

chapter 2

Approaches to Studying Individuals and Families

KEY TERMS

androcentricity
anthropology
cohort
conflict theory
demographics
developmental
theories
discipline
double standards
ethnocentrism
feminist theories
functionalism
institution
norm
normative event
opinion
perception
psychology
role
social exchange
theory
sociology
status
symbolic
interactionism
systems theory
theoretical
perspective
theory

CHAPTER EXPECTATIONS

While reading this chapter, you will:

- formulate research questions and develop hypotheses reflecting specific theoretical frameworks
- demonstrate an understanding of research methodologies, appropriate research ethics, and specific theoretical perspectives for conducting primary research
- evaluate information to determine its validity and to detect bias, stereotyping, ethnocentricity, datedness, and unethical practices, and distinguish among perceptions, beliefs, opinions, and evidence from research
- distinguish between an essay arguing and defending personal opinion and a research paper reporting on an original investigation
- conduct an independent study of an issue concerning individuals or families in a diverse society

RESEARCH SKILLS

- formulating research questions
- developing hypotheses
- understanding research methodologies
- evaluating information
- conducting an independent study



The family is a topic of lively discussion in Canadian society because individuals can choose how their families will fit into their lives.

CHAPTER INTRODUCTION

What concerns do you have about your future life as an individual and as a member of a family? Are they justified? Are they based on knowledge of the facts, or do they reflect perceptions gathered from personal experience or from opinions formed by thinking about incorrect or incomplete information? This chapter outlines how to locate and read research done by others who asked the same questions. It examines the theories that can be used to understand human behaviour. It also describes how to conduct investigations and how to analyze the evidence to determine the facts.

Preconceptions About Individuals and Families in Canada

The study of individuals and families can be approached with greater prior knowledge than any other subject. The experiences people have had in their own families, the **opinions** they have formed from observing and discussing their friends' families, and the families they have seen portrayed in the media will affect the **perceptions** they have of the subject. Therefore, a study of individuals and families requires that people set out and examine their own beliefs, perceptions, and opinions so that they can approach the subject objectively and with an open mind.

The talk about families reflects widespread concern about the lives of individuals and families in Canada today. In personal conversations and in the media, people discuss how marriage and the family are changing, who is responsible for what is happening to families, what families should be doing, what should be done to support families, and whether governments, charities, or other institutions can do anything to lessen the problems. Some concerns have to do with what is morally right or wrong when there are so many alternatives to choose from. Others ask what is financially sensible when there is competition for limited resources, or what is politically appropriate. The central question is about what choices Canadians should make in their own lives.

What Are Your Preconceptions?

Concerns about family issues arise because, unlike other current news, they affect us personally. Many young people believe that fewer people are getting married today because of the high divorce rate and that, consequently, they may not marry either for fear of getting divorced. Many Canadians are concerned that because so many marriages end in divorce these days, single parents are raising most of the children. They worry about the emotional consequences of divorce and single parenthood. In addition, some people argue that young women do not have the same educational opportunities as young men and, therefore, single women will not earn as much money to support themselves and their families. Concerns such as these result in anxiety about the future of families in Canada.

web connection



www.mcgrawhill.ca/links/families12

To learn about Canadian demographics, as well as analyses of trends, go to the web site above for *Individuals and Families in a Diverse Society* to see where to go next.

Using the Internet, you can locate facts about these concerns.

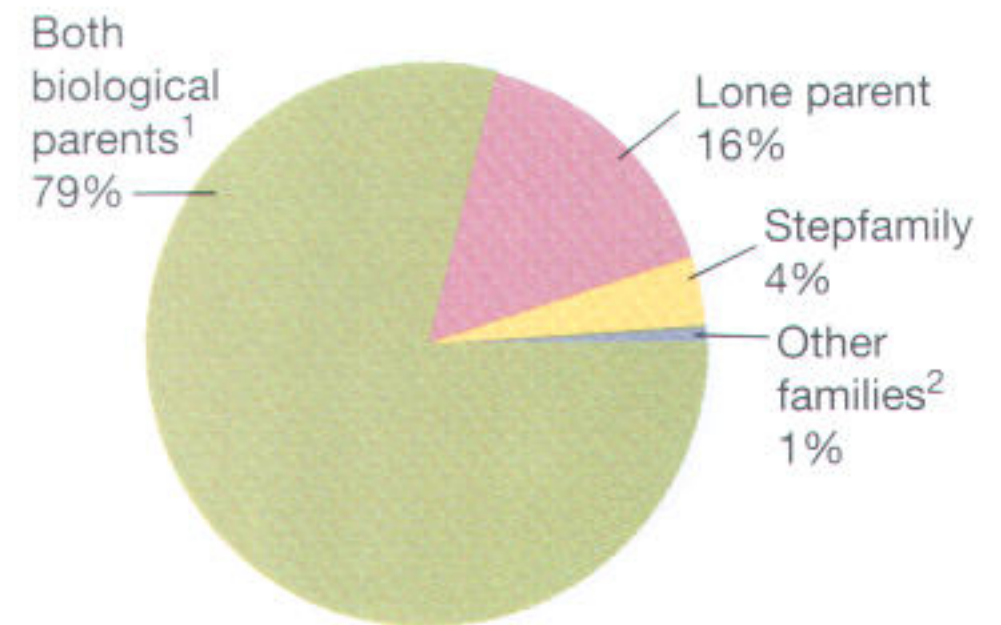
- Statistics Canada provides an overview of the lives of Canadians and their families. At the end of the twentieth century, trends suggest the following:
 - Canadians are not avoiding marriage, just delaying it until their late twenties, as people did in the 1930s.
 - Prior to marriage, people are cohabiting in larger numbers at all ages.
 - Approximately one-third of marriages will end in divorce at some time.
- The National Longitudinal Study of Children and Youth, begun in 1993 and still continuing, found that almost four out of five young children in Canada are currently living with their two biological parents.
- The report of the Pan-Canadian Education Indicators Program, 1999, reveals that women make up more than 50 percent of the graduates in Canada—from high school, college, or university—and are becoming better educated than men.

These facts do not support the common perceptions expressed by many Canadians.

Investigating familiar aspects of life as an academic study within the social sciences can present personal challenges. First, people tend to generalize from their personal experiences and observations. Accurate generalizations require a much larger and more organized set of observations. Second, any objective study in Canadian society will reveal a diversity of experiences that might contrast with one's own. In addition, the fact that individual and family behaviour are such common topics for discussion also makes them popular topics in the media. However, their portrayal of these issues may be entertaining or controversial rather than factual. Finally, setting aside all preconceptions at the beginning can mean abandoning familiar thinking that has provided the criteria for people's decisions in the past. An academic study of individuals and families in Canada, incorporating reliable research methods, will lead to clarification of the issues—a prerequisite for informed and meaningful debate and a stronger basis for decisions.

Family Structures, 1994

In 1994, most children under age 12 lived in two-parent families with both their biological parents.



¹ Includes children born into stepfamilies

² Includes children living with adoptive parents and foster parents

Source: Adapted from the Statistics Canada publication *Canadian Social Trends—Spring 1997*, Catalogue 11-008, Issue No. 44, page 3.

Smaller. Older. Different. That's not the motto of the Olympic Games, but rather a snapshot of what families will look like in the next century. Robert Glossop, executive director of programs and research for The Vanier Institute of the Family, writes in *Transition* magazine that we are no longer identified by our kinship. "For half a century, our society has valued individual autonomy, achievement, and choice, downplaying the traditional bonds to family, employer, community, and country," says Glossop.

The demand for personal choice is changing the Canadian family. For example, two of the greatest influences in the last half-century were the general use of the birth control pill and the 1986 change in Canada's divorce laws. The result is that we now have many versions of the family. There are married and common-law heterosexual couples with and without children; lone-parent and two-parent families; same-sex couples with and without children; single-earner and dual-earner families; blended families with various configurations of step-relationships; adoptive and foster families.

Indeed, medical science and political legislation will continue having major effects on where the family is going. New human reproductive technologies and the male contraceptive pill will satisfy people who either do or don't want to have children. On the political side, the number of couples having children could be increased by a national day-care program or by tax breaks for stay-at-home parents.

"The immediate future in Canada is that there will probably be a lot more choice and more variety of lifestyles," says Fran Puffer, a tutor in sociology of the family at Athabasca University, Alberta.

Following the uncertainties of life during [World War II], the number of marriages per capita in Canada peaked at nearly 11 per 1000 people in 1946.

Robert Glossop, of the Vanier Institute of the Family



Now there are half as many first-time marriages.

Cohabitation and remarriages are on the rise.

One American state is even experimenting with marriage contracts that may be renewed every five years.

The number of births per woman in Canada peaked at four in 1961. But due in large part to contraception and rising costs of living, births are now less than the rate of 2.1 it takes to replace our departing population. The result will be more immigration in the new century, bringing cultural changes.

Expensive post-secondary education will keep young people living at home longer. In the twenty-first century, Canadians who do marry and have [children] will do both later in life. The majority of women will spend their twenties going to school and working, rather than raising children.

Delays or downright avoidance of marriage and parenthood will be largely due to personal choice and economics. The average family now needs to work 76.8 weeks a year to pay off all their expenses. That's why a second partner is working at least part time; there are 3.6 million dual-income couples in the country. One hundred years ago, 45 percent of Canadians were employed in farming. Now it's 3 percent. And in the global economy, cheap labour in Vietnam and Mainland China will close Canadian factories, putting Canadian family members out of work.

A major growth industry in the next century will be caregiving. An increase in dual-income families

will create enormous child-care demands. And there will be growth in elder care, as the baby boom and modern medicine produce an aging population. The biggest five-year block of population will move from the 30–35 year range in 1996 to the 50–55 year range in 2016.

What will be the political and social will? “We have, in a sense, purchased our individualism at the expense of our family life, our marriages, the safety of our streets, our relationships with neighbours, and, ultimately, at the expense of knowing what

purposes we share with others,” says Glossop. The price may someday be deemed too high. But not in the immediate future. ■

Source: *Edmonton Journal*. (2000, January 1), p. E2.

1. What does individualism mean?
2. How would individualism and personal choice affect marriage rates and birth rates?
3. What do you think Glossop means when he suggests that the price of our individualism might be too high?

Theoretical Perspectives

This text presents a comprehensive study of the lives of individuals and their families that uses a variety of **theoretical perspectives** from several **disciplines**. Disciplines are specific branches of learning, such as mathematics, physics, or psychology. A theoretical perspective identifies a point of view based on a specific **theory**. A theory is a framework for organizing and explaining observable evidence. Without facts, a theory is just a speculation or a guess. On the other hand, information that has been gathered by observation, experiment, or survey lacks meaning without theory to organize it. Thus, an understanding of individuals and families requires that factual evidence be organized from a specific theoretical perspective (Goode, 1982).

The Disciplines in the Social Sciences

Theories from many disciplines can be used in the study of individuals and families. Social scientists ask four fundamental questions: *What happens? How does it happen? Why does it happen?* and, often, *How can people change what happens?* Each discipline focuses on a specific aspect of human behaviour to answer these questions. It is possible to approach the study of a topic, such as mate selection, using one or more disciplines. The discipline determines what observations a researcher will make and which theoretical perspective will be used to organize and explain the results. The discipline and the theoretical perspective also determine whether the research will be a *macro* (large-scale) study of a society or a *micro* (small-scale) study of individual cases. Finally, the discipline may suggest how the results are applied to predicting what will happen in order to make decisions about the course of human lives within society.



When Colin Turnbull observed the BaMbuti of Africa, he noted the rites of passage that signalled admission into adulthood for Mbuti boys and girls.

“The typical west of Ireland family consists of father, mother, twelve children, and resident Dutch anthropologist.”

— Attributed to Flann O’Brien

Anthropology

Anthropology is the study of human behaviour in societies; thus, it is the study of culture—the arts, beliefs, habits, institutions, and other endeavours that are characteristic of a specific community, society, or nation. Anthropologists study culture in various ways. Cultural anthropologists live within a society to observe behaviour in its natural setting and to record anecdotal evidence. For example, English anthropologist Colin Turnbull studied the

BaMbuti Pygmies in Zaire by living among them for an extended period, observing their behaviour and questioning them about the meaning of their behaviour (Turnbull, 1984). Cultural anthropologists study contemporary societies to determine cultural patterns and regional or national variations.

Anthropological studies highlight the diversity of behaviours that fulfill the functional requisites of society. An understanding of the diversity is necessary to overcome **ethnocentrism**, the tendency to evaluate behaviour from the point of view of your own culture. For example, when Colin Turnbull compared the initiation rites that marked the transition into adulthood of Mbuti boys with his own experience as an upper-class English boy, he concluded that his private boarding school education did not prepare him for marriage and sex as well as the initiation rites prepared the Mbuti boys (Turnbull, 1984). By reading anthropological studies of other cultures, people will come to understand that all cultural behaviour is “invented” and, as a result, they will develop an ability to observe their own culture objectively.

Sociology

Sociology is the social science that explains the behaviour of individuals in social groups, families, and society. Sociologists investigate social facts, the social sources of behaviour that are used to explain rates of behaviour. For example, Canadian sociologist Reginald Bibby is best known for his studies of adolescence and youth in Canada. The marketing industry has used his analysis of adolescent behaviour and attitudes to plan effective sales strategies targeting the adolescent consumer. Educators have used his conclusions about students to help them design the school curriculum to meet the needs of young Canadians.

Sociological studies are more concerned with the patterns of behaviour observed in large numbers of people or groups rather than with the behaviour

of individuals. For example, Statistics Canada uses sociological methods to gather information about Canadians in many aspects of their family, consumer, and business lives. It uses statistical analyses to produce **demographics** of the Canadian population. Governments use demographics for planning social policy, businesses use them for marketing decisions, and you will use them in your academic study of individuals and families. Determining patterns and rates of behaviour of groups facilitates planning and policy decisions within a society, but may not necessarily explain the behaviour of individuals.

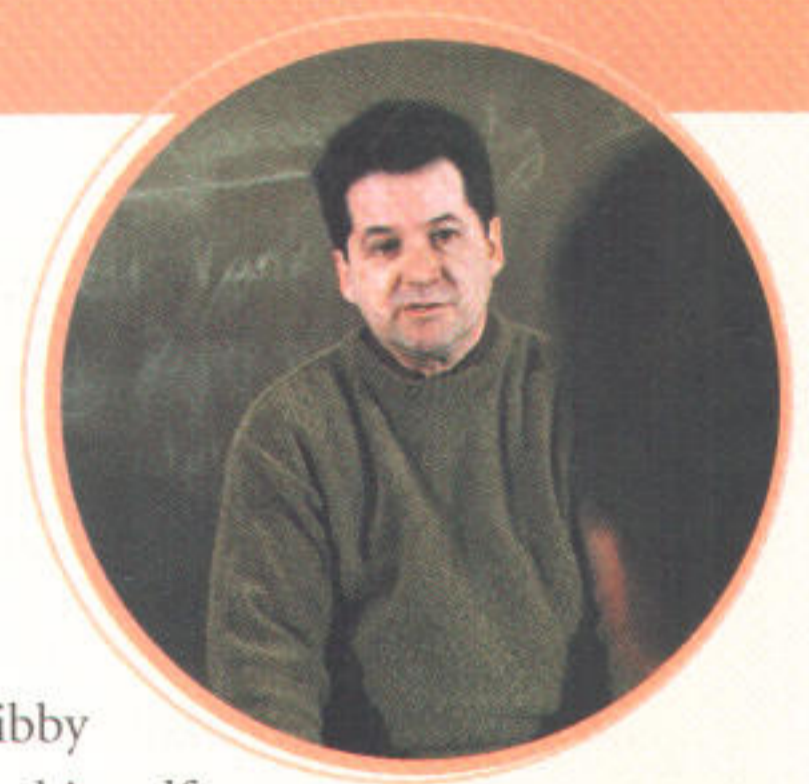
in focus | Reginald Bibby, Sociologist

by Brian Bergman

When Reginald Bibby accepted a teaching position at the University of Lethbridge, in 1975, he was concerned he might become just another invisible academic at a relatively small institution. He needn't have worried. From his post in southwestern Alberta, the 58-year-old sociologist has become Canada's foremost tracker of religious trends and an outspoken expert on teen behaviour and attitudes. Two of his earliest books, 1987's *Fragmented Gods* and 1985's *The Emerging Generation* (the latter co-authored by Don Posterski), sold about 30 000 copies each—phenomenal for works centred on academic research. With the publication in April 2001 of *Canada's Teens: Today, Yesterday and Tomorrow*, his eighth book, Bibby returns to one of his favourite topics—the need for teens and their parents to better understand one another. “If you want to talk about two solitudes in this country,” says Bibby, “talk about young people and adults.”

Bibby comes by his professional passions honestly. The second of seven children, he was born and raised in Edmonton as part of a devout Baptist family. Bibby went on to earn a theology degree and intended at one point to become a minister. But he found himself drawn to sociology, and later earned his Ph.D. from

One of Bibby's favourite topics is the need for teenagers and their parents to understand one another.



Washington State University. While Bibby continues to describe himself as a person for whom faith is important, he is no longer active in any religious group.

Similarly, Bibby's interest in teens stems, in part, from being the father of three grown sons (the boys continued to live with him after their parents' 1979 divorce). Bibby says his experience of the teenage years was very enjoyable, and thinks it can be so for most parents if they strike the right balance between giving teens direction and allowing them to emerge as individuals.

Bibby acknowledges that the very success of his books makes him suspect among some academics, who dismiss him as a “pop sociologist.” He is willing to take the knock. “I realized at an early point that, while the work needed to be academically sound, I also wanted it to be enjoyable and widely read.” He has succeeded on all counts. ■

Source: *Maclean's*. (2001, April 9). p. 44.

Psychology

Psychology is the study of behaviour based on mental processes. Its focus is how the individual thinks. For example, Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget studied the development of cognition in children by observing them thinking in natural and experimental settings. His theory of the Stages of Cognitive Development (1970) that describes how children think at each age is still the basis of curriculum design in school systems throughout the world. Recent developments in brain imaging technology that enable researchers to observe activity in the brain are helping psychologists to describe the biological and chemical bases for the mental processes that have been described in the past.

Psychologists use an understanding of mental processes and the characteristic patterns of motivation that they call the *personality* to explain individual behaviour. They also examine how individuals interact and influence one another. American psychologist Solomon Asch studied the influence of opinions and social pressure on individuals and concluded that conformity is a major factor in human behaviour that can cause people to doubt their own thinking. Psychology can be used for micro studies of individual behaviour and for macro studies of group behaviour. Psychological research is used to help individuals manage their behaviour. On the other hand, businesses also use the results of psychological research to motivate people to change their productive or consumer behaviour.

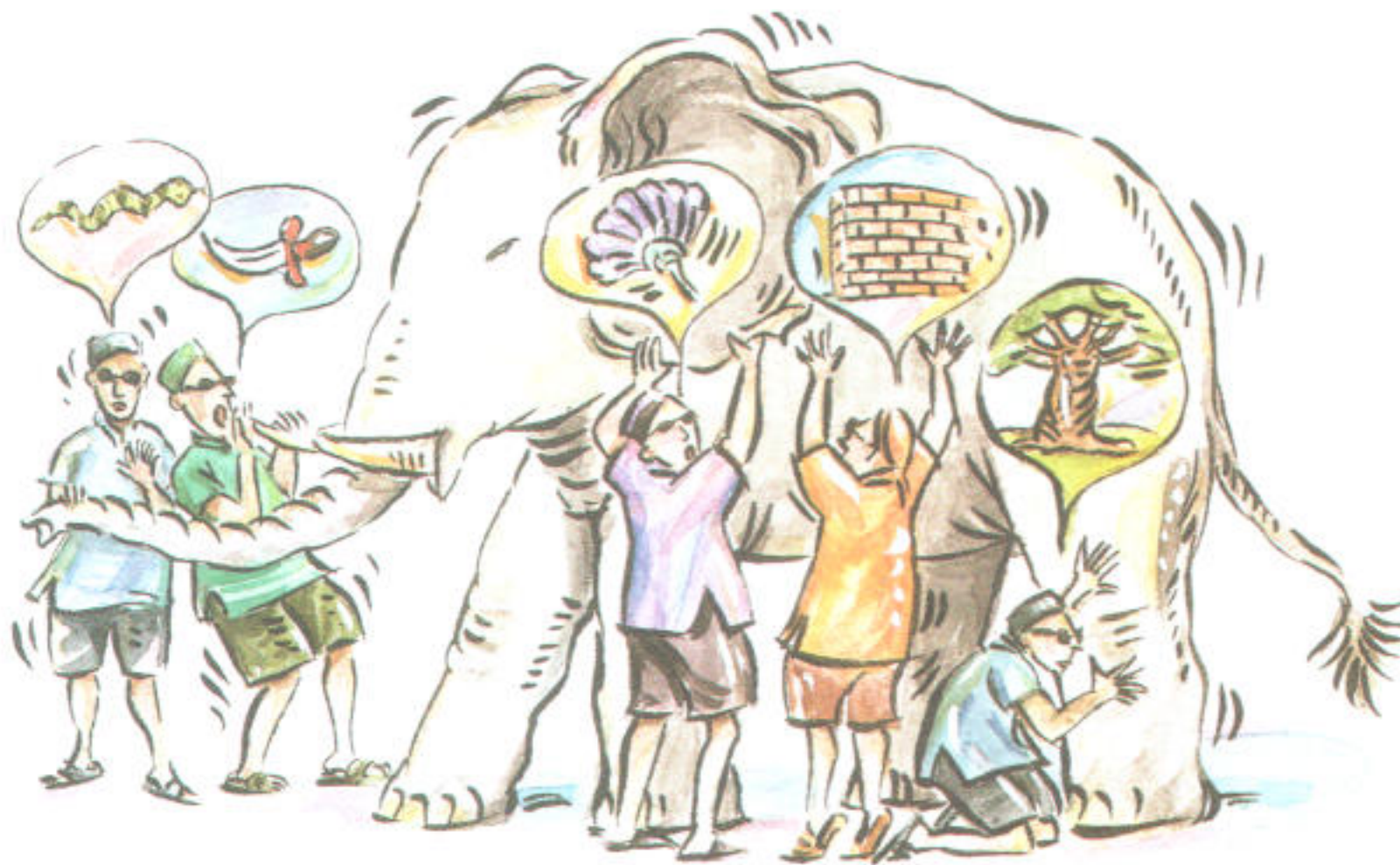
Other Disciplines

Other disciplines are useful in the study of individuals and families. Social history can provide facts about life in the past so that people can identify trends. Like anthropology, history will help you develop objectivity. Economics can provide insight into the economic function of families and help to explain how families acquire and use resources. Politics can be used to examine influences on individual power and authority within families. Religion can help you understand the motivation of individuals to participate in society. It is more common now to ask questions that draw on a variety of disciplines when attempting a comprehensive study of an issue concerning individuals and families in a society.

Family Studies is an interdisciplinary study that integrates anthropology, sociology, and psychology. Researchers, often working as teams, can examine individual and family behaviours from several perspectives at once. Psychologist Daniel Levinson worked with a sociologist and a psychiatrist when he analyzed the lives of men and women and determined the predictable developmental stages. David Buss is studying human sexual behaviour as an

evolutionary psychologist, a perspective that combines psychology and anthropology, to determine the impact of the evolutionary concept of natural selection on human behaviour. Interdisciplinary studies are efficient ways of using theoretical perspectives as research tools.

In the old story of the blind men and the elephant, five blind men approach an elephant from different angles and reach out to touch the elephant. Obviously, when they compare their perceptions of the elephant, their descriptions do not match, and an argument ensues. The owner of the elephant explains how their five descriptions fit together and invites them to touch the elephant from different perspectives in order to understand the complete animal. He then points out that the most important thing about elephants is how they can be used—you can ride them to get where you want to go (Backstein, 1992). This old story is a useful comparison for social science research. A study of human behaviour, whether of individuals or families, benefits from an interdisciplinary approach that combines theoretical perspective, but what is most important is what people learn from the research.



In the old story, when the blind men examined the elephant, each man had a different understanding of the elephant because each touched a different part.

Basic Theoretical Perspectives

Imagine that you listen in on a discussion about whether parents should spank their children. One person says that, according to the Bible, parents should not “spare the rod.” Another argues that all violence is wrong, including spanking. Strict parents counter that spanking teaches children that parents mean what they say. Someone questions whether spanking teaches obedience

or fear. Another parent responds that his children, who have never been spanked, are well-behaved. Each person is expressing a point of view about the same subject. Their answers reflect their assumptions about human behaviour and the motivations behind it.

When scientists explain their observations, their answers reflect their theories. Theories are essential tools when conducting research and, like any tool, should be suited to the task and used appropriately. Some theories are durable and have been used to explain human behaviour for many years. Others have fallen into disfavour and have been replaced by newer, more useful theories. In his book *A Brief History of Time: From the Big Bang to Black Holes*, physicist Stephen Hawking (1988, p. 9) tackled a much larger task than explaining individual and family behaviour: he attempted to explain the origins of the universe. Nevertheless, he defined theory in a way that is applicable to all disciplines and explained how to evaluate whether a theory is a good theory:

I shall take the simple-minded view that a theory is just a model of the universe, or a restricted part of it, and a set of rules that equate qualities in the model to observations that we make. It exists only in our minds and does not have any other reality (whatever that might mean). A theory is a good theory if it satisfies two requirements: It must accurately describe a large class of observations on the basis of a model that contains only a few arbitrary elements, and it must make definite predictions about the results of future observations.

“It is the theory that determines what we can observe.”

— Albert Einstein

Theories are not facts, just attempts to explain evidence. In the physical sciences, a valid theory considers all of the evidence and can be used to predict what will happen. Therefore, evidence that does not support the theory would indicate that the theory is inaccurate. On the other hand, theories in the social sciences define patterns and trends, not rules—and probabilities, not absolutes. Therefore, there are many theories that attempt to explain the same set of observations. You will examine two sociological theories, two psychological theories, and several interdisciplinary theories. The purpose of your study will be to suggest which theory is most useful for each investigation and what facts you should gather. Let us return to the analogy of the blind men and the elephant. Although the trunk is an obvious way to explain an elephant, measuring the ears is more useful for determining whether you are observing an African or an Asian elephant.

Functionalism

Functionalism is the sociological theory that attempts to explain how a society is organized to perform its required functions effectively. This theory, also called *structural functionalism* because it focuses on how the structures function within society, is the oldest sociological theory and is also used by anthropologists. These structures, such as the law, the political system, and the family, are called **institutions**. Functionalism assumes that societies are stable when structures function in ways that benefit society. Change can occur if the structures are able to adjust to maintain equilibrium in the society, but change will happen slowly.

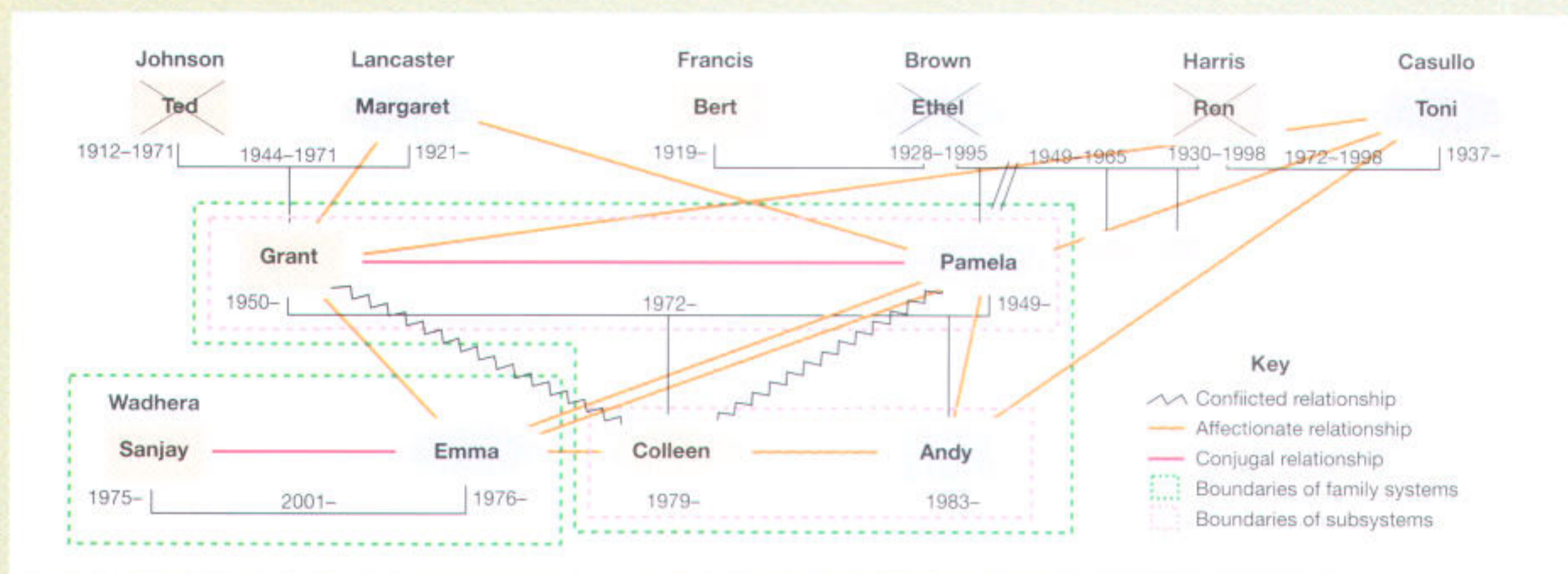
Functionalists examine the roles that individuals play within an institution such as the family. As you learned before, the groups within society motivate individuals to act. A **status** is a specific position within a social group. For example, you are a student. A **role** is the set of behaviours that an individual is expected to demonstrate within a status. For example, students are expected to attend class, ask questions, conduct investigations, and complete assignments. As you have noticed, societies run more smoothly when each individual behaves according to his or her specific role. Individuals learn the appropriate behaviour for the many roles they will play in society through the process of socialization.

Functionalists make observations about role behaviour and determine the rates at which various behaviours occur. They describe the most prevalent behaviours as the **norm**. Behaviours that occur at a lower rate are away from the norm, or abnormal. For example, an analysis of the rates of employment in Canadian families has determined that with most married couples, both husband and wife are employed. In some marriages, the husband is employed and the wife is not, or vice versa. In this case, a functionalist would conclude that it is normal for a husband to be employed, but abnormal for him to stay at home while his wife works. Functionalism uses a macro approach that assumes the organization of society is based on a consensus about what is functional. However, a problem with functionalism is a tendency for functionalists to go beyond explaining how a society is organized to prescribing how individuals within a society should behave.



Stay-at-home dads are becoming more common. Functionalists might ask whether this changing role benefits society, but systems theorists would ask how it affects the roles of wives and children.

case study | A Genogram of the Johnson Family System



A genogram is a diagram, much like a family tree, that depicts the relationships within a family system. You can use whatever symbols have meaning for you as you identify the members of your family system, describe the subsystems within the family, and analyze the nature of the relationships among individuals in the family.

The Johnson family is an extended family system, part of the larger Harris-Vidoni family that you read about in Chapter 1. Pamela, the oldest Harris child, married Grant Johnson in 1972. They have three children. Emma was born in 1976, Colleen in 1979, and Andy in 1983. Pamela and Grant have been a subsystem within the family system for over 30 years. They share their love of travel, theatre, and politics with their children in the larger family system, but they spend a lot of time together, gardening and discussing their work, without the children. The children, who are now grown up, formed a strong sibling subsystem based on a shared interest in sports leadership. The two girls were especially close, but Colleen and Andy formed a closer relationship, maintaining the sibling subsystem, when Emma went to university.

Emma is now married, forming a new family system with her husband, Sanjay. However, she maintains a close connection with her family of origin, because she and Sanjay live in a basement apartment in Pam and Grant's house.

The family is basically happy, although visitors think they are loud and argue a great deal—the inevitable consequence of living with people with strong opinions! Colleen's relationship with her parents has been conflicted for several years, but it does seem to be improving since Emma got married and Colleen moved away for university. ■

1. What kind of relationships do the children have with their grandparents?
2. What might be the reasons for the conflict between Colleen and her parents?
3. Why is there a boundary around Emma and Sanjay, even though they live in the same house as Pam and Grant?
4. Why is there a boundary around the subsystem of Colleen and Andy?

Systems Theory

Systems theory is the sociological theory that attempts to explain how groups of individuals interact as a system, a set of different parts that work together and influence one another in a relatively stable way over time. Family systems theory applies to the examination of family processes. A basic concept is that family systems have a complex organization. This means that although the organization is not a simple sequential one, it is not chaotic (Kantor & Lehr, 1975).

A basic principle of systems theory is feedback, a process by which the system informs its members how to interact to maintain the stability of the system. Because feedback implies give and take, the individuals within the family system influence one another in a reciprocal way, making it difficult to trace the origins of influence or to describe the organization of the family.

Family systems have special characteristics. They maintain a relatively stable size because members can be added to families only by birth, adoption, or cohabitation or marriage, and can leave only by death. However, some family systems theorists argue that individuals continue to exert an influence on the behaviour of others after they have left the family household, just as they do after divorce (Carter & McGoldrick, 1989). The larger family system contains subsystems:

- the family-unit subsystem of those members sharing a household
- the interpersonal subsystems between individuals, such as husband-wife or mother-son
- the personal subsystem comprised of interaction between the individual as self and as a member of the family

The restricted yet continuous membership, the multi-generational extent, and the hierarchy of subsystems contribute to the complexity of family systems.

Family systems develop strategies for achieving the goals and functions of individuals and of the family, and for interacting with the external society. Strategies are defined as patterns of interaction that are repeated; one could call them *meaningful habits* (Kantor & Lehr, 1975). Strategies require the collaboration of all members to continue. Therefore, all members share responsibility for the patterns of behaviour. For example, people who continually argue about chores share responsibility for this habit. Family systems adapt when a change in one person's behaviour causes the behaviour of others to evolve, resulting in new strategies. For example, when a wife and mother returns to work after having a child, new strategies for doing housework will evolve as her husband and children take on some of the chores. Unlike functionalism,

which explains the actions of individuals in groups, systems theory explains the behaviour of individuals as inseparable from the group. A limitation of systems theory is that it can be difficult to determine how others within the family are influencing an individual's behaviour.

Cooley's Looking-Glass Theory

"I am not what I think I am. I am not what you think I am. I am what I think you think I am."

— Charles Cooley

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism is a psychological theory that attempts to explain how individuals choose how they will act based on their perceptions of themselves and of others. People experience their social world, and then define and interpret their experiences to give them meaning. It is the perceptions, or the meanings that people give to their experience of the world, that matter, not the social facts. For example, if someone puts a hand on your shoulder, you will interpret the gesture and determine what it means before you respond. Only after the mental process of "giving meaning" do people act. Mental processes are not visible; only the actions that follow them are. Therefore, symbolic interactionists attempt to understand the point of view of the actor to explain the action.

Symbolic interactionism is based on three basic concepts:

1. An individual develops a self that has two parts: the "me" that consists of objective qualities (tall, male, student) and the "I" that is the subjective awareness of self (good student, shy, lonely). According to psychologist Charles Cooley, the "I" is based on how feedback from other people is interpreted.
2. People must also "take the attitude of the other" to be able to anticipate what the other person will do and decide how they should respond. This is what George Mead, a philosopher and psychologist, believed. This role-taking is the basis for human interaction.
3. People are able to interact effectively only if they can communicate using a common language; that is, shared symbols, Mead argued. Language is the means by which individuals interpret and give meaning to their experiences of self and others in order to interact in relationships.

A popular application of symbolic interactionism was used by John Gray in his book *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* (1992). He explained that men and women have problems in their relationships because they give different meanings to actions and words. Therefore, by acting in ways that reflect their own interpretation of the other sex, they behave in ways that are confusing to the other sex. He generalizes that since men and women do not

share common symbols, they could improve their relationships by learning what the other sex means by their behaviour.

Symbolic interactionism is a psychological theory because it emphasizes the mental processes of perception and interpretation in determining the behaviour of individuals. It also explains how people present themselves to others using shared symbols. It is useful as a micro theory for analyzing observations of individuals and small groups of people. A limitation of symbolic interactionism is the possibility that because the researcher perceives and interprets the actions of the individuals during the observation, the observations could be influenced by the researcher's self-image and beliefs and could, therefore, be inaccurate.

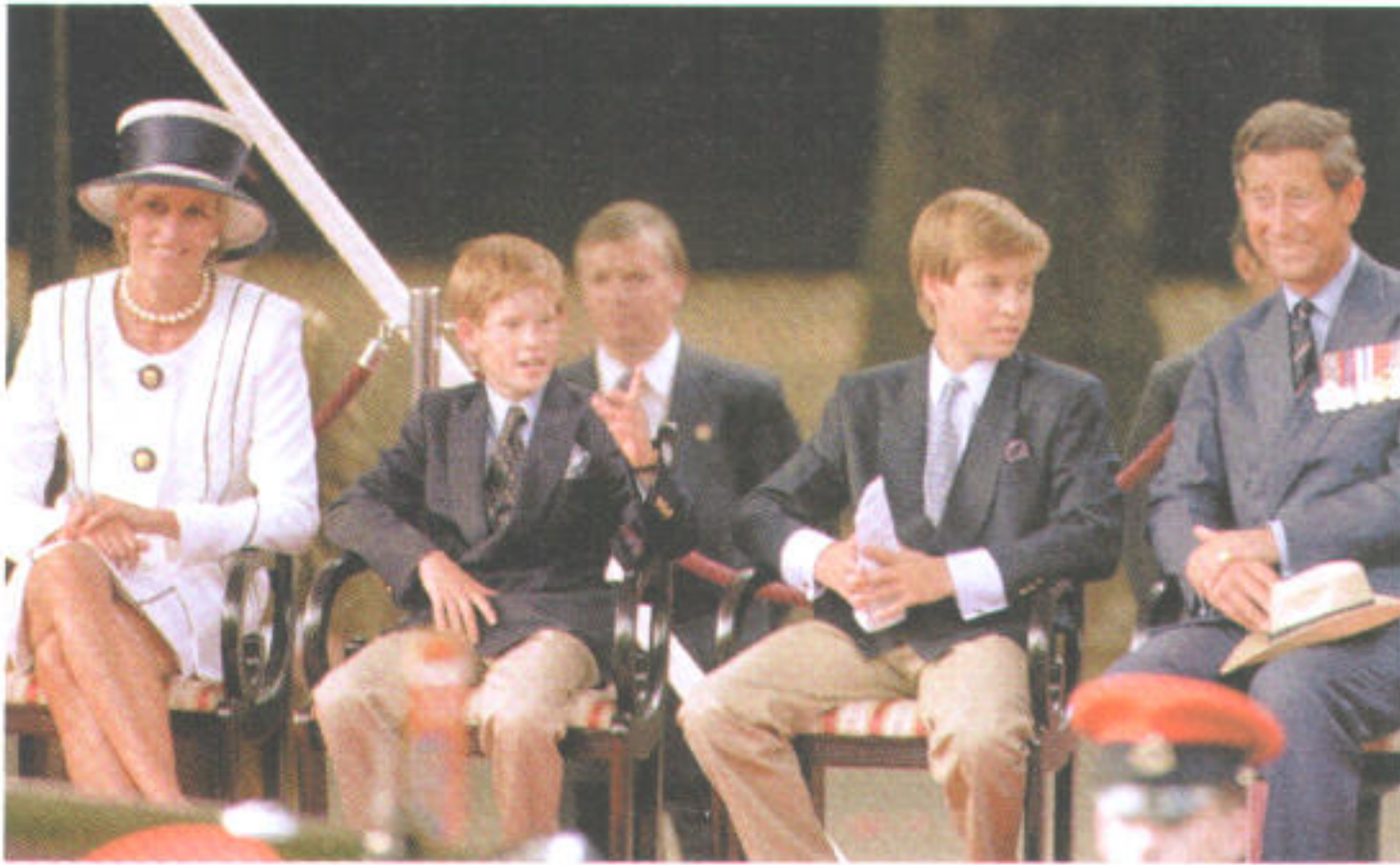


Symbolic interactionism explains that because men and women might interpret situations differently and use different language to express their ideas, misunderstandings can result.

Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory is a psychological theory that attempts to explain the social factors that influence how individuals interact within reciprocal relationships. Social exchange theorists explain that although individuals are constrained by role expectations, they act within each role to maximize the benefits they will receive and to minimize the costs to themselves. Social exchange theory borrows from symbolic interactionism when it says that individuals interpret their experiences of self and others to determine the benefits and costs. Therefore, the benefits and costs of a relationship are not facts, but are perceptions formed by each individual.

Social exchange theory can be used to explain choices of marriage partners. The marriage of Prince Charles and Diana, the late Princess of Wales, illustrates the trade-off in marriage. For the royal family, Diana offered the benefits of youth, fertility, and beauty that would ensure a healthy and attractive heir to the throne and draw favour from the public. She was also of noble blood and had been socialized for public life. Charles offered wealth, a luxurious lifestyle, and the opportunity for his wife to become a queen. Their marriage was successful in that it produced two sons as heirs. However, they separated when it became evident that Charles was unwilling to end his relationship with Camilla Parker-Bowles, and Diana was unable to withstand the restrictions placed on her by the royal family. The costs of the relationship were greater than the rewards.



According to social exchange theory, the benefits of staying in the relationship must outweigh the benefits of an alternative relationship, or it will not last. In the case of Prince Charles and the late Princess Diana, the benefits did not outweigh the costs, and they parted.

Relationships are stable when the benefits that each individual receives balance the costs of the relationship. Benefits are rewarding because they meet a perceived need and can include physical or emotional security, access to goods and services, and social approval. The costs of a relationship are those actions that meet the needs of another, such as providing physical or emotional support, or sharing goods and services. According to this theory, individuals prefer relationships that are cost-effective, those in which the benefits

are greater than those of alternative relationships. Social scientists use social exchange theory to explain how individuals make decisions to form and maintain relationships that might appear unacceptable to others. However, the fact that some people are offended by the cost/benefit analysis could be a limitation.

Developmental Theories

Developmental theories use an interdisciplinary approach to attempt to describe patterns of growth and change throughout the human life span. As individuals progress through life, they face role expectations that challenge them to develop. These challenges are called *developmental tasks*. For example, American psychologist Erik Erikson explained that people develop their individual identities separate from their parents to make the transition from adolescence to adulthood. They need to do this before they can form an intimate relationship with another person (Erikson, 1980). Developmental theories describe predictable changes in the behaviour of individuals or families. Because they explain how a personal or a family-unit system adapts in response to internal or external stimuli, they can be combined with systems theory to analyze how the transitions take place.

Developmental theories examine biological, psychological, social, and cultural factors that influence development in an interdisciplinary approach. Developmental theories are attempts to explain the factors that influence differences in behaviour demonstrated by individuals at different ages. Researchers must be careful to determine whether the differences are caused, in fact, by the age-stage of the individuals. Differences in behaviour could reflect factors that are typical only of those born in the same period of time; for example, being a “baby boomer” could result in patterns of behaviour

that will not be repeated by adults who were born ten years later. Differences could also reflect social change rather than development (Bee, 1987). Developmental theories based on long-term studies of many **cohorts**, or well-defined groups, can be used cautiously to understand the behaviour of individuals, but are not intended to be used to govern how people should behave or to criticize those whose lives follow a different pattern.

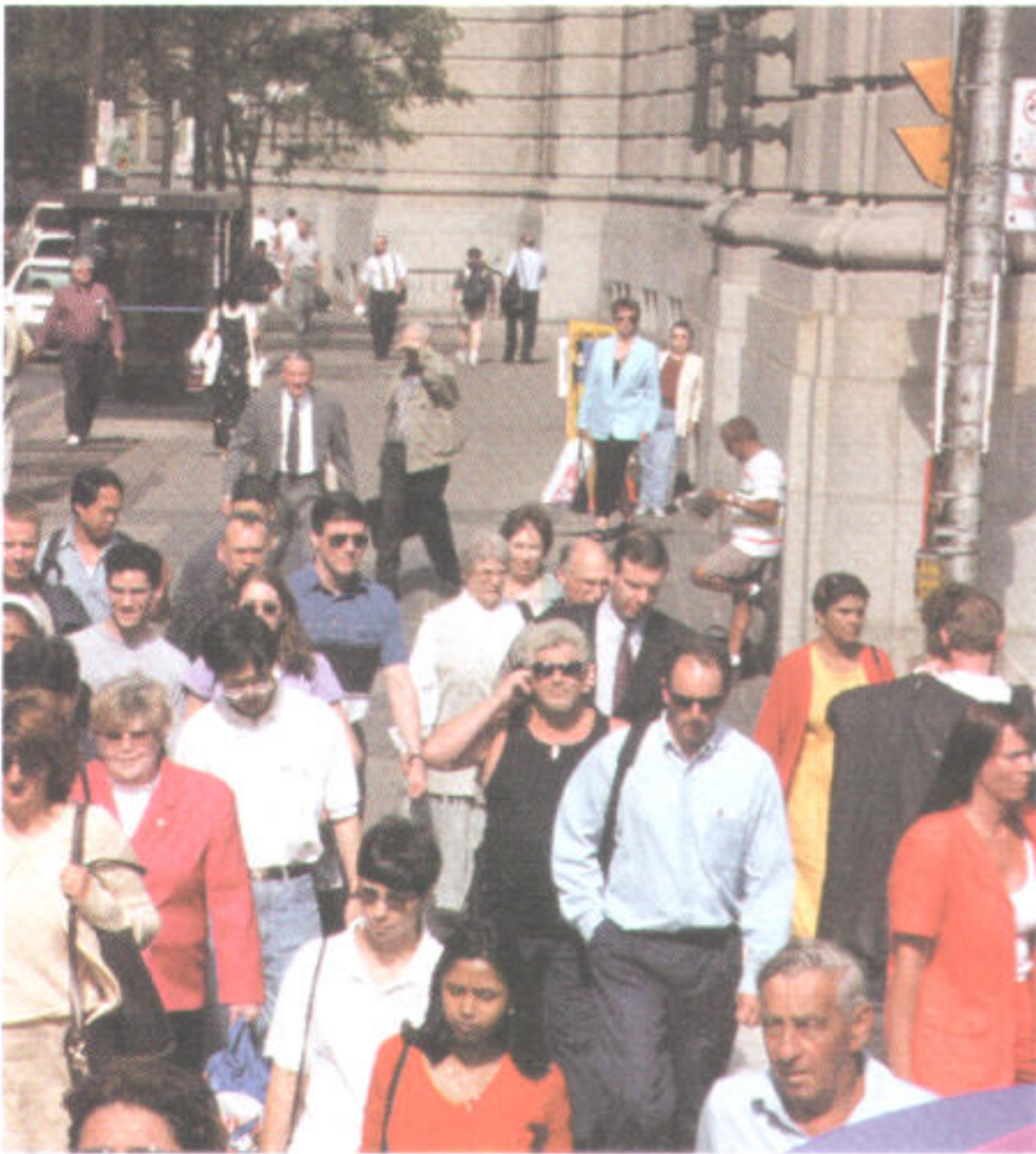
The family life-cycle framework applies the developmental perspective to the life spans of families. It assumes that families, like individuals, have life spans with predictable stages, marked by **normative events** such as marriage, the birth of a child, or a child leaving home. At each stage, the family faces specific developmental tasks that are prerequisites for moving on to the next stage. A newly married couple faces the task of negotiating how they will make decisions and solve problems. Mastering this task prepares them for the challenges of the next stage, if they have children. Of course, not all stages will fit all families, and some families will experience non-normative events, such as the death of a child, that present unique challenges. The identification of stages in the life of families is arbitrary and reflects the cultural realities of the society. The family life-cycle framework was developed by sociologists after World War II to enable policy makers to determine the needs of American families. Since it assumes that families at a similar stage of their life cycles face similar tasks, it still provides a useful perspective for investigating families in Canada.

Conflict Theory

Conflict theory is an interdisciplinary sociological and political theory that explains how power, not functional interdependence, holds a society together. It states that conflict exists between groups in society because of inequalities in power. It assumes that groups compete with one another to meet their needs. If groups are in competition, then the needs of all will not be met equally. This competition can also result in exploitation by individuals in the group with greater power over others from a group with lesser power. Conflict theory is a macro theory that explains inequalities. Unlike other theories, it is used to criticize, not explain, society. Conflict theorists ask the question



The family life-cycle framework predicts that parents of newborn children will have to adjust how they relate to each other to allow for their roles as mother and as father to develop.



Conflict theory and feminist theories argue that inequalities in power result in social structures that do not work for everyone.

“Functional for whom?” because, unlike functionalists, they question why the structure of society does not work for everyone (Teevan & Hewitt, 1995).

According to conflict theory, society is organized into groups to divide people according to their power and to encourage competition. Karl Marx described the class divisions within capitalist societies in the nineteenth century. He called those who controlled the means of production, the wealthy owners of businesses and factories, the *bourgeoisie*. The bourgeoisie were a small group in society, yet they had tremendous power because they controlled the livelihood of the masses of working people, the *proletariat*. He predicted that the natural evolution would be for the bourgeoisie to become smaller and richer, for the proletariat to become larger and poorer, and the gap between them to become greater. A society would be stable if people perceived the dominant group as being more entitled to the benefits of

society than others. Many people believe that this inequality is the natural state of human society. Marx argued that inequalities could and should be eliminated.

German socialist Friedrich Engels suggested that the divisions between the sexes in marriage not only paralleled the divisions between the classes, but also were necessary to maintain the class distinctions of capitalism. Men’s labour outside the home was paid, but women’s labour inside the home was unpaid. The concept of family wage meant that the salary paid to a man was sufficient to enable him to support a wife and children. Therefore, men of all classes wielded economic power within the household, while women had no alternative but to marry, reproduce, and provide the unpaid labour necessary to maintain the family. However, men could only maintain their power by continuing to sell their labour for wages, and women could not have economic support without maintaining the marriage. Engels argued that the oppression of women was linked to capitalism and would not end until capitalism was eliminated. Therefore, conflict theory describes the relationship of men and women within a family as one of exploitation and oppression, and is used for analyzing power and authority within the family.

Feminist Theories

Feminist theories were developed in the second half of the twentieth century to explain the impact of sex and gender on behaviour, and to consider issues

of human behaviour from the specific point of view of women. Feminist theories have their roots in conflict theory, but were developed to separate sex and gender from class. They also developed as a reaction to gender biases in sociology. For example, **androcentricity** is a bias that assumes male experience is human experience and therefore also applies to women. Therefore, it does not consider gender in research. On the other hand, **double standards** are biases that apply different standards for evaluating the behaviour of men and women. Feminist theories, like conflict theory, argue that change is required so that the needs of all people are met.

Feminist theories attempt to explain social inequalities between men and women from a female perspective. *Liberal feminism* argues that discriminatory policies force women into an inferior social class that restricts their rights to participate fully in society according to their individual abilities. Thus, American feminist writer Betty Friedan describes feminism as a theory of human rights (Code, 1993). Liberal feminists try to change social policy through political means. *Socialist feminism* is based on the assumption that the status of women is a social inequality rooted in the sexual division of paid and unpaid labour. It challenges both capitalism and the patriarchal model of the family. *Radical feminism* argues that the differences in power between men and women result in any male-female relationship as being exploitative. It suggests that only the development of a separate female culture can correct this (Code, 1993). The solutions feminists advocate vary because feminist theories differ in how they perceive the causes of the inequity.

Conducting Research in the Social Sciences

The purposes of the social sciences are to describe and explain the behaviour of individuals and families, predict how individuals and families will behave in response to their environments, and suggest ways of managing their



The rebirth of feminism in the 1960s resulted in changes in the law to eliminate discrimination against women, but social attitudes adapt more slowly.

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behaviour. Social science research methods are used to ask questions, to gather information, and to analyze the information. Knowing the methods used in social science research can help you understand the origins of knowledge presented in this and other books about social science subjects. Developing social science research skills will enable you to evaluate the validity of the information in this book and in other sources. You will also be prepared to conduct your own investigation of issues regarding individuals and the family.

As a social scientist, be systematic in your research. Clarify the topic of study by asking questions. Identify the specific research question to be investigated so that the study has a purpose. Begin the research by finding out what information is already known. Conduct a review of the available literature, including books, periodicals, media, and electronic sources. Select sources that analyze research in answer to your question. These sources are called *secondary sources* because they present someone else's analysis second-hand. Summarize your literature review to help develop a thesis that answers your question. If the answer is not clear after a review of secondary sources, continue your research. State a hypothesis, a possible answer to your question, and design an original investigation to gather additional evidence. The subjects of this kind of investigation are called *primary sources*, because you will get the information first-hand. Analyze the results of your research to form conclusions that indicate whether the hypothesis is true and to determine whether your question has been answered.

Research Papers

Social scientists are expected to write research papers that describe the results of their study for other people. There are two major types of research papers.

- **Research essays** Many research tasks will be complete when the secondary research is finished. The results are presented as a research essay in which evidence from the research is described to support a thesis.
- **Research report** The results of an original investigation of a hypothesis are presented as a research report in which the method and the results are described. A research report enables others to evaluate the methods to determine whether the results are reliable.

Publishing research papers contributes to knowledge about individuals and families in Canada for the benefit of future students and researchers.

Ask these questions to assess whether a source of information is valid.

When was it published?

Consider whether the information still applies or whether legal, economic, or political changes have made the information dated. Recent periodicals and books published within ten years are more reliable unless you require historical information.

Where was it published?

Consider whether information gathered in another country applies to Canada. For example, the United States is ten times the size of Canada, and has significant political, historical, ethnocultural, and economic differences that could affect the validity of applying the information to Canada. Psychological research can be universal, but Canadian sources are more reliable for the study of social behaviour.

Who is the author?

Is the author a qualified expert in the subject study or a professional writer who, like you, has conducted research? As you read, determine whether the author has any biases that affect the reliability of the information.

What is the author's purpose?

Consider the author's motivation for publishing the information. Is the source a report of the results of research, a personal opinion, a persuasive argument, an explanation, or a response to another argument? Although persuasive arguments can be more exciting to read, sources that use evidence from research to support statements are more reliable for your studies.

Who is the intended audience?

Consider who paid for the publication and whether the source presents a biased viewpoint. Material written for a specific audience might rely on shared assumptions or stereotypes to support statements. Look for sources that include all evidence in the presentation of ideas.

What is the author's point of view or theoretical perspective?

Consider how the author's point of view is presented and whether a specific theoretical perspective is identified. In a valid source, the author should discuss all evidence, including that which does not support his or her point of view. ■

Research Questions and Hypotheses

A research question establishes the purpose of the research. Preliminary research will reveal whether the topic is relevant enough for there to be sufficient sources of information and will help clarify which aspect of a topic to investigate. Develop a clearly worded research question about a specific aspect of the topic to guide you in selecting information from secondary

sources in your literature review. There are two basic types of questions asked in the social sciences:

- description questions that ask “What happens?”
- explanation questions that ask “Why?” or “How?” (Bee, 1987)

Description and explanation questions form the basis of all research questions.

A *hypothesis* is a possible answer to your research question. You develop it after your review of the literature to explain what happens and why it happens. Sociologists James J. Teevan and W.E. Hewitt of the University of Western Ontario explain *hypothesis* this way:

An hypothesis is a statement of presumed relationship between two or more variables, usually stated in the form “Other things being equal, if A, then B.” If the A variable occurs or goes up or down, then the B variable also occurs or goes up or down. The B variable is usually the one being explained, the A variable the explanation (1995, p. 153).

Variables are qualities, such as gender or birth order, or behaviours, such as marrying or attending university. A is the *independent variable* because it occurs first. B is the *dependent variable* because it depends on A. Thus, A is the cause and B is the effect.

When you study the topic “early adulthood,” you could ask the question, “What factors influence an individual’s decision about when to leave home?” A review of the literature suggests that the decision is influenced by the make-up of an individual’s family. Your hypothesis could be “Children of remarried parents leave home earlier.” Notice that although the hypothesis assumes that other things are equal, it usually does not include those words. In this hypothesis, having remarried parents is the independent variable, and leaving home earlier is the dependent variable.

Ethical Research

Any research using human subjects should be conducted in an ethical manner that respects both the well-being and the dignity of people. The procedures outlined by school boards ensure that this happens in the course of studies. Discuss your study proposal and obtain permission from your teacher before you begin to research. Explain the nature of your research to your subjects carefully and obtain their consent to participate, unless you will be observing people in a public setting or conducting an anonymous survey. If your research requires some sort of deception, you could obtain general consent,

but then you must explain the deception as soon as possible afterwards. For example, if you wanted to observe how people respond to aggressive behaviour, you could obtain the subjects' consent to participate in a study of behaviour in crowds, and then explain after the observation that you had arranged for a colleague to push them aside so that you could observe their reaction. Finally, you must inform the subjects if the research will cause them any physical or emotional discomfort. When you design your investigation, choose the method that will be most effective while being respectful of the people who are helping you in your research.

There are also ethical issues affecting the reporting of your research. Do not change, omit, or make up evidence in a mistaken attempt to improve your report. Any shortcomings should be discussed as a legitimate part of the discussion in a reliable research report. Use citations and references to give credit to the original authors of any work you have consulted, but ensure that the report reflects your own analysis and conclusions. To submit all or part of someone else's work as your own is plagiarism. You also have an obligation to your subjects to let them know the results of the study as soon as they are available. Since the purpose of research is to answer questions, you are responsible for ensuring that your report presents the evidence accurately.

Sample Groups

To conduct an original investigation, you need to gather evidence about behaviour from people who represent the topic of your study. Using your hypothesis, define the population who will be the subjects of your study. Remember that your hypothesis assumes "all other things being equal." Define your population so that you eliminate as much as possible other factors that could confuse the effects of the independent variable. For example, if your hypothesis is that "Boys are more likely to write at the top of a chalkboard than girls are," you should set a *parameter* that defines or limits the subjects' height.



While you are a student, your choice of research method might be limited by whether you have access to the population you want to study.



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Consider such parameters as age, gender, ethnic group, religion, socio-economic class, and level of education. When there are several related variables, such as height and gender, some studies compare the results for two or more groups within the population.

Conducting research using a *sample group* selected from the people you want to study will ease the constraints of time and money. There are two limits when you select your sample group. First, the sample group must be representative of the population you want to study. For example, if you want to study students at your school and 55 percent of the students are girls, 55 percent of your sample group must be girls. Secondly, you cannot generalize beyond the group from which you draw your sample. For example, if your sample group is selected only within your school, you cannot conclude that the results apply to all students in Canada (Teevan & Hewitt, 1995).

Social Science Research Methods

A hypothesis will suggest the type of information that will be gathered and how the information will be analyzed. *Quantitative methods* are those that gather information from many people, which can be analyzed to describe, explain, and predict patterns of behaviour for groups of people. The results of quantitative research can be analyzed using *statistics* to generalize from the behaviour of the sample group to predict the behaviour of the entire group. *Qualitative methods* are used to gather detailed information from individuals to help the researcher understand their behaviour. It assumes that each subject might behave differently and does not usually predict how others will behave. The evidence gathered by qualitative research can be analyzed to determine the reasons for the subjects' behaviour and can be presented anecdotally as case studies. While you are a student, practical considerations such as whether you have access to the population you want to study or have sufficient knowledge of statistics could limit your choice of research method.

Selecting a Research Method

The theoretical perspective that your hypothesis reflects also suggests the methods of gathering information that are most appropriate for your investigation. Choosing methods that other researchers have used makes it easier to see the connections between your research and the research of others. This overview outlines the methods most commonly associated with each approach.

Functionalism

Functionalists use quantitative methods; that is, they count observable behaviours to determine the *norms* (consistent behaviours) or the *trends* (patterns of change in behaviour). To gather a large body of observations, a functionalist perspective uses survey methods. A statistical analysis is used to identify the norms or trends. For example, Statistics Canada applies functionalism when it conducts a census every five years to produce demographics about Canadian society and publishes reports on the trends in the behaviour of Canadians.

Family Systems Theory

Family systems theory looks for the interactions among family members. It can be used to determine how individuals collaborate to carry out a plan or goal, how a change that affects one individual affects the behaviour of other members of the family, or how a family adapts to internal or external stimuli. Both quantitative and qualitative methods can be used. Observation and interviews are useful research methods that enable researchers to observe the interactions within a family.

Symbolic Interactionism and Social Exchange Theory

Symbolic interactionists and social exchange theorists investigate how people interpret their experiences and how they respond. To understand the mental processes of perception and interpretation, they use participant observation to view real behaviour, including behaviour that people may not be aware of, or may be unable to explain. Symbolic interactionists also use interviews to ask the actors to explain their behaviour as it makes sense to them. Social exchange theorists use survey methods to determine the values and priorities of individuals and experiments to enable them to determine factors that affect the choices people make.

Developmental Theories

Developmental theories describe the patterns in individuals' behaviour over time. Since a large and diverse sample group is necessary for identifying patterns, questionnaires and interviews are used to gather life histories from many people. Experiments can be used to determine cause-and-effect relationships. Some researchers also use content analysis for historical research. The sample group usually includes people of various ages, and the research should be repeated later to determine whether patterns apply to different generations and to ensure that the patterns are reliable for predicting behaviour.

Conflict Theory and Feminist Theories

Conflict theory and feminist theorists argue that objective methods that seek only to describe behaviour support social inequalities. Unlike objective researchers, they assume that the role of research is to facilitate change. Therefore, they gather data using qualitative methods and content analysis to determine the reasons for behaviour. Their analysis results in difficult questions that are designed to point out the inequities.

developing your research skills | Research Methods

Quantitative Research Methods

- **Experiments** In an experiment, the experimenter manipulates an independent variable to observe the effects. *Subjects* in the sample group are assigned randomly to an experimental group, or a control group. The independent variable being studied is applied only to the experimental group and not to the *control group*, and the behaviour of both groups is observed. To be valid, the effects should occur only in the experimental group and not in the control group, and they should be observed when the experiment is repeated.
- **Surveys** In surveys, the researcher asks a sample group questions and records their answers. In *questionnaires*, the questions are written and given to the subject to answer in written form. Usually the questions are *closed questions* that require the subject to select from the answers provided. Questionnaires can be used efficiently with very large sample groups. Interviews are usually conducted orally and *contain open-ended* questions that the subjects can answer freely. Interviews are suitable for smaller sample groups and for studies in which the answers cannot be anticipated.
- **Content Analysis** In content analysis, the researcher examines and classifies the ideas presented in a sample group of communications, such as books, letters, movies, or television commercials. The researcher

defines the variables before conducting the research. Although it can be difficult to obtain a reliable sample, content analysis is useful for anthropological and historical research.

Qualitative Research Methods

- **Observations** In observations, the researcher watches and records the subjects' behaviour. Observations might be conducted in a laboratory setting; for example, a child psychologist might observe, from behind a two-way mirror, the interaction between a mother and child. Because the laboratory environment might influence the behaviour, a natural setting is preferred. The researcher can observe from a distance, perhaps using cameras, so that the subjects are unaware that they are being observed. In *participant observation*, the researcher is a participant in the group, and the subjects are aware that they are being observed.
- **Interviews** In interviews, the researcher asks the subject to describe and explain his or her behaviour. As a method of qualitative research, interviews are useful for determining the motivation for the subject's behaviour, which might not be visible to the researcher. To be valid, the interview questions should ask subjects to discuss actions after they occur rather than to speculate about what they might do. Interviews are often combined with participant observation. ■

A research report is a technical paper that presents research in the social sciences. You will read them as part of your studies, and you will write them after you conduct your own investigations. In a research report, present the topic you investigated, your methods, your results, and the meaning of those results in a chronological order that reflects your research process.

Title

In the title identify the main idea of your paper and include the variables (usually).

Abstract

For the abstract write a summary, in about 100–150 words, of the topic that you investigated, the methods, the results, and the meaning of the results.

Introduction

In the introduction, define the terms, review the literature, relate the study to the review of literature, and state the purpose of the study.

Methods

In the method, describe the hypothesis and the specific research method you used to test the hypothesis.

- **Sample Group** In this section, describe the parameters you used to select the participants for the study and how you selected a representative sample.

- **Instruments** In this section, describe the survey, questionnaire, interview or observation schedule, or experiment used in your investigation.
- **Procedure** In this section, outline, step by step, how you conducted the research. Describe what you said and did in precise action terms.

Results

In the results, state your main findings, supported by detailed descriptions of the evidence and including case studies or statistical analysis.

Discussion

In the discussion, summarize the results of your research, explain how the results relate to the review of literature and the theoretical perspective you used in the analysis, and outline the implications of the results. Briefly state your conclusions in a paragraph that ends the discussion.

References

In a research paper, include citations to tell the reader where you found the information. Use in-text citations, like those used in this text, to refer your reader to the references at the end of the paper that acknowledge all of your sources. Use the American Psychological Association (APA) style in the social sciences. ■

chapter 2 Review and Apply

Knowledge/Understanding Thinking/Inquiry

1. Identify three preconceptions or concerns you have about issues affecting individuals and families in Canada as you start your study. How might each of these concerns affect the choices you make about your life in the future?
2.
 - a) What are the four fundamental questions asked by social scientists?
 - b) If you apply the four fundamental questions to each of the issues you identified in question 1, what specific questions would you ask?
3. Explain how the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, and psychology differ in their study of individual and family behaviour.
4. Select a topic that interests you about individuals and families in Canada.
 - a) What would an anthropologist ask about the topic?
 - b) What would a sociologist ask?
 - c) What would a psychologist ask?
5. Identify the basic theoretical assumptions of the following theories, and suggest how each would explain what happens in a classroom such as yours.
 - functionalism
 - systems theory
 - symbolic interactionism
 - social exchange theory
 - developmental perspective
 - conflict theory
 - feminist theories
6. Explain how you would choose a representative sample of high school students in your community for a research study concerning the behaviour of high school students.

Knowledge/Understanding Thinking/Inquiry Communication

7. Distinguish between a research essay and a research report. What experience have you had so far in writing, reading, or using each type of research paper?

8. Select an interesting topic concerning individual and family life. Write research questions that could be used as the basis for a research study that reflects as many of the various theoretical perspectives as possible.

Knowledge/Understanding Communication Thinking/Inquiry Application

9. Select a research study from the Internet. Describe the study under the following headings:
 - a) Research Question
 - b) Hypothesis
 - c) Research Method
 - d) Sample Group
 - e) Results
 - f) Conclusion
10. Identify a topic for a research study concerning individual and family life that you would like to pursue. After some preliminary reading to clarify the issues, formulate a research question that will be the basis of your research.

unit 2 Leaving Home

UNIT EXPECTATIONS

While reading this unit, you will:

- analyze decisions and behaviours related to individual role expectations
- analyze theories and research on the subject of individual development, and summarize your findings
- analyze current issues and trends relevant to individual development, and speculate on future directions
- analyze issues and data from the perspectives associated with key theories in the disciplines of anthropology, psychology, and sociology
- communicate the results of your inquiries

chapter 3

Early Adulthood

chapter 4

Becoming an Adult

chapter 5

Young Adult Issues and Trends

Although legally you are an adult at the age of 18, leaving home and becoming financially independent are signs that you are acquiring an adult role in Canadian society.

