provide an alternative to self-care. Although the rise of after-school programs is dramatic, only 8.4 million children (15%) are in after-school programs. Another 18.5 million children would be enrolled in some form of after-school care if quality programs were available in their communities (After School Alliance, 2009).

To illustrate how far we have come along the outsourcing road, consider the number of three- to five-year-olds who spend part of their time in nonfamily settings. In 1970, only about 25% of American children under age six were cared for by someone other than their mother for significant portions of each week. In contrast, by 2011 a majority were. In fact, more than 11 million children under age five in the United States are in some type of child care arrangement every week (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010b). On average, the children of working mothers spend 35 hours a week in child care. About one-third of these children are in multiple child care arrangements so that parents can meet the need for child care during traditional and nontraditional working hours. Today only one fifth of American parents can count on extended family to provide child care, which has led to an increase in various forms of nonparental or in many cases nonrelative child care.

Both formal and informal mentoring partnerships between adults and children or youth are becoming more prevalent in response to the need for nonfamily adult guidance. Mentoring can be an informal arrangement with an older individual in one's social network. Or in some cases, mentoring is a formal arrangement whereby an organization such as Big Brothers/Big sisters arranges the contact between the mentor and mentee (Rhodes & DuBois, 2006). Just as we saw in the case of other forms of nonfamily support such as child care and after-school programs, mentoring programs have increased in recent years. An estimated three million youth are in formal mentoring relationships (Mentor, 2006). Even larger numbers of youth report experiencing informal mentoring relationships with teachers, coaches, neighbors, or extended family members (Rhodes & DuBois, 2006). In fact, about 23% of youth have nonfamily informal mentors (coaches, employers, coworkers, neighbors, or friends' parents), and 35% have "professional" mentors (teachers or guidance counselors, ministers, priests, rabbis, doctors, therapists, or social workers) (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005; Erickson, McDonald, & Elder, 2009). Researchers have documented a range of benefits from such having such informal mentors, including improved educational outcomes and decreased drug use and violence (Black, Grenard, Sussman, & Rohrbach, 2010; DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005). Similarly, formal mentoring programs improve social, emotional, behavioral, and academic development (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011).

As we will see in later chapters, many cultures share responsibility for their children with both extended kin and nonrelated members of the community. So instead of parents and mentors being in competition, it is best to view parents and mentors as partners on behalf of children and youth. Moreover, the positive effects of natural mentors are evident even after controlling for parental influence (Greenberger, Chen, & Beam, 1998), peer influence (Beam, Chen, & Greenberger, 2002), and even romantic partners (Haddad, Chen, & Greenberger, 2011). In sum, there is added value in having a mentor. As families continue to consist of single and divorced parents, who often live apart from natural support systems such as extended family or are simply overwhelmed, these types of nonkin mentors have a legitimate and needed place in the socialization mix.

Parental facilitation of children's involvement in religious institutions is another form of parental outsourcing. It is important to distinguish between religious institutions as sources of social support and personal and family religious beliefs and practices, because these two aspects of religion may have partially independent effects on family functioning and child outcomes (Mahoney, Pargament, Tarakeshwar, & Swank, 2001). First, religious institutions are social as well as spiritual entities and in their social capital role, they provide social support and social ties for their members. This form of social capital has been termed "congregational support" (Pargament, 1997). The support takes several forms including the social and emotional support provided by the social relationships among church members. For parents, this can often take the form of both child-rearing advice and direct child-care assistance. For example, religious mothers and fathers in North America exhibit greater supervision of their offspring and higher warmth toward their children and enjoy more positive relationships with their children than less religious parents. At the same time, some religious fundamentalist groups advocate harsh discipline, which may lead to less than optimal child development (Holden, 2010). In addition, marital satisfaction, commitment,

and communication are higher, and conflict and divorce rates are lower among religious couples (Mahoney et al., 2001). Together these links between religious participation and family harmony and stability have a positive effect on child and adolescent outcomes.

As Glen Elder and Rand Conger (2000) found in their study of rural Iowa farm families, when both parents attended church on a regular basis, children were more likely to be involved in religious organizations. Involvement in church activities was associated with higher involvement in school, better grades, less deviant activity and – especially for boys – more participation in community activities. Although, the relative importance of beliefs and involvement in organized religious activities in accounting for these outcomes is unclear, it is clear that religious institutions are an important part of the outsourcing family model.

Families Do Not Exist in a Social Vacuum: Parents, Extra Familial Partners, and the Development of Social Capital

As our exploration of the role of parents as managers of social opportunities suggests, families are embedded in a variety of other social systems, including extended networks of relatives and informal community ties such as friends and neighbors, work sites, and social, educational, and medical institutions. An important product that results from this embeddedness of families is the possibility of acquiring social capital – a concept introduced by sociologist James Coleman. As described by Coleman (1988), social capital considers the relations among people, institutions, and organizations of the community outside the immediate family structure; it involves both the flow of information and the sharing of norms and values that serve to facilitate or constrain the actions of people who interact in the community's social structures (e.g., schools, places of worship, or business enterprises). Later commentators, such as political scientist Robert Putman, who generated considerable debate with his book *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (2000), in which he argues that there has been a decline in participation in community groups over the last four decades in American society, makes an important distinction between two kinds of social capital: bonding capital and bridging capital. Bonding occurs when you are socializing with people who are like you: same age, same race, same religion, or some other personal characteristic or social interest. Mary Winston's participation in a Single Mothers by Choice group is an example of this form of social capital. This is commonly seen in homogenous societies. But in a diverse multiethnic country, there is the need for a second kind of social capital: bridging. Bridging is what you do when you engage others who have a different perspective from your own. Bridging capital is the product of learning new ways of viewing the world as a result of this engagement with dissimilar others. Most scholarly work has focused on bonding capital; for example children benefit when bonding capital is high as reflected in the presence of norm and value consensus among members of their family and the wider community (Coleman, 1988). Monitoring of children is facilitated, as is their socialization, through multiple efforts of network members who hold shared family community norms and values (Elder & Conger, 2000). Moreover, if a child's own family is negligent in fulfilling

the socialization role, other adults are available to assume the responsibility. However, my argument is that both forms of social capital are important for understanding contemporary families. Specifically, bridging capital, which flows from engaging others who have formed families that differ from one's own, can yield valuable lessons about the advantages of alternative family forms. The Evans family can learn about the value of kin networks from the Dorado family. As our society becomes increasingly diverse in the ways that families form and function, children and parents can benefit from exposure to different perspectives on family. Moreover, lessons from other cultures are another form of bridging capital that we will explore. The embeddedness of families and their reliance on both bonding and bridging forms of social capital for their smooth functioning and for promoting change in families is a central theme of this book.

In sum, the social capital in local communities or in the case of some immigrant families in cross-border communities can aid parents' socialization of their children through several pathways. First, when parents and children have community ties, more social support is available. Second, parental connections with community services and their participation in shaping the institutions of the community promote the maintenance of values and norms that influence their children. Third, parental participation in collaboration with parental surrogates in the community with their children enables closer supervision of children and reduces the likelihood of negative peer influence. Fourth, by exposure to dissimilar families, parents, and children can gain new perspectives on how families can be organized and operate and gain new respect and acceptance of diverse family forms. The concept of social capital embodies the notion not only that parenting is a community enterprise (Elder & Conger, 2000) but also that children and adults are active players in the distribution of social capital. As we will see in a later chapter, children in immigrant families can also play important roles as cultural brokers on behalf of their parents in dealing with physicians, lawyers, and government offices. We will explore the myriad ways in which the effectiveness of alternative family functioning is dependent on utilizing resources offered by extrafamilial agents.

Some Further Guiding Assumptions

In our effort to understand various family forms, several assumptions guide the journey through this book.

First, family processes that govern family functioning in all family forms need to be recognized as important ways of understanding the successes and failures of different family forms. Second, we need to appreciate that there are universal socialization goals that are shared across most cultures and form the foundation for family functioning. Third, at the same time we need to be aware and informed of the ways that culture shapes our family values and strategies and appreciate the diversity of family forms that are evident historically and globally. Closely related is the fourth assumption that it is important to recognize the diverse ways in which different ethnic and racial groups within our own country organize their family lives. Fifth, it requires the collective perspectives of multiple disciplines to understand the forms, functions, and processes that define contemporary families. Finally, understanding families can benefit from

a developmental life course perspective in which changes in individual family members, dyads, and the family unit itself all change across time. We examine each of these assumptions in more detail next.

Process and Form Need to Be Considered for Understanding Families

An assumption that is central to the argument of this book is that there are multiple ways that families can be organized and internal processes of family life are just as important for the successful development of children as the form, status, or organization of the family. The quality of the relationships among family members, whether parent and child or between spouses and parents' methods of child rearing and their goals and expectations for their children are independent of family form. Just as the "ideal" family can be fraught with conflict, harshness, and lack of caring, other family forms can share these characteristics as well. At the same time, families of all forms – not just the "ideal" family form – can provide supportive, loving, and healthy environments in which to raise children. In short, family relationships of both good and bad quality exist in all family forms. However, some family forms have a tougher time than others. Single-parent families may experience special challenges related to inadequate economic resources and accompanying stress. Same-gender parents may confront discrimination and prejudice and their children may encounter negative reactions from peers and classmates. By focusing on both form and process, we can better understand the circumstances under which various family forms can function effectively. We can recognize the challenges faced by different family forms and open up an inquiry into how these challenges can be overcome.

The Goals of Family Socialization

To appreciate how different families can raise children successfully, we need to investigate their common goals of socialization. Although it is important to recognize differences, there are some aspects of family socialization that are probably shared by parents in most cultures. As anthropologist Robert LeVine (2003) has argued, in any family arrangement the universal goals of physical survival, promotion and maintenance of physical health, and preparation for economic independence through education and instruction are evident as well as culture-specific goals of particular forms of intellectual achievement, culturally informed versions of social and emotional competence, and knowledge of culturally unique rules and norms. Moreover, LeVine suggests that these goals are hierarchically organized such that under conditions of high threats to infant and child mortality, the physical survival and health of offspring is likely to be a paramount aim. Next in LeVine's hierarchy of parental child-rearing goals is ensuring that the child will be prepared for economic independence in adulthood. Once these basic needs are satisfied, parents can and presumably do devote more resources to other specific cultural values. The form and content of these culturally specific goals vary across cultures and reflect the values and beliefs of the particular culture in which the child and family are

situated. In each chapter, I will examine the processes by which these goals are met and how well these parenting goals and related child outcomes are achieved in different family arrangements.

Different Cultures, Different Families

In order to understand families, we need to take off the blinkers that often blind us to the ways in which other cultures approach the topic of family. For the last several decades, social scientists have begun to critically examine the assumption that generalizations from a single culture (e.g., American) are appropriate (Rogoff, 2003) and a major shift has been to question the universality of our theories about families. Cultures vary enormously in how they organize their families, how they allocate family roles to different individuals, what outcomes they value in their children, and even what child-rearing tactics they choose to achieve their socialization goals. Although there are many similarities across and within cultural groups around the globe, we need to recognize variations and how we as contemporary Western societies can benefit from them.

To illustrate, consider the Aka, a group of hunter-gatherer pygmies who live in the Central African Republic and the northern Congo. They have been described as models for the Women's Movement, as they have very egalitarian male and female family roles. Throughout the day, couples share hunting, food preparation, and social and leisure activities. Aka fathers have even been called the best dads in the world for their devotion to their children. But the parents are not left to themselves to rear their children. In this culture, caretaking of infants and children is not only a maternal or even a paternal responsibility, but a community responsibility. Among the Aka not only relatives but other women in the community participate in the care and even the nursing of newborns and young infants. The active sharing of caregiving increases a sense of belongingness and ensures that infants are cared for even when parents are working or unavailable. We can learn from how other cultures organize family life and responsibilities.

Different Ethnicities, Different Families

As the Dorado family illustrates, ethnicity leaves a clear imprint on how families are organized and function. Especially in the current era of increasing diversity within our society due to immigration, we need not only to recognize the variations represented by different ethnic groups within our society but to ask how we can learn from these differences as well. It is important not only to examine the diversity of familial organization, goals, and strategies across ethnic groups but it is equally critical to explore variations within different ethnic groups (Garcia Coll & Magnuson, 1999; Parke, 2004). Not all Hispanic origin families are alike; families from Spain, Mexico, Cuba, Venezuela, and Puerto Rico may share a common Spanish heritage but they may also have their own unique ways of expressing this shared heritage in their family values, customs, and organization. Nor do all immigrants follow a similar path. Some come as family units, whereas in other cases

family members migrate separately and reunite or not later. Recognizing the ethnic diversity within our own culture is a necessity both for understanding and for guiding social policy.

Many Disciplines Are Necessary to Understand the Variety of Family Forms

There is an increasing appreciation of the need for perspectives from a variety of disciplines to understand the family socialization process. No longer restricted to developmental psychology, the field of family socialization is increasingly multidisciplinary. History, biology, anthropology, sociology, demography, pediatrics, psychiatry, economics, and even architecture and urban planning are all fields that are playing a role in the study of families (Parke, 2004). Historians (Coontz, 2010) have provided a glimpse at families in earlier times, while demographers (Hernandez, Denton, & Macartney, 2008) are helping us track changes over time and aid in our policy planning for the future. In turn, families' links with the legal and medical establishments have enticed legal and medical scholars to join the effort to understand families (Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992; Pruett, 2000). Families are embedded in and influenced by biological systems, which has led to the assessment of hormonal changes in men and women across the transition to parenthood (Storey & Walsh, 2012). Sociologists remind us that families are embedded in a wider set of extrafamilial contexts such as neighborhoods, work, school, and religious institutions and underscore the importance of social class. Economists emphasize the centrality of monetary resources for family functioning and highlight the impact of poverty on families (Duncan, 2012). And not all families function adequately; some family members are depressed, others are violent; some are uninvolved. This has led psychiatrists, social workers, clinical psychologists, and educators to become involved in this inquiry as well (Bender et al., 2007; Cowan and Cowan, 2000). Anthropologists have alerted us to patterns of cultural variation around the globe in how families are organized while highlighting the ethnic diversity among families in our own society (Hrdy, 2009; Small, 2001). Psychologists help us understand the processes by which families affect children's development (Parke & Buriel, 2006). Finally, architects and urban planners can help us envision how the built environment affects families and how new housing and community designs can better support families (McCamant & Durrett, 2011). Clearly, families are too important and too diverse to be left in the hands of a single discipline; multiple disciplines are essential to advance our understanding of how families function and how they affect children's social and cognitive development.

A Developmental Perspective on Families Is Useful

Another guiding assumption is that family relationships can be usefully considered from a developmental perspective. Although developmental changes in infant and child capacities continue to represent the most commonly investigated aspect of development, other aspects of development are viewed as important too. Under the influence of life-course and life-span perspectives (Elder, 1998; Parke, 1988),

examination of developmental changes in adults is gaining recognition because parents continue to change and develop during adult years. For example, age at the onset of parenthood has implications for how women and men manage their parental roles. This involves an exploration of the tasks faced by adults such as self-identity, education, and career, and an examination of the relation between these tasks and parenting. For example, Mary Winston decided to become a single mother by choice because of her age and her ticking biological clock, a decision that is usefully conceptualized from a life-course perspective. Similarly, Jackie Fuller's unplanned entry into motherhood in her late teens had a subsequent effect on her education and occupational trajectories and can be understood through a life-course lens.

Developmental analysis need not be restricted to the individual level for either child or parent. Relationships (e.g., the marital, mother-child, or father-child relationship) may follow separate and partially independent developmental courses over childhood (Parke, 1988). In turn, the mutual impact of different sets of relationships on each other will vary as a function of the nature of the developmental trajectory. Families change their structure (e.g., through the addition of a new child or the loss of a member through death or divorce), norms, rules, and strategies over time. Tracking the family unit itself over development is an important and neglected task but one that can help us understand the challenges faced by Bethany Tremblay and Oscar Bailey, who divorced and then remarried and formed a new stepfamily.

To understand the nature of relationships in families, a multilevel and dynamic approach is required. Multiple levels of analysis are necessary to capture the individual, dyadic, and family unit aspects of operation in the family itself, and to reflect the embeddedness of families in a variety of extrafamilial social systems. The dynamic quality reflects the multiple developmental trajectories that warrant consideration in understanding the nature of families.

A Brief Orientation to the Goals of the Book

The first goal of this book is to explore how the social, medical, and policy shifts are challenging our culturally constructed notion of the "ideal" family form. The argument is that we need to revise or expand our definition of the "ideal" family to accommodate current and new family forms and critically examine these forms as alternatives or complements to our view of the ideal nuclear family.

The second goal is to review and evaluate the empirical evidence concerning the effects of these variations in family forms for children's social, emotional, and intellectual development. In order to provide a coherent framework for evaluation of the effects of various family arrangements on children's developmental outcomes, we need to recognize a set of child rearing goals that are viewed as universally relevant.

As our review of the research shows, some aspects of development are affected by cooperative family forms in positive ways such as empathy, responsibility taking, perspective taking, and altruism (Hrdy, 2009); other aspects of social development such as gender roles are relatively unaffected. Still other aspects such as cognitive development may be detrimentally affected if stimulation is restricted to peers and siblings with minimal adult input (Weisner, 1987). At the same time, children learn

valuable social skills as a result of either being a sibling caregiver or being part of a sibling or multiage social group; they learn how to manage conflict, take responsibility, and how to function effectively in a social group. My strategy is to present a balanced view of the advantages and disadvantages of different family forms for children's development.

The third goal is to go beyond describing children's developmental progress under various family forms by identifying gaps in our knowledge of how different family forms affect children's social, cognitive, and emotional development and to provide a framework for future research on these issues. By setting and defining an agenda for the next generation of scholars, the book will serve as a catalyst for a new interdisciplinary and multicultural approach to understanding how changing family forms affect children's development.

A fourth goal is to examine current social policies that are designed to support the optimal functioning of families but often fail because of their focus on one particular so-called ideal family form. Ways in which these policies can be modified to better achieve the goal of supporting the array of contemporary family forms will be explored.

To achieve these goals, I draw upon the following lines of scholarly research:

First, evidence shows that parental roles are to some extent interchangeable; fathers as well as mothers are competent caregivers and both can provide the critical ingredients for children's optimal development, such as nurturance and stimulation. Not surprisingly, children develop into competent social and intellectual individuals in families in which parental roles are reversed.

Second, the idea that two parents of opposite genders are necessary for the adequate development of children has come into question since research shows that same-sex couples can support children's normal development as well as heterosexual couples. Children's social, emotional and cognitive development is unaffected by being raised in a same gender parent families. Even children's gender roles and sexual preferences remain relatively similar in same- and opposite-gender parent families. Indeed, neither mothers nor fathers are necessary for healthy child development.

Third, relatives in extended families and nonrelatives in the community can provide children with socialization and stimulation beyond what is provided by their parents. Evidence suggests that these additional socialization agents have unique and beneficial effects on children's social-emotional development above and beyond the effects of the nuclear family. This suggests that we need to expand our view of the family as a two-parent unit and recognize the porousness of boundaries between nuclear families and extended families and communities.

Fourth, new routes to family formation made possible by modern reproductive technologies have separated the biological and social aspects of parenthood. A variety of individuals such as egg and sperm donors and surrogate mothers contribute to the child's biological family but are not necessarily part of the child's social family. While there is considerable evidence that children conceived through the use of the ART fare well in their social, emotional, and cognitive development, less is known about the role of nonkin contributors in children's lives. To what extent should they be involved in the child's life? What are the psychological and legal issues involved? I argue that these individuals ought to be able to be active participants in the life of the family because such involvement will be potentially beneficial for children, parents, and these nonkin players as well. In appreciation of the complexity of this issue not

only the positive but also the potential negative effects of expanding the range of “nonkin players” for children’s development and for family cohesion will be explored.

Fifth, cross-cultural and intracultural variations in family forms expand our view of the ideal family beyond the nuclear, two-parent form as Aka families and Latino families such as the Dorado family illustrate. A cooperative, community-based model of parenting, I argue is the universal norm not the exception and this model is a clearly viable alternative to our notion of the “ideal” family form. Both cross-cultural evidence and recent empirical studies of ethnic groups within our own Western culture will be reviewed to highlight some of the beneficial lessons that can be gleaned by expanding our cultural lens.

Sixth, to address concerns that multiple caregivers will be harmful to children, I show that infants are capable of forming multiple meaningful relationships beyond the parent–child relationship and that these extrafamilial ties are beneficial for children. Empirical work on infant attachment to multiple social figures in other cultures as well as studies of multiple attachments in our own culture are critically examined. The extensive literature on child care, especially children’s attachment relationships with nonfamily caregivers reveals the potential protective functions of multiple attachments for young children.

Seventh, caregiving of both one’s own children and others’ children is beneficial for adults as well. The recent empirical evidence of the beneficial neurological effects of caregiving is highlighted as well as the long-term satisfaction for adults derived from caregiving activities. The role of a supportive social network in realizing the positive potential benefits of parenthood is examined as well as the costs and downsides of caregiving responsibilities for parents and nonparents alike. The positive aspects of intergenerational-caregiving is explored to illustrate that such cross-generational contact can be beneficial for children and adult care providers. The burdens and stresses associated with intergenerational caregiving are also examined as well as ways to maximize the positive potential of this cross-generational involvement for grandchildren, adults, and the grandparent generation.

In a final chapter, I explore the changes or policies that could help overcome barriers to a broader cultural view of the “ideal” family and lead to greater acceptance of and support for multiple family forms. Ways to support family diversity will be considered across legal, social policy, economic, architectural, and media domains. The potential positive effects of these policy-driven changes for children’s social, emotional, and cognitive development are emphasized.