

# DIVERSITY IN FAMILIES, 7/e

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### Myths and Realities

**Myth:** Alternative lifestyles are destroying the family.

**Reality:** The rise of new family forms not based on marriage reflects global changes and greater choices available to women and men, but they are not threatening the nuclear family.

**Myth:** Being single is a lonely existence, especially for never-married women, who miss out on the best things life has to offer.

**Reality:** Research belies this stereotype and shows that never-married women can lead meaningful lives, complete with intimate relations and strong family ties.

**Myth:** Because living together is practicing for marriage, cohabitants who later marry have more successful marriages than those who do not.

- Reality:** Some couples live together to test their compatibility before marriage, but others live together without marriage simply as a nonmarital family form. Couples who live together before marriage are more likely to break up than those who do not.
- Myth:** Lesbian and gay partnerships are incompatible with family life.
- Reality:** Family arrangements are becoming more pervasive in gay communities, as gay men and lesbians establish families of choice, raise children, and create their own kinship networks.
- Myth:** Today's immigrants to the United States sever family ties in their homelands and settle amid a chaotic pattern of living arrangements.
- Reality:** Contemporary immigrants retain strong family bonds that often cross national boundaries and sustain them in the new society.
- Myth:** Commuter marriage is a romantic lifestyle, much like a honeymoon when partners are together.
- Reality:** Commuter marriage is a difficult alternative, and most commuters are ambivalent about their way of life.

**T**hroughout this book we have examined the social forces that produce and require diversity in family life. In the last three decades of the twentieth century, domestic arrangements diversified as the U.S. population adapted to evolving technologies, economic changes, and social developments. All of these forces have fueled a movement away from the idealized family model of the 1950s. This chapter is about the growing fluidity of family life in an era of unprecedented change.

First, we set forth the close connections between emerging family forms and larger social trends. We use the social constructionist perspective to set the stage for thinking about the growing diversity in domestic life. We show how structural changes are freeing women and men from conventional marriage, enabling them to accommodate their family arrangements to the new social realities they face. We move beyond a simple “lifestyles” approach to see that pluralism is a central dynamic in family formation. We turn, then, to four domestic arrangements that are the subject of this chapter: singlehood, heterosexual cohabitation, lesbian and gay families, and family arrangements involving separations of space and time.

## THE RISE IN NEW FAMILY ARRANGEMENTS

### Families in Transition

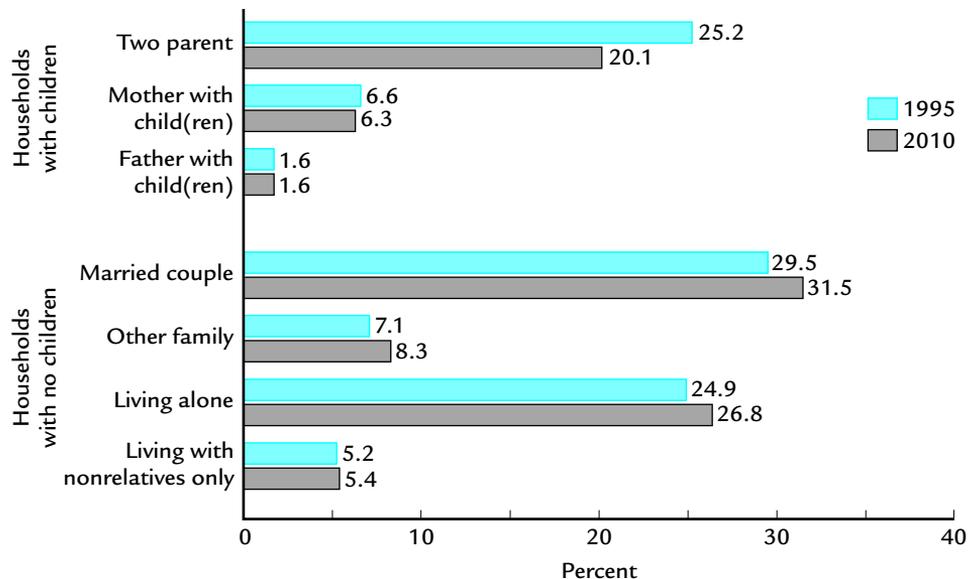
To understand current trends in living arrangements, we must return to the distinction between households and families (see Chapter 1). (The following is based on Ahlburg and De Vita, 1992:5; and Bianchi and Casper, 2000:8). The U.S. Bureau of the Census defines a *household* as all persons who occupy a housing unit, such as a house, apartment, or other residential unit. A household may consist of one

person who lives alone or of several people who share a dwelling. A *family*, on the other hand, is two or more persons related by birth, marriage, or adoption who reside together. All families comprise households, but not all households are families under the Census Bureau's definition. Indeed, the growth of the **nonfamily household** (that is, persons who live alone or with unrelated individuals) is one of the most dramatic changes to occur during the past four decades, as shown in Figure 12.1.

In 1960, 85 percent of households were family households; by 2001, just 68 percent were family households (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2002a:). At the same time, nonfamily households, which consist primarily of people who live alone or who share a residence with roommates or with a partner, have been on the rise. The fastest growth has been among persons living alone. The proportion of households with just one person doubled from 13 percent to 26 percent between 1960 and 2000 (Bianchi and Casper, 2000:8).

Nonfamily households are a diverse group. They may consist of elderly individuals who live alone, college-age youths who share an apartment, cohabiting couples, individuals who delay or forgo marriage, or those who are "between marriages" (Ahlburg and DeVita, 1992:5; Rawlings, 1995:22).

Another dramatic shift in household composition between 1970 and 1995 was the decline in the percentage of households with children. Today, less than one-fourth of households are made up of married couples with children (Schmidt,



**Figure 12.1**

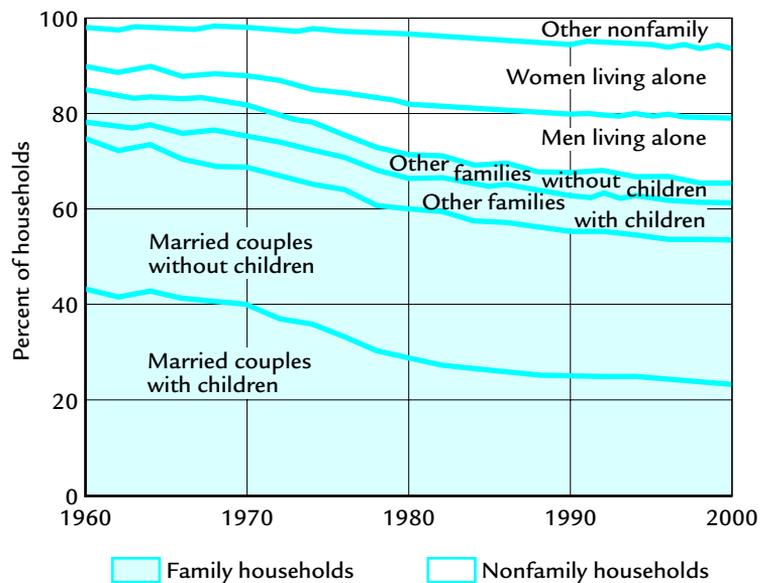
#### Projections of changing household composition: 1995 and 2010

Source: Jennifer Cheeseman Day, "Projections of the Number of Households and Families in the United States: 1995 to 2010." U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Reports*, Series P-25-1129. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, April 1996, p. 11.

2001). (The following is based on Bianchi and Casper, 2000:8). Two-parent households with children dropped from 44 percent to 24 percent of all households between 1960 and 2000 (Figure 12.2). This downward trend reflects the postponement of marriage and children, and the shift toward smaller families (Day, 1996:11). However, household composition varies considerably among different segments of the population. Minorities are much more likely than Whites to live in households that include children. In 2002, 37 percent of African American households and 51 percent of Latino households had at least one child under age eighteen compared with 32 percent of White households (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2002a:). This difference arises primarily because minority populations tend to have a younger age structure than the White population (that is, a greater share of minorities are in the prime childbearing ages) and minorities tend to have higher fertility rates than Whites (DeVita, 1996:34). During the next fifteen years, the overall composition of households is projected to shift, with a decreasing proportion of family households and continued growth of nonfamily households. (Casper and Bianchi, 2002).

### Global Trends, Individual Options, and the Decline of Marriage

Current household and family patterns are not the result of overnight changes but a continuation of forces set in motion long ago. These changes are not uniquely a



**Figure 12.2**

#### Trends in U.S. households, 1960 to 2000

Source: Suzanne M. Bianchi and Lynne M. Casper, "American Families." *Population Bulletin* 55 (December 2000): 8.

U.S. phenomenon; instead, they have global dimensions. Research of the last two decades has revealed five global trends in family formation:

(1) women's average age at first marriage and childbirth has risen, delaying the formation of new families; (2) families and households have gotten smaller; (3) the burden on working-age parents of supporting younger and older dependents has increased; (4) the proportion of female-headed households has increased; and (5) women's participation in the formal labor market has increased at the same time that men's has declined, shifting the balance of economic responsibility in families (Bruce et al., 1995:5).

Many family changes reflect changing attitudes toward a variety of living arrangements outside of marriage. Many domestic arrangements do not have marriage at their core. Today, marriage is less central in organizing and controlling life course transitions, individual identities, intimate relations, living arrangements, childbearing and child rearing (Thornton and Young-DeMarco, 2001:1009). Declining proportions of adults are married. Indeed, nonmarriage has nearly doubled in the past three decades, from 28 percent of the adult population in 1970 to 40.5 percent in 2000 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2002d). Many adults now push beyond current definitions of "the family," choosing to live as a single person, to live with another adult of the same or the other sex without marriage, or to live separately from a spouse. Still, the focus on choice should not ignore the broad social conditions that sustain and even require changes in household formation. Emerging domestic arrangements reflect the complex interaction of social structure and human agency. Individual choice is now an important facet of alternative household and family formation, but structural conditions that lie beyond individual choice help explain the long-term trends.

## How to Think about Family Diversification

### Rethinking Family Categories

Many people now choose from a wide range of lifestyles and living arrangements. For others, family adaptations emerge in response to changes and constraints in the external world. Despite the proliferation of family forms, there is little evidence that "the commitment of Americans to children, marriage, and family life has eroded substantially in the past two decades" (Thornton and DeMarco, 2001:1030). Although the current patterns do not signal the breakdown of the nuclear family, they do require a rethinking of the categories we use for sorting out the complex array of family relationships we find in society today.

The family field has long made a distinction between "the traditional family" and "nontraditional alternatives." Although so-called nontraditional families make up a diverse array of forms, they all tend to be categorized in *opposition* to the family ideal of the working father, stay-at-home mother, and their children. This dichotomy is less useful for understanding the emergence of new family and household forms. Not only does it simplify the incredible array of contemporary family arrangements, but it also miscasts the idealized family as the normal family—the standard from which "alternatives" depart. But how can one family form be the standard when all family forms are adaptations to their social contexts? In

fact, the 1950s model was itself made possible by certain historically specific forces. At the same time, other social conditions, such as the growing participation of married women in the paid labor force, rising divorce rates, and the rise of lesbian and gay communities, have led to a variety of domestic arrangements. New family types are no more alternative to what had preceded them than the 1950s (traditional) type was to its historical predecessors. To believe otherwise is to construct a false distinction between “traditional” and “alternative” family forms (Nicholson, 1997:28).

Rather than categorizing varied family arrangements as alternatives to an idealized traditional form, we should think of all family forms in their own right. No family structure is better than others. All families are social forms that emerge in response to different conditions. This gives us a better understanding of today’s emergent and reconfigured families. As the larger social world in which families are embedded grows more complex, families, too, become more diverse and fluid. Today, different family forms coexist in society. As individuals move through the phases of their lives, their family and household arrangements are increasingly marked by family diversity.

### The Question of Lifestyles

Past scholarship often used the term *alternative lifestyles* to refer to new family and household arrangements. However, the concept of “lifestyle,” which refers to the “relational patterns around which individuals organize their living arrangements” (Stayton, 1985:17), has become less useful. In fact, the concept of “alternative lifestyles” can be misleading in that it must be alternative to something. Alternative lifestyles prompt the question, “alternative to what?” (Fowlkes, 1994:152), presuming a family form shared by most people in society. As the number and significance of families formed outside of marriage has grown in recent decades, scholarship moved away from “lifestyles” to a broader emphasis on nonmarital families. “Although studies of non-marital relationships are not new phenomenon, recent data facilitate a broader conceptualization of families than was possible before this decade” (Seltzer, 2001:466).

Throughout this book, we have argued that social and economic forces in society produce and require diversity in family life. Therefore, family variation is not new. What is new is a greater recognition of diversity and ongoing public outcries of groups insisting that “they too are families.” These changes have given a new urgency to questions about family diversity. “What makes a legitimate family? Who is entitled to family status and the social support associated with it? Who should or does define appropriate family formation?” (Lempert and DeVault, 2000:6). Family forms differ in the degree to which the large society accepts them. For example, lesbian and gay families are often stigmatized, whereas blended stepparent families or living arrangements created by career choices are more likely to be viewed as legitimate. When variations are associated with subordinate class and racial categories, they are judged against a standard model and found to be deviant. Many alternative lifestyles that appear new to middle-class Americans are actually family patterns that have been traditional within African American and other ethnic communities for many generations. Presented as the “new lifestyles of the young mainstream elite, they are in fact the same

lifestyles that have in the past been defined as pathological, deviant, or unacceptable when observed in Black families” (Peters and McAadoo, 1983:288). Many of the family patterns among racial-ethnics have been adopted as available and logical life choices in a society that has denied them a full range of resources.

The family and household configurations discussed here represent additional adaptations to those already discussed in previous chapters. Like the variations in family living produced by class, race, and gender inequality, these variations have always existed.

Singlehood, heterosexual cohabitation, lesbian and gay alternatives, and families separated by time and space represent an array of adaptations that cannot be neatly tied to a single cause. They are part of a larger web of economic, demographic, and social trends. Women’s economic independence, later age at marriage, and the high divorce rate are some of the trends associated with these forms, but no one explanation covers all of them. Although these arrangements appear to be a heterogeneous mixture of lifestyles, in fact they all embody new definitions of women’s and men’s public and private roles. Singlehood, heterosexual and homosexual cohabitation, and families separated by time and space expand the traditional boundaries and behaviors associated with gender. Each form, in its unique way, modifies the relational patterns around which women, men, and sometimes children organize their living arrangements. In this way, these domestic arrangements represent adaptations to both particular social arrangements and the times in which we are living. They show how emergent domestic forms are situated and structured in the larger social world. Of course, they do not include all of the new family patterns in today’s world. It is impossible to include all present arrangements in one chapter, so we encourage our readers to explore others such as multigenerational families including grandparents, their children, and grandchildren (see Box 12.1) and other broad transformations in family life.

The question “What is a family?” will grow more contested as household and family patterns fall outside the nuclear mold. The U.S. Census Bureau’s definition of “two or more persons related by birth, marriage or adoption who live in the same household” fails to include many arrangements in which people live and relate as families; practical and legal considerations require that we modify the conventional definition of the family.

## SINGLE LIFE

*Single* used to mean what people were before they settled down to marriage and family. Today, the question “When are you going to settle down and get married?” no longer applies. Over the past four decades, a growing proportion of adults spent a larger proportion of their lives in a single status and in one-person households. Living alone has increased in all age groups, even those in which most people get married (see Figure 12.3). People who live alone now make up over one-fourth of households (26 percent); 58 percent are women and 42 percent are men. (Fields and Casper, 2001). Although women accounted for the larger share of people living alone (six in ten), the number of men living alone increased

**BOX 12.1 Emergent Family Trends: Grandma, I'm Home!**

More grandparents are living with their grandchildren in multigenerational household settings. According to the Census Bureau, as of 2000, there were a total of 3.9 million multigenerational households in the U.S., making up 3.7 percent of the total population. Some 65 percent of those households consist of grandparents their child or children and grandchildren. The remainder are households in which the middle generation acts as the head of household or the grandchild's generation serves as the head of household. Grandparents today are more likely to deal with blended families. We're more likely to have parents who are still alive, so we've got four generations to contend with. And we're still working," says author Allan Zullo, who became a grandfather in his 40s.

States with a comparatively large percentage of multigenerational households include Hawaii, where 8.2 percent of all households are multigenerational. Puerto Rico also has a high rate (7.4 percent), particularly when compared with states such as North Dakota, where multigenerational households account for about 1 percent of the total number of households. Multigenerational households are also more likely to exist in areas heavily populated by new immigrants, areas with high out-of-wedlock birth rates where women often live with their parent(s) and areas with housing shortages or high living costs, according to demographer Lynne Casper, author of *Continuity and Change in the American Family* (Sage Publications, 2002).

The number of households maintained by a grandparent has also grown dramatically—to 3.9 million in 1998, from 2.2 million in 1970, an increase of 76 percent in 28 years. In a 1999 AARP national survey of 800 grandparents over age 50, 11 percent of grandparents identified themselves as caregivers, with 8 percent providing day care on a regular basis and 3 percent raising a grandchild by themselves.

According to a 1998 analysis by the Census Bureau, there are five main types of grandparent-maintained households with both grandparents and one or both parents present (34 percent of the total); both grandparents, no parents present (17 percent); grandmother only some parents present (29 percent), grandmother only (14 percent), and grandfather only (6 percent). While the growth in the number of families with one parent and both grandparents present dominated the 1980s, since 1990, the most significant growth has been in households consisting of grandchildren and grandparents only, with neither parent present.

Certain characteristics apply to grandparent-headed households. As of 1997, half of the children living with grandparents were under age 6. Grandchildren living with their grandmothers tend to be black and live in urban centers. More than one-fourth of grandparent-raised (with either or both grandparents) children (27 percent) live in poverty; 63 percent of those living with a grandmother alone are impoverished. Grandparents raising their grandchildren are more likely to work. 72 percent of grandfathers and 56 percent of grandmothers are employed, compared with 33 percent and 24 percent respectively in parent-maintained homes.

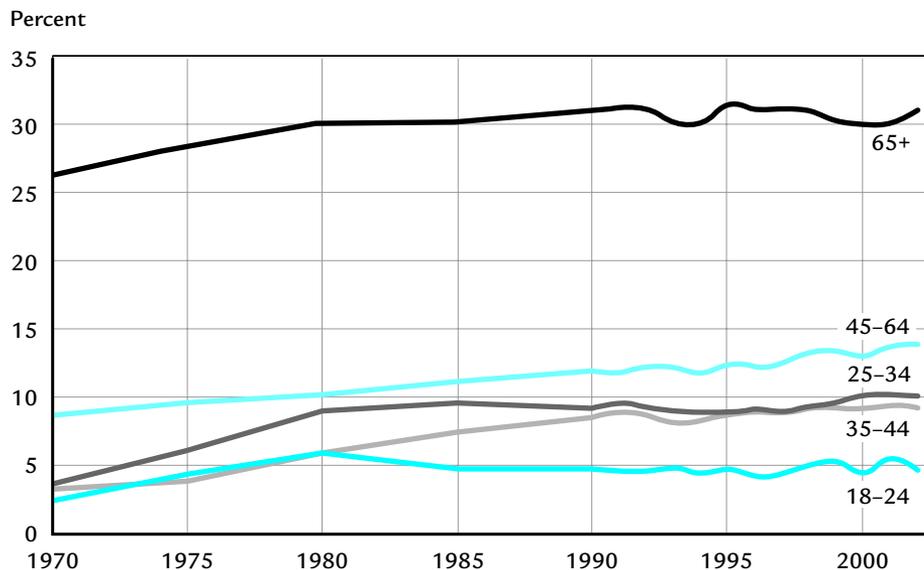
A host of possible reasons can account for the increase in both multigenerational households and households in which the grandparents act as primary caregivers. The census report cites drug abuse among parents, teen pregnancy, divorce, the rise of single-parent households, mental and physical illness, AIDS, child abuse and imprisonment as the leading causes. Vern Bengtson, professor of gerontology and sociology

(continued)

at the University of Southern California, also attributes this growth to new laws on child endangerment, which have removed children from abusive-parent homes. He says there are pluses to these multigenerational households. “Multigenerational families are becoming more important for social support,” he says. “And grandchildren are also increasingly taking care of both their grandparents and great-grandparents.”—PP.

Source: Pamela Paul, “Make Room for Granddaddy.” *American Demographics* (April 2002): 41–45. [www.demographics.com](http://www.demographics.com).

at a faster pace. As a result of the rise in single living, there are now as many households of those alone as there are of married couples with children. Reasons for the increased members of those living alone include more people living independently before marriage; more people, especially women, postponing marriage; a boom in the elderly population due to increases in life expectancy, including many who have lost partners; and the desire for residential independence (Peterson, 1996:4d; Ameristat, 2003c).



**Figure 12.3**

### People living alone, by age group, 1970–2002

Source: Ameristat, “Solitaire Set Continues to Grow,” Population Reference Bureau (2003). [http://ameristat.org/Content/NavigationMenu/Ameristat/Topics1/MarriageandFamily/Solitaire\\_Set\\_Continues\\_to\\_Grow.htm](http://ameristat.org/Content/NavigationMenu/Ameristat/Topics1/MarriageandFamily/Solitaire_Set_Continues_to_Grow.htm).



"I'd like to live with you - But I'm not sure I'm ready for that sort of commitment."

Today, a growing share of adults are unmarried. One in three men and almost one in four women were unmarried in 2000, compared with fewer than one in ten in 1900 (Caplow et al., 2001:68, U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2002d). Although more women and men now live alone for part of their adult lives, most people do marry, at least once. In 2000, 91 percent of women and 94 percent of men ages forty-five to fifty-four had been married (Bianchi and Casper, 2000:15). For young women and men today, it is plausible to assume that approximately 10 percent will never marry in their lifetime. For those who do marry, approximately 50 percent will divorce, and the surviving marriages will eventually end in widowhood.

### The Singles Population

The growing disinclination to marry among people of all ages means that there are many different ways of being single and consequently many different ways to depict the experience of singlehood. In the broadest sense, the term *single* refers to all unmarried adults over the age of eighteen. This population represents a wide-ranging demographic diversity with respect to age, race, ethnicity, education, occupation, income, and parental status. Singlehood also has different connections to the institution of formal, legal marriage, including as it does those who have never married, together with the divorced, the separated, and the widowed (Fowlkes, 1994:153).

Peter J. Stein (1981) proposed a useful typology for distinguishing the varieties of single status in the contemporary United States. His typology is based on whether an individual's single status is voluntary or involuntary, stable or temporary. Of particular interest here are those described by Stein as voluntary stable singles, "those who have never married and are satisfied with that choice; those who have been married but do not want to remarry; cohabitators who do not intend to marry (see the next section on cohabitation); and those whose lifestyles preclude the possibility of marriage (e.g., priests and nuns)" (Stein, 1981:10; cited in Fowlkes, 1994:153).

Formal marriage no longer organizes life decisions and transitions, as it did in the past. In colonial times, almost all unmarried persons lived in a family environment, either with parents or in the homes of their employers. Only with marriage did they become fully independent members of society. This pattern began to change in the nineteenth century, when increasing numbers of single people worked for wages outside the family and lived in boardinghouses. The dramatic shift, however, occurred in recent years, as divorce, cohabitation, remarriage, and single motherhood all contributed to the growth of the single population (Coontz, 1997:79).

Women's economic independence has had a great impact on the rise of singlehood as a viable option. Many women have jobs that pay enough that the women do not require a partnership with a man to have a decent living. They need not marry for economic support or for social identity. Many women with strong career aspirations have opted for singlehood because marriage and domestic demands greatly lessen their chances for career success. Other social and cultural reasons make marriage less desirable. Marriage may be less necessary for happiness now, because unmarried persons can more readily engage in sexual relationships without social stigma and because the financial security of marriage has been undermined by high rates of divorce. With higher rates of single living, the social stigma of divorce is decreasing (Marks, 1996:917).

### Gender, Race, and Class

More women than men marry sometime over the life course. Still, women are more likely to be alone for some or all of their lives from their middle years on. Forty-four million women are now single. This is more than 40 percent of all adult females, up from 30 percent in 1960 (Edwards, 2000:48; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2002d). Of course, the rise in single women encompasses other important trends, and a growing number are being more open about lesbian relationships. Still, singlehood is not always a matter of choice. Demography and culture combine to create a condition known as the "marriage squeeze." This is an imbalance in the number of women and men available for marriage. Because women tend to marry men who are somewhat older than themselves, there are more women than men who are looking for a partner. The older women become, the greater the imbalance. Among persons age sixty-five and older, men are a minority and unmarried men are a minority within that minority (although in the specifically never-married population men outnumber women until the age of sixty-five). In the *total* elderly single population, comprising the widowed and divorced to-

gether with the never-married, unmarried women begin to outnumber men by the age of thirty-five (Fowlkes, 1994:154). The single woman has come into her own. Not long ago, she would live a temporary existence—a rented apartment shared with a girlfriend or two. Adult life—a house, a car, travel, and children—only came with a husband. Today 60 percent of single women own their own homes, more than half of adventure travelers are women, and two in five business travelers are women (Edwards, 2000:48).

As women acquire higher levels of education and income, the female singles category grows ever larger. Demographers project that more than 20 percent of college-educated women currently in their thirties will never marry, representing a dramatic increase from any previous cohort of American women. The irony of this development is that men who are statistically available are the least educated. So we have a puzzle with completely mismatched pieces. As Jessie Bernard put it years ago, in the pool of eligibles, the men are at the “bottom of the barrel” and the women are the “cream of the crop” (quoted in Doudna and McBride, 1981:23).

The proportion of never-married has increased for Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics. Among Whites, the proportion increased from 16 percent to 21 percent between 1970 and 2000. Thirty-nine percent of Black adults in 2000 had never been married, up from 21 percent in 1970. For Hispanics the proportion rose from 19 to 28 percent during this period (Saluter and Lugaila, 1998:2; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2002d:47).

Many would say that fewer Black women marry because there are not enough eligible men. However, many Black women remain single by choice. Sociologist Elizabeth Higginbotham, who studied the priorities of educated Black



women in the contemporary United States, found important class differences in women's life preferences. Women from established middle-class families were expected both to marry and to complete college, but women from lower-middle-class families were expected to finish college before they married (Higginbotham, 1981).

Although women are more likely to remain single, research suggests that long-term singlehood has often been a more positive state for women than for men, and that women who remain single are superior to single men in terms of education, occupation, and mental health (summarized in Marks, 1996). After divorce, men are at greater risk of emotional disorder. They also remarry more quickly and more frequently than women (Fowlkes, 1994:157). There is evidence that unmarried women remain outside marriage in different ways and for different reasons than men do. Fowlkes summarizes the research findings:

Permanently single men give every indication of living out socially and emotionally undeveloped lives compared to their married counterparts . . . Women who remain single identify the advantages of preserving and fully developing their personal and social autonomy by not accommodating to the secondary status of the traditional wife role (Fowlkes, 1994:159).

Barbara Levy Simon's study *Never Married Women* (1987) provides a corrective to the myth that never-married women are lonely and embittered "old maids." Simon conducted interviews with fifty never-married women born between 1884 and 1918. She included women of diverse racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds in her study. Thirty-eight of her fifty elderly respondents (76 percent) actively chose singlehood. Although they gave varied reasons for their choice, the theme of freedom (freedom from the demands embedded in the wife's role) emerged repeatedly in the interviews as a major reason to remain single. Intensely involved in the social networks of their jobs and voluntary service, these women were "agents contributing to their own history" (Simon, 1987:38). Recent studies also suggest that mature single women are beginning to report more advantages to single status in terms of personal autonomy and growth than might have been true in the past (Marks, 1996:921).

### Experiencing Single Life

Singlehood's new respectability has not dispelled myths and stereotypes about single people. Stereotypes about singles abound in a society in which marriage is idealized. Old beliefs about unmarried people being somehow flawed have given way to newer stereotypes. Two of the more prominent stereotypes are that singles must be terribly lonely and that they are "swingers" (i.e., sexually nonexclusive). A study conducted by Leonard Cargan in the mid-1980s examined these two stereotypes by comparing the responses of single people with those of married people to determine whether singles felt undesirable, lonely, and incomplete. The singles included both never-married and divorced women and men. The stereotype of loneliness was shown to be true, in that singles had no one with whom to share happy or sad moments or with whom to discuss problems. But these findings were qualified by the relatively large numbers of the married who

also felt these facets of loneliness. The other stereotype of sexual “swinging” was upheld in the sense that singles have more sexual partners. However, it was the divorced singles, not single people in general, who tended to be sexually nonexclusive. Furthermore, “swingers” appeared in all of the categories examined (Cargan, 1984:546–557).

Do singles still swing in the twenty-first century? Apparently, they do somewhat. As the median age of the U.S. population has increased, the singles scene is maturing. According to the American Association for Single People (AASP), an unmarried majority has emerged in most major cities, as well as six states. Until the AASP was formed a few years ago, most singles groups were for dating and matchmaking (Wilson, 2001:2D). Today, upwardly mobile singles are as likely to meet in fitness clubs, libraries, amateur theatrical groups, walking and running clubs, churches, political associations, coffee bars, and, of course, online in chat rooms and through e-mail. More and more singles groups are formed for support rather than matchmaking (Stapinski, 1999; Wilson, 2001).

Like other nontraditional alternatives, singlehood can be an ambivalent experience: autonomous and euphoric at some times, lonely and unconnected at other times (Gordon, 1994). Even amid the joys of self-discovery, people require companionship. A growing number of adults are opting to live by themselves while maintaining a stable relationship. Other “singles” are, in fact, living with a partner without being married. Today, what it means to be single is no longer clear. Because many single people are actually cohabitants, what it means to be “single” or “married” is changing “as the personal lives of unmarried couples come to resemble those of their married counterparts in some ways but not in others” (Casper and Bianchi, 2002:40). In the next section, we examine how the lives of millions of unmarried women and men resemble those of married people.

## HETEROSEXUAL COHABITATION

The term *heterosexual cohabitation* refers to the practice of a couple sharing a household in a marriage-like relationship. Once considered “living in sin,” this arrangement is one of the most important changes in family life. Today, living together is a routine phase leading to marriage as well as a variation on formal marriage. According to the 2000 Census, there are about 11 million people living with an unmarried partner in the U.S. This includes both same-sex couples and different-sex couples: 9.7 million live with an unmarried different-sex partner and 1.2 million live with a same-sex partner. The numbers increased from 3.2 million unmarried-partner households in 1990 to 5.5 million in 2000, an increase of 72 percent in just a decade. The number of households containing two different-sex, unmarried people is 4.7 million. (Alternatives to Marriage Project, 2003).

Cohabitation has grown rapidly in all developed countries. In the United States, it has changed the nature of family formation. Sixty percent of all marriages formed in the 1990s began with cohabitation (Teachman, 2003). Whereas the pattern in the United States is relatively new, it is an old custom in many Scandinavian countries.

## The Rise of Cohabitation

Noted demographer Larry Bumpass asks, “How has it happened that what was once morally reprehensible has become the majority experience in just two decades?” (Bumpass, 1990:486). Sociologists point to several trends that explain why cohabitation is now the majority experience among cohorts of marriageable age, including the later age at which young people marry, the sexual revolution, new living arrangements after divorce and before remarriage, and increasing individualism and secularization (Bianchi and Casper, 2000; Bumpass and Lu, 2000b; Smock, 2000). These developments underlie the growing acceptability of living together. Bumpass explains that

shacking up was offensive after all, not because couples were sharing cooking and the laundry, but because they were sharing a bed. The revolution in the sexual experience of unmarried persons over the same period has seriously weakened the basis for disapproving of cohabitation (Bumpass, 1990:486).

Not only have social norms changed, but other conditions also have promoted the increase in cohabitation. The trends associated with singlehood and living away from parents in dormitories and apartments open up new possibilities for women and men. Women’s changing roles in the labor market have given them financial and personal options beyond marriage, while men no longer face the same pressures from employers to be married (Goldscheider and Waite, 1991; Smock, 2000).

Something else has changed to make living together a common experience. People are much less confident about marital stability. Many choose cohabitation because they worry about marriage, given the high divorce rate. Bumpass reports that in a series of questions about reasons for cohabitation, couples reported wanting to make sure that they are compatible before getting married (Bumpass, 1990:407).

Still other reasons for cohabitation lie in the economic and emotional benefits it offers. It is a means by which two persons can pool their resources to share the costs of rent, food, and utilities. Even among the elderly, economic incentives may encourage cohabitation and inhibit marriage (Chevan, 1996). In addition, this arrangement provides some of the emotional advantages of marriage with few of its economic and legal restrictions (Spain and Bianchi, 1996:32).

## Who Are Cohabitators?

Cohabitation is not new. Throughout American history, some couples have lived together without formal marriage. In the past, the practice was concentrated among the poor. But as cohabitation has become the majority experience, cohabitators are not a distinct population. We could make the case that instead of asking, “Who cohabits?” we might ask, “Who does not cohabit?” (Smock, 2000:4). Although we no longer provide profiles of those who live together without being married, we can make some generalizations about the social characteristics of cohabitators (summarized in McLanahan and Casper, 1995; Spain and Bianchi, 1996; Seltzer, 2001; and Scommegna, 2002):

- They are mostly young adults. Although cohabitation has risen in all age groups, (including older adults), it is greatest among women and men in their late twenties and early thirties. Thirty-eight percent of cohabitators are in the 25- to 34-year range. A substantial number (23 percent) are over 45, and 4.4 percent are over the age of 65.
- A sizable proportion are divorced from a previous mate. Over two-thirds of cohabiting couples include at least one divorced person.
- Increasing proportions of cohabiting couples today include children in their households.
- Today, two-thirds of children spend some time living with their mother and a cohabiting partner.

The old assumption was that those individuals who cohabit before marriage are somehow different types of people—less traditional, more willing to experiment. However, this assumption tells us little about the social circumstances that go beyond individual choices to facilitate cohabitation. Nor does it provide insight into the properties of the cohabiting partnership itself. Not enough research has been done to substantiate the advantages and disadvantages of cohabitation as (1) a temporary premarital experience, (2) a trial marriage, or (3) a stable, nonmarital alternative (Fowlkes, 1994:157; Seltzer, 2001). Despite its dramatic increase in the past two decades, cohabitation for many remains an ambiguous arrangement, often lacking in predictability and clear normative standards.

### Gender, Class, and Race

Cohabitation, like other domestic arrangements, is shaped by gender, class, and race. For example, gender is an important variable in how cohabitation is experienced. Past research has shown that men tend to view cohabitation in pragmatic terms, with less emotional involvement and less personal commitment than women, who tend to define the arrangement as a step toward a stable, long-term relationship (Jackson, 1983; Macklin, 1983). Women cohabitators are more likely than men to desire marriage (Blumstein and Schwartz, 1983; Lyness et al., 1972:308). About one in four unmarried women who are now living with a man do not expect to marry him. The biggest factor in women's expectation of marriage is the man's social and economic status. If she perceives he is not good marriage material, she does not expect to marry him (Healy, 2002). Cohabiting may be a better deal for men than for women if women end up with the responsibilities of marriage without the legal protections. Some research finds that women who cohabit are more prone to depression than married women, especially if children are involved. If some women constantly worry that the union could dissolve, the instability is detrimental to their well-being (Peterson, 2000a:2D).

Compared with married couples, cohabitators tend to be more egalitarian and to have less traditional attitudes toward family life. In four out of five cohabiting couples both partners work outside the home, compared with three in five married couples. Nevertheless, there are differences in the household division of labor. The strong tendency is for household duties to be split along traditional

gender lines, with women doing more domestic chores (Blumstein and Schwartz, 1983:148; Shelton and John, 1993a; Seltzer, 2001). Despite this gender gap, research finds a smaller gap among cohabitators than among those who are formally married because cohabitating women spend less time on housework than do married women. Men's time spent in housework is not significantly different among cohabitators and those who are formally married (Shelton and John, 1993a:401). Housework is another indication that cohabitation may be more advantageous to men than to women, even though women in this arrangement spend less time on household duties.

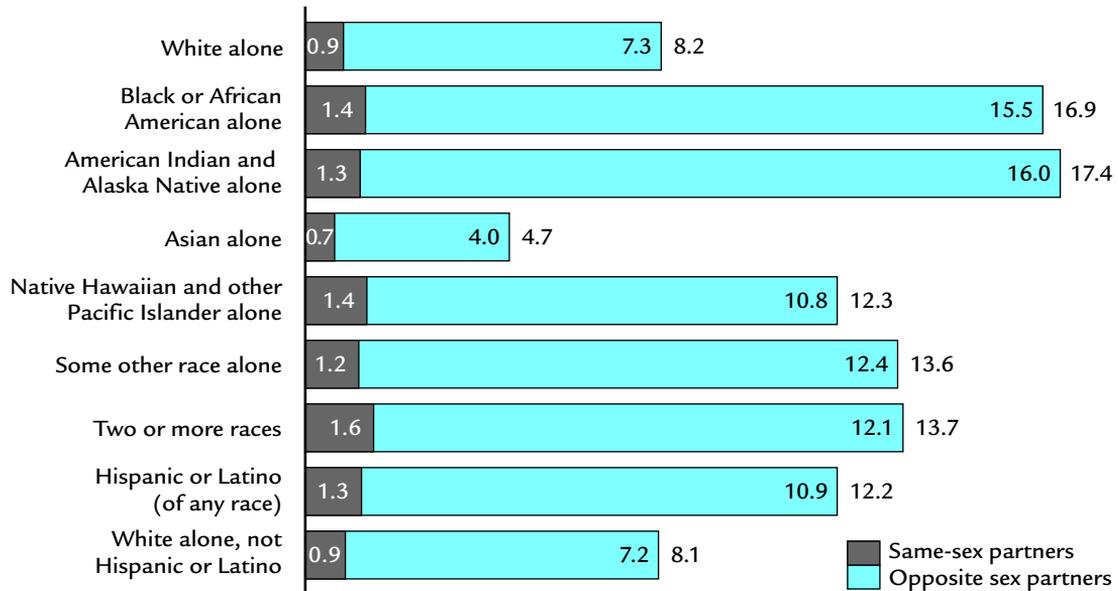
Although the rise in cohabitation is characteristic of all social and economic groups, it continues to be more common among those with less education and for whom economic resources are more constrained (Bumpass and Lu, 2000b:32; Casper and Bianchi, 2002). Perhaps this is because cohabiting unions require less initial commitment to fulfill long-term economic responsibilities. Because "marriage includes expectations about economic roles, couples may think that they should reach specific financial goals such as steady employment or housing of a certain quality before it is appropriate to marry" (Seltzer, 2000:469). Economic factors have produced a long history of consensual unions among African Americans and some Latino groups. These patterns differ in important ways from the majority patterns. Recent research finds that informal unions among Puerto Ricans in New York City are widespread. Almost half of the first unions of young Puerto Ricans ages fifteen to twenty-nine begin informally. Such unions are similar to marriage especially insofar as childbearing behavior is concerned. Young Puerto Ricans' high rates of cohabitation reflect a set of economic conditions, including low rates of labor force participation, low earnings, and other factors that discourage entry into legal marriage. Their unions, however, are much like marriage and can be considered a distinctive family form (Landale and Fennelly, 1992).

Cohabitation has risen in all racial groups. Unlike the large racial differences in marriage, there are more modest racial differences in cohabitation rates (Figure 12.4 shows the racial differences in the proportion of unmarried households to all coupled households). In 1978, single White women were least likely to live with a partner outside of marriage, while single Hispanic women were most likely to cohabit. By 2000, 9 percent of single White women lived with a male partner, compared with 10 percent of single Hispanic and 6 percent of single Black women (Fields and Casper, 2001:13). By 2000, cohabiting couples were also more likely to be of different races than married couples.

### Is Cohabitation a Prelude to Marriage or a Substitute for Marriage?

Differences in the nature of cohabitation raise questions about how this widely accepted practice should be viewed in relation to marriage. In the family field, scholars are debating whether cohabitation is a trial period before marriage, a stage in the marriage process, or a replacement for formal marriage.

Many see cohabitation as simply a new stage in the American courtship process, a now-common premarital step. They argue that cohabitation is an extension of marriage because it allows people to "try out" potential marriage part-



**Figure 12.4**

**Unmarried-partner households by sex of partners and race and Hispanic origin of householder: 2000**

(Percent of all coupled households. For information on confidentiality protection, nonsampling error and definitions, see [www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/docs/sf1.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/docs/sf1.pdf))

Note: Percent same-sex partners and percent opposite-sex partners may not add to total percent unmarried-partner households because of rounding.

Source: Tavia Simmons and Martin O’Connell, “Married-Couple and Unmarried-Partner Households: 2000,” *Census 2000 Special Reports*. U.S. Bureau of the Census (February 2003).

ners. As reasonable as this sounds, some cohabitation patterns raise questions about this perspective. First, not all cohabiting couples anticipate marriage. In fact, many cohabitation arrangements are relatively short-lived—only 1.5 years (Bumpass, 1990:487; Bumpass and Lu, 2000b). Cohabitation before marriage may even increase the risk of divorce (McLanahan and Casper, 1995; Casper and Bianchi, 2002).

Another perspective holds that cohabitation is not a prelude to formal marriage at all. Instead, it is a family form in its own right for cohabiting couples who do not necessarily reject marriage. They are “less likely to see marriage as the defining characteristic of their family lives” (Seltzer, 2001:470). In many racial-ethnic settings, informal unions are surrounded by standard expectations much like those that apply to married couples. And the fact that minority cohabiting couples are more likely to have children than White cohabiting couples “suggests that cohabitation has become more of a substitute for marriage in minority communities than in White communities” (McLanahan and Casper, 1995:29). In a

study of planned and unplanned childbearing among unmarried women, cohabitating Hispanics were two times more likely to have a planned birth versus an unplanned birth, suggesting that cohabitation is more integral to the family life of Hispanics than other groups (Musick, 2002:925).

Which of the contrasting views about cohabitation is most correct? Is it a temporary step on the way to marriage, or is it a distinctive family type? No doubt both perspectives are correct. Each captures a distinctive feature of cohabitation with different purposes and meanings. Considering these differences, we must not treat cohabitants as one homogeneous group. Comparisons between cohabitating and noncohabitating couples imply that all cohabitating relationships are alike, which is not true.

Given the increasing numbers of cohabiting couples and the fact that many do not intend to marry their partner eventually, does this mean that the institution of marriage is in jeopardy? Bumpass, after reviewing the evidence, does not think so. However, he notes several implications of cohabitation for marriage (from Bumpass, 1990; Smock, 2000):

1. Cohabitation changes the meaning of "single." Singlehood (and the rapid decline of marriage) no longer means unattached living.
2. Marriage is now a less specific marker of other transitions, such as sex, living arrangements, and parenting.
3. Cohabitation requires a new way of marking those unions that eventually become marriages. For some couples, "marriage" began when they started living together, whereas others avoid an unstable marriage by splitting up before they reach the altar.
4. "Premarital divorces" help keep the divorce rate from going even higher, since many couples are using cohabitation to test their relationship.
5. Not all cohabitations are part of the marriage process. Some are better characterized as relationships of convenience in which marriage is not an issue.

Does cohabitation provide an opportunity for couples to learn about each other, strengthen their bonds, and increase their chances for a successful marriage? The evidence suggests the opposite. "Premarital cohabitation tends to be associated with lower marriage quality and to increase the risk of divorce even after taking account of variables associated with divorce (e.g., education, age at marriage)" (Smock, 2000:6). Why? Two explanations address this association. The first explanation refers to the idea that people who cohabit before marriage differ in important ways from those who do not and these ways increase the likelihood of marital instability. The second explanation is that there is something about cohabitation itself that increases the likelihood of marital disruption above and beyond one's characteristics at the start of the cohabitation; in other words, the experience makes people more prone to instability (Smock, 2000:6).

In sum, it is apparent that U.S. families are not following the path established by some European countries. Most of the evidence indicates that cohabitation is not (yet) becoming an alternative to marriage. Nevertheless, it is redefining family life. Among its many effects on family boundaries, none is more profound than its implications for children's lives. Living together now often involves chil-

dren from previous marriages as well as nonmarital births occurring in cohabiting unions (Bumpass and Lu, 2000b:29).

## SAME-SEX PARTNERS AND FAMILIES

Before the gay liberation movement of the 1970s and the AIDS epidemic that first appeared in the 1980s, gay men and lesbians were largely invisible. Before that time most gay men and lesbians sought to avoid the risk of disclosing their **sexual orientation**. Today, lesbian women and gay men are a well-established presence in the public consciousness. Same-sex partnerships are an important part of growing family diversity in the United States and the world.

The social movement for gay civil rights was catalyzed by the 1969 **Stonewall riots**, when police raided a gay bar in New York City. Instead of dispersing, the two hundred homosexual patrons who had never collectively resisted the police before, fought back. This gave impetus to collective efforts by gays to publicize police harassment, job discrimination, and other indignities that lesbians and gays routinely face. By 1980, more than 4000 gay rights organizations existed in the United States. This provided the political basis for challenging various forms of same-sex oppression.

By the end of the twentieth century, thirty years after Stonewall and three decades of gay rights activities, homosexuals had achieved recognition as a distinct social group. This has worked to both their advantage and disadvantage. No longer closeted or hidden from view, those inside the community find support for their sexual preference that has never before existed. However, securing a legitimate public identity has not eliminated prejudice. There is a long tradition of fear and hatred of homosexuality in Western society (termed *homophobia*). Most religious groups are unyielding. The military continues to discriminate. Many employers subtly discriminate. Bias toward gays is far more accepted among larger numbers of Americans than is bias against other groups. In surveys, about three-fourths of homosexuals say they have been harassed by people calling them names, and as many as one in four say they have been physically assaulted.

On the other hand, three decades of struggle for gay rights have produced modest gains. Some court decisions have been favorable. The Supreme Court's ruling in *Lawrence v. Texas* (2003), which protects private lives of gays, is a landmark victory. Some gay rights ordinances have been passed by progressive legislatures and city commissions. Some religious leaders and a few congregations accept gays and lesbians and have worked to change attitudes and move gays closer to the mainstream. The American Psychiatric Association has removed homosexuality from its list of mental illnesses. Still, huge obstacles remain.

The success of gay rights political activists has not achieved the ultimate goal—full acceptance of same-sex relationships. Many, if not most, lesbians and gay men express the desire for an enduring love relationship with a partner of the same gender. Research findings suggest that many are successful in creating such relationships. Survey data suggest that 40 to 60 percent of gay men and 45 to 80 percent of lesbians are currently involved in steady romantic relationships (Patterson, 2001:272). Yet same-sex marriage is vehemently opposed by those who be-

lieve that homosexuality is morally offensive and dangerous. In Chapter 8 we examined the political debate over same-sex marriage and the mainstream political resistance for legalizing gay marriage. Public opinion on gay marriage is more negative than positive, even though the United States is now more accepting of gays and lesbians. This is a time of great paradox. Lesbians and gays are simultaneously depicted as pioneering and as a major sign of social deterioration (Laird 2003:176). Just two months after the Supreme Court's ruling, polls showed a 10 percentage point drop in public support of gay rights (Cooperman, 2003:12). This reflects a fear that the Court's decision will lead to gay marriage and pose a threat to "the family."

Despite resistance and discrimination, lesbians and gay men are creating and sustaining families. Not only are gay families here to stay, but family has become a frontier issue in the struggle for gay rights. It may seem odd to identify a family, rather than an individual, as gay. Nevertheless, this historically new category of family is a vital part of family diversification that is now taking place in the nation and the world (Stacey, 1998:118).

### Who Is Gay and What Are Gay Families?

Important questions revolve around the numbers of gay men and lesbian women in the United States. The numbers of homosexuals are unknown and perhaps unknowable, because many never reveal their sexual orientation and live lives that appear to be heterosexually oriented. The common estimates by researchers range from 4 to 10 percent of adults in the total population that are exclusively or substantially homosexual. Pioneering research by Alfred Kinsey and his associates first on men, in 1948, and then on women, in 1953, made it clear that homosexuality was much more common than anyone had suspected. Since Kinsey's studies, the 10 percent figure has been widely used, prompting the phrase, "one in ten," meaning that one in ten persons in the United States is gay or lesbian. In fact, Kinsey argued that it was impossible to answer the question of how many gays and lesbians are in the population. The authors of *Sex in America* (Michael et al., 1994), the book based on the national sex survey (see Chapter 7), explain that the answer to the gay numbers question is subtle and shaded with gray. They give three reasons why we cannot say that a person is gay or not gay: first, people often change their sexual behavior during their lifetime, making it impossible to state that a particular set of behaviors defines a person as gay; second, there is no one set of sexual desires or self-identification that uniquely defines homosexuality; and third, homosexual behavior is not easily measured. Persecution means that many people never reveal their sexual orientation (Michael et al., 1994:172).

Problems of definition also apply to gay families, because individuals and not families have sexual orientations. Typically, in families of origin, family members have different sexual orientations. Katherine Allen and David Demo suggest that we can define lesbian and gay families by the presence of two or more people who share a same-sex orientation (e.g., a couple), or by the presence of at least one lesbian or gay adult rearing a child. This definition represents families that are influenced by issues and dynamics associated with homosexuality (Allen and Demo, 1995:113). Others refer to lesbian and gay cohabiting couples as families

even though they are not considered families according to official definition because they are not legally married (Bianchi and Casper, 2000:10). Although the matter of what constitutes a gay family is important, family researchers extend the discussion to include the following (from Savin-Williams and Esterberg, 2000:199):

- Families in which parents are heterosexual but the children are lesbian or gay
- Children of lesbian and gay parents and how these children have fared, both psychologically and socially (see Chapter 9)
- Lesbian and gay parents who are making the decision to parent and the relationships they have with each other
- Public policies that have, with relatively few exceptions, neglected the needs of gay and lesbian families (see Chapter 13)

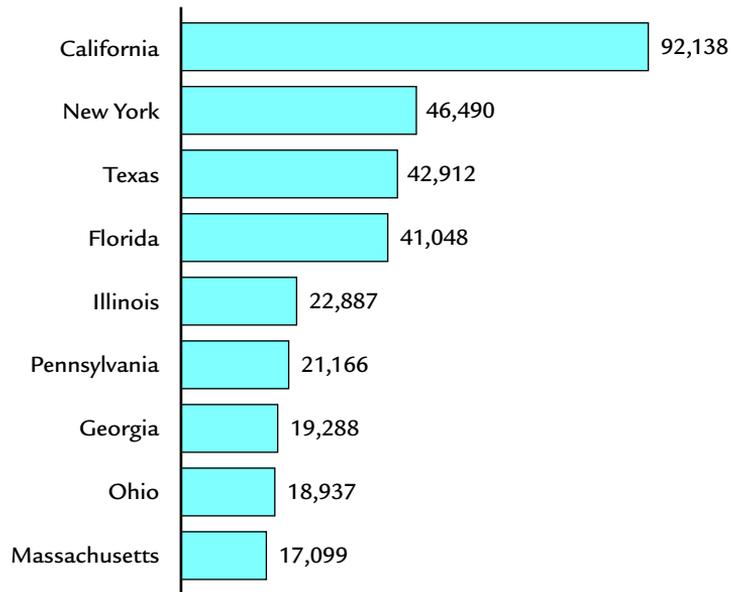
Many same-sex couples misrepresent their relationships in surveys and their households come in different shapes, and compositions, so “gay families” are difficult to count. We do not have systematic or comprehensive data on gay and lesbian households because the U.S. Census Bureau does not identify the sexual orientation of those it surveys. Federal agencies recognize only opposite-sex marriages for enacting any agency programs, including the national census. “Thus those responses that indicate same-sex spouse were invalidated in the 1999 and 2000 censuses. However, in the 2000 Census, these responses were reallocated to the ‘unmarried partner’ category. In conjunction with an additional question regarding the sex of the unmarried partner, it begins to be possible to estimate roughly the number of gay households” (Laird, 2003:183). Census data show that same-sex couples lead a household in nearly every county. Lesbians and gays now head nearly 600,000 homes in the United States, slightly more than one-half of 1 percent of the nation’s households (Associated Press, 2001). (Figure 12.5 shows the states with the largest numbers of same-sex couples counted.) Social scientists are now developing solid demographic studies to describe the gay and lesbian population and inform policy debates (Black et al., 2000).

### Gay Couples and Families

The idea that we should go beyond “homosexual lifestyles” to study the family relations of lesbians and gays is new even in the family field. “We have yet to reach a point where lesbians and gays are viewed as family members who happen to be gay” (Allen and Demo, 1995:116). Until recently, much of what we knew about gays and lesbians came from classic studies of homosexual partnerships (e.g., Bell and Weinberg, 1978; Harry, 1983; Peplau, 1981; Blumstein and Schwartz, 1983), but a newly published report on the demographics of the lesbian and gay population has constructed the first real portrait of cohabiting couples (from Black et al., 2000; and Bianchi and Casper, 2000:10 11):

1. Lesbian and gay couples are highly urban. About 45 percent of lesbian couples and 60 percent of gay couples were concentrated in twenty cities in 1990. The greatest proportion lived in San Francisco, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, Atlanta, and New York City.

Of all the U.S. couples, 1%, or 594,000, identify themselves as same-sex households. States with the largest numbers:



**Figure 12.5**

#### Same-sex couples counted

Of all U.S. couples, 1%, or 594,000, identify themselves as same-sex households. States with the largest numbers:

*Source: USA Today, "Gay Marriage Debate Clouds Real Issue of Equal Treatment" (August 5, 2003): 10A.*

2. Many couples include children: 22 percent of lesbian couples and 5 percent of gay couples, compared with 59 percent of married-couple families.
3. Gays and lesbians who live with partners have higher educational attainment than men and women in heterosexual marriages. In 1990, 13 percent of cohabiting gay men ages twenty-five to thirty-four had a postgraduate education, compared with 17 percent of married men. Sixteen percent of cohabiting lesbians had some postgraduate education compared with 5 percent of married women.
4. Gay men who live with a partner tend to earn less than other men, whereas cohabiting lesbians generally earn more than other women.
5. The rate of home ownership is lower for gay and lesbian couples than for married-couple families. Among those who own a home, however, gay and lesbian couples tend to own more expensive homes than married couples.

In their classic study, Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) found that lesbian couples and gay male couples faced many of the same issues confronting

heterosexual couples who live together, married or not. They must work out issues related to the division of household labor, power and authority, and emotional obligations. Homosexual couples, however, face additional problems. Because of the general antipathy toward homosexuality in American society, gay and lesbian couples function in social settings that may or may not accept their family commitment. They must negotiate their families in varying degrees of adversity (Laird, 2003:194; Weeks et al., 2001; Oswald, 2002). They are not accorded the benefits automatically conferred upon heterosexual relationships. For example, they are seldom extended such commonplace courtesies as having a partner invited to an office party or to a retirement banquet. Even heterosexuals who might like to welcome a gay friend's partner may not know how to go about doing so. Blumstein and Schwartz contend that the "couple" status of homosexuals is always in jeopardy:

The problem with gay male culture is that much of it is organized around singlehood or maintaining one's sexual marketability. Meeting places like bars and baths promote casual sex rather than couple activities. The problem with the lesbian world is quite different. Women are often in tight-knit friendship groups where friends and acquaintances spend so much intimate time together that, it seems to us, opportunities arise for respect and companionship to turn into love and a meaningful affair (Blumstein and Schwartz, 1983:322–323).

Current research on lesbian and gay couples points to a number of similarities and differences between homosexual and heterosexual couples, some of which contradict the prevailing stereotypes. For example, lesbians and gay men report as much satisfaction with their relationships as do heterosexual couples. For the most part, they describe themselves as happy. When they do experience problems in their relationships, they often stem from the difficulties that heterosexuals face, that is, different backgrounds, job-related problems, financial pressures, and friction with extended family networks. On the other hand, the lack of formalized social supports for committed lesbian and gay relationships might lead to higher breakup rates than are found in married couples (Kurdek, 1998). In her summary of research, Charlotte Patterson concludes: "In general, the picture of lesbian and gay relationships emerging from this body of work is one of positive adjustment even in the face of stressful conditions (Patterson, 2001:271).

### Gender

In Chapter 7 we saw that gender is important in the intimate relationships of lesbians and gays, but in ways that contradict common stereotypes. For example, lesbians are commonly depicted as masculine women, whereas gay men are depicted as effeminate men. In reality, lesbians and gays are not inverts of heterosexuals. Lesbians and heterosexual women are more alike than different, as are gay and heterosexual men. Nevertheless, in the values and behaviors that link love and sex, lesbians and gays have identifiable gender-linked behaviors (Fowlkes, 1994:172). To simplify, "men are like men, and women are like women despite differences in sexual orientation" (Hovedt, 1982:182, cited in Fowlkes, 1994:172).

Studies comparing lesbian, gay, and heterosexual couples find important contrasts in their characteristic patterns of intimacy. Gender shapes domestic val-

ues and practices more strongly than sexual identity (Stacey, 1998:139). For example, lesbians have been found to be more sexually exclusive than gay men. Data collected before and after the HIV/AIDS epidemic had attracted public attention revealed that most lesbians experienced monogamous sexual relationships whereas gay men did not (reported in Patterson, 2001:273). The tendency for gay men to be less sexually exclusive than lesbian women parallels the difference in heterosexual males and females. This difference is related to gender role socialization in society, where “males are socialized to engage in sexual behaviors both with and without affection while women are expected to combine the two” (Harry, 1983:226).

Research highlights the effects of gender on relationship quality. There are many coupling issues in which gender “sameness” can be valuable, and other areas in which it can generate problems. Similarly, the issue of gender “differentness” can enrich a couple’s life (Laird, 2003:195). Studies find that same-sex couples handle conflicts better than heterosexual couples (Gottman and Levinson, 1999), and that lesbian couples have higher levels of cohesion and adaptability than heterosexuals (Zacks et al., 1988).

In a major departure from the heterosexual pattern, homosexual couples tend to be egalitarian (Allen and Demo, 1995). Studies have found that heterosexual couples, whether in cohabitation or marriage relationships, tend to accept the traditional gender roles for men and women. In contrast, homosexual couples are much more likely to share in the decision making and in household duties. This was confirmed by Lawrence Kurdek (1993), who found that married, gay, and lesbian couples followed different strategies for allocating household labor. As reported in other studies (Thompson and Walker, 1991), married couples allocated housework primarily on the basis of gender. In other words, wives did most of the housework. Although partners in gay couples and married couples were equally likely to be specialized in task performance, gay couples tended to distribute the pattern of specialization equally so that, unlike married couples, one partner did not do all the work. Partners in gay couples specialized in task performance on the basis of skill, interest, and work schedule, while Lesbians typically followed an ethic of equality (Kurdek, 1993).

An important implication of the equality found in homosexual relationships is that, contrary to the stereotype, the partners do not take the role of either “husband” or “wife.” The prevailing assumption is that one takes the masculine role and is dominant in sexual activities and decision making, while the other does the “feminine” household tasks and is submissive to the first. Research consistently refutes this “butch/femme” notion, noting that only a small minority of couples reflect the stereotype.

### Voluntarily Chosen Kinship Networks

In conventional thinking, “family” is a heterosexually based unit, formed through legal marriage. By assuming that homosexuals are incapable of procreation, parenting, and kinship, gay and lesbian relationships are thought to be incompatible with family life. It is true that gay rights movements once sought to escape the constraints of a heterosexist institution. In the 1990s, however, family issues are at the forefront of lesbian and gay struggles for social justice (D’Emilio, 1996).

New research is finding networks of support that operate like families. Partners and friends are more reliable sources of social and emotional support than families of origin (Allen and Demo, 1995:420). These networks are an emergent feature of lesbian and gay family life.

Same-sex networks of support are the subject of the book *Families We Choose*, by anthropologist Kath Weston (1991). This book is based on a study conducted in the San Francisco Bay Area in the late 1980s. During a two-year period, Weston conducted interviews and engaged in participant observation with forty lesbians and forty gay men from diverse racial-ethnic backgrounds (see Box 12.2). She discovered kinship networks among gays and lesbians who were creating relationships they defined as family. “Chosen” families are formed from networks of friends, lovers, co-parents, children conceived through artificial insemination, adopted children, children from previous heterosexual relationships, and blood kin (in other words, “fictive kin”). The families that gays and lesbians were creating in the Bay Area had extremely fluid boundaries, much like kinship organization among sectors of racial-ethnic and White working-class families (see Chapters 3 and 5).

**BOX 12.2****Researching Families: Fieldwork in Gay Communities**

Kath Weston describes the methods she used to select and study lesbians and gay men in San Francisco.

The fieldwork that provides the basis for my analysis was conducted in the San Francisco Bay Area during 1985–1986, with a follow-up visit in 1987. . . .

With its unique history and reputation as a gay city, San Francisco hardly presents a “typical” lesbian and gay population for study. Yet the Bay Area proved to be a valuable field site because it brought together gay men and lesbians from very different colors and classes, identities and backgrounds.

In addition to the long hours of participant-observation so central to anthropological fieldwork, my analysis draws on 80 in-depth interviews conducted while in the field. Interview participants were divided evenly between women and men, with all but two identifying themselves as lesbian or gay. Random sampling is clearly an impossibility for a population that is not only partially hidden or “closeted,” but also lacks consensus as to the criteria for membership. In general, I let self-identification be my guide for inclusion. Determined to avoid the race, class, and organizational bias that has characterized so many studies of gay men and lesbians, I made my initial connections through personal contacts developed over the six years I had lived in San Francisco previous to the time the project got underway. The alternative—gaining entry through agencies, college classes, and advertisements—tends to weight a sample for “joiners,” professional interviewees, the highly educated, persons with an overtly political analysis, and individuals who see themselves as central (rather than marginal) to the population in question.

By asking each person interviewed for names of potential participants, I utilized techniques of friendship pyramiding and snowball sampling to arrive at a sample varied in race, ethnicity, class, and class background. While the Bay Area is perhaps more

(continued)

generally politicized than other regions of the nation, the majority of interview participants would not have portrayed themselves as political activists. Approximately 36 percent were people of color; of the 64 percent who were white, 11 (or 14 percent of the total) were Jewish. Slightly over 50 percent came from working-class backgrounds, with an overlapping 58 percent employed in working-class occupations at the time of the interview.

Of the 82 people contacted, only two turned down my request for an interview. A few individuals made an effort to find me after hearing of the study, but most were far from self-selecting. The vast majority demanded great persistence and flexibility in scheduling (and rescheduling) on my part to convince them to participate. I believe this persistence is one reason this study includes voices not customarily heard when lesbians and gay men appear in the pages of books and journals: people who had constructed exceedingly private lives and could scarcely get over their disbelief at allowing themselves to be interviewed, people convinced that their experiences were uneventful or unworthy of note, people fearful that a researcher would go away and write an account lacking in respect for their identities or their perceptions.

To offset the tendency of earlier studies to focus on the white and wealthier sectors of lesbian and gay population, I also utilized theoretic sampling. From a growing pool of contacts I deliberately selected people of color, people from working-class backgrounds, and individuals employed in working-class occupations.

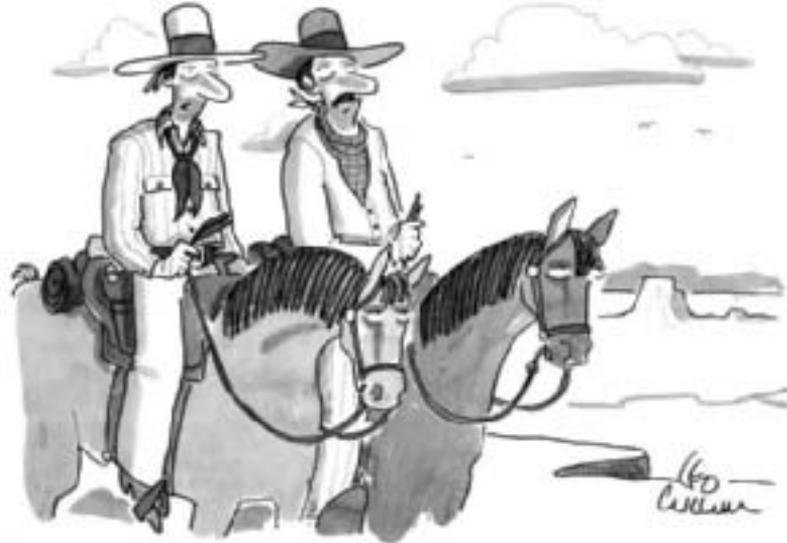
In any sample this diverse, with so many different combinations of identities, theoretic sampling cannot hope to be “representative.” To treat each individual as a representative of his or her race, for instance, would be a form of tokenism that glosses over the differences of gender, class, age, national origin, language, religion, and ability which crosscut race and ethnicity. At the same time, I am not interested in these categories as demographic variables, or as reified pigeonholes for people, but rather as identities meaningful to participants themselves.

*Source:* Kath Weston, *Families We Choose*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991, pp. 7–10.

Weston’s study is important because it challenges the conventional notion that homosexuals lack family ties. It also reveals some of the ways in which lesbians and gays are broadening the definition of family by including domestic partnerships and friendship networks. Joan Laird reports that in some lesbian communities the boundaries between family, kinship, and community are diffuse. “Although it has been said that you cannot choose your relatives, that is exactly what gay families in devising a new system of kinship do. They choose their families, retaining the familiar symbol of blood and combining it with symbols of love and choice” (Laird, 2003:178).

### The Domestic Partner Movement

Family matters have become the newest battleground for lesbian and gay rights. In the last two decades, two developments made the economic and legal discrimination against gay and lesbian families hit home. The first is AIDS. As partners and friends have died, homosexuals have grown more aware of their lack of



*"What's the point of being your sidekick if the courts won't recognize it?"*

family rights. They have not been able to have their partners included in their companies' health plans and have had no claims on their lovers' property. The second development is the growing number of gay and lesbian couples having and adopting children (Horn, 1990:9). These changes have mobilized lesbians and gays to take legal and political action in their quest for family rights.

A few industrial nations (Denmark, Norway, and Sweden) permit "registered partnerships" that give same-sex couples the full benefits of marriage, but are not legal marriage. Chapter 8 details the significant legal and economic benefits of marriage: coverage under a spouse's health and pension plans, rights of inheritance and community property, and potential savings from joint tax returns. Gay and lesbian partners face a "catch-22": "They legally cannot wed and yet they face discrimination because they are not married. Until recently, the courts have ruled consistently to deny these benefits to same-sex partners in long-term relationships. In 2000, a Vermont law established "civil unions" for lesbian and gay couples with all the rights afforded to married couples under state law. California followed in 2003. Lesbian and gay partners who enter civil unions are eligible to receive the same benefits for their spouses, including health insurance, as are now offered to married couples by their employers (Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2000:18). These changes have mobilized lesbians and gays to take legal and political action in their quest for family rights. They argue that "family" can no longer be defined by marriage alone, but by sharing lives in intimate and committed relationships of mutual caring.

In 1982, the *Village Voice*, a New York City weekly, became the first U.S. employer to offer health insurance benefits to the domestic partners of its lesbian and gay employees. The **domestic partner movement** has entered the courts, legislatures, and workplaces to qualify for some of the legal benefits accorded married heterosexuals. **Domestic partners** are two individuals who are in a long-term

committed relationship and are responsible for each other's financial and emotional well-being. Employers usually set their own definitions of domestic partners when they decide who is eligible for domestic partner benefits. Such definitions require that the partners have lived together for at least six months, are responsible for each other's financial welfare, are at least eighteen years old, and are mentally competent to enter into a legal contract. Many employers offer extra compensation to employees beyond their wages, such as health insurance, dental care, relocation expenses, and the like (Human Rights Campaign, 2003).

As more employers added the benefits through the 1990s, others followed. By 2000, over 3500 private companies, colleges and universities, and state and local governments offered domestic partnerships health insurance to their employees (see Figure 12.6). Employers who offer domestic partnership benefits operate in all fifty states (Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2000:23-24). More than one-fourth of Americans work for an employer that offers domestic partner benefits, and 90 percent that offer domestic partner benefits make them available to both same-sex and different-sex couples. Thus, cohabiting heterosexuals also benefit from the new legislation. Many are using domestic partner plans as well. Not only has the gay rights movement transformed our understanding of human sexuality; it is also expanding the definition of what constitutes a family.

## FAMILIES SEPARATED BY TIME AND SPACE

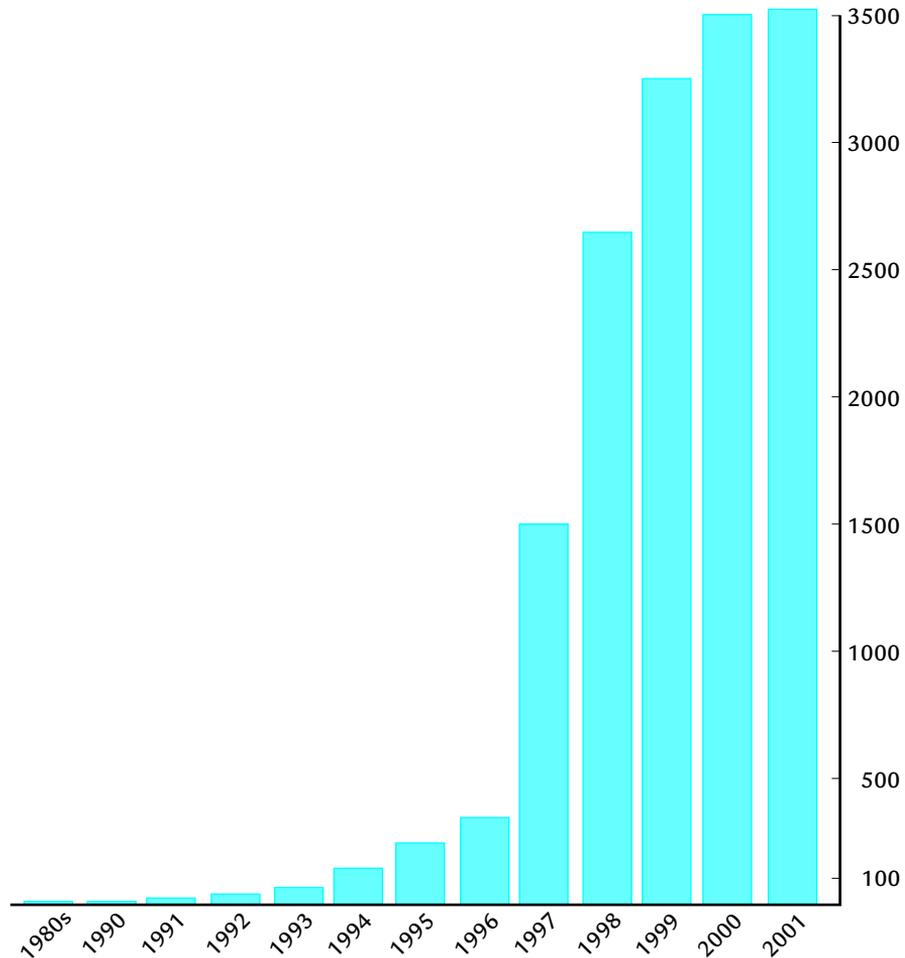
Global changes in labor force participation are profoundly altering family arrangements and contributing to growing family diversity. As more family members seek employment in market economies, families throughout the world are becoming more dispersed (Bruce et al., 1995). To conclude this chapter, we consider briefly two family forms that are characterized by temporal and spatial separation: transnational families and commuter marriages in the United States. Both forms rearrange interactions between family members and require a redefinition of family.

### Transnational Families

In Chapter 4 we discussed some of the family consequences that are emerging from immigration. As migrants separate themselves from families, homes, jobs, and communities, they must adjust to new surroundings. One of the ways they do this is through their family connections. Instead of severing family ties, they retain strong family bonds that sustain them across time, space, and national boundaries. Today's patterns of work and migration are creating a new family form—the transnational family. **Transnational families** are those with one partner living and working in one country while the other remains “back home” in the country of origin (Chavez, 1992:119).

Transnational family life entails extraordinary emotional, financial, and physical stress for family members. Anthropologist Leo Chavez writes:

Migrants are subject to many life-threatening experiences in crossing the border and then in working in the United States. As a consequence, parents in transnational



**Figure 12.6**

**Number of employers who offer domestic partner health benefits, by year**

Source: Human Rights Campaign Foundation, *The State of the Workplace for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered Americans 2000*. Washington, DC: Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2000, p. 23.

families wait expectantly for the migrant's return, as do spouses and children. Wives not only fear for their husbands' safety, but often worry that their husbands will meet other women, causing them to forget their families back home. . . . Family members left behind often must assume tasks and roles belonging to the missing spouse. Although this can be quite burdensome, many families left behind do not reunite with migrants in the United States. Others, however, find the pressures too great to bear and choose to join the family members in the United States (Chavez, 1992:119).

Globalization is creating new immigration patterns and producing new transnational family forms around the world. According to Hondagneu Sotelo (2002), postindustrial economies need large numbers of women workers. This

differs from the needs of industrial societies, which typically recruit men. Globalization has put women on the move as never before. Millions of women migrate from poor countries to rich ones where they serve as nannies, maids, and sometimes sex workers. They migrate to do “women’s work”—work that affluent women are no longer able or willing to do. These migrant workers often leave their own children in the care of grandmothers, sisters, and sisters-in-law. This pattern of female migration reflects a worldwide gender revolution (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2003) and a worldwide family revolution as well.

As labor demands reshape the lives of female migrants, new family forms are emerging. For example, motherhood can be stretched across national boundaries. **Transnational motherhood** is an arrangement whereby immigrant women work in one country, while their children live in another country. Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (1996) studied transnational mothering among Latina domestic workers, where mothers work in the United States while their children remain in Mexico or Central America. Sometimes these immigrant women did not bring their children with them because they worked as live-in maids or child-care providers, and these types of employment made it impossible for them to live with their children. Other mothers found that they could provide better for their children by a transnational mothering arrangement because U.S. dollars stretched farther in Central America and Mexico than in the United States. This arrangement is difficult for parents and children, but it is sometimes the only choice if one is to take advantage of better wages in the United States. Latinos living in the United States have a long history of family flexibility, yet Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila argue that transnational mothering is radically different from many other family adaptations because it is now women with young children who are recruited for U.S. jobs that pay far less than a “family wage.” When men come north and leave their families in Mexico, they are fulfilling familial obligations defined as breadwinning for the family. When women do so, they are embarking not only on an immigration journey, but on a more radical gender transformative odyssey. They are initiating separations of space and time from their communities of origin, homes, children, and sometimes husbands. In doing so, they must cope with stigma, guilt, and criticism from others. Furthermore, caring for other people’s children is not always compatible with doing daily care for one’s own family (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila, 1997:7).

Filipina migrants also fill the international need for domestic work. In more than one hundred countries today, they do housework and other forms of caretaking for more privileged women. At the same time, they hire low-wage women workers in the Philippines to care for their children they left behind. This represents an international division of reproductive labor that extends to family life among (1) middle-class women in receiving nations, (2) migrant domestic workers, and (3) Third World women who are too poor to migrate. The Filipina domestic workers who are “in the middle” of this division of labor suffer the pain of family separation, even as they provide caregiving for other families in postindustrial societies (Parrenas, 2000).

Immigrant families are fractured in other ways. For example, many immigrant mothers of newly born children must send their infants “home” to their countries of origin to be cared for by extended-family members. This is a common



Transnational families require major adaptations in all areas of family life.

practice is New York's Chinatown where immigrants work long hours in garment factories for paltry pay, leaving them no time to care for children (Sengupta, 1999).

As we think about how immigrant families adapt themselves to the new social and economic realities they face, it is important to keep the following two points in mind. First, transnational families are closely linked with the globalization of economies that create increasing demands for immigrant labor. Second, transnational families require major adaptations in all areas of family life to cope with the problems of immigration and withstand temporal and spatial separation. Gender relations are deeply affected by migration, separation, and the reuniting of family members (see Box 12.3).

### Commuter Marriages and Other Long-Distance Relationships

Changes in technology and the workplace have contributed to the growth of commuter marriages and other long-distance relationships (Dainton and Aylor, 2001). Spouses or relational partners maintain separate households as a way of solving the dilemmas of dual-career families. Two demanding careers in different locations means that couples commute to one or the other household between periods of separation that are devoted to work. Most commuting couples do not see their decision to commute as a matter of choice. Instead, living apart is a necessary accommodation to their careers. Like many innovations, couples view commuting as a temporary lifestyle (Baber and Allen, 1992:38). Not all long-distance

**BOX 12.5****Inside the Worlds of Diverse Families: Strategy and Strain in a Multinational Family**

Anthropologist Leo Chavez describes family separation as a survival strategy. He uses the story of Felicia and Héctor Gómez to illustrate some of the experiences of families that are stretched across time, space, and national boundaries.

Héctor left Mexico for the United States in 1972, when he was about 26 and Felicia about 21, with two children and another on the way. Héctor and Felicia lived, at that time, in a rancho called Cabellito, in the state of Aguascalientes. Héctor had always worked in agriculture. Both his and Felicia's parents were farmers. Although his father owned a piece of land, it provided the family with little income. Héctor said, "We were very poor. I never had schooling. My father was poor and the work I had to do was to help him." Héctor did not have his own land after he married Felicia. His father's land was given to his brother. "I didn't have land. I was just a field hand," Héctor noted. "Sometimes I worked and sometimes I didn't." Faced with irregular work and the economic demands of a family, Héctor decided to migrate to San Diego County, where his cousin worked.

I worked very much, very much [in Aguascalientes]. And we tried to save to buy things, a chimney for the house. We didn't have these things. We didn't have anything to buy them with. So, I had a dream to come here because I knew that here one could earn a little more. So, I said to myself, "I'm going to the United States. I'm going to try."

For five years Héctor migrated back and forth between an avocado farm in Escondido and his family in Aguascalientes. Héctor would see his family in Mexico once a year, as he said, "for a month, or a couple of weeks, or 15 days, depending upon when there was little work. Then I'd return to Escondido when there was more work." Felicia and Héctor had two more children during this period of brief encounters.

As Felicia remembers it,

The first time he came here I was left alone [with two children] and pregnant. Then he came back when my daughter was born. Then he returned [to the United States] while I raised her. During the time I was raising her he came back again and I got pregnant again. He returned when the boy was two months old. Then I raised the boy and he returned and I got pregnant with the other girl.

Héctor's absences meant extra work for Felicia. The rancho she lived in was very rural. Felicia had to perform physically demanding chores daily, such as carrying water from a well or nearby river to the house. She had to take care of all household responsibilities alone, as well as care for their growing family.

My life was full, of a lot of work, cutting wood, hauling water to bathe my children, and all of the work. Well, I had to do my husband's work and mine, too, because all of the men there would gather the wood and haul water to the house. But because he was absent, I had to do it. And I had to do my work, which was caring for my children, making tortillas, and preparing food for them. So, it was too much suffering for me to have to carry the whole weight, fetching the water, gathering wood, washing. Because I couldn't carry a lot of water at once. I had to bathe them [the children] with what little water I had and with the remaining water I wash the clothes. All day long, this went on. One day I would fetch five or six buckets of water. The next day I would wash, because it wasn't possible to do everything at once.

*(continued)*

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Héctor's separation from Felicia and their children was a physical strain on Felicia. But his absence also created an emotional gulf between Héctor and his children. Since he saw them for only one short period during the entire year, his children were growing up without his presence. As Felicia noted,

The children didn't know him because he could only stay two weeks in Mexico. So, when he arrived the children cried because they didn't know him. They didn't know their father. For them, their father was only a picture.

Héctor felt saddened by the emotional distance between himself and his children. He lamented the lack of affection his children held for him. They were almost like strangers.

The first years, I was fine. But then the time came, after four years, that I would go to visit my family and my children didn't know me. I would try to hold them and they wouldn't allow it. They would cry. They weren't comfortable with me. I noticed that they didn't have any affection for me, nor I for them.

Despite these problems, Héctor did not consider bringing his family to the United States. His work on an avocado farm earned him only about \$1.50 an hour, and he did not have housing suitable for a family. It was his employer who kept insisting that Héctor bring his family. Over the years, the employer, who did not live on the farm, gave Héctor increasing responsibility for its daily operations. Héctor noted that when he would suggest going back to see his family, the employer "didn't like it because I was in charge of the trees. He said, 'I don't like it that you go so often. Look, send for your family.'"

After his pay was raised to \$2.50 an hour, Héctor finally decided to bring his family north. "I thought I must make a decision. It was very hard for me to continue living here alone. My family occupied my thoughts; when would I be able to see them on a continual basis?" In 1977, Héctor returned to Aguascalientes and brought his family back with him to Escondido. "I brought them and they were all very happy. My children and I could finally be together."

For the Gómezes, Héctor's life as a migrant meant that he lived more in San Diego than at home in Mexico. They viewed the effect of this separation on Felicia and the children as a major problem facing the family and its future. Their solution was to move the entire family to San Diego, where they would face new problems as undocumented immigrants. But for the Gómezes, these were challenges they could face together, as a family.

*Source:* Leo R. Chavez, *Shadowed Lives: Undocumented Immigrants in American Society*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1992, p. 134.

relationships are alike. Some couples are together each weekend; others are together only once a month. Some couples are a day's drive away; others fly across the country.

Marital separation is not entirely new. In the past, there have always been circumstances under which husbands and wives lived in different locations. These

have included war, immigration, economic need, and specific occupations such as those of pilots, truck drivers, politicians, entertainers, salespeople, and executives. These lifestyles have not usually required separate households. Furthermore, in these examples, it is typically the husband's work that separates the married couple. New commuter marriages are the result of *women's* professional roles. Most often, wives set up a temporary residence in a different geographic location. This contrasts sharply with the traditional pattern of wives giving up their jobs to live with their husbands.

Married couples who live apart view the careers of husband and wife as being equally important. Their work and family arrangements promote women's equality by making it acceptable for women to be dedicated to their careers, to individual freedom, and to personal growth. Great effort is required to live this way. Individuals' needs are pitted against family needs, and most commuters are ambivalent about their way of life (Gerstel and Gross, 1987a). Yet most commuting couples feel that the strains in separate living are outweighed by the individual rewards they gain in their careers.

Studies of commuting couples have found both benefits and challenges for those involved. (The following is based on Jackson et al., 2000.) Benefits of commuting include (1) increased sense of autonomy, achievement, and satisfaction; (2) greater self-esteem and confidence; (3) ability to pursue careers without immediate and everyday family constraints, and other opportunities associated with compartmentalizing work and family roles (Chang and Wood, 1996; Douvan and Pleck, 1978; Groves and Horm-Winegerd, 1991).

Commuters tend to compartmentalize their lives into two areas: work and marriage. This may restrict interaction with people outside these realms and impose unique strains on the couple's relationship. Unlike the habituated togetherness of most married couples, commuters must work out the patterns of communication, sex, and domestic maintenance during their infrequent visits. This can be a gain for couples as an interacting unit. "They invest themselves heavily in their marital relationship when they are together, and often regard this shared time as a special, important time to concentrate on the relationship. As a result, there is less trivial conflict" (Gerstel, 1977:364). Some relationships are even strengthened by living apart. The separation can offer a balance between separation and togetherness by easing the stress of unrelieved companionship (Douvan and Pleck, 1978:138; Haberman, 2000). A study by Bunker et al. (1992) found greater work-life satisfaction among commuting couples than among dual-career single-residence couples.

The other side of this career-enhancing autonomy includes the following challenges: (1) stresses from trying to balance family and career responsibilities, (2) loneliness and lack of companionship, (3) uncertainty about the future of the relationship, (4) lack of understanding of this family arrangement, and (5) hectic schedules associated with greater separation of work and family responsibilities (Jackson et al., 2000:23; Dainton and Aylor, 2001).

Gerstel and Gross (1987b) found that career and family characteristics interact to influence couples' commuting experiences. They identified three types of commuting couples who experience commuting differently based on the length of the marriage and the presence of children:

1. *Adjusting couples.* These were young couples in the early stages of both careers and marriages. They spent a good deal of effort “adjusting.”
2. *Balancing couples.* These couples were older and more advanced in their careers, contending more with conflict over the increased child-care and domestic responsibilities of who stays home with the children. They struggled to strike a balance between the demands of their jobs and their families.
3. *Established couples.* These couples were freed from their childbearing responsibilities. At least one partner was well established in a career. With children no longer in the home, they had fewest stresses and saw the greatest advantages in commuting.

Commuter marriages are becoming more common for couples of various racial backgrounds, but little research has addressed the experiences of racial-ethnic couples in this arrangement. Anita Jackson and her colleagues Ronald P. Brown and Karen E. Patterson-Stewart studied African American couples in commuter marriages to see how they managed commuting and how their families and careers were affected. These couples experienced many of the same advantages and disadvantages as noted in studies of White couples (see Table 12.1), but the study also suggests that commuting may have distinctive benefits for African Americans:

Commuting is a strategy for engaging in meaningful work when such opportunities are not in close proximity to one’s family residence. For African Americans, this opportunity may be of particular significance considering their long history of oppressed employment opportunities and the finding in this study that commuting was viewed as a way to combat obstacles, such as employment limitations, restrictive assumptions about one’s skills and abilities, and racial stereotypes and oppression. Through-

**TABLE 12.1**

**Advantages and Disadvantages of the Commuter Lifestyle in the Lives of African American Couples**

Advantages	Disadvantages
Meaningful personal expression	Stress of complex lifestyle
Personal fulfillment	Hectic schedules
Enhanced identity	Driving
Autonomy	Financial hardship
Enhanced family dynamics	Sexual advances
Effective interactions	Alienation and isolation
Quality use of time	Loneliness
Career advantages	Guilt
Combat employment limitations, assumptions, racial stereotypes/ oppression	Misperceptions of the lifestyle
	Lack of community

Source: Anita P. Jackson, Ronald P. Brown, and Karen E. Patterson-Stewart, “African Americans in Dual-Career Commuter Marriages: An Investigation of Their Experiences.” *The Family Journal: Counseling and Therapy for Couples and Families* 8 (1) (January 2000): 26.

out history, African Americans have traveled long distances from their families to obtain gainful employment, such as during the large migration of African Americans from the rural south to the northern cities in the early part of the 20th century (Staples and Johnson, 1993). Today, with a greater range of educational and occupational opportunities available to them, coupled with a competitive workforce, African American men and women may be choosing to commute in order to obtain not only employment but employment that matches their skills and abilities and is personally meaningful (Jackson et al., 2000:31).

### Gender

Commuting is a solution to the incompatible demands of career and family, but it creates new problems depending on the couple's stage of family and career. Although some commuters as a group view their adaptation as a complex mixture of costs and benefits, women in general tend to evaluate the overall arrangement less negatively. Apparently, the freedom from schedules and household chores and the ability to work without interruption works to the advantage of women more than men. Gerstel and Gross (1987b) found that women increased the amount of time they spent on professional work, but because commuting equalizes the division of domestic responsibilities, men did more household labor than they had done in the past. This made men more dissatisfied with the arrangement.

Still, most studies have found varied sources of strain for husbands and wives (Gerstel, 1977; Gross, 1984; Kirschner and Walum, 1978; Jackson et al., 2000). According to Gross, wives miss the emotional protection that they expected from the ideal husband, and they sense that this loss is the cost of their gain in independence. "More so than husbands in our culture, wives are programmed to think of marriage as an intimacy oasis, an emotionally close relationship that will be total" (Gross, 1984:473). Though highly career oriented, these women still give interpersonal relations, as compared to work-related rewards, a primacy in their lives that their husbands do not. Husbands, on the other hand, are less likely to express as much unhappiness about the loss of emotional closeness that living apart can produce. They do feel guilty about not providing the emotional closeness they sense their wives need. But in spite of women's expressed loss of intimacy, wives are more comfortable with the arrangement because it validates their equal rights in work and marriage.

The study of African American couples found that while commuting produced stronger identities for both husbands and wives, gender differences were also present. Commuting strengthened husbands' family provider identities, while wives' new identities centered on their confidence in managing home, career, and travel responsibilities (Jackson et al., 2000:32).

## CHAPTER REVIEW

1. Family boundaries are becoming more ambiguous. Marriage is no longer the basis of family life. This decline has been ushered in by global changes, especially

new social practices regarding sex, child-bearing, divorce, and women's labor force participation.

2. Emerging family forms have not replaced nuclear families but coexist as increasingly legitimate social arrangements.
  3. The rise in new family arrangements shows the importance of both structure and agency. Social, economic, and demographic changes have created opportunities for individuals to choose from a wide variety of household and family options.
  4. A growing share of adults are spending more of their lives in an unmarried status. Approximately 10 percent of adults will never marry. The increased number of singles is rooted in historical circumstances, including the independence from birth families fostered by urbanization and industrialization.
  5. There are many ways of being single. Long-term singlehood is generally a more positive state for women than for men. Yet demographic and cultural factors combine to create a "marriage squeeze" that increases the number of single women, including those who are not single by choice.
  6. The imbalanced sex ratio among Black men and women creates greater difficulties for Black women desiring marriage than for White and Latina women.
  7. The rise in cohabitation is one of the most important changes in family life. A quarter of Americans have cohabitated at some point during their lives. Several possible factors explain the increasing acceptance and practice of a formerly unthinkable phenomenon, including postponement of marriage and the tendency of divorced individuals to choose cohabitation over remarriage.
  8. Cohabitation is diverse. For some, it is a prelude to marriage. For others, it is a practical domestic arrangement.
  9. Cohabitation resembles marriage in some ways, and it also resembles singlehood.
- Among minorities, however, cohabitation often resembles marriage in important respects. Common sense suggests that cohabitation would increase the chance for successful marriage, but the evidence shows that it increases the risks for divorce.
10. Although popular estimates of the gay and lesbian population are about 10 percent of the population, lesbian and gay couples are not easily counted. Despite the new struggles for gay rights, discrimination is pervasive in U.S. society.
  11. Gender differentials in same-sex relationships are important. Sexual exclusivity is more likely among lesbians than among gay men. This parallels the behavior of heterosexual males and females. Same-sex couples tend to be more egalitarian than heterosexual couples.
  12. Lesbians and gay men have begun to establish families of choice, constructing their own notions of kinship and thereby expanding the definition of family.
  13. Gay and lesbian partners are denied the symbolic and financial benefits of legal marriage. Domestic partnerships offering benefits for heterosexual and same-sex partners are now recognized in private companies, colleges and universities, and state and local governments throughout the United States.
  14. New patterns of family dispersal stem from changes in work opportunities in the United States and the world. Transnational families and commuter marriages and other long-distance relationships are two emerging family forms that require radical changes in family living as women and men adapt to temporal and spatial separation. Immigration creates transnational families, while commuter marriage is the result of U.S. women's increased entry into professional occupations. Both family forms entail difficult costs and strains that accompany women's and men's new roles.

## RELATED WEB SITES

<http://www.lovemakesafamily.org/>

Family Diversity Projects. Family Diversity Projects, Inc. is a nonprofit organization devoted to educating employees, students, parents, teachers, politicians, religious leaders and communities, and the general public about family diversity. Through this site, visitors can access their award-winning photo-texts on gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people and their families; portraits of multiracial families; and mental illness in the family

<http://www.proudparenting.com/>

ProudParenting.com. ProudParenting.com is the first worldwide interactive community-based web site for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender parents and their families.

<http://www.unmarried.org/>

Alternatives to Marriage Project. AtMP is a national nonprofit organization advocating for equality and fairness for unmarried people, including people who choose not to marry, cannot marry, or live together before marriage. They provide support and information for this fast-growing constituency, fight discrimination on the basis of marital status, and educate the public and policy makers about relevant social and economic issues. They believe that marriage is only one of many acceptable family forms, and that society should recognize and support healthy relationships in all their diversity.

<http://www.singlesrights.com/main.htm>

Unmarried America. Unmarried America is the membership division of the American Association for Single People. AASP is a nonprofit and nonpartisan national organization. Unmarried America promotes the well-being of and fairness for unmarried Americans whether they live with a family member or partner, a roommate, or live alone. They conduct research and provide information and advice to members, elected officials, corporate policy makers, and the media.

<http://singleparentsource.com/>

Single Parent Source. This virtual community provides support, information, inspiration, and resources for single parents.

<http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/nsfh/>

National Survey of Families and Households. Data collection for NSFH began in 1987 and included interviews with 13,007 from a national sample. It also included a main cross section of 9637 households plus an oversampling of blacks, Puerto Ricans, Mexican Americans, single-parent families, families with step children, cohabiting couples, and recently married persons. The third wave of this survey was conducted in 2001–2002 and includes interviews with respondents, respondents' spouse or partner, and the children of the participants when eligible.