

2 Studying the Family

Chapter Overview

Research and theory helps people make better decisions. This chapter describes the major theoretical perspectives, data collection methods used by the researchers, ethical standards the researchers follow, and finally the political, religious, and community constraints the researchers encounter.

Learning Objectives

After reading and studying this chapter students will be able to:

- 2.1. Describe three ways that theory and research can help people make better decisions about their families.
- 2.2. Describe eight major family theoretical perspectives, identify whether each is macro- and/or micro-level, and summarize the strengths and limitations of each perspective.
- 2.3. Describe seven data-collection methods that researchers use to study families, and identify each of the method's strengths and limitations.
- 2.4. Describe the ethical standards that researchers must follow, and explain the political, religious, and community constraints that researchers encounter.

Detailed Chapter Outline

I. Why Theories and Research are Important in Our Everyday Lives [\[LS1\]](#)

Learning Objective

- 2.1. Describe three ways that theory and research can help people make better decisions about their families.

The words *theory* and *research* are often intimidating. Many of us may distrust statistics when they're different from our beliefs. There are practical reasons why theory and research are important:

- What we don't know can hurt us
- Theories and research help us understand ourselves and our families
- They improve our ability to think more critically and make informed decisions in our own families

A. What We Don't Know Can Hurt Us

Many Americans, especially women, rely on talk shows for information on a number of topics. Misinformation can be dangerous. Many websites are maintained by people who know little about family issues. For example, no one can become knowledgeable about leading workshops (such as a

marriage workshop) after listening to only a few hours of audiotapes. In other cases, people may simply be wasting their money on pills that have little effect on their health and longevity.

B. Theories and Research Help Us Understand Ourselves and Our Families

Theories and research illuminate many aspects of our family life. Empirical studies show that neither ignoring a problem nor inflicting physical punishment stops bad behavior.

C. Theories and Research Help Us Make Informed Decisions

People rarely read a newspaper, newsmagazine, or online article without coming across statistics that affect some aspect of our lives. People listen numbly to the probabilities of dying earlier than expected because of their genetic inheritance, lifestyle, or environment. People are inundated with information on the importance of exercising, losing weight, lowering cholesterol levels, and not smoking. Some of the information is sound, but much is biased, inaccurate, or generated by unlicensed, self-proclaimed “experts.” They whip up anxieties and then sell solutions that include their own books and consulting services. Students in family courses sometimes feel that they and their instructor are on different planets.

II. Theoretical Perspectives on Families [\[CA1\]](#)

Learning Objective

2.2. Describe eight major family theoretical perspectives, identify whether each is macro- and/or micro-level, and summarize the strengths and limitations of each perspective.

Someone once observed, “I used to have six theories about parenting and no children. Now I have six children and no theories.” Ideas have consequences. People who theorize that the family is disintegrating might propose micro-level solutions. In contrast, those who theorize that the family is changing might propose macro-level remedies. As people struggle to understand families, they develop theories. A **theory** is a set of statements that explains why a phenomenon occurs. Theories drive research, help us analyze our findings, and, ideally, offer solutions for family problems. There are about a dozen or so influential family theories. Eight family theories that are the best known can be considered:

- Two macro-level theories
- Three theories that are both micro- and macro-level
- Three micro-level theories that focus on face-to-face interaction and personal dynamics.

Family researchers typically use more than one theoretical framework because each perspective answers particular questions. Because reality is complex, the “coexisting theories concentrate on a different aspect of real life.”

A. The Structural Functional Perspective

Structural functional theory (often shortened to *functionalism*) examines how a society’s interdependent parts work together to ensure its survival. When functionalists study families, they look at how families contribute to a society’s stability (through procreation and socialization, for

example), and the relationships between family members and between families and other institutions such as education and religion.

Family Roles

The husband or father, the “breadwinner,” performs **instrumental roles**: providing food and shelter for the family and being hardworking, tough, and competitive. The wife or mother plays the **expressive roles** of the “homemaker”: providing the emotional support and nurturing that sustain the family unit. These family roles characterize what social scientists call the *traditional family*, a family form that many conservative groups would like to preserve. These and other family roles are *functional* because they create and preserve order, stability, and harmony. They also provide the physical shelter and emotional support that ensure a family’s health and survival. Anything that interferes with these tasks is seen as *dysfunctional* because it jeopardizes the family’s smooth functioning.

Family Functions

There are two general kinds of Functions in families and other institutions. **Manifest functions** are purposes and activities that are intended and recognized; they are clearly evident. **Latent functions** are purposes and activities that are unintended and unrecognized; they aren’t immediately obvious.

Institutional Connections

Functionalists also note that the family affects, is affected by, and is interrelated to other institutions such as law, politics, and the economy.

Critical Evaluation

Structural functionalism was a dominant perspective in the 1950s and 1960s, but later came under attack for being so conservative in its emphasis on order and stability that it ignored social change. Some critics also maintain that functionalists shouldn’t assume that just because some aspects of the family are functional, they should be maintained. Functionalism is useful in understanding families on a macro level, but it doesn’t show how families interact on a daily basis. It also doesn’t take into account that disagreements aren’t necessarily dysfunctional but a normal part of family life. Also, feminist scholars, especially, have criticized structural functionalism for viewing the family narrowly through a white, male, middle- class lens.

B. The Conflict Perspective

The conflict perspective became popular in the United States in the late 1960s, when African Americans and feminists started to challenge functionalism as the dominant explanation of families and marriages. **Conflict theory** examines how groups disagree, struggle for power, and compete for scarce resources such as wealth and power. In contrast to functionalists, conflict theorists see conflict and the resulting changes in traditional roles as natural, inevitable, and even desirable because many of

the changes improve people's lives. Specifically, conflict theories have been useful in identifying some of the inequities within and across families, and promoting structures and values that are less oppressive.

Social Class and Power

For conflict theorists, families perpetuate social stratification. Those in high-income brackets have the greatest share of capital, including wealth that they can pass down to the next generation. Unlike functionalists, conflict theorists see society not as cooperative and stable but as a system of widespread inequality. There is continuous tension between the haves and the have-nots: The latter are mainly children, women, minorities, and the poor. Much research based on conflict theory focuses on how those in power—typically white, middle-aged, wealthy males—dominate political and economic decision making in U.S. society.

Family Problems

Conflict theorists view many family difficulties as resulting from widespread societal problems rather than individual shortcomings. This has had a profound influence on many families, sending some into a spiral of downward mobility. Racial discrimination also has a negative impact on many families, often blocking their access to health services, education, and employment.

Critical Evaluation

Some social scientists criticize conflict theory for stressing clashes and coercion at the expense of order and stability. According to critics, conflict theory presents a negative view of human nature as selfish while neglecting the importance of love and self-sacrifice, which characterize many family relationships. Some critics also believe that the conflict perspective is less useful than other approaches because it emphasizes institutional constraints rather than personal choices in everyday family life. Some family theories focus on solutions. In contrast, conflict theories often address primarily competition, power, control, and similar problems.

C. Feminist Perspectives

Feminist theories examine the social, economic, and political inequality between women and men in society. There are many types of feminism, each with a different emphasis.

Gender Inequality

Any person—male or female, straight or gay, young or old—who believes that *both* sexes should have equal political, educational, economic, and other rights is a feminist, even if he or she refuses to identify with this label. A core issue for feminist family scholars (both women and men) is gender inequality, both at home and in the workplace, and how gender inequality intersects with race, ethnicity, and social class. For example, the poorest older adults are most likely to be minority women, and caregivers of the old—who are predominantly women—must often leave their jobs or

work only part time to accommodate caregiving.

Family Diversity

Feminist family scholars, more than any other group, have been instrumental in broadening our view of families. For these scholars, limiting families to the traditional nuclear definition excludes many other family forms such as long-term cohabiting couples, single parents and their children, multigenerational families living together, same-sex families, stepfamilies, and fictive kin.

Emphasis on Social Change

Since the early 1980s, feminist scholars have contributed to family theory and social change in several ways:

- They have initiated legislation to address family violence and to impose stiffer penalties for men who assault children and women.
- They have endorsed greater equality between husbands and wives as well as unmarried partners, and have pushed for legislation that provides employed women and men with parental leave rights.
- They have refocused much of the research to include fathers as involved, responsible, and nurturing family members who have a profound effect on children and the family.

Critical Evaluation

One criticism for the feminist perspectives is that feminist scholars focus primarily on issues that affect women, and not men, and don't pay enough attention to other forms of oppression such as age, disability, and religious intolerance. A second criticism is that feminists, by emphasizing diversity, overlook commonalities that make families more similar than different. A related issue is that some feminist scholars have a tendency to view full-time homemakers as victims rather than as individuals who choose the role. Some critics, including some feminists, also question whether feminist scholars have lost their bearings. For example, some maintain that instead of focusing on personal issues such as greater sexual freedom, feminist scholarship should emphasize broader social issues, particularly wage inequality

D. The Ecological Perspective

Ecological theory examines how a family influences and is influenced by its environment. Urie Bronfenbrenner, a major advocate of ecological theory, proposed that four interlocking systems shape our development and behavior.

Interlocking Systems

These systems range from the most immediate settings, such as the family and peer group, to more remote contexts in which a child is not involved directly, such as technological changes and ideological beliefs. The four systems are the following:

- The *microsystem* is made up of the interconnected behaviors, roles, and relationships that influence a child's daily life (such as parents' toilet-training their child).
- The *mesosystem* is composed of the relationships among different settings (for example, the home, a day care center, and schools). Parents interact with teachers and religious groups; children interact with peers; and health care providers interact with both children and parents.
- The *exosystem* consists of settings or events that a person doesn't Experience directly but that can affect her or his development (such as parents' employment).
- The *macrosystem* is the wider society and culture that encompasses all the other systems.

Critical Evaluation

Ecological theory is useful in explaining family dynamics and proposing programs to deal with issues such as youth violence. Ecological theories try to explain growth as resulting from changes in the environment, but explanations of disintegration (such as aging) are notably absent. It's also not always apparent exactly how and when environments produce changes in individuals and families. Finally, it's unclear how the interactions among the four systems affect nontraditional families such as stepfamilies, gay and lesbian households, and intergenerational families living under one roof.

E. The Family Development Perspective

Family development theory examines the changes that families experience over their life spans. This is the only theoretical perspective that emerged out of a specific interest in families and still focuses exclusively on the family (rather than the relationships between dating couples, for example).

The Classic Family Life Cycle

The **family life cycle** consists of the transitions that a family makes as it moves through a series of stages and events. According to this classic model and others like it, the family life cycle begins with marriage and continues through child rearing, seeing the children leave home, retirement, and the death of one or both spouses.

Developmental Tasks Change Over Time

As people progress through various stages and events of the family life cycle, they accomplish **developmental tasks**. That is, they learn to fulfill various role expectations and responsibilities, such as showing affection and support for family members and socializing with people outside the family. Depending on the developmental stage, people learn to interact and handle different challenges as we grow older. For adults, the greatest source of stress is family conflict.

Developmental Tasks are Multifaceted

Developmental stages and tasks vary in different kinds of families, such as single-parent families,

childless couples, stepfamilies, and grandparent–grandchild families. The complex situations and problems that confront families in an aging society are multigenerational.

Critical Evaluation

Most of the family development studies are micro level, but some examine family patterns cross-culturally and historically. Critics point out several limitations. First, some believe that the family life cycle stages are artificial because “the processes of life are not always so neatly and cleanly segmented.” Second, despite the recent work on kinscripts and extended families, most developmental theories are limited to examining nuclear, heterosexual, and traditional families. A third criticism is that family development theory is largely descriptive rather than explanatory. Fourth, some critics question why developmental theories often gloss over sibling relationships, which are among the most important emotional resources one has throughout life and especially after the last parent dies.

F. The Symbolic interaction perspective

Symbolic interaction theory (sometimes called *interactionism*) is a micro-level perspective that examines individuals’ everyday behavior. Symbolic interactionists examine how our ideas, beliefs, and attitudes shape our daily lives, including those of our families.

Symbols

The symbolic interaction perspective looks at subjective, interpersonal meanings and how people communicate them using *symbols*: words, gestures, or pictures that stand for something. To interact effectively, the symbols used must have *shared meanings*, or agreed-upon definitions.

Significant Others

One of the most important shared meanings is the *definition of the situation*, or the way we perceive reality and react to it. An individual typically learns his/her definitions of the situation through interaction with **significant others**, people in his/her primary groups—such as parents, close friends, relatives, and teachers—who play an important role in the individual’s socialization.

Family Roles

According to symbolic interaction theory, each family member plays more than one role. Roles also carry *reciprocal* rights and responsibilities. For instance, parents must take care of their children and expect obedience. Children have the right to be safe and fed, but are also expected to be courteous and perform assigned tasks.

Critical Evaluation

One of the most common criticisms of symbolic interaction theory is that it ignores macro-level

factors that affect family relationships. For instance, families living in poverty, and especially single mothers, are likely to be stigmatized and must often raise their children in unsafe neighborhoods. Such constraints increase stress, feelings of helplessness, and family conflict—all of which can derail positive everyday interactions. Related criticism is that interactionists sometimes have an optimistic and unrealistic view of people’s everyday choices. A third criticism is that interactionists often overlook the irrational and unconscious aspects of behavior.

G. The Social Exchange Perspective

The fundamental premise of **social exchange theory** is that people seek through their interactions with others to maximize their rewards and to minimize their costs.

What Do We Exchange?

From a social exchange perspective, when the costs of a marriage outweigh the rewards, the people may separate or divorce. On the other hand, many people stay in unhappy marriages or relationships because the rewards seem equal to the costs: “It’s better than being alone,” “I don’t want to hurt the kids,” or “It could be worse.”

Are Our Exchanges Conscious?

Cost–reward decisions may or may not be conscious.

Critical Evaluation

Some critics contend that exchange theorists put too much weight on rational behavior. People don’t always calculate the potential costs and rewards of every decision. Exchange theory is also limited to explaining behavior that is motivated by immediate costs or rewards. In many ethnic groups, family duties take precedence over individual rights.

H. The Family Systems Perspective

Family systems theory views the family as a functioning unit that solves problems, makes decisions, and achieves collective goals. The emphasis is not on individual family members but on how the members interact within the family system, how they communicate, how family patterns evolve, and how individual personalities affect family members.

What Holds Families Together?

Family systems analysts are interested in the implicit or explicit rules that hold families together. A key concept is *equilibrium*. That is, a change in one part of the family or the external environment sets in motion an adjustment process to restore the family to the way it was in the past—to regain equilibrium.

Critical Evaluation

Some critics maintain that family systems theory has generated a lot of terminology but little insight into how the family really functions. Also, because the perspective originated in the study of dysfunctional families in clinical settings, some question whether the theory can be applied to healthy families. Finally, because much of research is based on case studies, the results are limited because they can't be generalized to larger groups.

I. Combining Theories

Researchers and practitioners often use several perspectives to interpret data or choose intervention strategies. For example, a counselor might draw on social exchange, symbolic interaction, development, and systems theories to shed light on the problems in a couple's relationship. Counselors who work with children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorders (ADHD) typically combine ecological and family systems perspectives in conducting assessments and developing interventions. Instead of simply focusing on the child or the family, clinicians usually observe the child in his or her natural environment, involve the child's teacher, and educate grandparents about ADHD.

III. Family Research Methods [\[DQ1\]](#) [\[STA1\]](#) [\[STA2\]](#) [\[LTA2\]](#)

Learning Objective

2.3. Describe seven data-collection methods that researchers use to study families, and identify each of the method's strengths and limitations.

Why are we attracted to some people and not to others? Why are many young adults postponing marriage? To answer these and other questions about the family, social scientists typically use seven major research methods:

- Surveys
- Clinical research
- Field research
- Secondary analysis
- Content analysis
- Experiments
- Evaluation research

Family researchers also rely on qualitative and quantitative approaches. In **qualitative research**, social scientists examine and interpret nonnumerical material that they then interpret. In **quantitative research**, researchers focus on a numerical analysis of people's responses or specific characteristics.

A. Surveys

Researchers use **surveys** to systematically collect data from respondents through questionnaires or interviews. Before the data collection begins, researchers must first decide on the population and sample.

Populations and Samples

A **population** is any well-defined group of people (or things) that researchers want to know something about. The population may be so large that it would be too expensive and time consuming to conduct the research. As a result, researchers typically select a **sample**, a group of people (or things) that are representative of the population they want to study. In a **probability sample**, each person (or thing) has an equal chance of being chosen because the selection is random. *Random-digit dialing* involves selecting area codes and exchanges followed by four random digits. In a procedure called *computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI)*, the interviewer uses a computer to select random telephone numbers, reads the questions to the respondent from a computer screen, and then keys the replies into pre-coded spaces. In a **nonprobability sample**, there is little or no attempt to get a representative cross-section of a population. Instead, researchers use other criteria, such as convenience or the availability of participants.

Questionnaires and Interviews

Researchers collect survey data using questionnaires, face-to-face or telephone interviews, or a combination of these tools. Questionnaires can be mailed, used during an interview, or self-administered to large groups of respondents.

Strengths

Surveys—whether by phone or a self-administered questionnaire—offer many advantages. They're usually inexpensive, easy to administer, and have a fast turnaround rate. When assured that their answers will remain anonymous or confidential, respondents are generally willing to answer questions on sensitive topics such as income, sexual behavior, and drug use. With the innovation of "robo-polls," the entire interview is conducted by a programmed recording that interprets the respondent's spoken answers, records them, and determines how to continue the interview. This method is cost effective because it cuts out the cost of hiring people, but respondents may be more reluctant to answer sensitive questions.

Limitations

One of the major limitations of surveys that use mailed questionnaires is a low response rate, often only about 10 percent. If the questions are unclear, complicated, or seen as offensive, respondents may simply throw the questionnaire away or offer opinions on subjects they know nothing about. Surveys might also be problematic because people may skip or lie about questions that they consider intrusive. As a result, the research results will be invalid or incomplete because the researcher may have to scrap a key variable such as income. There's also a problem of a survey's sponsorship. Unlike questionnaires and telephone surveys, face-to-face interviews can be very expensive. They can also be dangerous.

B. Clinical Research

Clinical research studies individuals or small groups of people who seek help from mental-health professionals and other social scientists. Many clinical researchers focus on family conflict and intervene in traumatic situations such as marital rape and incest. Clinical research often relies on the *case study method*, a traditional approach used by social workers, psychologists, clinical sociologists, and marriage counselors.

Strengths

Case studies are typically linked with long-term counseling, which can be beneficial for individuals and families. Useful intervention strategies can be disseminated fairly quickly to thousands of other practitioners. Clinicians may also offer insights about family dynamics that can enrich theories such as symbolic interaction or family systems perspectives. Researchers can then incorporate these insights into larger or more representative studies that use surveys or other data-collection methods.

Limitations

Clinical research and case studies are usually time consuming and expensive. Clinicians typically see only people with severe problems or those who are willing and financially able to seek help.

C. Field Research

In **field research**, researchers collect data by systematically observing people in their natural surroundings. Field research usually is highly structured and typically involves carefully designed projects in which data are recorded, described, and sometimes converted into quantitative summaries.

Two Kinds of Observation

In *participant observation*, researchers interact naturally with the people they are studying but don't reveal their identities as researchers. In *nonparticipant observation*, researchers study phenomena without being part of the situation. Some field research studies are short term (such as observing whether and how parents discipline their unruly children in grocery stores during a few weeks or months). Others, called *ethnologies*, require a considerable amount of time in the field.

Strengths

Field research is more flexible than some other methods. Most important, because field research rarely disrupts a natural setting, the people being studied aren't influenced by the researcher's presence.

Limitations

Observation can be expensive if a researcher needs elaborate recording equipment, must travel far or often, or lives in a different society or community for an extended period. Researchers who

study other cultures must often learn a new language, which is a time-consuming task.

D. Secondary Analysis of Existing Data

Family researchers also rely heavily on **secondary analysis**, an examination of data that have been collected by someone else. The data may be historical materials (such as court proceedings), personal documents (such as letters and diaries), public records (such as state archives on births, marriages, and deaths), and official statistics (such as those generated by the Census Bureau).

Strengths

Secondary analysis is usually accessible, convenient, and inexpensive. Census Bureau information on topics such as employment, household income, and medical insurance, is readily available at public and college libraries and on the Internet. Because secondary data often are *longitudinal* (collected at two or more points in time) rather than *cross-sectional* (collected at one point in time), they offer the added advantage of allowing the researcher to examine trends (such as age at first marriage) over time. Another advantage of secondary analysis is the high quality of the data.

Limitations

Secondary analysis has several drawbacks. First, the data may not provide the information needed. Second, accessing historical materials may be difficult because the documents may be fragile, housed in only a few libraries in the country, or part of private collections. Determining the accuracy and authenticity of historical materials can also be. Third, the data may not include specific information the researcher is looking for.

E. Content Analysis

Content analysis is a data-collection method that systematically examines some form of communication. This is an unobtrusive approach that a researcher can apply to almost any form of written or oral communication: speeches, TV programs, newspaper articles, advertisements, office e-mails, songs, diaries, advice columns, poems, or Facebook chatter, to mention just a few. The researcher develops categories for coding the material, sorts and analyzes the content of the data in terms of frequency, intensity, or other characteristics, and draws conclusions about the results.

Strengths

A major advantage of content analysis is that it is usually inexpensive and often less time consuming than other data-collection methods, especially field research. Also, researchers can correct coding errors fairly easily by redoing the work. A third advantage of content analysis is that it is unobtrusive. Finally, researchers can obtain specific data over time.

Limitations

Content analysis can be very labor intensive, especially if a project is ambitious. In the research on the top-grossing films, for instance, it took several years to code the major characters' words and behavior. A related disadvantage is that the coding may be subjective. Having several researchers on a project can increase coding objectivity, but many content analyses are performed by only one researcher. Finally, content analysis often reflects social class bias.

F. Experiments

Unlike surveys, field research, secondary analysis, and content analysis, an **experiment** is a carefully controlled artificial situation that allows researchers to manipulate variables and measure the effects. The *independent variable* (for example, watching a film on racial discrimination) predicts that there will be an effect on the *dependent variable* (for example, reducing prejudice). In the *experimental group*, the subjects are exposed to the independent variable (watching the film). In the *control group*, they are not. Before the experiment, the researcher measures the dependent variable (prejudice) in both groups using a *pretest*. After the experimental group is exposed to the independent variable (the film on racial discrimination), the researcher measures both groups again using a *posttest*.

Strengths

A major advantage of the controlled (laboratory) experiment is its isolation of the causal variable. A second strength of experimental designs is their low cost. Usually, there's no need to purchase special equipment and most participants expect little or no compensation. A third advantage is that experiments can be replicated many times and with different participants. Such replication strengthens the researchers' confidence in the *validity*, or accuracy, and *reliability*, or consistency, of the research findings.

Limitations

One disadvantage of laboratory experiments is their reliance on student volunteers or paid respondents. Students often feel obligated to participate as part of their grade, or they may fear antagonizing an instructor who's conducting a study. A second and related disadvantage is that the results of experimental studies can't be generalized to a larger population because they come from small or self-selected samples. Another limitation is that experiments, especially those conducted in laboratories, are artificial. People *know* that they're being observed and may behave very differently than they would in a natural setting. Finally, even if a researcher finds that there's an association between variables (such as watching a film and reducing prejudice), it doesn't mean that the former "causes" the latter.

G. Evaluation Research

Evaluation research (also known as *program evaluation*) is the process of determining whether a social intervention has produced the intended result. In family studies, social interventions are typically programs and strategies that seek to prevent or change negative outcomes such as teenage pregnancy, delinquency, substance abuse, interpersonal violence, and unemployment. Evaluation

research isn't a specific method but relies on all the standard data-collection methods described previously. Like clinical research, evaluation research is *applied*. It assesses a social Program for an agency or organization and compares a program's achievements with its goals.

Strengths

Evaluation research is valuable for several reasons. First, because local and state governments have been cutting their budgets since the early 1980s, social service agencies often rely on evaluation research to streamline their programs, and to achieve the best results at the lowest possible cost because they have to do more with less. Second, evaluation research is versatile because it includes qualitative and quantitative approaches. It can address almost any topic. Third, evaluation research addresses real-life problems that confront many families and communities.

Limitations

A number of research evaluations are flawed or inadequate because they're poorly designed. Many evaluations address only one or a few of the many factors in intervention strategies and outcomes that affect behavior. The social context also affects evaluation research because of politics, vested interests, and a conflict of interests. Agency heads may ignore the results if the study shows that the program isn't tapping the neediest groups, the administrators are wasting money, or caseworkers are making serious mistakes. Researchers have to weigh the benefits and limitations of each research approach in designing their studies, and often use a combination of strategies to achieve their research objectives. Despite the researcher's commitment to objectivity, ethical debates and politically charged disagreements can influence much family research.

IV. Ethics, Politics, and Family Research [\[LS2\]](#) [\[CA2\]](#) [\[DQ2\]](#) [\[LTA1\]](#)

Learning Objective

2.4. Describe the ethical standards that researchers must follow, and explain the political, religious, and community constraints that researchers encounter.

Researchers today operate under much stricter guidelines than they did in the past.

A. Ethical Research

Because so much research relies on human subjects, the federal government, university institutional review boards (IRBs), and many professional organizations have formulated ethics codes to protect research participants. Regardless of the discipline or the research methods used, all ethical standards have at least three golden rules:

- First, *do no harm* by causing participants physical, psychological, or emotional pain.
- Second, the researcher must get the participants' *informed consent* to be in a study. This includes the participants knowing what the study is about and how the results will be used. Sociologists can use deception (such as not revealing that they are researchers) if doing so doesn't harm the participants, if the research has been approved by an IRB, and if the researcher explains the purpose of the study to participants at the end of the research (American

Sociological Association, 1999: 14).

- Third, researchers must always protect a participant's *confidentiality*, even if the participant has broken a law that she or he tells the researcher about.

Scientific Dishonesty

Medical researchers, especially, have been accused of considerable scientific misconduct. Some of the alleged violations have included the following:

- Changing research results to please the corporation (usually tobacco or pharmaceutical companies) that sponsored the research
- Being paid by companies to deliver speeches to health practitioners that endorse specific drugs, even if the medications don't reduce health problems
- Allowing drug manufacturers to ghostwrite their articles (and even draft textbooks) that are published in prestigious medical journals
- Falsifying data

Surveys, secondary analysis, and content analysis are less vulnerable because the researchers typically don't interact directly with subjects, affect their behavior, or become personally involved with the respondents. Web research and sometimes unintentionally approve social science research that might violate ethics guidelines.

B. Political, Religious, and Community Pressures

The late Senator William Proxmire became famous (or infamous, some believe) for his "Golden Fleece" awards to social research projects that he ridiculed as a waste of taxpayers' money. One of the most controversial research topics is human sexuality. Research on teenage sexual behavior is valuable because it provides information that public health agencies and schools can circulate about sexually transmitted diseases (such as HIV) and contraception. Nonetheless, many local jurisdictions have refused to let social scientists study adolescent sexual behavior.

Lecture Starters

Lecture Starter 1: Share the following facts before starting this chapter:

- The return rate for mailed census questionnaires was 78 percent in 1970, 75 percent in 1980, 65 percent in 1990, and 74 percent in 2000 and 2010.
- A national public opinion poll costs between \$30 and \$50 per respondent— or about \$30,000 to \$50,000 for a telephone survey of 1,000 people.
- The response rate of a typical Telephone survey decreased from 36 percent in 1997 to 9 percent in 2012.
- Among U.S. adults, 59 percent have searched online for information about health.
- DNA tests, which trace our genetic origins, have found that at least 4 percent of Americans don't know that their father isn't their biological parent.
- Almost half of Americans (most of them women) purchase at least one self-help book in their

lifetimes. As a result, this genre rose from \$581 million in sales in 1998 to more almost \$9 billion in 2003. The sales are expected to be about \$12 billion by 2012.

This lecture starter will help the students understand the cost, response rate, return rate, etc., of several research methods. [[Go to Outline](#)]

Lecture Starter 2: Share the following basic principles of ethical family research after completing the section on Ethics, Politics, and Family research.

- Obtain all participants' consent to participate and their permission to quote their responses, particularly if the research concerns sensitive issues.
- Do not exploit participants or research assistants involved in the research for personal gain.
- Never harm, humiliate, abuse, or coerce participants, either physically or psychologically. This includes the withholding of medications or other services or programs that might benefit participants.
- Honor all guarantees to participants of privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality.
- Use the highest methodological standards and be as accurate as possible.
- Describe the limitations and shortcomings of the research in published and unpublished reports.
- Identify the sponsors who funded the research.

This lecture starter will help the students understand the basic principles of ethical family research. [[Go to Outline](#)]

Classroom Activities

Classroom Activity 1: Have students read a one-page vignette you have written of a husband and wife arguing. Set up their family situation (thirty-something married right after high school, two children—both girls and ages 7 and 9, wife worked to earn money while the husband went to college, he works in marketing and they move every two or three years to follow his career, she is a stay-at-home mom, etc.). Have the couple arguing about the husband always coming home late for dinner and not being around the home much. Ask students in groups of 4-5 to identify reasons for why this marriage is in trouble (simply have one person in each group bullet-point a list). Collect the lists and either on the board in class right then, or on a PowerPoint slide for the next class, categorize the items in the lists in terms of which, if any, of the sociological theories each fits under.

This activity will give students a chance to think in theoretical terms about marriages and families without having them burdened by the thought they are working with abstract, boring theories. [[Go to Outline](#)]

Classroom Activity 2: Divide students into groups of 4-5 and ask them to give examples of bad ethics in the real world, and ask each group to analyze the example and conclude which element of the ethics is violated.

This activity will give the students an opportunity to understand the importance of following ethical guidelines. [[Go to Outline](#)]

Discussion Questions

Discussion Question 1: Surveys are often used in public opinion polls and are reported on television

and in newspapers. Asking a few basic questions about a survey will help evaluate its credibility. Ask students to write down the questions that they feel are important to check the credibility of any survey. Explain how the questions they came up with could be used to find the credibility.

This discussion question will help students understand the major concern regarding credibility of survey methods and how this problem can be evaluated. [\[Go to Outline\]](#)

Answer: Students answers might vary. The following questions can be used to check the credibility of any survey:

- *Who sponsored the survey?* A government agency, a nonprofit partisan organization, a business, or a group that's lobbying for change?
- *What is the purpose of the survey?* To provide Objective information, to promote an idea or a political candidate, or to get attention through sensationalism?
- *How was the sample drawn?* Randomly? Or was it a SLOP— a “self-selection opinion poll” (see T anur, 1994)?
- *How were the questions worded?* Were they clear, objective, loaded, or biased? If the survey questions are not provided, why not?
- *How did the researchers report their findings?* Were they objective, or did they make value judgments?

Discussion Question 2: Because so much research relies on human subjects, the federal government, university institutional review boards (IRBs), and many professional organizations have formulated ethics codes to protect research participants. Regardless of the discipline or the research methods used, all ethical standards have at least three golden rules. Ask students to explain “ethical standards.” What are the three golden rules? Explain these three rules in detail.

This discussion will help the students understand the ethical standards which need to be maintained while conducting any research. [\[Go to Outline\]](#)

Answer: The three golden rules are:

- First, *do no harm* by causing participants physical, psychological, or emotional pain.
- Second, the researcher must get the participants' *informed consent* to be in a study. This includes the participants knowing what the study is about and how the results will be used. Sociologists can use deception (such as not revealing that they are researchers) if doing so doesn't harm the participants, if the research has been approved by an IRB, and if the researcher explains the purpose of the study to participants at the end of the research (American Sociological Association, 1999: 14).
- Third, researchers must always protect a participant's *confidentiality*, even if the participant has broken a law that she or he tells the researcher about.

MyLab Activities

2.1. Describe three ways that theory and research can help people make better decisions about their families.

- http://abavtooldev.pearsoncmg.com/sbx_videoplayer_v2/simpleviewer.php?projectID=MSocL&cli

- [pID=Ritzer_01_63.flv](#)
- http://abavtooldev.pearsoncmg.com/sbx_videoplayer_v2/simpleviewer.php?projectID=MSocL&clipID=explain_exp_method_768K.flv

2.2. Describe eight major family theoretical perspectives, identify whether each is macro- and/or micro-level, and summarize the strengths and limitations of each perspective.

- <http://abavtooldev.pearsoncmg.com/MSocL/simpleviewer.php?projectID=discuss>
- <http://view.ebookplus.pearsoncmg.com/ebook/linktoebook5.do?platform=1027&bookid=15318&ageid=343>
- <http://www.socialexplorer.com/pearson/plink.aspx?dest=http%3a%2f%2fold.socialexplorer.com%2fpearson%2fspicemap.aspx%3fv%3d4778aa84e5cf4567%26m%3dplay>
- <http://www.socialexplorer.com/pearson/plink.aspx?dest=http%3a%2f%2fold.socialexplorer.com%2fpearson%2fspicemap.aspx%3fv%3d450c6ba900654509%26m%3dplay>

2.3. Describe seven data-collection methods that researchers use to study families, and identify each of the method's strengths and limitations.

- http://abavtooldev.pearsoncmg.com/sbx_videoplayer_v2/simpleviewer.php?projectID=MFL&clipID=strombler_research_methodology.flv
- http://abavtooldev.pearsoncmg.com/sbx_videoplayer_v2/simpleviewer.php?projectID=MFL&clipID=staley_qual_methods.flv

Suggested Assignments

Short-Term Assignment 1: Ask students to conduct an online survey, telephone survey, and field research on any topic. Ask them to submit a report incorporating all their research results. Their report should also discuss the advantages and disadvantages each of them faced during the process of conducting the research.

This assignment will help the students identify the advantages and disadvantages of online surveys, telephone survey, and field research on any topic. [[Go to Outline](#)]

Short-Term Assignment 2: Ask students to develop a survey questionnaire that examines the effect of a wife's employment on marital satisfaction. Students should keep the following points in mind while developing the tool:

1. Suggest different questions you would ask people to complete the questionnaire.
2. How are you operationalizing the key variables in this research through the questions you develop for your questionnaire (wife's employment and marital satisfaction)?
3. What other variables are you going to include in questions as controls (e.g. years married, presence of children and their ages, type of occupation, reason for working, social class, etc.)?
4. What sampling procedures will you use to select potential respondents? What factors might affect the response rate?
5. How will you measure for reliability and validity?

Further, ask students to conduct a research using this questionnaire and submit the report in the class. This assignment will help enlighten students about the complexities involved in constructing a questionnaire. [[Go to Outline](#)]

Long-Term Assignment 1: The Tuskegee experiment provides an excellent historical example of research ethics gone awry. Ask the students to research on the historical facts (<http://www.cdc.gov/nchstp/od/tuskegee/index.html>), and also watch a short excerpt of *Miss Evers' Boys*, an HBO documentary of the Tuskegee story. Other film possibilities include, *And the Band Played On*, or *Philadelphia*, both of which discuss the AIDS crisis and medical research. Ask the students to identify specific ethical violations and determine if such an “experiment” could be performed today.

This assignment will help the students to illustrate ethical guidelines and provide some historical context for why these guidelines exist. [[Go to Outline](#)]

Long-Term Assignment 2: Assign the class to obtain the average years of education for persons age 25 or older by gender (or other statistics that the instructor sees as interesting and relevant). Students need to obtain these statistics on the Census Bureau website (www.census.gov), and report in writing to the class. Students can be assigned with different statistics so that they can share what they find on the census site. Remind the students that these statistics are updated from time to time by the census, an example that the family is constantly changing.

This assignment will help the students to understand how to obtain the most recent statistics on the family researches. [[Go to Outline](#)]

Annotated Film/TV Show Suggestions

1. *Research Ethics*, 2008, 21 min. (Insight Media). Featuring vignettes that follow students devising a research proposal, this program examines ethical issues in reporting and conducting research involving human subjects.
2. *A Scientific Approach*, 2003, 30 min. (Insight Media). Introducing research methodology—how scientists explore and gain knowledge to understand human development—this video traces the evolution of attachment research, including the work of Harry Harlow, Mary Ainsworth, and Mary Main. It also addresses the ethics of conducting and reporting scientific research.
3. *The Bigger Picture: Distributions, Variation, and Experiments*, 2000, 12 min. (Insight Media). This video uses classroom situations to show how to gather data, present the data on graphs, and summarize the data using measures of central tendency and variation.
4. *Capturing the Past: How to Prepare and Conduct an Oral History Interview*, 2000, 31 min. (Insight Media). Oral history is an invaluable means of preserving personal stories and perspectives for future generations. This video uses an actual interview to illustrate the process of oral history, providing step-by-step instructions for the interview. This process begins with planning and preparation and ends with preservation on audio or videotape.

5. *How to Read and Understand a Research Study*, 2008, 24 min. (Insight Media). This video program introduces the basic components of a research study. This program also illustrates the structure of a scientific paper, defining important terms, including validity, reliability, and p value.

Annotated Book/Journal Article Suggestions

1. White, James M. and Klein, David M., *Family Theories*. This book helps readers understand the various sociological theories on marriages and families.
2. Greenstein, Theodore N. and Davis, Shannon N., *Methods of Family Research*. This book explains the basic concepts of social science research methods in simpler terms.
3. Bagner, Daniel M., *Father's Role in Parent Training for Children with Developmental Delay*. This article describes the results of a research pointing out the significance of fathers' involvement in parent training, especially in the case of raising children with developmental delay.
4. Bengston, William F. and Hazzard, John W., "The Assimilation of Sociology into Common Sense: Some Implications for Teaching," *Teaching Sociology*. This article examines how sociological sensitivities have led to common sense even without the need of formal education.
5. Basirico, Laurence A., "Integrating Sociological Practice into Traditional Sociology Courses," (*Teaching Sociology*, January, 1990: 57-62). This article will help integrate applied sociological focus with individual approach to the marriage and family course.

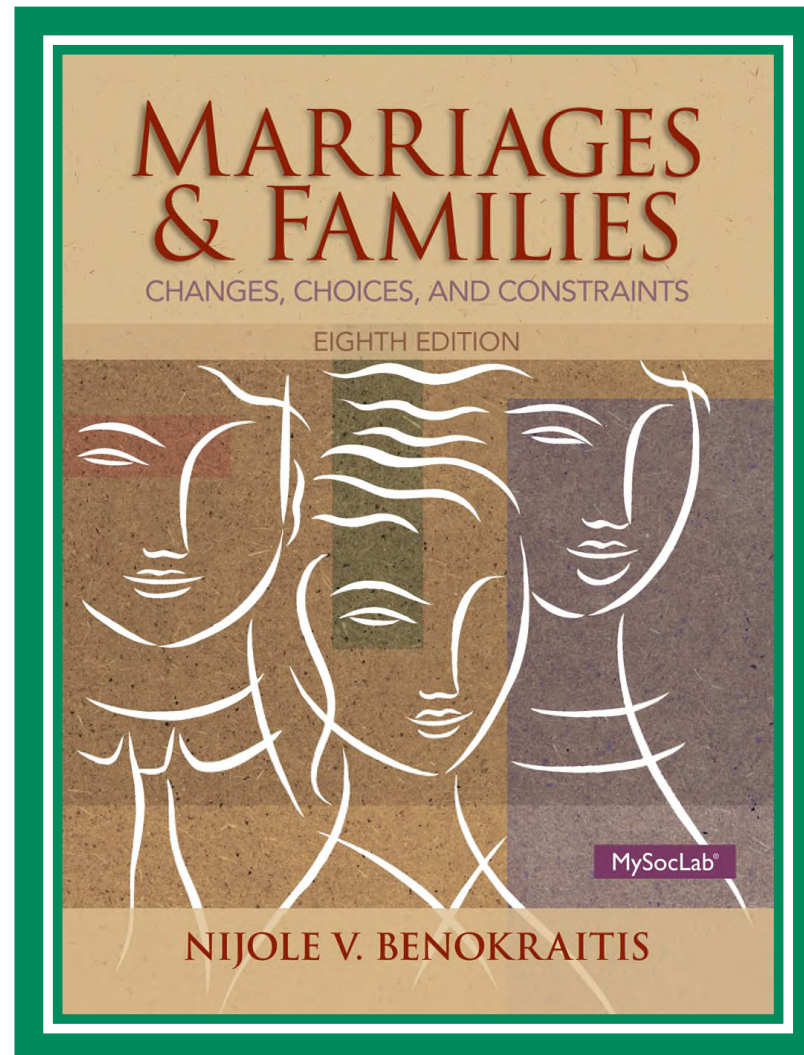
Annotated Website Suggestions

1. www.cdc.gov. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website serve as a good source of information on public health and safety topics.
2. www.census.gov. The Census Bureau's website serves as the leading source of quality data about the people and economy.
3. www.straightdope.com. This website provides information of how people misuse statistics in order to support certain agendas.
4. www.irb.umn.edu. The Institutional Review Board's website provides information on how the IRB reviews research projects which involve human subjects to ensure that two broad standards are upheld: (i) that subjects are not placed at undue risk and (ii) that they give uncoerced, informed consent to their participation.
5. www.ncfr.org. The National Council on Family Relations is the oldest multidisciplinary, nonpartisan professional organization. The information on its site is focused solely on family research, practice, and education.

Marriages and Families: Changes, Choices and Constraints

Eighth Edition

Nijole V. Benokraitis



Chapter 2

STUDYING THE FAMILY

Learning Objectives

LO 2.1 Describe three ways that theory and research can help people make better decisions about their families

LO 2.2 Describe eight major family theoretical perspectives, identify whether each is macro- and/or micro-level, and summarize the strengths and limitations of each perspective

Learning Objectives

LO 2.3 Describe seven data collection methods that researchers use to study families and identify each of the method's strengths and limitations

Learning Objectives

LO 2.4 Describe the ethical standards that researchers must follow, and explain the political, religious, and community constraints that researchers encounter

Why We Should Study the Family

- What we don't know can hurt us
- Theories and research help us understand ourselves and our families
- Theories and research help us make informed decisions

What We Don't Know Can Hurt Us

- Reliance on TV shows and internet for information is dangerous
 - Perpetuates misleading and incorrect information

Theories and Research Help Us Understand Ourselves and Our Families

- Theories and research:
 - Outline numerous aspects of family life
 - Provide a view taking into consideration various factors

Importance of Sociological Theory

- In this video George Ritzer discusses the importance of Sociological theory to an understanding of society and social behavior

http://abavtooldev.pearsoncmg.com/sbx_videoplayer_v2/simpleviewer.php?projectID=MSocL&clipID=Ritzer_01_63.flv

Theories and Research Help Us Make Informed Decisions

- Research:
 - Helps make informed decisions
 - Enhances the ability to think critically before making a decision

Experiments

- This video explains the role of experiments in theories and research

http://abavtooldev.pearsoncmg.com/sbx_videoplayer_v2/simpleviewer.php?projectID=MSocL&clipID=explain_exp_method_768K.flv

Question 1

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 - B. They help us understand ourselves and our families.**
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 - D. None of these

Question 2

- Theories and research are important because they help us make better decisions.
 - A. True
 - B. False

Question 2

- Theories and research are important because they help us make better decisions.
A. True
B. False

Theoretical Perspectives on Families

- The structural functional perspective
- The conflict perspective
- Feminist perspectives
- The ecological perspective
- The family development perspective

Theoretical Perspectives on Families

- The symbolic interaction perspective
- The social exchange perspective
- The family systems perspective
- Combining theories

Theoretical Perspectives on Families

- **Theory:** Set of statements that explains why a phenomenon occurs
- **Help:**
 - Drive research
 - Analyze findings
 - Offer solutions for family problems

Major Theoretical Perspectives on the Family

Theoretical Perspective	Level of Analysis	View of the Family
Structural-Functionalist	Macro	Institution that is part of the social structure of society Family maintains its members and ensures a society's continuity
Conflict	Macro	Group that experiences problems due to social inequality Family and its members must compete for limited resources that are controlled by powerful groups

Major Theoretical Perspectives on the Family

Theoretical Perspective	Level of Analysis	View of the Family
Feminist	Macro and Micro	Group whose members learn socially constructed expectations based on gender roles, social class, race, age, sexual orientation, marital status, and other factors
Ecological	Macro and Micro	Group that adapts and reorganizes in response to changing environments
Developmental	Macro and Micro	Group whose members accomplish specific behaviors or tasks in a series of stages

Major Theoretical Perspectives on the Family

Theoretical Perspective	Level of Analysis	View of the Family
Symbolic Interactionist	Micro	Group whose interactions are governed by the communication of knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, values, and roles
Social Exchange	Micro	Group within which people rationally seek to maximize their rewards and minimize costs
Family Systems	Micro	Unit whose daily functioning and survival depend on the interactions of its members with each other and the larger society

Structural Functional Perspective

- Examines how a society's interdependent parts work together to ensure its survival
- Family roles
 - **Instrumental roles:** Providing food and shelter for the family and being hardworking, tough, and competitive
 - **Expressive roles:** Providing the emotional support and nurturing that sustain the family unit

Structural Functional Perspective

Family functions

- **Manifest functions:** Purposes and activities that are intended, recognized and clearly evident
- **Latent functions:** Purposes and activities that are unintended and unrecognized, but aren't immediately obvious

Institutional connections

- Family is affected by institutions such as law, politics, and the economy

Conflict Perspective

- **Conflict theory:** Examines how groups disagree, struggle for power, and compete for scarce resources
 - Considers conflict and resulting changes as natural, inevitable, and desirable
 - Helps identify inequalities within and across families
 - Promotes structures and values that are less oppressive

Conflict Perspective

- Social class and power
 - Families perpetuate social stratification
 - Society is viewed as a system of widespread inequality
- Family problems
 - Difficulties result from societal problems
 - Negative impact of racial discrimination

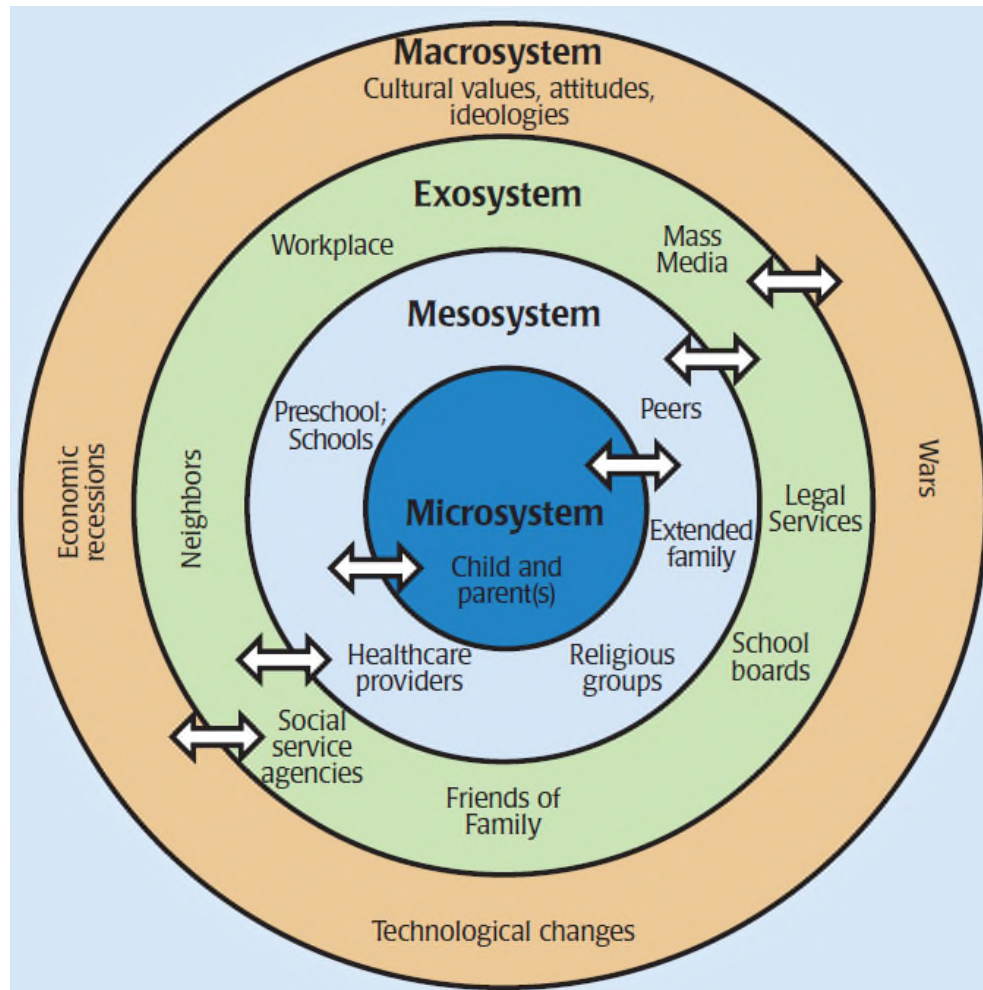
Feminist Perspectives

- **Feminist theories:** Examine the social, economic, and political inequality between women and men in society
 - Use micro and macro approaches
 - Address:
 - Gender inequality
 - Family diversity
 - Social change

Ecological Perspective

- **Ecological theory:** Examines how a family influences and is influenced by its environment
- Interlocking systems
 - Microsystem
 - Mesosystem
 - Exosystem
 - Macrosystem

Figure 2.2 - An Ecological Model of Family Development



Source: Based on Bronfenbrenner, 1979.

Family Development Perspective

- **Family development theory:** Examines the changes that families experience over their lifespans
 - **Family life cycle:** Transitions that a family makes as it moves through a series of stages and events
 - **Developmental tasks:** Various role expectations and responsibilities

Family: Theories and Question

- This ventures the zone family dynamics

<http://www.socialexplorer.com/pearson/plink.aspx?dest=http%3a%2f%2fold.socialexplorer.com%2fpearson%2fspicemap.aspx%3fv%3d4778aa84e5cf4567%26m%3dplay>

Table 2.1 - The Classic Portrayal of the Family Life Cycle

Stage 1	Couple without children
Stage 2	Oldest child younger than age 30 months
Stage 3	Oldest child between ages 2-1/2 and 6
Stage 4	Oldest child between ages 6 and 13
Stage 5	Oldest child between ages 13 and 20
Stage 6	Period starting when first child leaves the family until the youngest leaves
Stage 7	Empty nest to retirement
Stage 8	Retirement to death of one or both spouses

Family Diversity: Who Takes Care of Whom?

- This explores statistics pertaining to families

<http://www.socialexplorer.com/pearson/plink.aspx?dest=http%3a%2f%2fold.socialexplorer.com%2fpearson%2fspicemap.aspx%3fv%3d450c6ba900654509%26m%3dplay>

Symbolic Interaction Perspective

- **Symbolic interaction theory:** Micro-level perspective that examines individuals' everyday behavior
- Symbols - Words, gestures, or pictures that stand for something
 - Share meanings or agreed-upon definitions
- Significant others - People in our primary groups

Symbolic Interactionism

- In this video Melissa Milkie discusses symbolic interactionism

<http://abavtooldev.pearsoncmg.com/MSocL/simpleviewer.php?projectId=discuss>

The Nature of Symbolic Interactionism

- The text illustrates the views of Herbert Blumer on symbolic interactionism

<http://view.ebookplus.pearsoncmg.com/ebook/linktoebook5.do?platform=1027&bookid=15318&pageid=343>

Social Exchange Perspective

- **Social exchange theory:** People seek through their interactions with others to maximize their rewards and to minimize their costs
- Resources
 - Tangible or intangible
 - Traded for more, better, or different assets that another person has

Family Systems Perspective

- **Family systems theory:** Views the family as a functioning unit that:
 - Solves problems
 - Makes decisions
 - Achieves collective goals
- **Equilibrium - Adjustment process** to restore the family to the way it was in the past

Combining Theories

- Researchers and practitioners often use several perspectives to interpret data or choose intervention strategies

Question 3

- Which of the following theories examines the relationship between family and the larger society?
 - A. Conflict theory
 - B. Family systems theory
 - C. Ecological theory
 - D. Structural-functional theory

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- Which of the following theories examines the relationship between family and the larger society?
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Question 4

- Feminist theory has been criticized for stressing expectations about how men and women should behave.
 - A. True
 - B. False

Question 4

- Feminist theory has been criticized for stressing expectations about how men and women should behave.
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 - B. False**

Family Research Methods

- Surveys
- Clinical research
- Field research
- Secondary analysis of existing data
- Content analysis
- Experiments
- Evaluation research

Research Methodology

- In this video, Mindy Strombler talks about the need for research and its methodology

http://abavtooldev.pearsoncmg.com/sbx_videoplayer_v2/simpleviewer.php?projectID=MFL&clipID=strombler_research_methodology.flv

Family Research Methods

- **Qualitative research:** Social scientists examine and interpret nonnumerical material that they then interpret
- **Quantitative research:** Researchers focus on a numerical analysis of people's responses or specific characteristics

Qualitative Methods in Research

- The video gives an example based overview of how qualitative research is conducted

http://abavtooldev.pearsoncmg.com/sbx_videoplayer_v2/simpleviewer.php?projectID=MFL&clipID=strombler_research_methodology.flv

Surveys

Systematically collecting data from respondents through questionnaires or interviews

Population: Well-defined group of people that researchers want to know something about

Sample: Group of people that are representative of the population they want to study

Probability sample: Due to random selection each person has an equal chance of being chosen

Nonprobability sample: Little or no attempt to get a representative cross section of a population

Clinical Research

- Studies individuals or small groups of people who seek help from mental health professionals and other social scientists
- Case study method
 - Provides in-depth information and detailed and vivid descriptions of family life

Field Research

- Data are collected by systematically observing people in their natural surroundings
- Highly structured and involves carefully designed projects in which data are:
 - Recorded and described
 - Converted into quantitative summaries

Field Research

- Kinds of observation
 - Participant observation - Researchers interact naturally with the people they are studying
 - Nonparticipant observation - Researchers study phenomena without being part of the situation
 - Ethnologies - Require a considerable amount of time in the field

Secondary Analysis of Existing Data

- Examination of data that have been collected by someone else
- Secondary data includes:
 - Historical materials
 - Personal documents
 - Public records
 - Official statistics

Content Analysis

- Systematically examining some form of communication
 - Researcher develops categories for coding the material
 - Sorts and analyzes the content of the data in terms of frequency, intensity, or other characteristics
 - Draws conclusions about the results

Experiments

- Carefully controlled artificial situation that allows researchers to manipulate variables and measure the effects
- Rare in case of family research
 - Useful in studying family-related issues

Evaluation Research

- Process of determining whether a social intervention has produced the intended result
- Relies on all the other standard data collection methods and is applied

Table 2.2 - Seven Common Data Collection Methods in Family Research

Method	Strengths	Limitations
Surveys	Fairly inexpensive and simple to administer; interviews have high response rates; findings often can be generalized to the whole population.	Mailed questionnaires may have low response rates; respondents may be self-selected; interviews usually are expensive.
Clinical research	Helps people who are experiencing family problems; offers insights for theory development.	Usually time consuming and expensive; findings can't be generalized.
Field research	Flexible; offers deeper understanding of family behavior; can be expensive or inexpensive depending on the project's scope and location.	Difficult to quantify and to maintain observer-participant boundaries; the observer may be biased or judgmental; findings can't be generalized.

Table 2.2 - Seven Common Data Collection Methods in Family Research

Method	Strengths	Limitations
Secondary analysis of existing data	Usually accessible, convenient, and inexpensive; often longitudinal and historical.	Information may be incomplete; some documents may be inaccessible; some data can't be collected over time.
Content analysis	Usually inexpensive; can recode errors; unobtrusive; permits comparisons over time.	Can be labor intensive; coding is often subjective (and may be distorted); may reflect social class bias.
Experiment	Attempts to demonstrate cause and effect; usually inexpensive; many available participants; can be replicated.	Subjects aren't representative of larger populations; artificial laboratory setting; findings can't be generalized.
Evaluation research	Usually inexpensive and versatile; valuable in real-life applications.	The quality of research varies; the social context may affect the researchers and the results.

Question 5

- In which of the following research methods people collect data by observing people in their natural surroundings?
 - A. Participant observation
 - B. Surveys
 - C. Clinical research
 - D. Experiments

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Question 6

- A limitation of clinical research is that it does not generalize the information.
 - A. True
 - B. False

Question 6

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A. True
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Ethics, Politics, and Family Research

- Ethical research
- Political, religious, and community pressures

Ethical Research

- Golden rules
 - Do no harm by causing participants physical, psychological, or emotional pain
 - Researcher must get the participant's informed consent to be in a study
 - Researchers must always protect a participant's confidentiality

Table 2.3 - Some Basic Principles of Ethical Family Research

- Obtain all participants' consent to participate and their permission to quote their responses, particularly if the research concerns sensitive issues.
- Do not exploit participants or research assistants involved in the research for personal gain.
- Never harm, humiliate, abuse, or coerce participants, either physically or psychologically. This includes the withholding of medications or other services or programs that might benefit participants.
- Honor all guarantees to participants of privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality.
- Use the highest methodological standards and be as accurate as possible.
- Describe the limitations and shortcomings of the research in published and unpublished reports.
- Identify the sponsors who funded the research.

Scientific Dishonesty

- Changing research results to please the paying corporation
- Being paid by companies to deliver false speeches to health practitioners that endorse specific drugs
- Allowing drug manufacturers to ghostwrite their articles
- Falsifying data

Political, Religious, and Community Pressures

- Research on teenage sexual behavior
 - Helps spread information about STDs and contraception
 - Opposed by some religious groups, school administrators, and politicians

Question 7

- Ethics are required in research because:
 - A. They provide guidelines to get effective results.
 - B. Research is not governed by law.
 - C. Much of the research relies on human subject.
 - D. None of these

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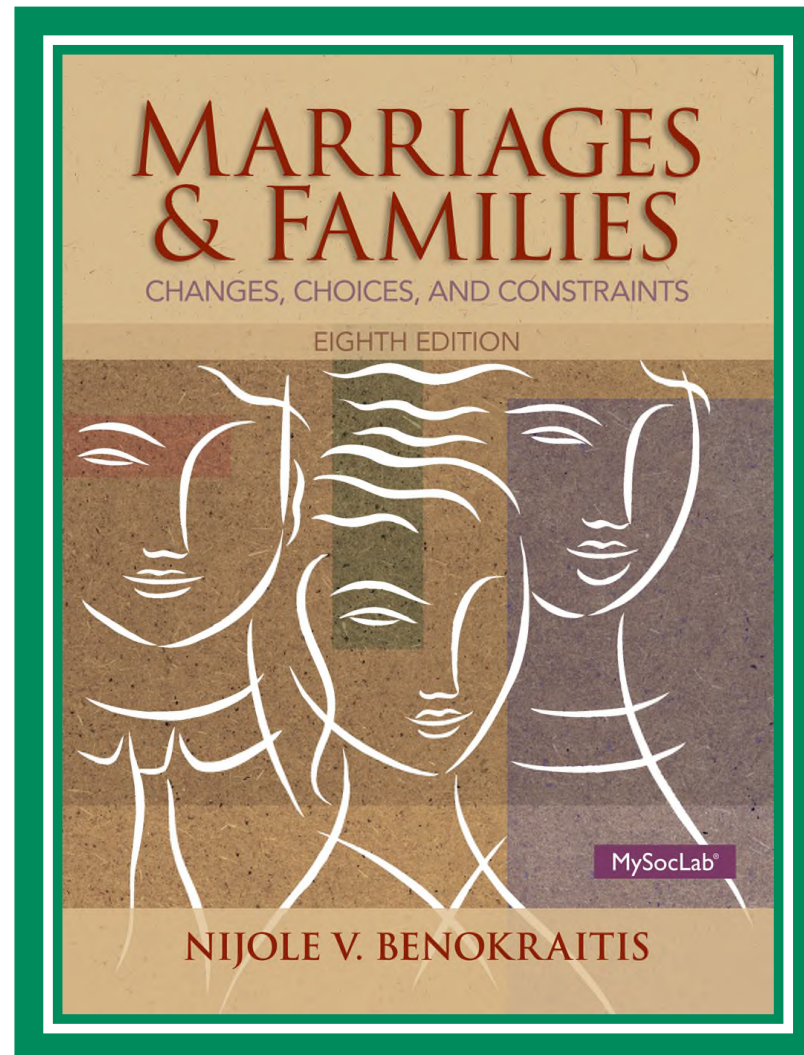
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Discussion Question

- Discuss the following theoretical perspectives.
 - Conflict
 - Developmental
 - Social exchange

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Chapter 2

STUDYING THE FAMILY

Question 1

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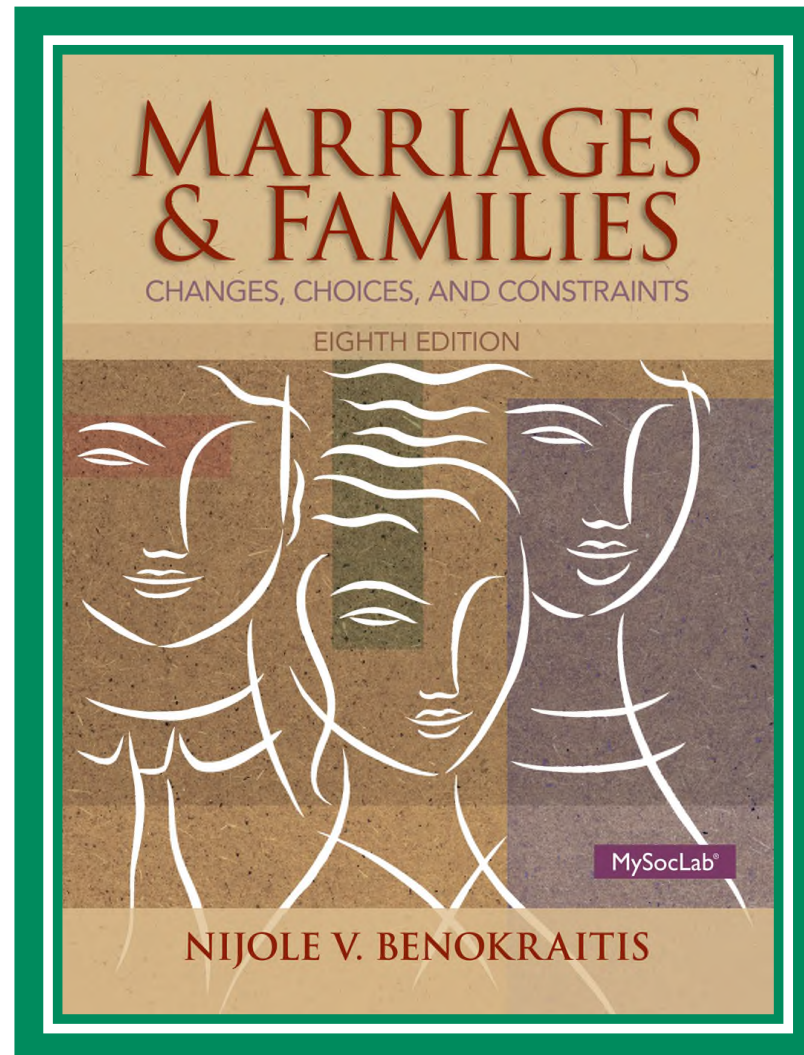
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LO 2.3 Describe seven data collection methods that researchers use to study families and identify each of the method's strengths and limitations

Learning Objectives

LO 2.4 Describe the ethical standards that researchers must follow, and explain the political, religious, and community constraints that researchers encounter

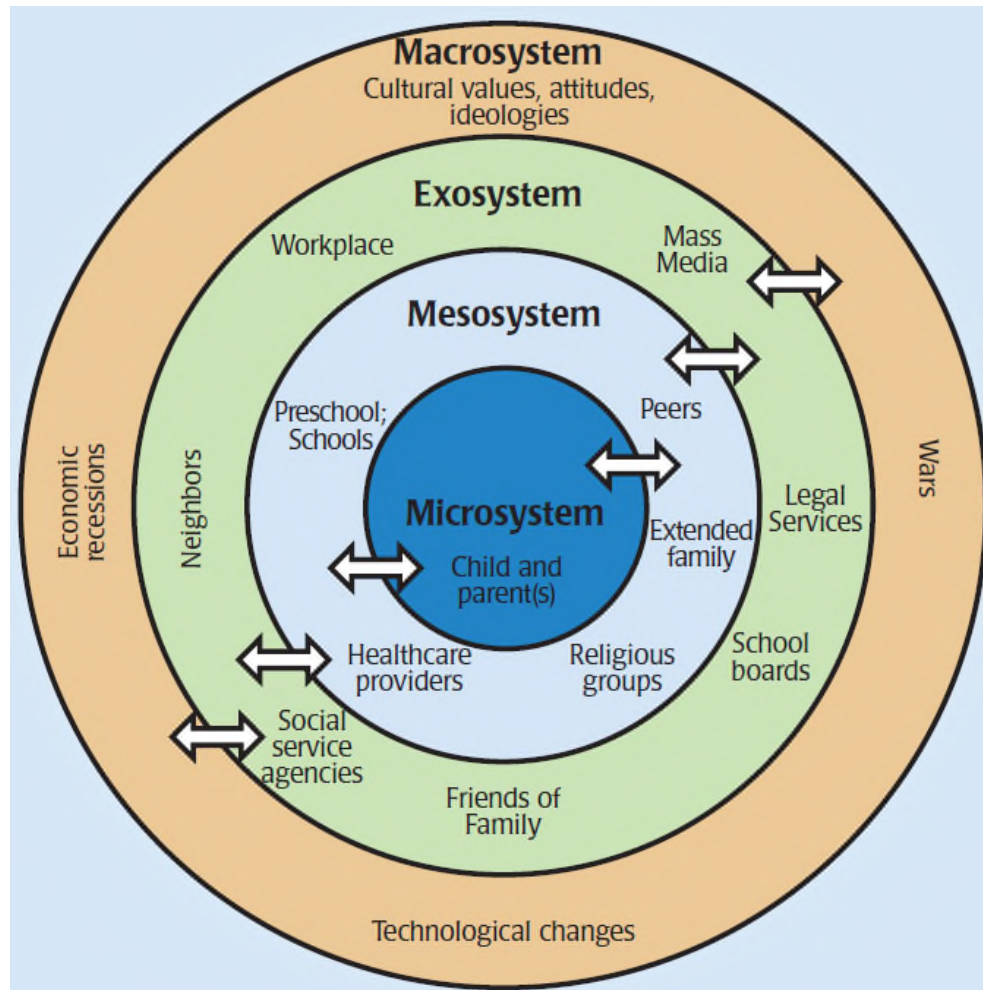
Figure 2.1 - Major Theoretical Perspectives on the Family

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE	LEVEL OF ANALYSIS	VIEW OF THE FAMILY	MAJOR QUESTIONS ?
STRUCTURAL-FUNCTIONALIST	Macro	An institution that is part of the social structure of society; the family maintains its members and ensures a society's continuity	How are families structured and what functions do they perform? How do families meet their own needs and contribute to social stability?
CONFLICT	Macro	A group that experiences problems due to social inequality; the family and its members must compete for limited resources that are controlled by powerful groups	Which families benefit and which lose when resources are scarce? How do families protect their privileges?
FEMINIST	Macro and Micro	A group whose members learn socially constructed expectations based on gender roles, social class, race, age, sexual orientation, marital status, and other factors	How does family life reflect economic and patriarchal arrangements? Do women and men experience the family in similar or different ways?

Figure 2.1 - Major Theoretical Perspectives on the Family

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE	LEVEL OF ANALYSIS	VIEW OF THE FAMILY	MAJOR QUESTIONS ?
ECOLOGICAL	Macro and Micro	A group that adapts and reorganizes in response to changing environments	How are family roles and environmental settings interrelated? How can families allocate and manage responses to meet the family's needs?
DEVELOPMENTAL	Macro and Micro	A group whose members accomplish specific behaviors or tasks in a series of stages	What are the tasks a family must perform to survive? What are the stages it goes through?
SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONIST	Micro	A group, like others, whose interactions are governed by the communication of knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, values, and roles	How do family members perceive and explain reality? How is "right" and "wrong" behavior defined, interpreted, reinforced, or discouraged?
SOCIAL EXCHANGE	Micro	A group within which people rationally seek to maximize their rewards and minimize costs	What are a person's benefits in a relationship? What are the costs?
FAMILY SYSTEMS	Micro	A unit whose daily functioning and survival depend on the interactions of its members with each other and the larger society	Do families have functional or dysfunctional relationships? How can the relationships and behaviors be improved?

Figure 2.2 - An Ecological Model of Family Development



Source: Based on Bronfenbrenner, 1979

Table 2.1 - The Classic Portrayal of the Family Life Cycle

Stage 1	Couple without children
Stage 2	Oldest child younger than age 30 months
Stage 3	Oldest child between ages 2-1/2 and 6
Stage 4	Oldest child between ages 6 and 13
Stage 5	Oldest child between ages 13 and 20
Stage 6	Period starting when first child leaves the family until the youngest leaves
Stage 7	Empty nest to retirement
Stage 8	Retirement to death of one or both spouses

Table 2.2 - Seven Common Data Collection Methods in Family Research

Method	Strengths	Limitations
Surveys	Fairly inexpensive and simple to administer; interviews have high response rates; findings often can be generalized to the whole population.	Mailed questionnaires may have low response rates; respondents may be self-selected; interviews usually are expensive.
Clinical research	Helps people who are experiencing family problems; offers insights for theory development.	Usually time consuming and expensive; findings can't be generalized.
Field research	Flexible; offers deeper understanding of family behavior; can be expensive or inexpensive depending on the project's scope and location.	Difficult to quantify and to maintain observer-participant boundaries; the observer may be biased or judgmental; findings can't be generalized.

Table 2.2 - Seven Common Data Collection Methods in Family Research

Method	Strengths	Limitations
Secondary analysis of existing data	Usually accessible, convenient, and inexpensive; often longitudinal and historical.	Information may be incomplete; some documents may be inaccessible; some data can't be collected over time.
Content analysis	Usually inexpensive; can recode errors; unobtrusive; permits comparisons over time.	Can be labor intensive; coding is often subjective (and may be distorted); may reflect social class bias.
Experiment	Attempts to demonstrate cause and effect; usually inexpensive; many available participants; can be replicated.	Subjects aren't representative of larger populations; artificial laboratory setting; findings can't be generalized.
Evaluation research	Usually inexpensive and versatile; valuable in real-life applications.	The quality of research varies; the social context may affect the researchers and the results.

Figure 2.3 - Reproduction of the Questions on Hispanic origin and Race from the 2010 Census

→ NOTE: Please answer BOTH Question 5 about Hispanic origin and Question 6 about race. For this census, Hispanic origin are not races.

5. Is this person of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?

No, not of Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin

Yes, Mexican, Mexican Am., Chicano

Yes, Puerto Rican

Yes, Cuban

Yes, another Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin—*Print origin, for example, Argentinean, Colombian, Dominican, Nicaraguan Salvadoran, Spaniard, and so on.* ↘

6. What is this person's race? Mark one or more boxes.

White

Black, African Am., or Negro

American Indian or Alaska Native—*Print name of enrolled or principal tribe.* ↘

Asian Indian Japanese Native Hawaiian

Chinese Korean Guamanian or Chamorro

Filipino Vietnamese Samoan

Other Asian—*Print race, for example, Hmong, Laotian, Thai, Pakistani, Cambodian, and so on.* ↘ Other Pacific Islander—*Print race, for example, Fijian, Tongan, and so on.* ↘

Some other race—*Print race.* ↘

Source: U.S. Bureau, 2010 Census Questionnaire

Table 2.3 - Some Basic Principles of Ethical Family Research

- Obtain all participants' consent to participate and their permission to quote their responses, particularly if the research concerns sensitive issues.
- Do not exploit participants or research assistants involved in the research for personal gain.
- Never harm, humiliate, abuse, or coerce participants, either physically or psychologically. This includes the withholding of medications or other services or programs that might benefit participants.
- Honor all guarantees to participants of privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality.
- Use the highest methodological standards and be as accurate as possible.
- Describe the limitations and shortcomings of the research in published and unpublished reports.
- Identify the sponsors who funded the research.