

# 2

## THE VARIED EXPERIENCES OF PARENTING

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 Explain the ways in which societies and cultures influence the experiences of parenting and family life.
- 2.2 Describe the landscape and trends of various family structures in the United States today.
- 2.3 Summarize the process of racial and ethnic identity formation in children.
- 2.4 Using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model and each of its ecosystems, discuss the ways in which systemic racism is perpetuated in the United States today.

- In Norway and many other Scandinavian countries, parents have their children (as young as two weeks old) nap in the outdoors, regardless of how cold it is. It is commonplace for parents to park their infants' baby strollers for up to three hours on busy sidewalks while they go inside to stores and restaurants. Parents believe that frigid infant/child napping promotes better sleep and that it increases the duration of sleep.



Without question, parenting is a cultural experience. In Norway, parents leave their infants and toddlers outside to nap because of the cultural belief that frigid air is healthy for children.

Source: iStock.com/AlexPnferov.

They also believe the cold temperatures (as cold as 4° below 0) promote health in their infants (Coleman, 2015).

- In Japan, children as young as the age of six (oftentimes with their younger siblings as young as three or four) run various errands for their parents (such as shopping for groceries) and children as young as four take subways—with no guardian (Doi et al., 2018). The purpose of these practices is to indoctrinate children early into **group reliance**, the cultural belief that children can count on anyone in the community to help them (Dixon, 2020). **Free-range parenting** is a newly emerging parenting style that promotes the idea of raising children to function as independently as possible, as young as possible (Skenazy, 2010).
- French parenting is described as kind—but no nonsense (Andersen, 2020). For example, babies are allowed to cry for longer periods than American parents allow their children to cry because French parents believe it teaches babies to comfort themselves. In the French culture, parents praise their children sparingly (everyone does *not* get a trophy), children eat on a strict schedule with no in-between meal snacks, and “no” means “no.” Put simply, French children learn about delayed gratification early on. The French firmly believe that parenting doesn’t mean that adults are at the constant service of their children (Druckerman, 2020).
- In the Polynesian Islands, independence is encouraged early on: Children, as young as three years of age assume a caretaking role for younger toddlers and babies—and most are not their own siblings. This type of independence and responsibility encourages *community responsibility* (Ritchie & Ritchie, 1983).

While certainly some of these parenting practices may seem unusual to us according to our American standards, what strikes you most about these child-rearing behaviors? What was your initial reaction when you read about these different parenting customs? Is there only one best way to raise a child? Even though some of these parenting practices may be discrepant with your beliefs about parents’ responsibilities, the ways in which parents raise their children is quite diverse, but the world over, parents raise their children with one singular goal: Molding their children into effective adults (Bernstein, 2016).

In essence, **diversity** refers to the broad spectrum of demographic and philosophical differences among people groups both within and outside of a culture. When we talk about being **diverse**, or about diversity in the United States and abroad, we are referring to peoples’ differences in age, gender, race, ethnicity, culture, sexual orientation, religion, and socioeconomic status (SES); each of these factors are key variables in parenting practices. When we study people from an inclusive and diverse perspective, it not only furthers our knowledge about the variances in parenting experiences but it also helps us to value individuals and groups, free from bias. This then fosters a climate of equity and mutual respect.

Today it is essential that students know the differing arrangements of families because this understanding enables human service providers and other family professionals and educators to

work more effectively support, value, and work with diverse families (Banks & McGee-Banks, 2019). Without question, culture ties its members together and significantly impacts how children are raised—child-rearing varies across countries and communities in our global society, and the role culture plays is profound.

Because we do not develop in isolation, and because we very much are influenced by the cultures in which we live, our parenting reflects these societal differences, as evidenced in the examples above. We continue our intriguing study of contemporary parenting life by first turning our attention to the cultural identities that shape parenting experiences. We'll then gain an understanding of the compositions of today's families, examining the different cultural contexts in which parenting occurs; we also address characteristics of parenting and parent–child interactions among diverse cultural groups in the United States. We'll conclude with an exploration of the multiple contexts of society that affect parenting and child development.

## PARENTING IN CULTURAL CONTEXTS

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As we continue our study of contemporary parenting, it is necessary to embrace the idea that we do not develop in isolation. Who we are as human beings—every emotion, fear, thought, and behavior—is somehow linked, both genetically and environmentally, to the family in which we were raised. It is also important to understand that there are many areas of parenting that are affected and influenced by the broader culture in which we live, by the many facets of society that surround us. Often these influences are overlooked in the study of the processes associated with parenting practices.

### Social Identity: Collectivist Cultures

It is important to understand that how people parent is determined in large part by how a culture defines its **social identity**, or whether societal goals emphasize the advancement of the group's interests or individual interests (van Kleef et al., 2015). Particularly important is whether the culture defines itself as a *collectivist* culture or an *individualistic* culture because culturally approved beliefs influence our expectations, experiences, attitudes, and behaviors (Neto, 2007). It profoundly affects the ways we behave and respond to the world.

In **collectivist cultures**, individuals define their identity in terms of the relationships they hold with others. For instance, if asked the question, “Who are you?” a collectivist is likely to respond by giving the family's name or the region from which he or she originates (Triandis & Suh, 2002). The goals of the collective—the whole society—are given priority over individual needs (Myers, 2008). Group membership is important, and society members value social order (Stamkou et al., 2019). In these cultures, members strive to be equal, contributing, beneficial members of the society, and their personal behaviors are driven by a feeling of obligation and duty to the society (Johnson et al., 2005; Triandis & Suh, 2002). Collectivist cultures promote the well-being and goals of the collective *group*, rather than the well-being and goals of the *individual*. Because of the desire to maintain harmony within the

group, collectivist cultures stress harmony, cooperation, and promoting feelings of closeness (Kupperbusch et al., 1999).

Latinx, for example, value strong interdependent relationships with their families, and they value the opinions of close friends (who, in many cases, are treated as family members); this, in turn, influences how they experience and practice parenting (Prioste et al., 2015; Stamkou et al., 2019). Asians and Arab Americans, too, accentuate the importance of the collective whole, and they therefore emphasize family bonds in their parenting and family experiences (Liu et al., 2019; Stamkou et al., 2019). A bit later in this chapter we'll take an in-depth look at parent–child relationships in various collectivist cultures.

### Social Identity: Individualistic Cultures

In **individualistic cultures**, where individual goals are promoted over group goals, people define their identity or sense of self in terms of personal attributes, such as wealth, social status, education level, and marital status (Myers, 2008). Unlike in collectivist cultures, *individualists* view themselves as truly independent entities from the society in which they live, and their personal needs and rights guide their behavior, rather than the needs of the society (Johnson et al., 2005). Individualistic cultures, such as those of the United States and Europe, promote the idea of autonomy and individuations from the family (Yaman et al., 2010). As one researcher succinctly notes, the fundamental differences observed in individual development are the result of their collectivist or individualistic upbringing because each social identity carries its own distinct values and characteristics (Gallardo, 2019).



While the United States federal government may define “family” as individuals who are related by birth, marriage, or adoption, today’s families are not one-size-fits-all. This is reflected in the many different and diverse family forms in the United States.

Source: iStock.com/nd3000.

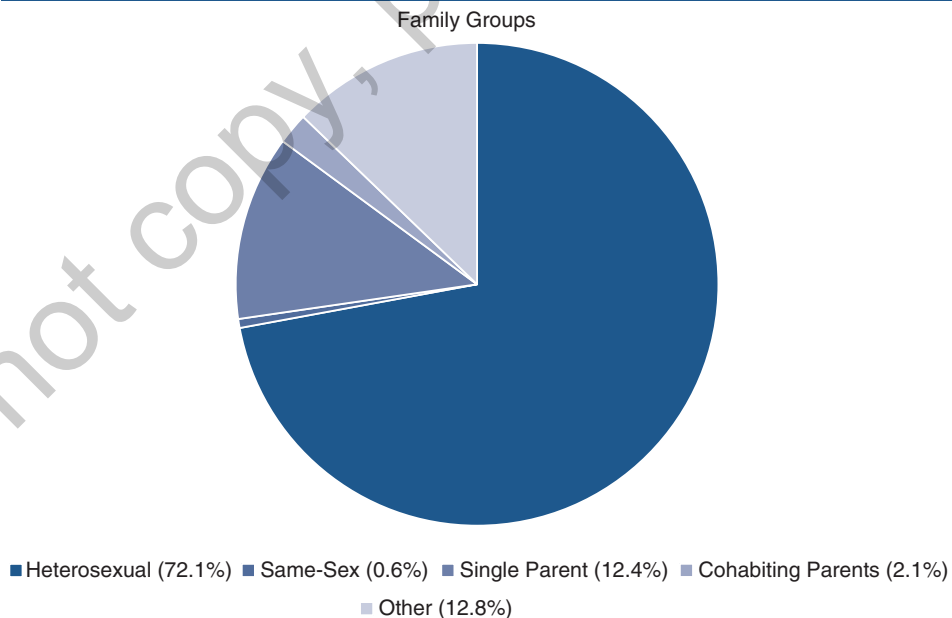
A culture's social identity shapes and directs the attitudes, norms, and behaviors of its members. But there are other cultural factors that significantly influence and shape parenting and family life experience, such as family structure and race/ethnicity.

## WHAT IS FAMILY?

What is “family?” How do you define it? In all likelihood, your definition may be entirely different from the federal government's definition or from ours. The reason for these differences is that our definitions and your definition of family are based on *unique experiences within our own families*. An understanding of family is necessary because variations in parenting attitudes and styles are evident among the diverse cultural groups in the United States, as well as in the diverse family structures in which children are raised today. In nearly all societies the world over, the family is the social unit that is responsible for nurturing, protecting, educating, and socializing children (Barbour et al., 2005).

According to the United States Census Bureau (2019a), a **family** “is a group of two people or more (one of whom is the householder) related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together; all such people (including related subfamily members) are considered as members of one family.” On the other hand, a **household** “consists of all the people who occupy a housing unit. A household includes the related family members and all of the unrelated people, if any, such as lodgers, foster children, wards, or employees who share the housing unit. A person living alone in a housing unit, or a group of unrelated people sharing a housing unit such as partners or

**FIGURE 2.1** ■ Types of Households in the United States



Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2019).

roomers, is also counted as a household” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019a). Thus, according to the federal government, a married couple and their children are considered to be a family, whereas intimate couples who live together who are not married make up a household. In nearly all societies the world over, the family is the social unit that is responsible for nurturing, protecting, educating, and socializing children (Barbour et al., 2005). Figure 2.1 illustrates for us the types of households in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019a). As you can see, nearly three-fourths (72 percent) of all households today are married-couple families, but there is great diversity in family forms (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019b). It’s interesting to observe that nearly 13 percent of families today classify themselves as “other nonfamily households.” A **nonfamily household** comprises a householder living alone, such as a widow, or where the householder shares the home with people to whom she/he is not related, such as a widow sharing her home with two friends. Not only has the distribution of households shifted over time, so too has the size of U.S. households. For example, in 1970, the average household size was 3.14 whereas today it is 2.53.

The question arises, then, is it possible to arrive at a one-size-fits-all definition of “family,” as the U.S. Census Bureau describes? Probably not, for there exist as many definitions or descriptions of “family” as there are students who are reading this textbook, and beyond. The concept of family is, indeed, a subjective notion.

Each of us experiences our individual development in our family of origin, or family of orientation. Our **family of origin** is the family into which we are born or brought into by adoption or circumstance (such as being raised by a grandparent). It is the family in which we are raised and socialized to adhere to the customs and norms of the culture in which we live. As we explore the nature of contemporary parenting, we use statistics to help us identify current patterns and trends. Although it is sometimes tempting to skip over statistics when reading, numbers are necessary because they present overall trends and provide us with an instant snapshot of American families in which today’s children develop.

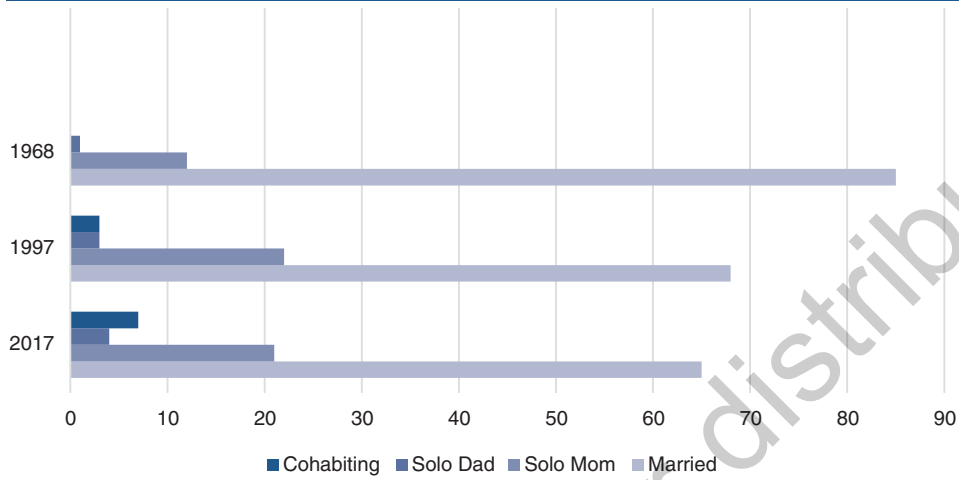
## Nuclear and Extended Families

Today, it is essential that students of parenting and parenting education know the differing family arrangements of families, because this understanding allows human service providers and other family professionals to more effectively support, value, and work with diverse families (Banks & McGee Banks, 2019). In the sections that follow, we’ll first take a look at *nuclear* and *extended* family forms. We’ll then examine the expanding family landscape in our culture today.

### Nuclear Family

The **nuclear family** consists of a biological father, a biological mother, and their biological or adopted children. In the truest sense of the definition, nuclear families consist of first-time married parents, their biological or adopted children, and no other family members living in the home. In 2018, the “typical” nuclear family form was found in about 65 percent of family households (Pew Research Center, 2018a). Figure 2.2 illustrates the family configurations in which children in the United States live today. Notice that although the majority of children



**FIGURE 2.2** ■ Unmarried Parents Living With a Child Over Time

Source: Pew Research Center (2018a).

live in nuclear families, other family forms show the complexity of contemporary family living. For example, among parents living with a child, a growing share of unmarried parents are cohabiting: In 2017, 35 percent of unmarried parents were cohabiting in comparison with 13 percent in 1968 (Pew Research Center, 2018a). We'll discuss cohabiting parents at length later in this chapter.

Often, the nuclear family is referred to as the *traditional* family. This term carries with it a conventional depiction of the family form and the accompanying family values and traditions. *Family values* is a term that is commonly used today by politicians and TV news reports, although it may mean different things to different people. Most often, *family values* refers to a society's paradigm or viewpoint that expects its members to adhere to perceived "proper" social roles, such as marrying and having children, remaining monogamous and faithful to the marriage partner, and opposing same-sex relationships, marriages, and parenting by gay or lesbian partners. The family values viewpoint also frowns on births to women outside of marriage. It evokes a certain set of ascribed gender roles; for example, the women fulfill homemaker and mothering responsibilities (the breadmaker role), and the men fulfill the role of primary wage earner (the breadwinner role). This particular family form is also considered a patriarchy, wherein the male is dominant and is in charge of most decision-making in the family.

Historian and author Peter McWilliams (1998) offers insight into the roots of the traditional family. He notes that the modern concept of two adults rearing their children under a single roof grew out of necessity during the Middle Ages, when the minimum number of people required to own and maintain a plot of land was two. In order to multiply their wealth, it was necessary to have others work the land; children were free labor. Thus, in order to have the free labor provided by children, it was economically necessary that one of the adults was a man and the other was a woman—and they were thus paired until death. According to McWilliams, love had nothing to do with the pairing. "Even if a husband and a wife hated each other, all they had to do was wait



Which child abuses substances? Which child has behavioral problems in school? Which child copes with mental health issues? Is this a nuclear family or a step-family? In the 1950s, we would never know because these real-life problems were never addressed. The television and media portrayed an idealized image of the American family: The breadwinning dad, the breadmaker mom, and the practically perfect children who all live in their always-perfectly-kept home.

Source: CBS Photo Archive/Contributor.

a little while—with disease, war, childbirth, and an average lifespan of about 25, most marriages lasted less than five years. The departed partner was immediately replaced, and the system continued.” Men and older children worked the land and the women tended to the livestock, the crops near the home, and the younger children. Because the system worked so well, the church eventually got involved and, over time, the one-man/one-woman for life theology emerged.

If we were to identify a specific period in American history that the traditional family form was in vogue, we would look at the period of the 1950s in the United States (McWilliams, 1998). The high postwar marriage and birth rates, coupled with a prosperous economy in which a single wage earner could support a family, led to a national perception of the period as a “golden era” for families (McWilliams, 1998).

Through the television and the media, families tuned in to watch the idealized image of the American family: The wise, reassuring father who came home from a hard day at the office; the



apron-clad homemaker mother (wearing pearls and heels and lipstick) who offered comfort and support to her hardworking husband and perfect children; the clutter-free, immaculate home; and the homogenous neighborhood. Notes McWilliams (1998), the family life portrayed in the 1950s media was wholesome—there were no single parents (unless the father was a widower, such as with the fathers in *My Three Sons*, *The Andy Griffith Show*, and *Bonanza*), no infidelities, no divorce, no abuse, no teen runaways, no financial problems, no stress, and no prior marriages or children from prior marriages. There was no discussion about religion, politics, and the economy. No one lost his job. There was no violence in the home or school or neighborhood. There was no drug usage. No racism. No LGBTQ+ relationships. And no babies born out of wedlock.

Despite TV Land’s depiction of the American family during this era, like *Leave It to Beaver*, it is questionable whether this idealized image of family really ever existed. Author and professor of comparative family history, Stephanie Coontz, notes the discrepancies of the idealized 1950s “good old days” family form portrayed in the media and the reality of family living during the 1950s (Coontz, 1992, 1999):

- About one-quarter of the population lived below the poverty line.
- The number of pregnant brides more than doubled from the 1940s.
- From 1944 to 1955, the number of babies born outside of marriage and relinquished for adoption rose 80 percent.
- Juvenile delinquency was so prevalent that in 1955 Congress considered nearly 200 bills to address the social problem.

As Coontz notes, the 1950s were a dismal time for women, minorities, gays and lesbians, and any other social group that did not “fit in” with the images typified on the television screen.

The traditional nuclear family is no longer predominant in the United States. In the 21st century, 1950s television shows like *I Love Lucy* have been replaced by shows such as *Family Guy*, *Modern Family*, *Black-ish*, and *A Million Little Things*, which better reflect the diversity found in today’s families.

### Extended Family

The **extended family** is typically defined as a family unit where two or more generations of close family relatives live together in one household. There are three common extended family configurations (Barbour et al., 2005):

1. A mother and father with children (may be married or not), with one or more grandparents
2. A mother and father with children (may be married or not), with at least one unmarried sibling of the parents, another relative, such as a cousin
3. A divorced, separated, or never-married single parent with children, in addition to a grandparent, sibling, or other relative.

This type of extended or *multigenerational* family structure was the basic element of slave life in the 19th century and remains today an integral part of the lives of many families, particularly in families of color (Pittman, 2012a,b). During, and sometime after the era of slavery, upon marriage, African couples were not permitted to form their own households; because of this, the newly married couple joined an already-existing family compound (Sudarkasa, 2007). The African extended families were organized in one of three ways: blood-related relatives and their children (i.e., parents and in-laws); a group of married spouses, where all men were referred to as “husbands,” all women were referred to as “wives,” and all children considered themselves as siblings, not cousins; extended family and **fictive kin** (unrelated by birth, but emotionally close) (Sudarkasa, 2007). Still today, families with African roots often experience close-knit, multigenerational family groups—in addition to parents and children, family members may be grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins (Cross, 2020).

Today, about 57 percent of African American/Black Caribbean children have lived in an extended family home compared with 20 percent of white children (Banerjee, 2019). Similarly, about 35 percent of Hispanic children have lived in an extended family home. Overall, 17 percent of all children in the United States live in an extended family household (Banerjee, 2019). No data exist to determine how many extended family members live nearby (not necessarily with) other family members, but we know that multigenerational family members can provide much emotional and economic support, along with the richness of family legacy and heritage.

## The Expanding Family Landscape

In the United States today, there is no such thing as a “traditional” or “typical” family configuration. In order to better serve today’s families and to help them reach their full potentials, we need to understand the changing compositions of contemporary families, as well as the racial and ethnic compositions of families.

### Single-Parent Families

Today, one in four U.S. parents are unmarried (Cilluffo & Cohn, 2019). **Single-parent** family types can be the result of the choice of the parent or by circumstance; they can result either from divorce, the death of a spouse, or unmarried parenthood. Trends indicate that single-parent households are on the increase in the American family: In the past 10 years, the number of children who live with two married parents has decreased from 68 to 65 percent (Institute of Family Studies, 2019). Table 2.1 illustrates children’s living arrangements from 1970 to 2019. While the percentage of children living with no parents has remained relatively stable over the past nearly 50 years, the percentage of children living with unmarried parents has increased, while those living with two parents has decreased. Understanding these trends in single-parenting experiences is important because as our study will show us in just a bit, single parents oftentimes live in poverty—which, in turn, affects their children’s development.

**TABLE 2.1 ■ Children’s Living Arrangements by Presence of Parents in the Home, 1970–2018**

Percentage of Children Who Live With...						
	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2018
<b>Two parents</b>	85.2	76.7	72.5	69.1	69.4	68.9
<b>Single parents</b>	11.9	19.7	24.7	26.7	26.6	27.0
<b>No parents</b>	2.9	3.7	2.8	4.2	4.1	4.1

Source: Institute for Family Studies (2019).

### Childless/Childfree Family

Couples may consider themselves **childless** if they are unable to conceive or bear children of their own or adopt children. Some couples today prefer to remain **childfree** as a conscience choice. And although they’re waiting longer to have children, older women today are more likely to have children than a decade ago. Today, 86 percent of women aged 40 to 44 are mothers in comparison with 80 percent in 2006 (Pew Research Center, 2018). The U.S. Census Bureau measures the presence of children primarily by examining the *general fertility rate* (how many children a woman bears). In 2018, there were 59 births for every 1,000 women aged 15 to 44; this is a decrease from 70 births for every 1,000 women aged 15 to 44 in 2010 (Pew Research Center, 2018b). The typical American family today has an average of 1.9 children under 18; this is a decrease from the average number of 2.44 children per family in 1970 (Pew Research Center, 2018b).

It is important to note, however, that this is not the first generation of people who are deciding not to have children. Notes Philip Morgan, professor of sociology at Duke University, “Childlessness is not new, [but] in the past it was more closely connected with non-marriage than now. During the depression, many Americans also chose not to have children because they could not afford them. Childlessness levels now are not higher than those in the 1930s” (Taylor, 2005). Morgan adds that there are many factors involved in couples’ decisions to remain childfree today.

### Stepfamily

A **stepfamily** (or reconstituted family) is formed when, after death or divorce, a parent marries again. A stepfamily is also formed when a never-married parent marries and children from different biological families end up living within the new marriage for part of the time. In short, the presence of a stepparent, stepsibling, or half-sibling designates a family as a stepfamily (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019a).

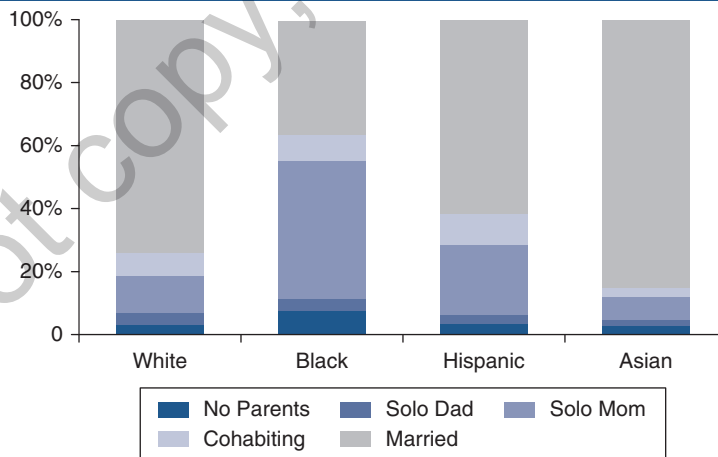
The U.S. Census Bureau no longer provides stepfamily data, so it is difficult to obtain accurate statistics about stepfamilies. But Census experts today estimate that one of three

Americans—about 33 percent—is now either a stepparent, a stepchild, a stepsibling, or some other member of a stepfamily (Gaille, 2017). Although the popular sitcom 1970s television show *The Brady Bunch* portrayed stepfamily living as an emotionally cohesive, trouble-free, happily adjusted family, this idealized concept of the stepfamily form is simply not the norm. (Because of the complexities of stepfamily living, an entire segment of a chapter is devoted to this family form in Chapter 9.)

### Cohabiting Family

Unmarried partners who live together in a single household are referred to as **cohabiting couples**. Although once considered a scandalous, uncommon alternative lifestyle, cohabiting before marriage (or instead of marriage) is now *the* prevailing living arrangement of intimate partners—the next step following serious dating. The U.S. Census Bureau today estimates that 35 percent of couples in the United States are cohabiting (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019b). In 2018, cohabitation was a more common living arrangement of children than living with a single parent. For example, while 3.5 percent of children lived with an unmarried parent, 4.2 percent lived with a parent and the parent's unmarried partner (Institute of Family Studies, 2019). This is a significant increase from 2007, where the percentage of children living with unmarried single parents and cohabiting parents was nearly identical (2.6 percent and 2.9 percent, respectively). Today, an estimated 5.8 million American children live with cohabiting parents (Institute of Family Studies, 2019). In 2018, there were 8.5 million unmarried opposite-sex couples living together (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019b). Many of these couples have no plans for eventual marriage. Indeed, 51 percent of women's first marriages are preceded by cohabitation (Institute of Family Studies, 2019). The rates of cohabiting parents vary by race; these data are presented in Figure 2.3.

**FIGURE 2.3** ■ Children's Living Arrangements by Race/Ethnicity



Source: Institute for Family Studies (2019).

## Gay and Lesbian Families

Lesbian and gay families consist of same-sex partners who live together in the same household, and may include either natural-born or adopted children. As you saw in Chapter 1, in the United States today there are 935,000 same-sex households, up from 780,000 same-sex households in 2011 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019c). Census Bureau statisticians point out, however, that this increase reflects the fact that same-sex families were previously uncounted, undercounted, or underreported, and not that the numbers of gay or lesbian families have increased significantly (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019c). Same-sex family forms may or may not resemble traditional marriage roles, such as in the division of household chores; today, same-sex couples tend to share more equally household and child care tasks than different-sex couples (Goldberg et al., 2012). Interestingly, when one partner earns less than the other, the lower earner contributed to more traditional feminine tasks, including a greater contribution to child care.

In the LGBTQ+ community, **chosen family**—nonbiological kinship bonds—replace blood families and become the bedrock of trust, support, and love; sometimes, LGBTQ+ individuals live with their chosen family (Carlson & Dermer, 2017; Hull, 2018). Kathleen Hull, professor of sociology and gender, women, and sexuality studies, notes that many LGBTQ+ individuals do not receive support and acceptance from their blood relatives, and because of this, they have formed nonbiological families with people who do love and support them (Hull, 2018). Another social scientist observes, “Until the world is a more inclusive place, [chosen family] will continue to exist within the LGBT community” (Mitchell, 2008).

## Immigrant Families With Children

**Immigrants** are people who reside in the United States who were not U.S. citizens at birth. **Immigrant families with children** are those with at least one parent who was born outside of the United States. From 1994 to 2017, the population of immigrant children in the United States grew by 51 percent to 19.6 million. This number represents one-fourth of all U.S. children (Child Trends, 2018a). *First-generation* immigrant children are those who were born outside of the United States; *second-generation* immigrant children are those who were born within the United States to immigrant parents. The growth we’ve seen in immigrant children are due to second-generation immigrants. In 2017, more than one-half (54 percent) of all immigrant children were of Hispanic origin (Child Trends, 2018a). Non-Hispanic Asian children comprised 17 percent of immigrant children. About 25 percent of first- and second-generation immigrant children live below the federal poverty level (Child Trends, 2018a).

Our study so far has shown us that in the 21st century, it is hard to encapsulate or sum up the “typical” American family—it simply doesn’t exist today in our complex, multifaceted, ever-changing, global society. To get the full grasp of parenting, we now need to examine the racial and ethnic characteristics of contemporary families.

## CONTEMPORARY FAMILIES

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As the United States moved into the second half of the 20th century, a number of social and cultural, economic, and political changes occurred that continue to have an impact on today's 21st century families and family living: *social and cultural forces*, such as lowered birth rates and an increase in nonmarital cohabitation; *economic factors* that include the influx of women into the workforce; and *political factors*, such as legalized abortion in 1973 and the Civil Rights legislation of 1965 which bans racial, ethnic, sexual, and sexual orientation discrimination.

All of these factors worked in tandem to change the traditional family in this century. Experts in the field of marriage and family living, however, view the changes occurring during the last half of the 20th century differently. Those with more conventional, conservative, or religious outlooks are concerned about what they perceived to be a moral decline in family life—that is, the increase in nonmarital cohabitation and same-sex relationships and in the number of births outside of marriage. These groups prescribe a return to more conventional, long-held family values as a way to reverse the trends (Popenoe & Whitehead, 2005). Those with a more contemporary outlook hold that these trends represent both flexibility and adaptability in today's families and in the society at large (Solot & Miller, 2004). In spite of increasing relational and economic stresses faced by today's families, marriage represents the most frequently chosen family form, with approximately 93 percent of the population choosing marriage at least once (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019a).

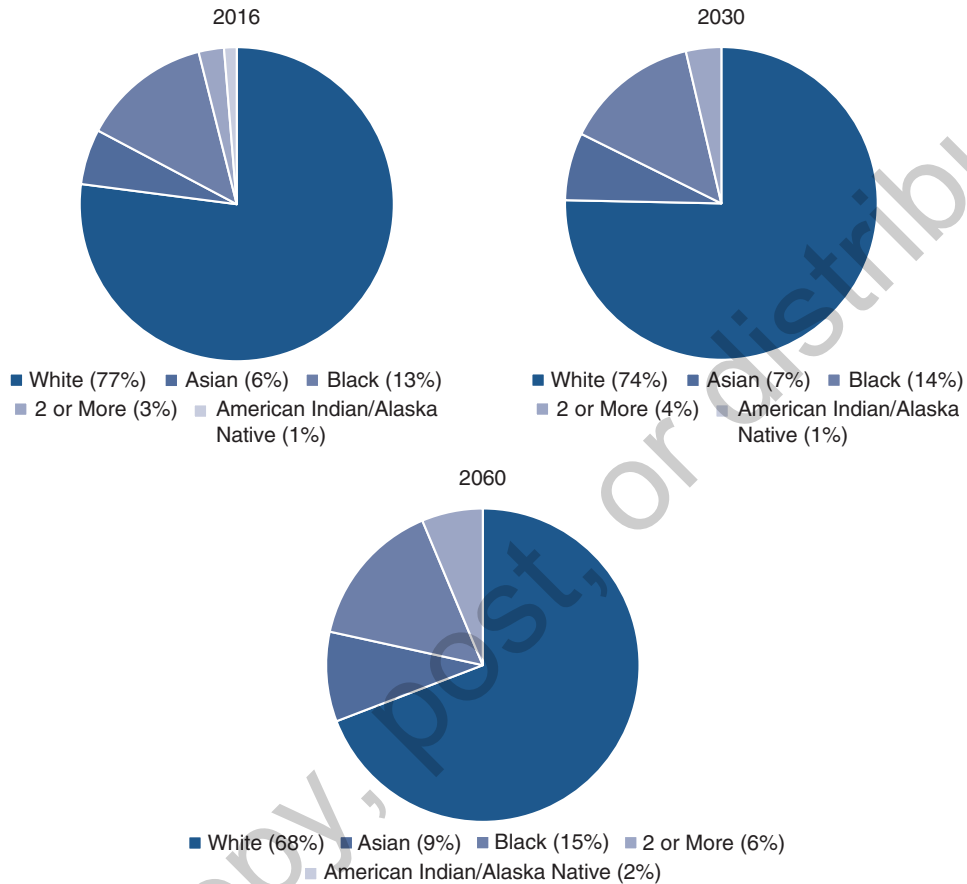
In the United States, there is more diversity now than ever before. Families today are complex and diverse, ranging from traditional two-biological-parent family structures, to single-parent homes, to extended family forms, to married gay or lesbian couples. There is also greater diversity of racial, ethnic, economic, and religious composition, and so social workers, family life educators, psychologists, sociologists, and health and mental health professionals must be aware of the full range of diversity in families today (see Figure 2.4).

It is incumbent upon parenting professionals to know the racial and ethnic composition of U.S. families because this knowledge aids in our understanding of the complex, changing nature of family living and parenting. When discussing contemporary parenting in the United States—particularly among African American/Black Caribbean and Latina mothers—it is important to introduce the concept of intersectionality. **Intersectionality** refers to the interconnected nature of social categorizations—such as race, social economic class, sexual orientation, and gender—regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage (Oxford Learner's Dictionary, 2019). Put another way, intersectionality is a theoretical perspective that helps to explain the complex and cumulative ways in which the effects of multiple types of discrimination combine or overlap, further marginalizing an individual or a people group. As a theoretical framework, intersectionality “encourages scholars to examine individual subjectivities and behaviors as unique but also shaped by and in conversation with broader sociocultural and historical processes and inequalities” (Elliott & Aseltine, 2013, p. 722).

Conceptualized by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), law professor and social theorist, the basic premise of intersectionality maintains that people are often disadvantaged in multiple ways by



**FIGURE 2.4** ■ Racial and Ethnic Composition of American Families: Projected Population by Race, 2016–2060

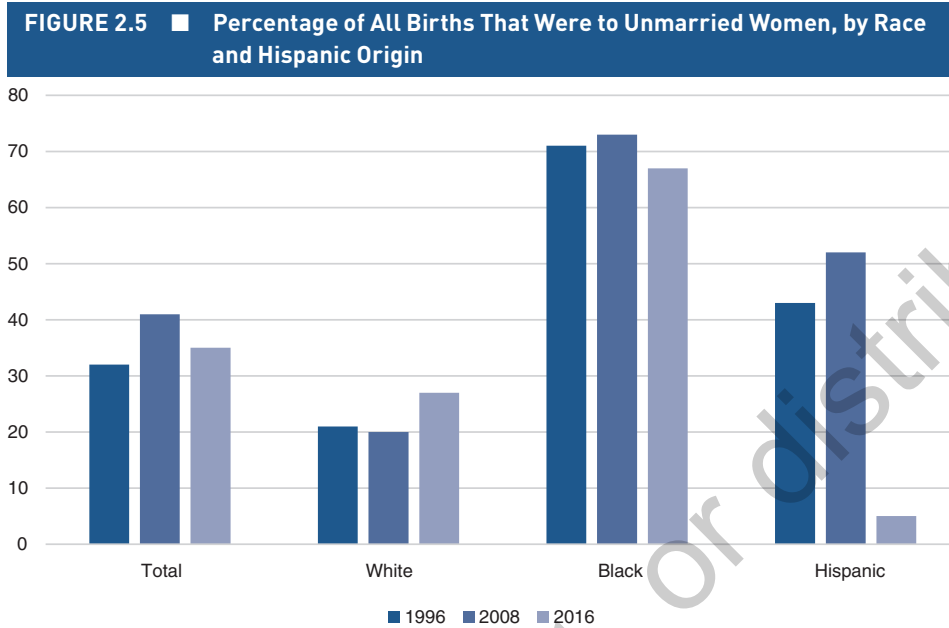


Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2018b).

multiple sources of oppression. Identity markers, such as race, SES, gender, gender identity, and religion, do not exist independently of each other. Indeed, each informs and impacts the other, which in turn affect the others; this creates a complex coming together, merging, of oppression. We'll take a closer look at this concept in the section that follows. Now, we briefly examine the racial and ethnic compositions of families so that you have a firm understanding of the diversity within the United States.

### African American/Black Caribbean Families

Historically, African American/Black Caribbean families assumed the traditional married-couple family structure, with children born inside the marital union. Today, it is common for Black children to be born to a single mother. As Figure 2.5 illustrates, nearly 70 percent



Source: Child Trends (2018b).

of the births to Black women of all ages are to unmarried women (Child Trends, 2018b). In comparison with white families, where nearly one-fourth (24 percent) live in a single-parent home (Kids Count Data Center, 2019a), 65 percent of Black children live in a single-parent home (Kids Count Data Center, 2019a). Eventually, 37 percent of Black children reside in two-parent homes, but many of these families are formed with a child who was born outside of marriage (Kids Count Data Center, 2019b). Of all racial and ethnic groups in the United States, African American/Black Caribbean families suffer one of highest levels of unemployment and poverty and the lowest median family income—slightly over \$40,000 annually (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018a).

Multigenerational, extended family ties are common among Black families (Cross, 2020). Census bureau data estimate that about 26 percent of African American/Black Caribbean children live in some type of extended family (Pew Research Center, 2018c). **Multiple mothering**, a practice that involves aunts, cousins, close friends, and fictive kin who provide mothers with a range of modeling and tangible support, is commonplace (Greene, 1995). According to a study by Noelle St. Vil et al. (2018), characteristics of African American/Black Caribbean extended family networks include:

- Strong commitment to family and family obligation
- Availability of and willingness to provide child care
- Reinforcement of social skills and family values in children

- Willingness to allow relatives and close nonrelatives to move into the family home
- Strong network of emotional support
- Strengthen marriages by protecting against the inability to meet responsibilities of multiple roles
- Close system of mutual aid and support.

Because of the large numbers of female-headed households among African American/Black Caribbeans, some research suggests that the child-rearing and economic support of extended kin is necessary; it is within the extended family networks of grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts, uncles, and cousins that children are cared for, socialized, educated, and have their emotional needs met (Cengage, 2020; Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2004; Taylor, 2000). Why are extended family forms so prevalent among Black families today? The history of Black Africans and Caribbeans helps us to better understand the present.



Before being ripped from their homelands, West African slaves embraced clans as their normative family experience. Clans were similar to extended family forms seen among African American families today.

Source: iStock.com/monkeybusinessimages.

### Pre-slavery Influences

Between 1525 and 1866, over 12 million Africans were shipped to the New World (Transatlantic Slave Trade Database, 2020); of these, 388,000 were brought to the United States, and 4.8 million were brought to the Caribbean. While in their homeland, the West African family—referred

to as a *clan*—very much resembled the extended family forms commonly seen among African American families today: It was the primary base for social relationships, connections, emotional attachment, and membership (Cengage, 2020). It was also the hub of economic activity. This clan structure served as the model for “family” life during slavery (Hallam, 2004).

How slaves experienced “family” was very much dependent upon the type of farming and agricultural activities they were expected to carry out (Hallam, 2004). For example, while cotton plantations required a great deal of slave labor to harvest the crops, tobacco farming did not (Hallam, 2004). Often, slave families were broken up and spread across many different plantations in a given region; when husband and wives were separated, they *married abroad*—a term that describes spouses who had different owners and lived apart from each other. Separation of family members was a constant threat. Notes Dr. Jennifer Hallam, a scholar in the History of Art, “When a master died, his slaves might be indiscriminately distributed among his heirs or sold off to multiple buyers. When a planter’s child was born or married, he or she might receive the gift of a Black attendant. Mothers were taken from their own children to nurse the offspring of their masters. And slave children were torn from mothers and brought into the house to be raised alongside the master’s sons and daughters” (Hallam, 2004, p. 2). Because of the large numbers of single mothers and orphaned children, *communal parenting* evolved, and children were often cared for by older women who could no longer be used for hard, physical field labor; these women were referred to as “aunties” or “grannies” (Hallam, 2004). These communal families became the substitute for the extended family that was central to African cultures and provided both physical and emotional support for enslaved women and children (Franklin & Moss, 1988; Gutman, 1977).

Without question, regardless of the unimaginable experiences and conditions of slavery, African men and women made every effort to create and maintain a family that was “an incomparable source of solace and strength and a primary means of survival” (Hallam, 2004, p. 2).

### Contemporary African American/Black Caribbean Family Patterns

There are a number of theories that speak to the diversity and rich cultural heritages of Black families. For example, the **cultural variation approach** refers to the range of social practices (i.e., gender roles, economic systems, and social hierarchy) observed in different cultures around the world and the maintenance of these ways of life (Wan, 2017). The **African Heritage theory** views African American/Black Caribbean cultures as distinctly different from white, European American cultures; this theory takes into consideration the unique characteristics and elements of West African culture (from where most slaves were captured) that were preserved while they were enslaved in America and the Caribbean, such as the value of extended families, kinship patterns, marriage, sexuality, and child-rearing (Hale-Benson, 1988). There are three primary tenets of African Heritage theory:

1. The cultural elements and practices are not commonly characteristic of white culture.
2. They are found among nearly all Afrocentric communities (especially in the Caribbean).
3. The characteristics still today embody West African culture (Hale-Benson, 1988).

This theory contends that language, development, interactions, and behavioral patterns of African American/Black Caribbean children differ as a result of growing up in a distinct African culture.

Central to the cultural variation approach is the idea that African culture has survived and has been subtly transmitted through multiple generations, without conscious effort. **Bicultural socialization, or biculturalism**, is a process wherein both the aspects of African and/or Caribbean heritages and Western culture are integrated (Okere, 2017). **Acculturation** refers to the transfer of societal values and customs from one group to another—it is a cultural shift where individuals or people groups adopt the predominant behaviors and traits of a different culture. Conversely, biculturalism is a distinct cultural orientation in which there is a blending of both cultures and a preservation of the original culture (Schwartz & Unger, 2010).

As an example of biculturalism, Black parents are more likely to socialize their children without strict differences determined by the gender of the child and to share in instrumental support (such as child care and in decision-making about child-rearing), housework, and financial assistance (Amos, 2013; Hill, 2001; Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2004; White-Johnson et al., 2010). Emotional support from the family is also important to Black families. For example, in a large study that sought to determine the racial differences in family support, the researchers found that nearly 70 percent of African Americans reported offering emotional support to family (including extended family and fictive kin) members; nearly 100 percent reported that they offered instrumental support (Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2004).

Afro parents also place more value on raising their children to be hardworking, ambitious, and financially independent than white parents do (Amos, 2013; Pew Research Center, 2015), and Black parents believe their children's behaviors and attitudes are a reflection of their parenting. All of these parenting practices are a reflection of parenting in African communities (Amos, 2013). It's important to keep in mind that when we use the word "parenting," we are referring not only to the Black child's parents but also to the extended family members/fictive kin who participate in child-rearing (Amos, 2013). It is vitally important for parenting professionals and teachers to fully acknowledge and embrace the importance of extended and fictive kin in Black children's lives, as well as the critical roles these family members play in children's well-being and academic success (Amos, 2013).

We'll explore the various parenting styles in Chapter 5; in the next sections, we examine the general ways in which ethnic parents interact with their children. There are three reasons why we observe different relational patterns among different races and ethnicities: differing cultural norms, differing perceptions, and differing interpretations (Chao, 1994; Gonzales et al., 1996; Rudy & Grusec, 2001).

### **African American/Black Caribbean Parent–Child Interactions**

Black parents play a crucial role in socializing their children into African culture and to participate successfully in school and society. Overall, African American parents self-rate their parenting interactions with their children as high in measures of control and harshness and low in measures of sensitivity (Berlin et al., 1995; McLoyd & Smith, 2002). Interestingly, these

parenting behaviors closely resemble acceptable parenting styles in other Afrocentric cultures (Shumow et al., 1998). Recall that differing interpretations are important when observing behaviors in other cultures. In the case of African American parent–child interactions, white, Euro-Americans view some behaviors as harsh (Gonzales et al., 1996); however, Black children report that their parents’ behaviors are expressions of love and care (Brown & Johnson, 2008).

This isn’t to say that Afro parents are uninvolved or ineffective. A substantial body of evidence supports that strict parenting observed in African American families is associated with positive effects in children:

- More independence and social maturity in preschool girls (Baumrind, 1972).
- More favorable self-regulation in three-year-old children (Chen & French, 2008; LeCuyer et al., 2011).
- More respect for parenting authority in school-aged children (Dixon et al., 2008).

In a study of 161 parents and 270 school-aged children, the investigators discovered that Black parents’ involvement at home regarding school-related matters and racial education/racism awareness had positive influences on their children’s academic success, whereas the lack of



Latinx families enjoy the rich, multigenerational relationships of extended family members and nonrelated kin who become as close as blood relatives. Latinx families embrace *familism*: The best interests of the family are placed ahead of the interests of the individual family member.

Source: istock.com/aldomurillo.



racism education/awareness and cultural pride in the school system negatively influenced children's school success (McKay et al., 2003).

Over the last two decades, a more balanced depiction of African American/Black Caribbean family life has emerged, with growing appreciation of the rich cultural diversity in these families, both in form and functioning.

## Latinx Families

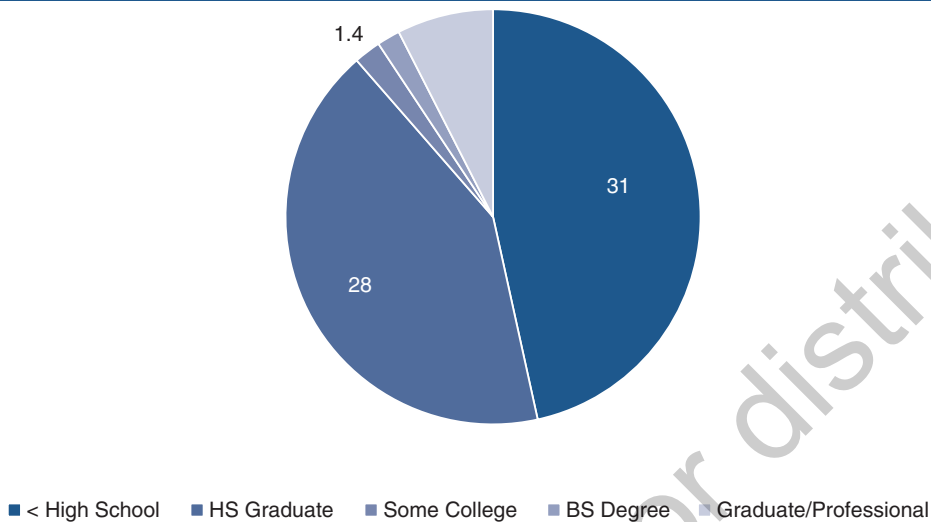
**Latinx** are people of Latin American origin or descent. This term is used as a gender-neutral alternative to Latino or Latina. Today, Latinx Americans account for slightly over 18 percent of the total U.S. population; this figure does not include the three million residents of the U.S. territory, Puerto Rico (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018b). This population traces their roots to Spain, Mexico, and the Spanish-speaking nations of Central America, South America, and the Caribbean. The fastest-growing population in the United States because of the large proportion of Latina women of childbearing age, the Hispanic population of the United States is nearly 59 million, making people of the Hispanic origin the nation's largest ethnic or racial minority (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018b; U.S. Census Bureau, 2019d).

About 76 percent of Latinx children live within two-parent families (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019d). Similar to the experiences of African American/Black Caribbean women, births to unmarried Latina women have increased since the 1970s. Nearly 40 percent of all Hispanic origin births are to unmarried women (Child Trends, 2018a,b). Currently, nearly 20 percent of Latinx children live in a household with their mothers and have no father present; 27 percent live in an extended, multigenerational family household with grandparents, and one-fourth live with their grandparents (Pew Research Center, 2018c; U.S. Census Bureau, 2019c).

Educational attainment varies among this population, as Figure 2.6 illustrates. In the United States today, Latinx families earn, on average, about \$50,000 per year (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019d). It's important to keep in mind that many Hispanic immigrants may have successful businesses in other countries or professional degrees from other countries, but because of the language barrier when they arrive in the United States, they are unable to secure high-paying jobs.

## Contemporary Latinx American Family Patterns

Latinx are highly group- and community-oriented and value strong interdependent relationships with their families; a high value is placed on family as the primary source of one's identity (among many, Carteret, 2011; Constante et al., 2019; Stein et al., 2019). This collectivist family type is an extended family, including grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. But this intense sense of family belonging isn't just limited to family—Latinx value the opinions of close friends who are considered to be part of the immediate family (who, in many cases, are treated as family members). **Familismo** or **familism** is the term used by Latinx to describe their loyalty to their collective family, and it refers to the mutual support and obligation shared between family members (Calzada et al., 2014; Carteret, 2011). Within this family dynamic, family members are provided clothing, shelter, food, education, and emotional support. People of Hispanic origin further extend family relationships to fictive, or nonrelated, kin, such as godparents and

**FIGURE 2.6** ■ Educational Attainment of Latinx Residing in the United States

Source: United States Census Bureau (2019d).

close friends. Within Latinx communities, the well-being of the family takes precedence over the well-being of the individual.

A 1987 landmark study discovered there are three interrelated facets of familism values (Sabogal et al., 1987):

- **Familial obligations:** The family members' responsibilities to provide economic and emotional support.
- **Perceived support and emotional closeness:** Family members' perceptions that each family member is dependable; because of this interdependency, family members are to be unified and maintain close relationships.
- **Family as referent:** All behaviors should meet with the family's expectations.

Furthermore, a substantial body of research exists that speaks to the protective effects of familismo with Latinx youth. For example, because they put family needs before their own, they develop empathy and sensitivity for the needs of others (Calderon et al., 2011). The highly supportive family structure prevents or reduces depressive symptoms in Latino-descent adolescents (Piña-Watson et al., 2019), and low-income, Latinx urban youth experience lower levels of violence exposure (Kennedy & Ceballo, 2013). Familismo is also associated with a higher attachment to school and greater academic success (Stein et al., 2013). To gain the trust of the parent(s) and other family members, it is essential that early childhood educators, teachers, child life specialists, social workers, therapists, and other helping professionals, understand,

appreciate, and recognize the collective loyalty Latinx families embrace (Calzada et al., 2014). Failure to do so can lead to conflicts with Latinx parents.

**Respeto**—respect—is another important trait found in Latinx culture (Cardona & Softas-Nall, 2010; Paniagua, 2005). It involves a “highly emotionalized dependence and dutifulness” to hierarchical relationships (Folicov, 2007, p. 48). Latinx children are taught from the earliest age to be obedient and respectful to parents, elders, and people in positions of authority (i.e., teachers, law enforcement); children value this authority and perceive it to be parental love (Bain, 2006; Delgado-Gaitan, 1994; Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002; Vazquez, 2004).

**Personalismo** refers to the warmth and familiarity expressed in family and extended kin relationships, and it is central to Latinx interpersonal relationships (Paniagua, 2005; Smith & Montilla, 2006). One of the primary goals of Latinx parents is to raise well-educated children, which means instilling in their children proper social skills and the *respeto* needed for quality relationships (Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002).

It is necessary that those working with parents have an understanding of all of these unique expectations—*familismo*, *respeto*, and *personalismo*—because it promotes the cultural competence required to effectively engage and work with Latinx children and parents. These rich cultural beliefs require that helping professionals take time to build trust and rapport with these families (Cardona & Softas-Nall, 2010).

Latinx children often reside within families in which at least one parent is an immigrant—foreign-born—or who are themselves foreign-born. Today, one out of four U.S. children is living in an immigrant family (Zong et al., 2019); Latinx immigrants and their children commonly live within extended family forms during the first 10 years following immigration (Carranza et al., 2002). Even as immigrants establish their own households, they do so nearby their families’ homes. Second- and third-generation Hispanic Americans have even larger extended kin networks than do immigrants (Carranza et al., 2002).

### Latinx Parent–Child Interactions

Parenting is central in the lives of Latinx adults, and their cultural values are infused in their daily interactions with their children, as you saw earlier with the concept of *familismo/familism* (Domenech Rodriguez et al., 2009; Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2007; Parra-Cardona et al., 2008). One writer (Ramirez, 1989) noted that *el amor de madre* (motherly love) is a greater force in Latinx families than wifely love; that is, the parent–child relationship is more important than the spousal relationship.

Although a number of studies have been conducted on the attitudes and practices of Latinx parents, the studies have failed to provide consistent conclusions (Allen et al., 2008). For example, some researchers found that Latinx parents are nurturing and egalitarian, but other studies have found that they are permissive (Hill et al., 2003). However, other research maintains that immigrant Latinx parents adapt their parenting behaviors to the environment/location in which they live in order to manage and cope with the stressors of the new environment (Reese, 2002).

Because Latinx families are a rapidly growing ethnic group in this country, careful research still needs to be undertaken to give keener insight into these family relationships and parenting

styles. Especially important to understand are the ways in which traditional cultural values and intergenerational relationships influence contemporary family relationships and parenting.

## Asian American Families

Asian American families come to the United States from countries including Korea, Japan, China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia. Each Asian country has a unique culture unto itself, which accounts for the vast cultural and ethnic differences within this racial group. Like Latinx families, Asian American families place great emphasis on extended kinship ties and the needs of the entire family, rather than on the needs of the individual. About 61 percent of all Asian American children live with both biological parents; only 9 percent live in mother-only families, and about 4 percent live in father-only families (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019e). Today, approximately 13 percent of Asian women give birth outside of marriage (Child Trends, 2018b). With an annual income of over \$80,000 per year, Asian American families have the highest median household income of all racial groups in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019e). This is perhaps because Asian Americans have the highest educational attainment and qualifications of all ethnic groups in the United States—nearly 54 percent have earned at least a bachelor's degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019e).

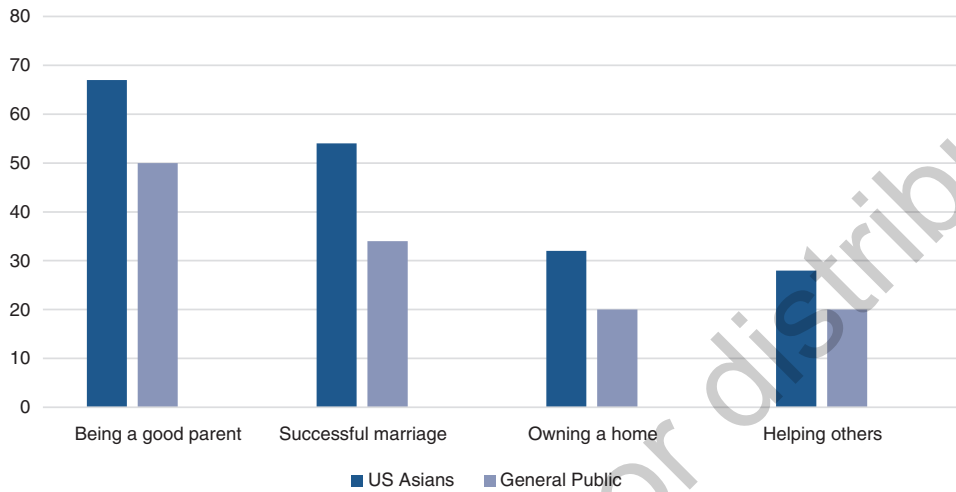
### Contemporary Asian American Family Patterns

The literature on Asian American families is not as robust in comparison with the research on other cultural and ethnic groups; however, we do know that the time of immigration to the United States seems to affect the degree of acculturation into mainstream culture, with third- and fourth-generation families demonstrating more similarity to U.S. culture than first- and second-generation immigrants (Choi et al., 2005). Similar to Latinx families, Asian American families are child-centric. Within the Asian family structure, a greater emphasis is placed on the parent–child relationship than on the husband–wife relationship (Fong, 2002). In exchange for the undivided loyalty and for sacrifices parents make for their children, Asian American parents expect respect and obedience from their children (Fong, 2002). Figure 2.7 presents the priorities of Asian American adults; as you can see, being a good parent is at the top of their priorities.

### Asian American Parent–Child Interactions

**Filial piety** has governed intergenerational Asian families for over 3,000 years (Mack, 2019). This complex system involves a series of obligations of child to parent—most centrally to provide aid to, comfort to, affection to, and contact with the parent. This child-to-parent devotion also brings glory and honor to the parent by doing well in educational and occupational areas, that is, achieving success in the outside world (Mack, 2019). It means that children are expected to satisfy their parents, and to respect and to show deference and reverence for elders in all situations (Kelley & Tseng, 1992; Lin & Liu, 1993). This concept is deeply ingrained in Chinese and other Asian cultures and has served as the moral foundation of interpersonal relationships for centuries (Lin & Liu, 1993).

Overall, Asian parents tend to be warm, affectionate, and lenient toward infants and young children, but once they reach the “age of understanding,” discipline becomes much stricter

**FIGURE 2.7** ■ Percentage of Asian Americans and the General U.S. Public Life Goals and Priorities

Source: Pew Research Center (2012).

(Kelley & Tseng, 1992; Kim et al., 2013). Children are taught mutual dependence, group identification, self-discipline, and good manners, as well as the importance of education. Departure from parental goals is seen as a reflection on the parents; therefore, parents take complete responsibility for the development of their children and are very involved in child-rearing (Li & Hein, 2019; Zhao, 2007; Zhao & Qiu, 2009). Asian Americans view the parenting role mainly as one of teacher (Kim et al., 2013).

Even though Asian parenting historically has been seen as more demanding and rigid than mainstream American parenting (Kim et al., 2013; Leung & Kwon, 1998; Li & Hein, 2019), some research suggests that Asian parenting styles may be a Western concept that does not accurately depict Asian socialization (Gorman, 1998). In one study, the author found little rule setting for adolescents among the Chinese mothers, suggesting that these mothers did not characterize their roles as including domination and control (Gorman, 1998). These mothers perceived that they were training their children, giving them guidance, and helping them to make good decisions; that is to say, they provided pertinent information and arguments but left the final decision in their children's hands. This approach is consistent with the Asian cultural value of individual responsibility—expectations for their children's successful adjustment rather than on a need to dominate their children (Kim et al., 2013; Leung & Kwon, 1998; Li & Hein, 2019).

Understanding *filial piety* is important to helping professionals because it helps those of us who work with children and their parents to see that Asian American parenting is characterized by an interaction of expectations and obligations, rather than parental control and child submission.



Native Americans/Alaska Natives embrace rich cultural heritages and an identity that stresses the importance of intergenerational family ties. Native spiritual and religious beliefs are numerous and diverse, and the beliefs often shape their attitudes toward marriage and family life.

Source: Flickr/Grand\_Canyon\_NPS (2010).

## Native American/Alaska Native Families

The terms *Native American*, *American Indian*, *Alaska Native*, *First Americans*, *First Nations*, and *Indian* are often used interchangeably and are used to describe the Indigenous people of the continental United States (UCLA: Equity, Diversity & Inclusion, 2020). Here, we use the term **Native American/Alaska Native (NA/AN)** to refer to aboriginal peoples of the United States and their descendants, and who maintain tribal affiliation or community attachment. Today, about 2 percent of the total U.S. population reports that they are Indigenous Americans (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019f). About one-third of this population is under the age of 18, making this a young ethnic group (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019f). As with other racial and ethnic groups in the United States, Native American/Alaska Native communities are culturally diverse with 561 federally recognized Native entities, and an additional 365 state-recognized American Indian tribes (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019f). Native Americans prefer to be identified by tribal names, such as *Wampanoag*, *Lakota*, and *Kickapoo* (Fleming, 2007; Makes Marks, 2007); our discussion here is generalized.

In order for us to accurately understand Native American family experiences, we must be aware of the unique qualities associated with this race. Unfortunately, comparatively little research has been conducted on Native American family life, and especially on Native



American parenting. Despite this gap in the empirical literature, however, the census data do give us insight into some characteristics of Natives. For instance, nearly 67 percent of all Native American households are married couple households. Interestingly, over one-third of households are nonfamily households. This means that a significant number of Native American families are headed by someone other than a parent, such as a grandparent, or even by nonfictive kin; nearly 52 percent of Native grandparents assume responsibility for their grandchildren (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019f). Although nearly 80 percent of this population has at least a high school diploma, the median household income of single-race American Indian and Alaska Native households is slightly over \$39,000. This compares with \$58,000 for the nation as a whole.

### Contemporary Indigenous Family Patterns

The predominance of extended family/nonfictive kin households among Natives is a reflection of the cultural roots of this racial group. Native American/Alaska Natives embrace a social identity that stresses the importance of family ties. For instance, when they introduce themselves to other Natives, they do so by telling them their maternal heritage, clans, and homelands (Makes Marks, 2007). In contrast to patriarchal societies where people's lineage is determined along **patrilineal** lines (the father's heritage), the roots of Indigenous peoples' social and clan relationships are by and large **matrilineal**; that is to say, these societies trace their heritage from a female ancestor to a descendant of either sex. This is also referred to as **uterine descent**. Within these societies, women are not given power per se because they are women—they are given power because of their status of mother, the power of female as mother (Makes Marks, 2007).

Indigenous peoples' spiritual traditions and religious beliefs are also numerous and diverse, and as such, the depth and dynamics of Native Americans' religious experiences are difficult to categorize or classify. Even so, there is an underlying or essential principal belief that informs most Natives' spiritual practices: The belief in the existence of unseen powers, and that something exists beyond them that is sacred and mysterious (Makes Marks, 2007). Within this belief are family attitudes, norms, and behaviors which are unknown because Native Americans are among the most misunderstood and understudied ethnic group in our culture; this is because they are commonly culturally isolated (Hellerstedt et al., 2006).

The Native American family system is vastly different from other extended families in this country. These networks are structurally open, assume a village-type characteristic, and are usually composed of *clans*, which include several households of relatives (Carson et al., 1990). The roles of family members and the structure of the extended family vary across tribes. Traditionally, they live in relational networks that serve to support and nurture strong bonds of mutual assistance and affection (Atkinson et al., 1998; LaFromboise & Low, 1989). Guidance and wisdom received from elders facilitate family cohesion and resiliency, and the personal support from extended family members and the community, especially during times of crisis, contributes immensely to family strengths (Carson et al., 1990).

## Indigenous Parent–Child Interactions

Perhaps because of the diverse nature of Indigenous people groups, there is little systematic knowledge about parenting styles and how they vary from tribe to tribe. However, child-rearing practices are shaped largely by the worldviews of Native American populations, which regard children as beloved gifts and the center of Native community (BigFoot & Funderburk, 2006). Pregnant Indigenous women actively engage with their unborn children, singing to them and talking to them, so the infants know they are wanted and welcomed (BigFoot & Funderburk, 2006). From pregnancy, the growing baby is viewed as:

- an eager learner;
- a worthwhile human being;
- a willing seeker of the traits necessary to be a kind, caring, and empathic person to self and others;
- accepted by all relatives;
- a group member with the clan or band, rather than an individual (BigFoot & Funderburk, 2006).

The most striking difference in child-rearing and socialization is the exposure of children to a wide array of persons to whom they can become attached—parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents—thus protecting children and providing them with the assurances of love (Dykeman & Nelson, 1995). The extended family plays as much a role in child-rearing, supervision of children, and the transgenerational transmission of teachings and customs as do parents, and parenting is very much a communal effort (BigFoot et al., 2007; Carson et al., 1990; Forehand & Kotchick, 1996; LaFromboise & Low, 1989). Notes one Native family practitioner, “Because a child is considered a gift from the Creator, caretakers have the responsibility to return to the Creator a person who respects him/herself [and others].” (BigFoot & Funderburk, 2006, p. 10).

As Indigenous children enter school, they often feel stranded between two cultures. Many speak a first language other than English, practice an entirely different religion, and hold different cultural values, yet they are expected to perform successfully according to conventional Western criteria (Brayboy et al., 2012; Little Soldier, 1992). These children also use their Native culture as their “anchor” when at school (Huffman, 2008, p. 187). Since these children have grown up with a group-oriented philosophy, striving for individual achievement is foreign to their world outside of school (Little Soldier, 1992). Because children are likely to feel marginal in both cultures, biculturalism must become an educational priority (Waterman, 2019).

## Arab American Families

Very little empirical information exists about Arab American families, although their population is increasing in the United States. Coming from countries such as Afghanistan, Israel, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Turkey, the term *Arab American* does not refer

necessarily to a racial group as much as it does geographic location and religion, which among Middle Eastern families is very diverse. There are no U.S. government demographics on the number of Arab Americans. This is because the U.S. Census Bureau does not track information and trends on the religious practices of those who reside in the United States. According to the Pew Research Center (2017a), there are 3.45 million Muslims living in the United States; they account for about 1 percent of the total U.S. population. They are the fastest growing immigrant population today; three in ten have immigrated to the United States since 2010 (Pew Research Center, 2017b). Nearly 42 percent of Arab Americans are American citizens. Of those who were foreign-born, nearly 70 percent have become naturalized U.S. citizens (Pew Research Center, 2017b).

### Contemporary Arab American Family Patterns

The most common living situation among U.S. Arab families is a multigenerational household; 57 percent live in this type of home configuration (Pew Research Center, 2017b). Nearly 20 percent live in a home with non-Muslims (such as a spouse). As a result of these tenets of the Muslim faith, heterosexual marriages and nuclear families are expected of devout Muslims (Boellstorff, 2005). Table 2.2 denotes the living arrangements of Muslim Americans today in the United States.

It's very important to understand that Arab Americans differ widely in their religious beliefs and practices of religion (Arab American Institute, 2019). This is essential to know because cultural typecasts of Islamic/Arab American women tend to lump religion (Islam) and ethnicity (Arab) into one-and-the-same components of culture, portraying them as veiled Islamic traditionalists who are submissive, secluded in the home, and uneducated (Zahedi, 2007). However, the majority of Arabs adhere to the Islamic faith because the religion is viewed as a lifestyle "guide" (Abudabbeh, 2005). Arab American families embrace a strong collectivist belief (Henry et al., 2008).

As sociology professor and researcher Jen'nan Ghazel Read of the University of California points out, understanding Arab American culture is complicated (2003). On the one hand, as a group, Arab Americans are more highly educated and are more likely to earn \$100,000 or more per year than any other ethnic or racial group in the United States (Arab American

**TABLE 2.2 ■ Household Configurations of Muslim Americans**

	All U.S. Muslims %	Foreign Born %
One-person household	23	22
Multiple-person household	75	75
Households with children	50	55
No children	46	43

Source: Pew Research Center (2017b).



Arab American parents stress conformity to the collective and require obedience from their children. Although little is known about this people group, it is known that family and children are highly valued.

Source: istock.com/FatCamera.

Institute, 2019; Pew Research Center, 2017). On the other hand, Arab religious and cultural customs and rituals reinforce traditional gender roles wherein women raise and nurture the children, and men protect and provide for the family (Mourad & Carolan, 2010). Indeed, male dominance is the cultural norm in most Arab countries; thus, in the United States, it is common for fathers to assume the role as head of household (Haboush, 2007). As a result, many Arab Americans' marital and family experiences are strongly shaped by traditional Arab views of honor, modesty, dignity, shame, and gender, as well as by the historical values of Islam (Arab American Institute, 2019; Smith et al., 2021). A predominant characteristic of Arab families is the cultural practice of keeping emotions to oneself and to guard the privacy of the family (Al-Darmaki & Sayed, 2009; Kobeisy, 2004). This is important to know because it prevents them from seeking help from others—going outside of the family for assistance is viewed as unacceptable and shameful behavior (Al-Darmaki & Sayed, 2009; Kobeisy, 2004).

### Arab American Parent–Child Interactions

Arab American parents keep a traditionally strict, demanding, rigid, and undemocratic household (for a full review, see Binghalib, 2007, 2011). Similar to Asian families, parents believe that their children's behaviors are a reflection of them, and because of this, shame and honor

are stressed (Haboush, 2007; Mourad & Carolan, 2010, as cited in Binghamlib, 2007, 2011). Parents stress conformity to the collective whole and use shame to control children's behaviors (Haboush, 2007; Mourad & Carolan, 2010). And, similar to the Asian culture, children strive to carry out their lives in such a way to not disappoint their parents (Haboush, 2007; Mourad & Carolan, 2010); they are taught at an early age that obedience to their parents is second only to the obedience to Allah (Haneef, 1997). The paucity of research impedes our understanding of this rich culture and people group, but what we do know from empirical science is that family and children are important (Binghamlib, 2007, 2011).

It's important to stress, however, that because Arab Americans come from a vast number of countries, parenting styles vary greatly. For instance, those from Lebanon use the authoritative Western approach to parenting, and families from Egypt, Algeria, and Palestine equally use permissive parenting and authoritarian parenting styles (see Dwalry et al., 2006). Love shown by Arab parents may be expressed in symbolic ways (i.e., providing protection, housing, food, and education), not in explicit ways (such as saying "I love you" repeatedly to a child). Indeed, country of origin significantly influences parenting styles and practices.

Without a doubt, there is great variation and diversity in our upbringing and our individual experiences with family and family living. It is virtually impossible in contemporary society to rely on the U.S. Census Bureau's rigid definition of *family* consisting of "two or more persons living together and related by blood, marriage, and adoption."

## HOW DO CHILDREN LEARN ABOUT THEIR RACIAL/ETHNIC IDENTITIES?

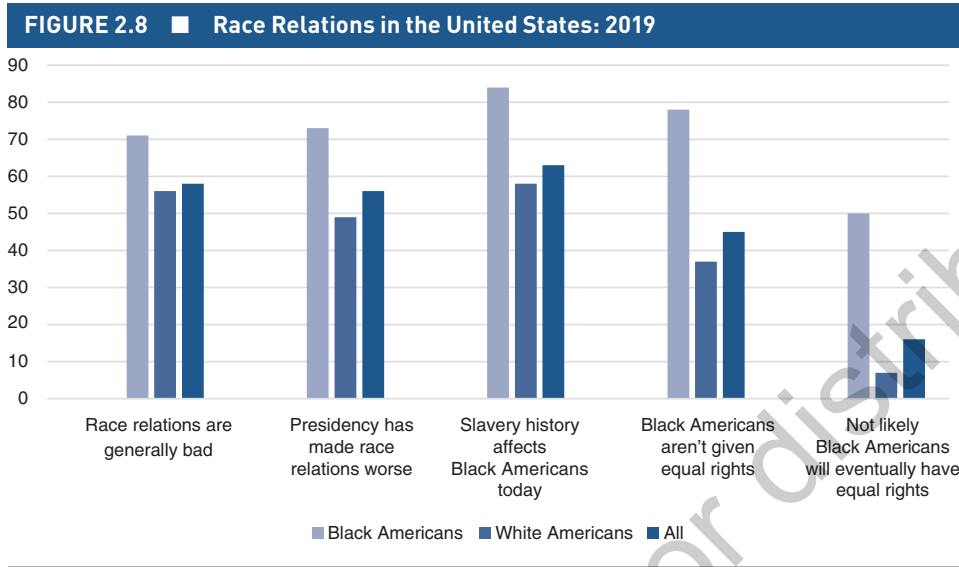
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As our study so far has shown us, there are racial/ethnic differences in the ways in which parents interact with their children. Emerging research is beginning to shed even more light on these differences, especially in the distinct parenting challenges with which people of color are faced.

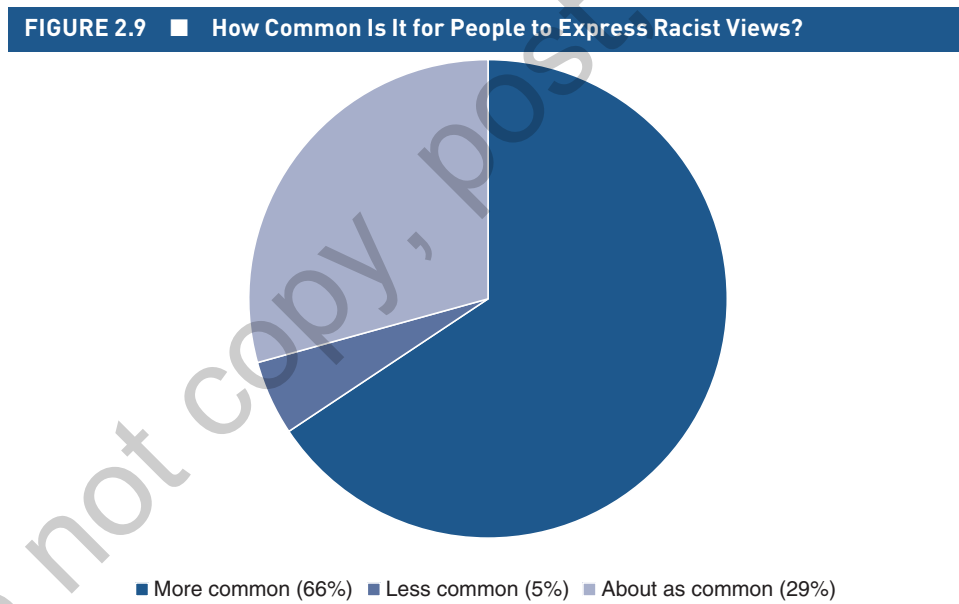
### Racial and Ethnic Socialization

African American/Black Caribbeans, Hispanics, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and Arab Americans in this country often experience racism. **Racism** is a belief system which holds that race accounts for differences in human character and/or ability; it results in discrimination and prejudice based on someone's skin color or ethnic background. Because of the historical disparaging and marginalizing views of people of color, and because of historical racial barriers in equal opportunities, racial and ethnic minority parents are faced with the challenges of insulating their children from the negative consequences of racism. They deal with these challenges by teaching their children how to "navigate and negotiate" the racism terrain through a process referred to as racial/ethnic socialization (Coard et al., 2007). And today, many adults have negative feelings about racial relations in the United States, as Figure 2.8 shows us.

Furthermore, most Americans across all racial and ethnic groups say that today, more and more people in the United States express racist and/or racially insensitive views, as illustrated in Figures 2.9 and 2.10 (Pew Research Center, 2019).



Source: Pew Research Center (2019).



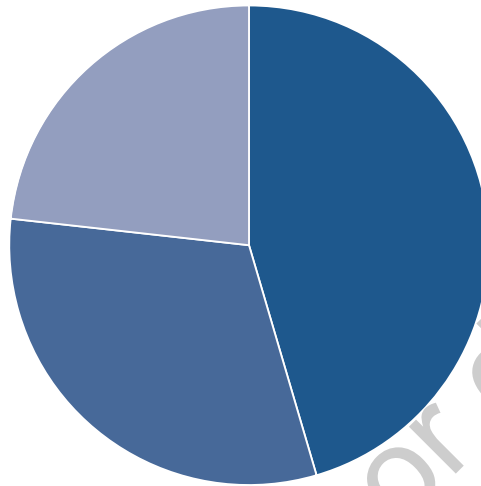
Source: Pew Research Center (2019).

**Racial/ethnic socialization** is the way in which families teach children about the social meanings of their race/ethnicity: What does it mean to “be” Black, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, or of Arab descent? Oftentimes, this socialization also includes teaching children the consequences of ethnicity and race, such as racism (Brown et al., 2007). Throughout the



**FIGURE 2.10 ■ How Acceptable Is It for People to Express Racist Views?**

Today it is \_\_\_\_\_ for people to express racist views



■ More acceptable (45%) ■ About as acceptable (31%) ■ Less acceptable (23%)

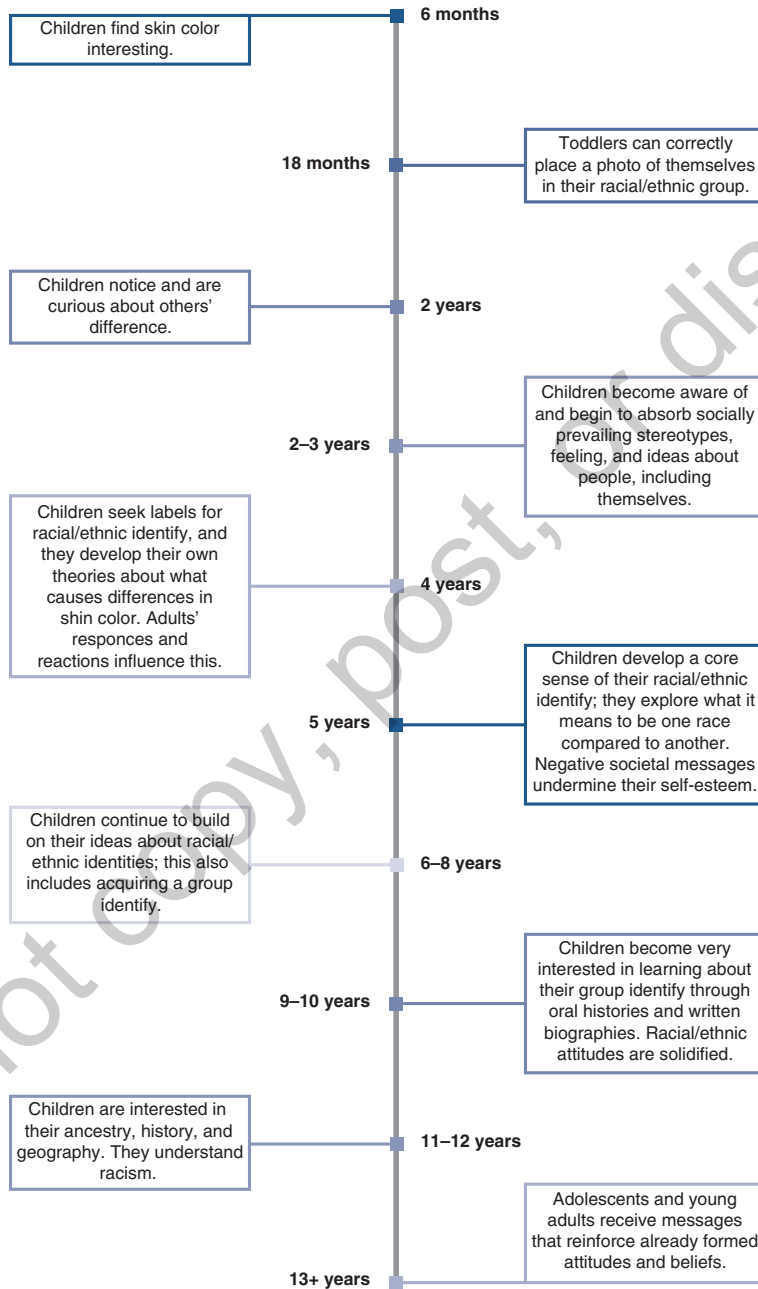
Source: Pew Research Center (2019).

socialization process, which is presented in Figure 2.11, children learn about the similarities and differences between races/ethnicities, as well as prejudice and discrimination that some people face. Through intergenerational discussions (which often include story-telling of ancestors' histories), conversations with parents, observations, and modeling, cultural knowledge is transmitted and children learn to “perform” race (Brown et al., 2007). Racial socialization not only teaches children the values and norms associated with their race/ethnicity, but it also shapes attitudes that help them to cope with race-related barriers (Coard et al., 2007). Typically, many white parents don't place importance on discussing racial or ethnic differences with their children (Brown et al., 2007). But given that racism and racial insensitivity appears to be increasing in prevalence in the United States, teaching children to be empathic about race, ethnicity, and racial identity is of critical importance (Markus & Moya, 2010). As African American former school principal and student advocate Paul Richards (2018) notes:

Empathy is a critical disposition to possess in today's context. Developing *cultural* empathy can come from exploring the practice of arranged marriages, or the central importance of family hierarchy in certain cultures, or what it is like to have dark skin in a white environment. There are countless examples that are appropriate [to educate children about]. The exploration should culminate in the [child] developing a strong sense of his or her own ethnic identity, and how this identity is interdependent with how other people and society view it. It is with this cultural toolkit that our youth will be ready to thrive in the global world.

**FIGURE 2.11 ■ Time Line of the Development of Racial and Ethnic Identity**

Racial/ethnic socialization is a process that unfolds across a number of years. How are children taught to “be” their race/ethnicity and what are the social meanings attached to being a member of a racial or ethnic group?



Sources: Coard et al. (2007) and Stein et al. (2018).

Racial/ethnic socialization practices have been linked to a number of positive outcomes in minority children and adolescents, as shown here. For a comprehensive review of the literature, see Coard et al. (2007), Hughes et al. (2006), and Huynh and Fuligni (2008).

- **Well-developed racial identity:** Children embrace racial and ethnic pride, history, and cultural traditions.
- **Heightened self-esteem:** Children’s and adolescents’ self-esteem is sensitive to the racial/ethnic messages they receive from their parents. Children who are taught to “blend” with mainstream culture have lower levels of self-esteem because they in some ways deny their heritage.
- **Higher academic functioning:** Positive ethnic identity and high self-esteem are associated with better academic outcomes and higher levels of motivation among children and adolescents.
- **Decreased levels of depression and anger:** The practice of cultural socialization is protective against racial discrimination because children and adolescents develop coping and problem-solving strategies to help buffer racism and deal with prejudice.

Racial/ethnic socialization among minority families is an emerging field of family and social science studies. It is a very complex issue, and we have much to learn about the multiple processes associated with this type of socialization, as well as how what children are taught about race influences their lives.

### Hate Hurts: Antidiscrimination and Inclusivity Education for Children

We live in a world that is not free from bias and discrimination, and because of this, parents, guardians, and teachers, must impart to our children that *everyone* has the right to feel included. It is important to teach children that *hate hurts* and leaves emotional scars that can affect not only a person’s self-worth but also every aspect of a person’s life. Because a child develops his or her self-concept and beliefs about others well before entering kindergarten, antibias and anti-discrimination education must begin early in the home and in the early years of school. Parents, guardians, and teachers need to model attitudes and behaviors that help young children appreciate and value the differences in others. To avoid prejudice and discrimination, we must:

- Model the values, attitudes, and behaviors we want our children to develop. This requires being aware of our own conscious and unconscious stereotypes and behaviors.
- Expose children to people and experiences from other cultures and belief systems.
- Encourage children to see that relationships with people who are different from themselves can be rich and rewarding experiences.
- Talk with children about the similarities and differences between themselves et al. Help them to see that being “different” from someone does not mean the person is “worse” than someone else.

- Integrate diversity, equity, and inclusion information and communication into conversations and activities.
- Teach children to be sensitive, critical thinkers, so that through examining and questioning they can better understand any issue.
- Adopt a “zero tolerance” policy about racism, prejudice, bias, and discrimination. Teach them that words *do hurt*.

Despite the fact that today’s parents and families are diverse in structure, income level, and racial and ethnic composition, and despite the fact that today’s families experience family living in diverse ways, one particular theorist has been able to organize the different cultural contexts of family life so we can see the level of influence each context has on us. With this in mind, in the section that follows we’ll take a look at Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Model, a model noted for grouping the various contexts that surround us and influence our individual and parenting/family development.

## CULTURALLY SPECIFIC INFLUENCES THAT AFFECT FAMILY LIFE

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To understand the multiple areas of individual and parenting development, we turn our attention to the *Ecological Model* developed by Uri Bronfenbrenner (1979). Central to this model is the concept that people develop in a variety of interacting contexts. **Contexts** refer to areas of individual and family development that play a role in the relationship between people and their environments; these multiple contexts make up a person’s “culture” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

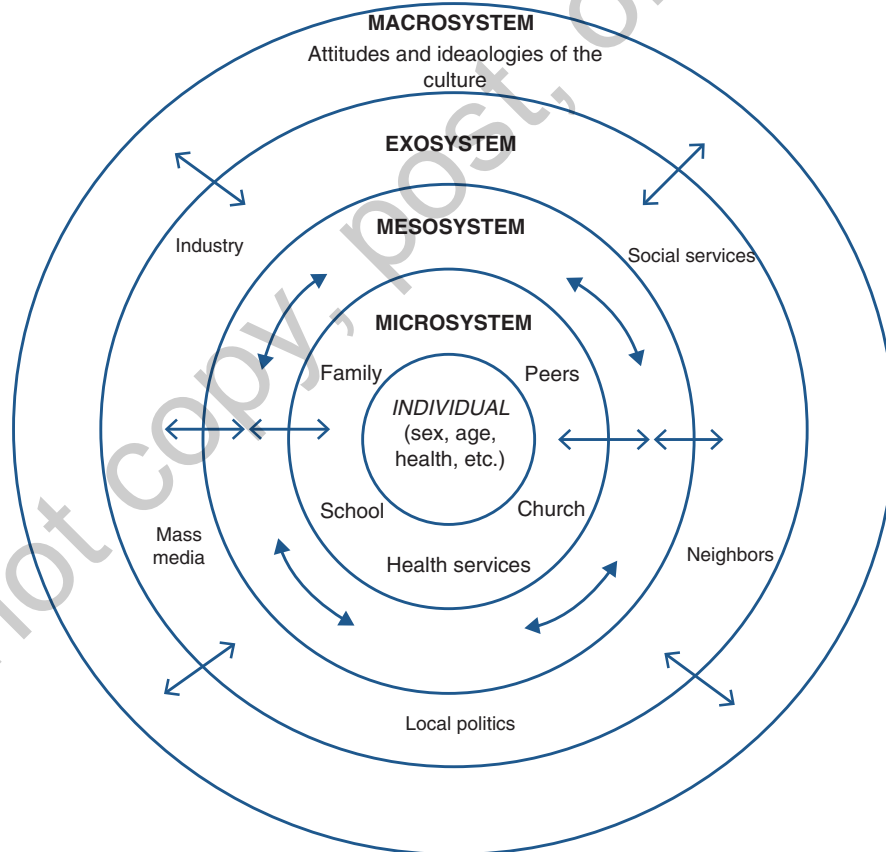
These multiple environments surround individuals from birth and play a significant interactive role in development. In order to truly understand parenting life today and parent-child interactions, we must first understand the interactive relationships *between* and *among* the different factors within the various contexts of development (Huit, 2003). If we want to study the effects of divorce on a child’s development, for example, we can study the child separately, but we can also introduce or take away various factors within a certain context to better determine which has the greatest impact on a child’s development. And, to better understand the influences and impacts of these contexts, we need to consider the concept of *intersectionality*, introduced earlier.

So far in our study of contemporary parenting, we have paid considerable attention to the racial and ethnic composition of the United States. We have stressed the importance of understanding these differences because each diverse family culture is “characterized and distinguished from other cultures, by deep-rooted and widely acknowledged ideas about how one needs to feel, think, and act as a functioning member of the culture” (Bornstein, 2012, p. 212). Thus, our cross-cultural study of the differing groups establishes the base of working with parents: We affirm that each cultural group embodies certain traits and characteristics that are unique to them, and that are vitally necessary to their members. And, because of this uniqueness, we expect that there are cultural variations in the experiences of parenting (Bornstein, 2012).

## Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model

Figure 2.12 presents the Ecological Model. Notice that the person is located in the center of five concentric, nested circles that expand outward, similar to ripples on the surface of water. Each of those circles represents a different layer of societal interactions and influences external to the individual, which affects his or her development. The circles nearest the individual have more immediate impacts on us, and those farther out are more distant. Perhaps what makes this model so useful is that Bronfenbrenner recognized that the impact on relationships is *bidirectional*: Not only does the environment influence the individual but also the individual influences the environment. For example, a new baby in a family has an impact on the parents just as much as the parents have an impact on the baby. When a couple goes through a divorce, both spouses are affected, but their children and other extended family members and friends are also affected. And, even though the individual or the family may not directly interact with various levels of society (such as the different levels

**FIGURE 2.12** ■ Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model



Source: Based on Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development* (1979).



The *microsystem* is the developmental context nearest the individual, and its components exert the most influence on a person's development, such as the influence of a child's school and teachers.

Source: istock.com/FatCamera.

of government), as you will see later in our study, these social influences have an impact on family functioning and health.

As we examine each context in the model, it is important to bear in mind the positioning of the context to better understand the degree of influence on the individual. To help guide this process, we will discuss each **context, or ecosystem**, within the Ecological Model. Those contexts nearest the individual carry the greatest influence on her or his development.

### The Person

At the center of this model is the person. Bronfenbrenner recognized that a person's development is not simply a matter of biology, cognition, or social interaction. Development is instead an intricate intertwining of *all three* of these components. Individual influences include, but are not limited to, race, ethnicity, genetics, health, nutrition, and physiological abilities or disabilities. The contexts that surround us can affect, for example, our overall health.

### The Microsystem

The **microsystem** is the developmental context nearest the individual and represents those interactions in which people are directly involved. The elements that make up this ecosystem



are the individuals, groups, and agencies that have the earliest and most immediate influences on the individual. These include:

- **The family of origin:** The family in which we are raised is the most influential on our development. The family structure (single-parent or two-parent family), SES (wealthy, middle class, or low income), race and ethnicity (strong influences on family educational and income levels), parenting styles (Are the parents warm and supportive? Do they abuse or use substances?), and parental involvement all play important roles in who children become.
- **Daycare/schools:** Because children spend an average of seven hours a day in daycare or in a classroom, Bronfenbrenner believed them to be a key influence on development. For example, the location of the school is important; students in small or rural communities or small suburbs tend to score higher on standardized tests than children from larger schools (Huitt, 2003).
- **The community:** Many of us have heard the saying, “It takes a village to raise a child.” Neighbors, neighborhoods, peer groups, and workplaces make up a community. The greater the community’s involvement in the child’s life, the greater the child’s success and achievement throughout life (Sikorski et al., 1999). Community involvement may include literacy programs, nutritional programs, recreational opportunities, or teen mentoring programs.
- **The church, synagogue, mosque, or temple:** Religious institutions influence the development of a person’s character and ethical and moral development (Nord & Haynes, 1998).

We individuals also have an impact on our environment: As we comply or rebel, agree or disagree, or express our views, hopes, and ambitions, we exert influence on the elements with which we interact.

### The Mesosystem

In the **mesosystem**, Bronfenbrenner retains all of the elements that are present in the microsystem, but now focuses on the interaction *between* the various elements rather than on the individual. For instance, how does the school affect the family? How does the church or temple affect the family? In what ways does the school impact the neighborhood? Consider a school district that tries to establish a sex education program that offers free condom distribution and referrals to health clinics for abortion in a community that has a strong fundamental religious belief system. Is it likely that a conservative community would endorse these practices? Likewise, consider the influence of a neighborhood organization that creates an after-school athletic and academic program for children located in a neighborhood that has a large gang presence, or a neighborhood watch organization that creates a network of “safe” houses that children can run to if a stranger attempts to approach them on the way home from school. These scenarios illustrate how elements within the microsystem interact with each other rather than directly with an individual and his or her family.



Although further away from the individual than the micro- and mesosystems, the *exosystem* is the societal context in which policies are made that impact individuals and families, such as fertility legislation..

Source: istock.com/Jcarillet.

### The Exosystem

The **exosystem** consists of the fabrics of society in which policies are made and influenced that ultimately have an impact on the elements of the microsystem and the individual. Social policies are beneficial to families when they foster and support the major functions of a family, such as child-rearing, economic support, and caring for family members (Alberts, 2002). As Figure 2.12 shows us, the exosystem serves as an umbrella for all of the “systems” in a society.

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Consider the state board of education, which establishes policies and selects curricula that are used in each of the local school districts. At the same time, the hierarchies of various religious denominations determine the central tenets of their faith, which include and determine what behaviors are deemed to be appropriate or inappropriate according to those tenets. In turn, those religious beliefs in large part determine what is taught in the public schools. As a result of this influence, a public school education may be vastly different in one state compared with another, depending on the components of the exosystem. In Kansas public schools, for example, teachers are permitted to teach the tenets of evolution, but they are also required to teach creation by intelligent design. The theory of *intelligent design (ID)* maintains that the universe is best explained by creation by an intelligent cause, rather than by evolution of species. Further, in 2016, battles raged in the Kansas legislature over a bill under consideration in the House that would prevent school boards from using national sexual education curriculum to give more control to local educators. Also up for debate was the issue as to whether Kansas schools should continue to provide sex education in public schools. These issues remain undecided. The broader point here is that because Kansas is in the center of the “Bible belt” in the United States, many curricula decisions are centered on the religious hierarchy of the state.

The media are another element within the exosystem. Some news outlets are thought to have either liberal or conservative bias in the way that they report news information, consequently influencing how certain policies and perspectives are viewed. In movies and through television programming, we also see changes in how families and family life are portrayed. Whether these changes are simply representations of historical changes in families over time, or are attempts to change perceptions about what family life should be, is not always clear. How these movies and TV shows are perceived may depend, to some extent, on a person’s life experiences and the influences that have shaped their development to this point.

### The Macrosystem

The **macrosystem** represents the next layer in Bronfenbrenner’s model. It recognizes that a society has a set of overarching cultural values and beliefs that affect individual development by establishing either implicit or explicit rules about what is or is not acceptable behavior. In a population as diverse as that of the United States, there are hundreds of different religious, racial, and ethnic groups. Each may have specific cultural norms that do not conform to a broader set of values. Additionally, not all groups that fall within a general ethnic category will be the same. For instance, not all Hispanics share the same belief system. Mexican Americans may have cultural values and expectations different from those of Cuban Americans. Jews have different values than do Islamics or Buddhists. And liberals have different values than do conservatives. The cultural values of parents who are first-generation immigrants to the United States may be vastly different from those of their children who have been acculturated in American values through their interactions with peers at school and the media.

### The Chronosystem

The **chronosystem**, the next, and outermost layer, reflects changes that happen over time. It accounts for the collective historical precursors of current social debates over, for example, social

and economic discrimination, women's rights to reproductive choice, and the long-held definition of marriage, such as who can marry whom (Dutton, 1998).

Bronfenbrenner's framework allows us to grasp both the nature of the main interacting influences on our lives and to examine the role that each play. With the Ecological Model, we can explore and better understand parenting and parent-child relationships. Throughout our study together, we'll explore certain areas of Bronfenbrenner's model, such as the *economic, religious, and government contexts*, and how they shape and affect the experiences of intimate partners and families today. In the section that follows, we'll use the concepts of Bronfenbrenner's Model to help us understand the roots of *systemic racism* in the United States.

## Systemic Racism

In 2020, protests erupted in the United States over the unequal, brutal, and fatal treatment of African Americans by law enforcement. Compounding the tragic, unnecessary death of George Floyd, a Black man killed by police in Minnesota, Black Americans were simultaneously disproportionately affected by pandemic-induced historic unemployment, permanent job loss, and COVID-19 infections and fatalities. Not since the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s had America seen such an outcry for racial justice and equality. Many in the United States had difficulties understanding the newly emerged outcries of racism—while, individually, a person may have adhered to antiracist viewpoints and beliefs, many white Americans didn't understand the concept of systemic or institutional racism.

At its base, racism is “an ideology of racial domination in which the presumed biological or cultural superiority of one or more racial groups is used to justify or prescribe the inferior treatment or social position(s) of other racial groups” (Clair & Denis, 2015, p. 12720). Typically, when we think of racism, we think of individual beliefs and attitudes. But a different type of racism also exists: **Systemic, or institutional racism**, is a type of subtle, less overt form of racism that is deeply embedded and commonly practiced in a society (Carmichael & Hamilton, 1967). The term was first introduced in 1967, and it speaks to the prevailing discrimination found in the criminal justice system, employment, housing, healthcare, and education in the United States (Clair & Denis, 2015). The Urban Institute provides us an understanding of systemic racism when they write:

Throughout this country's history, the hallmarks of American democracy—opportunity, freedom, and prosperity—have been largely reserved for white people through the intentional exclusion and oppression of people of color. [What we see today] is a direct result of the historical and contemporary policies, practices, and norms that create and maintain [institutional racism]. (Urban Institute, 2020)

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model helps us to understand the ways in which racism is deeply engrained in U.S. culture.

**The chronosystem:** Recall that the chronosystem accounts for the whole of historical precursors that shape current ideas and beliefs; it also shapes Black identities (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Without question, the origins of systemic racism

accompany the formation of America as early as 1619, when it is believed that the first slaves were purchased by English colonists (Austin, 2019). From this point and onward in U.S. history, people of color experienced oppression and segregation from whites (Brown et al., 2013).

**The macrosystem:** This context comprises the overarching cultural values and beliefs that affect individuals and govern behaviors. Because slavery created an historical system of control over Blacks, a racial hierarchy evolved (Brown et al., 2013; Hamilton & Roy, 2020; Rothstein, 2017; Trask-Tate et al., 2014).

**The exosystem:** Quality education, employment, housing, healthcare, treatment by law enforcement: All of these elements in this context are shaped by both the ideologies, values, and beliefs within the macrosystem and the chronosystem, and have an impact on an individual and they/his/hers' microsystems. Social policies that affect parenting and families are also made at this level. The disparity in the quality of life and upward mobility seen between Blacks and whites, established early on in the history of America, is underscored and expressed in this context still today (Hamilton & Roy, 2020; Urban Institute, 2020).

**The microsystem:** This context comprises an individual's immediate cultural environment. Some researchers today have referred to the influences in this ecosystem (i.e., family, friends, and teachers) as "social capital" (Hamilton & Roy, 2020, p. 104). **Social capital** can be thought of as the different relationship networks people have. Because of the historical, hierarchical beliefs about whites and Blacks, and because of the inequality experienced by Blacks set into place because of these hierarchical beliefs, a system of oppression and control still exists today in the microsystems of many African Americans; this is known as a lack of social capital (Brown et al., 2013; Hamilton & Roy, 2020; Rothstein, 2017; Trask-Tate et al., 2014). When we work with parents of color, we need to be very much aware and understanding of how "parents of color are silenced by fear, lack access [to many services], and are required to work within a [historical] system that perpetuates racial order" (Hamilton & Roy, 2020, p. 105).

Native Americans have also been, and continue to be, subjected to the cruelty of systemic racism. In 1830, the **Indian Removal Act**, fueled by racism, allowed the U.S. government to relocate Indigenous people. Known as the **Trail of Tears**, Cherokee First Americans were brutally forced at gunpoint to leave their homelands to allow white settlers access to their land; the Natives were classified as "noncitizens" (Watson, 1990). "Civilizing" Native children became a priority of the U.S. government (as well as Canada and Australia), and between 1870 and 1900, 307 boarding and day schools were established with three goals in mind:

- To teach Native children individuality and wean them from the collectivist, tribal families
- To learn English to function within the dominant white European American culture
- To teach Christianity (Montgomery & Colwell, 2019).

This forced cultural assimilation required children to leave their families, change their names to American names, cut their hair, wear school uniforms, speak English, and pray Christian prayers. Children in the boarding schools lived in abhorrent conditions, with poor housing. They suffered physical abuse, malnourishment, and contracted diseases from Euro-Americans (Montgomery & Colwell, 2019). Today, these actions and practices would be known as *ethnic cleansing* and *genocide* (Mench-Tum, 2001).

By using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model of cultural and historical contexts, we can see how systemic or institutional racism was established and continues to be perpetuated against people of color. Moving forward as a country requires that we examine and abolish paradigms and policies at all societal levels that reinforce hierarchical and divisive beliefs and practices (Hamilton & Roy, 2020).



One of the greatest responsibilities parent professionals and educators have today is helping to end the division in our society. This can only be accomplished by acknowledging and embracing differences.

Source: iStock.com/rawpixel.

## PARENTING LIFE EDUCATION: EMBRACING DIFFERENCES AND ENDING DIVISION

Up to this point, our study has highlighted the fact that the United States is a blend of races, ethnicities, and religions from all over the world. Often, though, we tend to focus on our own experiences, failing to realize the vastness of the human race. Many of us fall into the trap of thinking that how *we* experience family and parenting is the *only* way to experience these aspects of life. After all, we are each experts in our individual understandings. In order to gain a truer insight into the workings of parenting, we must step back from our cultural norms and stereotypes and enlarge our scope, so that we may see and take in more—and so far, our study has given us this opportunity.



Tragically, this wonderful medley of race, ethnicity, culture, and ways of life are not embraced by all. With this in mind, Dorian Solot and Marshall Miller (2004) put forth the following affirmation of family diversity:

We believe that all families should be valued, that the well-being of children is critical to our nation's future, and that people who care for one another should be supported in their efforts to build happy, healthy relationships. One of America's strengths is its diversity, which includes not only a wide range of races, ethnicities, creeds, abilities, genders, and sexual orientations but also a range of family forms.

All of the diversity seen today in the United States contributes to a unique, distinct social fabric that adds a deep richness to our culture. But along with diversity comes substantial differences in family structure, family living, and family experiences. Although the "traditional" family has long been held as the "ideal" standard in childrearing and family life, we are no longer a society composed primarily of married couples raising their biological or adopted children. Today, there really is no such thing as a homogenized American family. Throughout our course of study together, you will gain not only a deeper understanding of parenting life today but also a deeper appreciation for these differences.

As diverse and distinct as U.S. families are today, though, they are all a part of the whole. We do not develop in isolation! Just as important, we do not experience family living and parenting life separately from our surrounding environments—and we do not experience family life in isolation from other families, no matter how different they may be from our own.

Because "parenting" transcends race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and sexual identity, you will see yourself somewhere among the pages of this book. *Together*—you the student, your classmates, we the authors/teachers, and your professor/instructor—using this text as our guide, we will examine and understand the complexities and intricacies of parenting life. We hope that this book will help you gain a solid, practical understanding of parenting and the importance of family life on children's development, and equip you and empower you with the education to help you develop your full potential in your professional, personal, and family life. In this pursuit, we hope to engage your entire essence—your intellect, your emotions, and your heart.

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