

multifamily households consisting of an older married couple, their unmarried children, their married sons, and their sons' wives and children.

Few societies have residential patterns known as **matrilocal residence**—the custom of a married couple living in the same household (or community) as the wife's parents. In industrialized nations such as the United States, most couples hope to live in a **neolocal residence**—the custom of a married couple living in their own residence apart from both the husband's and the wife's parents.

To this point, we have examined a variety of marriage and family patterns found around the world. Even with the diversity of these patterns, most people's behavior is shaped by cultural rules pertaining to endogamy and exogamy. **Endogamy is the practice of marrying within one's own group.** In the United States, for example, most people practice endogamy: They marry people who come from the same social class, racial-ethnic group, religious affiliation, and other categories considered important within their own social group. **Exogamy is the practice of marrying outside one's own social group or category.** Depending on the circumstances, exogamy may not be noticed at all, or it may result in a person being ridiculed or ostracized by other members of the "in" group. The three most important sources of positive or negative sanctions for intermarriage are the family, the church, and the state. Participants in these social institutions may look unfavorably on the marriage of an in-group member to an "outsider" because of the belief that it diminishes social cohesion in the group (Kalmijn, 1998). However, educational attainment is also a strong indicator of marital choice. Higher education emphasizes individual achievement, and college-educated people may be less likely than others to identify themselves with their social or cultural roots and thus more willing to marry outside their own social group or category if their potential partner shares a similar level of educational attainment (Hwang, Saenz, and Aguirre, 1995; Kalmijn, 1998).

Theoretical Perspectives on Families

The *sociology of family* is the subdiscipline of sociology that attempts to describe and explain

patterns of family life and variations in family structure. Functionalist perspectives emphasize the functions that families perform at the macrolevel of society, whereas conflict and feminist perspectives focus on families as a primary source of social inequality. Symbolic interactionists examine micro-level interactions that are integral to the roles of different family members.

Functionalist Perspectives

Functionalists emphasize the importance of the family in maintaining the stability of society and the well-being of individuals. According to Emile Durkheim, marriage is a microcosmic replica of the larger society; both marriage and society involve a mental and moral fusion of physically distinct individuals (Lehmann, 1994). Durkheim also believed that a division of labor contributes to greater efficiency in all areas of life—including marriages and families—even though he acknowledged that this division imposes significant limitations on some people.

In the United States, Talcott Parsons was a key figure in developing a functionalist model of the



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▲ Functionalist theorists believe that families serve a variety of functions that no other social institution can adequately fulfill. In contrast, conflict and feminist theorists believe that families may be a source of conflict over values, goals, and access to resources and power. Children in upper-class families have many advantages and opportunities that are not available to other children.

- **ASA Task Force Recommendation:** #6 Empirical and Theoretical Analysis
- **Sociological Imagination:** "The life-fate of the modern individual depends not only upon the family into which he was born or which he enters by marriage, but increasingly upon the corporation in which he spends the most alert hours of his best years" (C. Wright Mills). Have the class discuss and write a brief evaluation of this statement.

- **Research:** "If it is to be done well, child-rearing requires, more than most activities of life, a good deal of decentering from one's own needs and perspectives. Such decentering is relatively easy when a society is stable and when there is an extended, supportive structure that the parent can depend upon" (David Elkind). Have the class research this decentering process and factors that affect it.

family. According to Parsons (1955), the husband/father fulfills the *instrumental role* (meeting the family's economic needs, making important decisions, and providing leadership), whereas the wife/mother fulfills the *expressive role* (running the household, caring for children, and meeting the emotional needs of family members).

Contemporary functionalist perspectives on families derive their foundation from Durkheim. Division of labor makes it possible for families to fulfill a number of functions that no other institution can perform as effectively. In advanced industrial societies, families serve four key functions:

1. **Sexual regulation.** Families are expected to regulate the sexual activity of their members and thus control reproduction so that it occurs within specific boundaries. At the macrolevel, incest taboos prohibit sexual contact or marriage between certain relatives. For example, virtually all societies prohibit sexual relations between parents and their children and between brothers and sisters.
2. **Socialization.** Parents and other relatives are responsible for teaching children the necessary knowledge and skills to survive. The smallness and intimacy of families make them best suited for providing children with the initial learning experiences they need.
3. **Economic and psychological support.** Families are responsible for providing economic and psychological support for members. In preindustrial societies, families are economic production units; in industrial societies, the economic security of families is tied to the workplace and to macro-level economic systems. In recent years, psychological support and emotional security have been increasingly important functions of the family.
4. **Provision of social status.** Families confer social status and reputation on their members. These statuses include the ascribed statuses with which individuals are born, such as race/ethnicity, nationality, social class, and sometimes religious affiliation. One of the most significant and compelling forms of social placement is the family's class position and the opportunities (or lack thereof) resulting from that position. Examples of class-related opportunities are access to quality health care, higher education, and a safe place to live.

Conflict and Feminist Perspectives

Conflict and feminist analysts view functionalist perspectives on the role of the family in society as idealized and inadequate. Rather than operating harmoniously and for the benefit of all members, families are sources of social inequality and conflict over values, goals, and access to resources and power.

According to some conflict theorists, families in capitalist economies are similar to the work environment of a factory. Women are dominated by men in the home in the same manner that workers are dominated by capitalists and managers in factories (Engels, 1970/1884). Although childbearing and care for family members in the home contribute to capitalism, these activities also reinforce the subordination of women through unpaid (and often devalued) labor. Other conflict analysts are concerned with the effect that class conflict has on the family. The exploitation of the lower classes by the upper classes contributes to family problems such as high rates of divorce and overall family instability.

Some feminist perspectives on inequality in families focus on patriarchy rather than class. From this viewpoint, men's domination over women existed long before capitalism and private ownership of property (Mann, 1994). Women's subordination is rooted in patriarchy and men's control over women's labor power (Hartmann, 1981). According to one scholar, "Male power in our society is expressed in economic terms even if it does not originate in property relations; women's activities in the home have been undervalued at the same

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