Family Matters
Chapter 1
An Introduction to the Sociology of Canadian Families
Outline

- What is a family?
  - Family is hard to define
  - Common elements of a family
  - A broad definition of family
  - Families interact along several key dimensions

- The demise of the family?
  - The Family Decline Hypothesis
    - Debate
Influence of family

Question:

How has your life been influenced by your family background? By family members? How is your life different from your family members’ lives?
Family is hard to define

- 1940s, 1950s, 1960s
  - Family is the basic institution of society
    - Social and economic unit consisting of two adults of the opposite sex who share economic resources, sexual intimacy, labour, accommodation, reproduction, and child rearing
  - Popularized on television, but not the norm from a historical perspective
The Standard North American Family (SNAF)

- An ideological code
  - Schema that replicates its organization in multiple and various sites
- SNAF is a conception of The Family as a legally married couple sharing a household, traditional gender roles
- Nuclear family is a theorized version of the SNAF

*Leave it to Beaver*, Image Accessed from: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cleaver_family_Leave_it_to_Beaver_1960.JPG
Family is hard to define

- Religious, legal, or official-based meanings of family
  - E.g. Religious definitions are concerned with moral issues and obligations, and teachings of faith

Image Accessed from: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Filos_tercer_logo.JPG
Family is hard to define

Statistics Canada (2002)

“A married couple (with or without children of either or both spouses), a couple living common-law (with or without children of either or both partners), or a lone parent of any marital status, with at least one child living in the same dwelling. A couple living common-law may be of opposite sex or same sex. ‘Children’ in a census family includes grandchildren living with grandparent(s) but with no parents present.”
Family is hard to define

- BUT government or other official agency-based definitions:
  - Can vary across domains
  - Dictate who may receive certain formal and informal rights, entitlements, and benefits
Family is hard to define

Everyday discourse/usage also results in a wide array of meanings

- “When you’re here, you’re family” – The Olive Garden
- “Because pets are family too” – Kimpton Hotels
- Fictive kin or non-relatives sometimes considered “family”

Understanding of family can be mediated by local culture
Common elements of families (McDaniel and Tepperman, 2004)

1. All close relations usually involve some relational type of attachment, emotional bonding, dependency, or interdependency
   - Families take many forms and structures
   - Families change and expand as we age
Common elements of families (McDaniel and Tepperman, 2004)

2. Sexual relations tend to be regulated

- Certain relations are appropriate (e.g. between spouses)
- Other relations are taboo (e.g. between parent and child)
Common elements of families (McDaniel and Tepperman, 2004)

3. Most families exhibit some degree of power imbalance (e.g. gender or age)
   ◦ More powerful tend to protect less powerful
Common elements of families (McDaniel and Tepperman, 2004)

4. Families tend to guard their members against internal and external danger
   ◦ Note: in reality, we know that violence, abuse, exploitation, or neglect can occur
A group of people who have intimate or close social relationships and a shared history together.

Many “acceptable” family structures and relationships
Families interact along several key dimensions (Eichler 1988)

1. Procreation
2. Socialization
3. Sexual Relations
4. Residence
5. Economic co-operation
6. Emotional ties

- Within each dimension, various degrees of interaction can be identified.
The Family Decline Hypothesis

  - The family is in decline since individuals reject the nuclear family
  - Rise of alternative family forms, "erosion of fatherhood" are main causes of decline
  - Families ill-suited to serving two basic functions: child rearing and providing emotional sustenance
The demise of the family?

- Judith Stacey (1996)
  - Family is not in decline, rather it is undergoing metamorphosis
  - Vision of traditional family no longer viable or desirable

- Many theorists argue that there was never a golden or stable family life, even in the 1950s
The demise of the family?

- Low life expectancy robbed family members of infants, husbands, wives, and parents at young ages

Life Expectancy by Sex, Canada, 1921–2004
Key trends in family life

- Viewpoint: The Family is in Decline
  - Assumed that young people are rejecting the institution of marriage and family
  - Non-marital cohabitation
  - “Boomerang kids”
  - Divorce culture
  - New technologies
    - Living with chronic illness and stress
    - Blamed for undermining family communication and interaction
Key trends in family life

- Viewpoint: The Family is in Decline
  - Common-law families

Profile of the Canadian Family, 2006 Census

Total Number of Families = 8,896,840

- Single-Parent Families, 15.9%
- Common-Law Families, 15.5%
- Married Families, 68.6%

Key trends in family life

- Viewpoint: The Family is in Decline
  - Statistics reveal shrinking marriage rates, rising ages of first marriage, and growth of non-traditional living arrangements
  - Age at first marriage
Key trends in family life

- Viewpoint: The Family is NOT in Decline
  - Cohabitation is not something new: predates marriage
  - Vast majority of Canadian families comprised of married parents

Profile of the Canadian Family, 2006 Census

- Total Number of Families = 8,896,840
  - Married Families, 68.6%
  - Common-Law Families, 15.5%
  - Single-Parent Families, 15.9%

Key trends in family life

- Viewpoint: The Family is NOT in Decline
  - Delayed marriage not a sign of dwindling commitment to marriage, but an extension of young adulthood
  - Many people chose not to marry historically also
  - Need to consider lower life expectancy in the past
Family Decline

Discuss the following statement:

- Family decline today is cause for alarm.
Family doom and gloom is nothing new

- Historically, social scientists and general public have always been concerned about the demise of the family
  - E.g. Industrialization in the 18th century; Elvis Presley in the 1950s

Summary

- Family is hard to define—changing and varied meanings
- Ideological codes and The Family
- Family Decline Hypothesis
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SUGGESTED IN-CLASS EXERCISES/ACTIVITIES
SUGGESTED ASSIGNMENTS
SUGGESTED FILMS AND CLIPS
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CHAPTER 1: Family Matters: An Introduction to the Sociology of Canadian Families

Suggested in-class exercises/activities

1. Defining family (30–50 minutes)

Part One:

Ask students to spend five minutes writing down a definition for “family.” As a class, share the student responses. Write down the varied definitions on the board.

Part Two:

Next, review the reasons why defining family is complicated (see pages 5–13), and discuss the scholarly definitions of the family in a historical and modern context.

Possible lesson points include:

- Family ideology and the Standard North American Family. Illustrate these concepts by showing video clips from television shows that portray “classic” families (e.g. Leave it to Beaver or Father Knows Best).
- Review other definitions of family (e.g., Statistics Canada, use in everyday discourse).
- Review the common elements of families as outlined by Tepperman

Part Three:

Following the above discussion, ask students if and how they would modify their definition of family. Divide the students into small groups to spend time honing a definition of family.

Regroup and work as a class to determine how to define family for the remainder of the course. Discuss any challenges the students faced when defining family. Discuss why it is important to be clear about definitions of family from an academic perspective.
2. Pets as part of the family? (10–15 minutes)

Part One:

To introduce this activity, show a short clip from Discovery Channel’s web series, “Small Dogs, Big Jobs” (see URL listed below).


Part Two:

Ask students for a show of hands to determine who owns a pet.

Encourage students to share stories about items they buy for their pets, what their pet is named (e.g., is it a human name?), whether or not they celebrate their pet’s birthdays, do they talk to their pets like humans, and any other stories they feel are relevant (see box 1.2, p. 9 for more discussion ideas).

Part Three:

Review the concept of pets as part of the family, including the benefits pets can have for human well-being, and how and why perceptions of pets may vary across cultures.
3. Family decline hypothesis debate (30–50 minutes)

Part One:

Review the Family Decline Hypothesis (see pages 13–21).

Show students a video clip from the Society Pages’ 7 minute documentary, *Is Marriage Changing*:

[http://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2013/07/07/is-marriage-changing/](http://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2013/07/07/is-marriage-changing/)

Part Two:

Divide the class into small groups. Assign half of the groups to develop support and provide evidence (using the textbook and other readings) for why the family is in a state of decline. Ask the other half of the class to develop support and provide evidence for why the family is not in a state of decline.

Part Three:

As a class, create a table comparing evidence and support for both sides of the debate.

End the discussion by asking students to weigh in on which side they agree with the most and why.

Suggested assignments

1. Critical thinking essays

Provide students with a statement or question that relates to each chapter’s subject matter. Ask students to spend 10–15 minutes writing a response essay.

Chapter One Sample Topics:

- Evaluate the following statement: the family is currently in a state of decline.
- Evaluate the following statement: the “normative” institution of the family is oppressive.
- How might the idea of family vary across cultures?
- Why is “family” hard to define?
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2. Take-home assignments

A. Find an example of a news article that examines an issue related to the family. Critically assess the article in 1–2 pages, addressing the following questions:

- What are the key points of the article?
- Is the definition of family made clear by the article? If so, how is family defined? If not, would the article benefit from a clear definition of family?
- Are there any social or cultural biases evident in the article? If so, what are they? How are they made evident? Use examples from the article to support your response.
- How does the article relate to our understanding of family from a sociological perspective?

B. Select a television program that you think relates to the theme of family in some way. Watch an episode of that program. Give a brief synopsis of the plot for that episode. Provide a 1-page critical analysis of how that show portrays family. How do you think family would be defined based on the program that you watched? How might this program influence the perception of family in Canada?

Note to instructors: this assignment could also work as part of a tutorial or class where students watch a television program and discuss the above questions in small groups.

3. Seminar discussion

Find a published, peer-reviewed academic article that addresses the role of aunts and uncles in the family (note: the textbook lists suggested readings, and may be a good place to start looking for resources). Prepare to lead the class in a seminar-style discussion about the article that you chose. You should create at least five discussion questions to help stimulate discussion.
Suggested films

The films and television programs listed below examine a variety of family types and could be useful for opening up the discussion about what family means, and its various forms. These films and programs could be used in-class, as part of a tutorial, or as a homework assignment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Popular Films</th>
<th>Brief Synopsis</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>American Beauty</td>
<td>A suburban father experiences a mid-life crisis and develops an infatuation for his daughter’s young friend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revolutionary Road</td>
<td>Set in the 1950s, a young Connecticut couple struggles with personal problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Miss Sunshine</td>
<td>A family sets out to get their young daughter into the beauty pageant finals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brokeback Mountain</td>
<td>A secret relationship develops between two male cowboys.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erin Brockovich</td>
<td>A single mother becomes a legal assistant and struggles to balance work and family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juno</td>
<td>A teenage girl copes with an unplanned pregnancy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanglish</td>
<td>A woman and her daughter move to America from Mexico and work for and live with an American family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stepmom</td>
<td>A mother is diagnosed with cancer and struggles to accept her ex-husband’s new wife and stepmother to her children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenthood</td>
<td>A comedy that follows the Buckman family and the pressures they experience raising their children and balancing work and family.</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Television Programs</th>
<th>Brief Synopsis</th>
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<td>Will and Grace</td>
<td>A gay lawyer and a straight interior designer live together in New York.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Cosby Show</td>
<td>Follows a successful African-American family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leave it to Beaver</td>
<td>1950s sitcom that follows the misadventures of a suburban boy and his family.</td>
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**Suggested sources for building case studies**

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<td><a href="http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/opinion/editorials/2002-09-23-oplede_x.htm">http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/opinion/editorials/2002-09-23-oplede_x.htm</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pets as part of the family.</td>
<td><a href="http://www.startribune.com/lifestyle/217651521.html">http://www.startribune.com/lifestyle/217651521.html</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Real Women of Canada</td>
<td><a href="http://www.realwomenofcanada.ca/">http://www.realwomenofcanada.ca/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistics Canada</td>
<td><a href="http://www.statcan.gc.ca/">www.statcan.gc.ca</a></td>
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TEST BANK

Sara J. Cumming & Dominique Falls

Family Matters

An Introduction to Family Sociology in Canada

Second Edition

Barbara A. Mitchell

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Multiple Choice

1. The family decline hypothesis maintains that
   a) it is a myth that there is a decline in family size
   b) modern day families are much better off due to their smaller sizes
   c) **modern day families are in crisis**
   d) the population will slowly dwindle if families do not start having more children
   e) the social importance of families is declining

2. Who are considered to be fictive kin?
   a) blood-relatives whom one has a close bond with
   b) **non-relatives whom one has a close bond with**
   c) distant blood-relatives who are technically family members but have no substantive interactions
   d) non-relatives whom one has been raised with since birth
   e) children’s make-believe friends

3. According to Robert Milardo, aunting, and uncling
   a) have little clear representation in the public discourse about families
   b) have extensive representation in the public discourse about families
   c) are new terms in the popular and academic literature on families
   d) a and c
   e) b and c

4. Statistics on family formation show
   a) shrinking marriage rates, stable ages of first births, and growth of cohabitation
   b) stable marriage rates, stable ages of first marriage, and small influx in cohabitation
   c) **shrinking marriage rates, rising ages of first marriage, and growth of nontraditional arrangements**
   d) rising marriage rates, rising ages of first marriage, and growth of nontraditional arrangements
   e) that rates of marriage, first births, and cohabitation have been consistent throughout the last 100 years

5. The percentage of Canadian women who have never married by the age of 45 to 49 was
   a) markedly higher in 2001 than in 1891
   b) fluctuated slightly from 1891 to 2001
   c) **remained at 10% of the population from 1891 to 2001**
   d) was almost non-existent in 1891
   e) a and d
6. The Standard North American Family characterizes the family as
   a) a heterosexual couple living under the same roof
   b) a heterosexual married couple with at least one child living under the same roof
   c) any persons who live together under the same roof
   d) a heterosexual married couple living under the same roof
   e) a family whose parents and children were born and raised in North America

7. Ideology refers to
   a) a body of systematic beliefs and ideas that justify or rationalize certain actions and behaviours
   a) a way to represent the objects, concepts, and other entities that are assumed to exist in some area of interest and the relationships that hold among them
   b) a branch of philosophy that investigates the origin, nature, methods, and limits of human knowledge
   c) none of the above
   d) all of the above

8. Census Canada currently defines family as
   a) a married couple (with or without children)
   b) a couple living common-law (with or without children)
   c) a lone parent of any marital status with at least one child living in the same dwelling
   d) an opposite sex or same sex couple (with or without children)
   e) all of the above

9. The procreative dimension of the family includes
   a) the sexual relationship between man and wife
   b) a couple having children biologically related to both of them
   c) a couple having children that are only biologically related to one of them
   d) a couple having no children at all
   e) all of the above

10. Dave Popenoe contends that the family is in a serious decline due to
    a) the increase in homosexuality
    b) women’s career aspirations
    c) the rejection of the nuclear family
    d) the expense of raising children
    e) its decreasing importance in the socialization of children

11. According to Dave Popenoe, the decline in family structure is due to
    a) the rise of single mother households
    b) cohabitation
    c) the absence of fathers in many families
    d) the rise of homosexuality
    e) a, b, and c
12. Dave Popenoe argues that the family is becoming ill suited to
   a) provide economically for children
   b) rear children
   c) provide emotional sustenance to its members
   d) a and c
   e) b and c

13. The normative idea of what a family is
   a) is often depicted by the *Leave it to Beaver* television show
   b) is represented by the 1950s family
   c) never really existed
   d) **all of the above**
   e) a and b

14. The family change perspective
   a) focuses on the change in family composition
   b) focuses on patterns of continuity
   c) focuses on change in social policies that affect the family
   d) all of the above
   e) a and b

15. Contemporary family life is often deemed in collapse or in crisis based on
   a) the emergence of non-traditional family forms
   b) the tendency for young adults to take longer to establish themselves
   c) the possibility of marrying more than once
   d) technological advances
   e) **all of the above**

16. Cohabitation
   a) is seen as a relatively new phenomenon
   b) **has existed long enough to predate marriage**
   c) is a clear rejection of marriage
   d) is only acceptable in North America
   e) was illegal in Canada until the 21st century

17. The decline of the family has been blamed for
   a) juvenile delinquency
   b) teenage pregnancy
   c) the emergence of popular culture targeted at youth
   d) homelessness
   e) **all of the above**

18. The family is viewed as
   a) a personal matter
   b) **an institution in society**
   c) inconsequential to the function of society
   d) an outdated way of socializing children
   e) none of the above
19. According to a long-range life course perspective, the nuclear family structure was
   a) the most beneficial for the government
   b) a historical fluke
   c) the best way to ensure happy, well-adjusted children
   d) a government initiative
   e) a and c

20. Definitions of families are
   a) static
   b) universal
   c) constantly under construction
   d) timeless
   e) all of the above

**True or False**

1. Many societies have existed without some sort of social arrangement labeled kinship or familial. **F (4)**

2. Generally, we have two or more families by the time we reach adulthood. **T (10)**

3. Family change perspective theorists argue that it is not families that are in decline, it is our normative idea of what a family is that is changing. **T (14)**

4. Young adults take longer to establish themselves now due to their rejection of family values. **F (18)**

5. There has been a dramatic increase in cohabitation with children. **T (17)**

6. Families are products of particular historical, economic, and political conditions and environments, as well as our own personal lived experiences and behaviours. **T (19)**

7. Concerns regarding the demise of the family are a relatively new phenomenon. **F (20)**

8. Families are a microsocial group that link and reflect macro-level institutions of society. **T (4)**

9. Current scholars define the family as the basic institution of society. **F (5)**

10. There is a uniform definition of family that government and other official agencies utilize. **F (5–8)**
**Short Answer**

1. Explain what the life course perspective is. *(4, 5, 21)*

2. Why is social demography integral to family sociology? *(5)*

3. Why does Eichler argue that a monolithic bias exists when discussing families? *(11, 13)*

4. According to Dave Popenoe, what are the main causes of family decline? *(13)*

5. How and why do religious definitions of family differ from legal or official-based meanings? *(7)*

6. How does the media play a role in perpetuating ideologies surrounding the family? *(18)*

7. Why do theorists believe that the age of first marriage has changed over the years? *(18–19)*

8. How does Mitchell counter the argument that “life was better for the elderly in the past”? *(20)*

9. List the common elements or processes fundamental to the family. *(8–10)*

10. What does Mitchell mean by the statement, “past family life is romanticized through a lens of ‘rose coloured glasses’”? *(13)*

**Discussion/Essay Questions**

1. What ideological and institutional practices are involved in defining family, and how do they define them? *(7–15)*

2. Why is the use of SNAF as an ideological code problematic? *(7)*

3. Eichler suggests that it is more realistic to view families in broad terms and as interacting along several key dimensions. What are these dimensions? Discuss. *(11–13)*

4. Is the family in a state of decline? What are the contemporary debates relating to this? *(13–20)*

5. What are the key socio-demographic, cultural, and technological changes in the family? Discuss the purported impact that each has on the family structure. *(16–20)*

6. How does the aging population affect the trajectories of families? *(18–20)*

7. Why is the sociological study of families so important to our society? *(4–5)*

8. What is Holstein and Gubrium’s constructionist approach to families? *(8, 10)*
9. In reference to SNAF, what does Dorothy Smith mean when she asserts that “as active agents, we all enter into and participate in such relations in ordinary and unthinking ways as these text are reproduced in our everyday practices of thinking about families and in our own experiences in families.” (7)

10. If you were given the task to define family for policy use (such as healthcare benefits, social assistance, immigration, etc.), how would you define it? Who would be included and why? How does your definition impact the structure of current policy? (Answers will vary)

11. According to McDaniel and Tepperman, what are the common elements or processes fundamental to families? (8–10)

12. Outline Dave Popenoe’s arguments about the family. What are the contrasting views? (13–14)

13. Discuss the following statement, “family decline today is cause for alarm.” Use material from the course to either legitimate or counter this statement. (13–16)

14. How are socio-demographic trends affecting family formations? (16–20)

15. How are sexual relations regulated within the family? (10)