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"First Comes Love, Then Comes Marriage, Then Comes Mary with a Baby Carriage":

Marriage, Sex, and Reproduction

IN 1963, I worked for a time at a mental hospital in Washington state. Although the psychiatrist and psychologist in charge were men, 90 percent of the rest of the staff, from the lowest-paid attendant counselors to the more highly trained occupational therapists and researchers, were women. Despite our different pasts and trajectories—some of us going on to college, some likely to work at the hospital for life; some young and unmarried, others older women with children in school—we exchanged confidences that now seem rare among people of such different racial, class, and age backgrounds. What bridged the gap between us was our sense that we all shared, or would share, a common life course—a predictable pattern in which women fell in love, got married, had sex, and bore children. Sometimes, granted, they had sex first, but they eventually married; if they did not, any children that resulted were adopted into a family that had proceeded in the accepted manner. Marriage, after all, was central to everyone's establishment of adult status and identity, and since we were women, marriage and childrearing would occupy the bulk of our active adult lives.

Jeri,* the physical therapist, married since 1951, had three children. She had gone "all the way" with her future husband while in college, a fact he often threw up to her when they argued over whether she could bring friends home from work. Sue, who dropped out of high school in 1952 to get married, had a similar sexual and marital history,

though her fights with her husband were usually triggered by his infidelities. Sherry and Gwen had had sex with a couple of other men before their marriages in the late 1950s, but they would never admit this to their husbands. Camilla had been a virgin at marriage in 1961, and she now regretted it. Carol and Willie Lee did not expect to be virgins when they married and claimed they would never put up with Jeri's husband's attitudes, but they did think I was too "young and innocent" to hang out with Annette, the "wild" one in the bunch. Still single at twenty-four, she had a tendency to develop huge crushes on men who stood out from the crowd in any way, from hospital administrators to the lead singer in the band at the local bar. If the only way she could spend some time with them was in a one-night stand, so be it. Annette was hardly permissive, however. She joined the older women in condemning the counselor who had gotten pregnant a few years earlier, put her baby up for adoption, and come back "pretending nothing had happened."

In 1983, I went to a twenty-year reunion of people who had worked in our ward. Many of the older women still worked there, although half were divorced and one had died. Of the younger ones, almost a quarter remained unmarried, two with children out of wedlock; another quarter had been divorced at least once. Annette, after admitting to herself that she had never been sexually attracted to men anyway, had finally settled down in a monogamous, long-term relationship: She and an older divorced woman had been together for eleven years. Willie Lee's husband had had a vasectomy in his previous marriage, so they were trying to adopt a baby.

The breakdown of the expectations of these women was not exceptional, nor was it caused by willful abandonment of traditional family roles and values. None of the women I spoke with was quite sure how she got where she was today. Yet even those who had experienced the most pain in their transitions saw no way of going back to older patterns, either for themselves or for their children.

The breakdown of the tight links and orderly progression we had once assumed to exist between marriage, sex, reproduction, and childrearing provides compelling evidence for those who contend that a "revolution" has occurred in family life. Marriage, for example, is no longer the major transition into adulthood. The average age for marriage has risen by six years since 1950. More than three-quarters of today's eighteen- to twenty-four-year-old men and women have never married, and the majority of young adults today leave their parental homes and establish themselves in jobs well before mar-

*I have changed the names of these women for obvious reasons.

riage. Marriage also is less likely to last until death. About 50 percent of first marriages, and 60 percent of second ones, can be expected to end in divorce. In 1988, sixteen out of every thousand children under age eighteen saw their parents divorce, down from nineteen in 1980, but still twice as many as in 1963. As a result of both the rising age for marriage and the frequency of divorce, men and women spend, on average, more than half their lives unmarried.¹

Men and women also live more of their lives alone. Despite recent increases in the number of grown children who live with one or both of their parents, the number of single-person households has risen dramatically. Almost four times as many Americans between the ages of thirty-five and forty-four live alone today as did so in 1970.²

Childrearing is no longer as tightly linked to marriage as in the past. Approximately three-quarters of a million unmarried couples in America are raising children together. In 1990, a quarter of all new births were out of wedlock; in half of them, there was no identified father. Since parenthood has ceased to inhibit divorce the way it did as late as 1970, more than half of American children will live in a single-parent household for some period during their childhood.³

Sex is far more likely to occur outside of marriage than at any time during recent history. By the mid-1980s, 75 percent of American women were sexually active before marriage. There are 2.9 million cohabitating couples in America today, an increase of 80 percent since 1980. People also are initiating sex at an earlier age. The percentage of women aged fifteen to nineteen who had had sexual intercourse at least once increased by one-third between 1971 and 1979.⁴

The separation of sex, marriage, and childrearing is most dramatically demonstrated in the new legal and social definitions of family that have emerged over the past two decades. Many states and cities have adopted "domestic partner" laws, allowing unmarried heterosexual or homosexual couples certain privileges that used to be accorded only to traditional married couples. In 1989, New York's highest court ruled that the surviving member of a gay couple held the same legal rights to the apartment they had shared as would a surviving wife or husband—the relationship had been exclusive, long-lasting, committed, self-sacrificing, and public enough to qualify as a family.⁵

There are more than two million gay mothers and fathers in America. Although most of their children come from earlier heterosexual relationships, up to 10,000 lesbians have borne children through

sperm donations or other such procedures, and many gay and lesbian couples have won the right to adopt children.⁶

Compared to the first sixty years of the twentieth century, then, there is now an increasing diversity of family types in America. The male-breadwinner family no longer provides the central experience for the vast majority of children, but it has not been replaced by any new modal category: Most Americans move in and out of a variety of family types over the course of their lives—families headed by a divorced parent, couples raising children out of wedlock, two-earner families, same-sex couples, families with no spouse in the labor force, blended families, and empty-nest families.⁷

Something Old ...

Throughout most of this book, I have emphasized that many recent innovations in family behaviors have deep roots in our past, and many so-called traditional norms never really existed. It would be easy, from one perspective, to organize this chapter along the same lines. None of these changes, taken by itself, is unprecedented or qualitatively new. While comparisons between 1960 and 1990 show enormous discontinuities in patterns of marriage, sex, and reproduction, 1960 represented the end year of a very deviant decade.

Today's diversity of family forms, rates of premarital pregnancy, productive labor of wives, and prevalence of blended families, for example, would all look much more familiar to colonial Americans than would 1950s patterns. The age of marriage today is no higher than it was in the 1870s, and the proportion of never-married people is lower than it was at the turn of the century. Although fertility has decreased overall, the actual rate of childlessness is lower today than it was at the turn of the century; a growing proportion of women have at least one child during their lifetime. Many statistics purporting to show the eclipse of traditional families in recent years fail to take into account our longer life spans and lower mortality rates. As one author asks: "Are an eighty-year-old husband and wife really to be counted as 'nontraditional' just because they've lived long enough to see all their children leave home?" Even though marriages today are more likely to be interrupted by divorce than in former times, they are much less likely to be interrupted by death, so that about

the same number of children spend their youth in single-parent households today as at the turn of the century, and fewer live with neither parent.⁸

The 1960s generation did not invent premarital and out-of-wedlock sex. Indeed, the straitlaced sexual morality of nineteenth-century Anglo-American societies, partly revived in the 1950s, seems to have been a historical and cultural aberration. Anthropologist George Murdock examined cultural rules concerning sexual behavior in 250 societies and found that only 3 shared our "generalized sex taboo" on sexual behavior of any type outside marriage. Nor is there evidence that homosexual or lesbian activity is more frequent now than it was in the past; the claim that increased toleration of such activity portends reproductive doom does not mesh with the fact that two-thirds of the historical societies for which evidence is available have condoned homosexual relations.⁹

America's Founding Fathers were not always married: In Concord, Massachusetts, a bastion of Puritan tradition, one-third of all children born during the twenty years prior to the American Revolution were conceived out of wedlock; during the 1780s and 1790s, one-third of the brides in rural New England were pregnant at marriage. A study of illegitimacy in North Carolina found that out-of-wedlock birth rates for white women were approximately the same in 1850 as in 1970, though the pattern was more indicative of class exploitation than it is today: The fathers tended to be well-off heads of intact families, while the mothers lived in poor, female-headed households.¹⁰

In nineteenth-century America, the "age of consent" for girls in many states was as low as nine or ten, which rather makes a mockery of the term. What one author calls "the myth of an abstinent past" stems in part from lower fecundity and higher fetal mortality in previous times, making early sexual activity less likely to end up in pregnancy or birth. The proportion of fecund fifteen-year-old girls in America increased by 31 percent between 1940 and 1968 alone. In 1870, only 13 percent of European girls were fully fecund at age 17.5, compared to 94 percent of American girls the same age today.¹¹

It is also estimated that there was one abortion for every five live births during the 1850s, and perhaps as many as one for every three in 1870. Although abortion and birth control were criminalized in the 1880s, and the age of consent for girls was raised, the triumph of the "purity" movement was short-lived. America experienced a sexual revolution in the 1920s that was every bit as scandalous to contemporaries as that of the past few decades.¹²

Even the 1950s were hardly asexual. My modern students, who accept premarital sex between affectionate partners quite matter-of-factly, are profoundly shocked when they read about panty raids and the groups of college boys who sometimes roamed through a campus chanting, "We want girls! We want sex!" Much of the modern sexual revolution, indeed, consists merely of a decline in the double standard, with girls adopting sexual behaviors that were pioneered much earlier by boys. This has led to a remarkable *decrease* in at least one form of extramarital sexual activity: Prostitution is far less widespread than it was in the nineteenth century, when New York City contained one prostitute for every sixty-four men and the mayor of Savannah estimated his city to have one for every thirty-nine men.¹³

And Something New ...

I do not, however, want to make a case that nothing has changed. Taken together, the rearrangements in marriage, childrearing, intergenerational relations and responsibilities, sexuality, and reproduction have been tremendous, far-reaching, and unprecedented. For many cultural conservatives, the framework that best describes and explains these changes is summed up in the words *permissiveness* and *self-indulgence*. For cultural liberals, less pejorative terms reflect an equally linear view of change: New family patterns are the result of pluralism, increased tolerance, and the growth of informed choice. I will argue that neither the notion of "permissiveness" nor that of "enlightenment" captures the complexity and breadth of the demographic and attitudinal changes we have experienced. To assess the opportunities and problems posed by these changes, we must accurately describe the full range of the new social and demographic territory through which modern men, women, and children are required to make their way.

The Changing Role of Marriage and Childrearing in the Life Course

Perhaps the most visible rearrangement of family terrain is that both marriage and childrearing occupy a smaller proportion of adults'

lives than they did at any time in American history. They define less of a person's social identity, exert less influence on people's life-course decisions, and are less universal, exclusive, and predictable than ever before. (The one seeming exception to the declining salience of marriage—that divorce is now a stronger predictor of poverty for women and children than any other factor—is true only in the short run. Even in the short run, the causative role of divorce and illegitimacy in poverty has been greatly overstated, as I will discuss in chapter 11.)

A white woman can now expect, on the average, to spend only 43 percent of her life in marriage, while a black woman can expect marriage to occupy only 22 percent of her life. Marriage has ceased to be the main impetus into or out of other statuses, and it increasingly coexists for women, as it has long done for men, with several other roles. The orderly progression from student to single jobholder to wife to mother to married older worker that prevailed from the 1920s to the 1960s, for example, is now gone. Modern women take on these functions in different orders or occupy all of them at once. In 1967, half of all women in their thirties were married mothers who remained at home full-time; by 1982, only a quarter of all women in their thirties could be found specializing in this way.¹⁴

Despite the high value that Americans continue to attach to marriage and family, there is a new tolerance for alternative life courses. In 1957, 80 percent of Americans polled said that people who chose not to marry were "sick," "neurotic," and "immoral." By 1977, only 25 percent of those polled held such views. In 1962, the overwhelming majority of mothers believed that "almost everyone should have children if they can"; by 1985, only a minority agreed. Most women still want children but feel less pressure to get married first. A national survey conducted in 1989 found that 36 percent of the single women polled had seriously considered raising a child on their own.¹⁵

Parenthood, like marriage, is a less salient, central, and long-lasting part of life than it used to be. Parents are having fewer children than they had in most decades of American history and are spacing them somewhat closer. At the beginning of this century, most women saw their last child married when they were fifty-six and then lived, on average, only ten or fifteen years longer. Today, despite the "boomerang" child phenomenon, the average woman has forty years to live after her children leave home. A couple who stays together after their kids depart faces more than a third of a century with no other company in the household besides each other, com-

pared to the short time of child-free years experienced by couples in previous centuries. Men, who are more likely to let their contact with children lapse after a divorce, live an even greater proportion of their lives today without involvement in childrearing. In 1960, men aged twenty to forty-nine spent an average of 12.3 years in families with children under age eighteen; by 1990, that had fallen to 7 years.¹⁶

This decline in the centrality of marriage and parenthood for adults has been building for 150 years, with only a partial and temporary interruption during the 1950s. Changes in the life course of American youth, less linear, appear especially dramatic because the first sixty years of the twentieth century saw an *increase* in the centrality of family formation for young people and in the predictability of patterns of schooling, work, marriage, and parenthood.

Changes in the Roles and Experiences of Youth

Until the end of the nineteenth century, the major transitions of youth—leaving home, finding a job, exiting school, getting married, and setting up an independent household—all occurred at more variable ages and in more random order than they have during most of this century. There was nothing random about gender behavior, of course. Gender determined more of an individual's options and constraints than in the twentieth century, but those options and constraints varied tremendously between classes and occupational groups.¹⁷

In the early twentieth century, youthful transitions for both genders became much more predictable in their order and concentrated in time, as well as more prevalent throughout the population. With the abolition of child labor and the prolongation of schooling, a dramatic shift in the flow of intergenerational resources occurred and a new life cycle was established: Almost all children gained a protracted period of freedom from productive responsibilities and then moved quite rapidly from school to work to leaving home to getting married and establishing a separate family.¹⁸

This "institutionalization" of youth as a separate stage of life seems to have been a transitory stage. It helped create a youthful independence that has recently allowed individuals of both sexes to discard the normative sequences without returning to older dependencies and subordinations. Entry into work, school, sexual activity, indepen-

dent residence, and parenthood are much more variable today than they were during the first two-thirds of this century. It appears that youth are returning to a diversity and randomness of life-course transitions more characteristic of earlier periods yet are combining this with a new convergence of behaviors between men and women and a reduction of family responsibilities. Young people increasingly move in and out of their parents' homes, other living arrangements, jobs, education, and marriage at different times and in a bewildering combination of orders. At age twenty-nine, nearly 40 percent of American men have not yet settled in to a stable long-term job.¹⁹

Between 1965 and 1975, the proportion of young people living alone more than doubled. Most of this increase occurred because of a rise in their disposable income, so the fall in real incomes after 1973, discussed in chapter 11, soon reversed this trend. By the 1980s, growing numbers of young people were choosing to live at home with their parents. In 1990, more than half of eighteen- to twenty-four-year-olds were living with their parents, well above the 42 percent living at home in 1960 but far less than the figures for 1975. One in nine young adults aged twenty-five to thirty-four was also living in a parent's home, an increase of more than 25 percent since 1960.²⁰

Interestingly, however, most of this increase occurred among families with higher-than-average incomes, and substantial anecdotal evidence suggests that youths who remained home longer, as well as their "boomerang" siblings who returned home, did not accept greater obligation within the family in exchange for parental subsidization. While such youths could not support full adult establishments, historian John Modell argues, they could still take advantage of a wide variety of opportunities for enlarging their independent economic roles as both workers and consumers. Perhaps they were more likely to spend money on cars and stereos because they had less hope of ever saving up enough for a house. Yet the trend shows up at younger ages as well: By the end of the 1980s, three out of four high school seniors were working an average of eighteen hours a week, but only 11 percent of them saved all or most of their earnings for college or other long-range goals.²¹

In recent years, then, youths have had more leeway in terms of personal consumption but less opportunity to acquire the "big ticket" items usually associated with family formation and adult independence. The resulting confusion between adult and youth prerogatives has reinforced the homogenizing effect of television on

children's and adult's knowledge, as well as the outright role reversal in new technologies, such as computers, where most of us are outpaced by our children. Perhaps this is why so many recent movies and television series (*Big and Like Father, Like Son*) have experimented with the notion of switching a child's mind into an adult's body or vice versa, while others (*Home Alone*, and "Doogie Howser, M.D.") have portrayed youths as far more competent than most of the adults around them.²²

Of course, most such productions are aimed at a white audience. There are similar ambiguities in youth and adult roles among African Americans, but they take different forms. A major concern for parents of white youths, for example, is whether the jobs their children take in fast-food outlets and concession stands retain any of the values traditionally associated with work; a major concern of black parents is whether their children will find any jobs at all. After high school, it is interesting to note, young African Americans receive less material aid from their families and contribute more income to their families than do white youth. This youthful sacrifice confounds racist stereotypes about the decline of parental authority in the black community, but it severely disadvantages black youth in terms of their educational prospects.²³

The Graying of America

Another major reshaping of the demographic terrain is the aging of the population. The median age in America today is slightly over thirty-two, approximately twice the median age of the population at the time of the American Revolution. In the past two decades, with fertility rates at near-record lows, the population aged sixty-five and above has grown twice as fast as the general population. Today, there are thirty million Americans sixty-five or older, representing 13 percent of the population. More than six and a half million of them require long-term care. By 2030, elder Americans will represent almost 21 percent of the population, and the number of aged persons requiring long-term care is expected to rise even more quickly. If current rates of disability persist, for example, the number of elderly requiring institutional care will more than triple in the next forty years.²⁴

One of the cheap shots directed at modern families is the charge that they have abandoned their commitment to the old, fobbing them

off on government or private nursing homes. In fact, however, care of the elderly was never a major function for most families in the past, since so few people lived to an advanced age. In 1900, the proportion of the population aged sixty-five or over was only 4 percent, and though elders had more children than today to share the burden of their support, their poverty rates were the highest in the nation.²⁵

If the total years families devote to childrearing have declined over the past half century, the total years they devote to elder care have increased significantly. Eighty percent of the long-term care that the elderly require is provided by family members, and more than twice as many impaired elderly are cared for at home as in institutions. Contrary to the bleak view presented in the mass media, two recent local studies of death patterns found that 30 percent of elderly Americans died at home and 45 percent were transferred to the hospital shortly before dying, while only 25 percent died in a nursing home. Ninety percent of those who died, in whatever location, saw family and friends within the last three days of life.²⁶ But there are high costs to families associated with these relatively comforting facts.

When Judy Stanley's* mother became incapacitated in 1949, Judy was forty years old. She kept her mother at home until her death five years later. Even though Judy's two children were old enough not to suffer unduly from the drain on their mother's time, they were five exhausting years that strained Judy's marital relationship and left her determined never to "be a burden" to her own children. But when Judy developed Alzheimer's in 1977, her physical health was excellent; she is still alive at this writing. Her daughters managed to keep Judy in her own home for six years, by juggling their schedules and hiring part-time help. Then the younger daughter, Barbara, moved her mother in with her, despite the fact that she had two preschool children to deal with as well. It was three years before Judy's paranoia made her so difficult to deal with and her forgetfulness made her so dangerous to herself that Barbara committed her to a nursing home. "After all that work," says Barbara bitterly, discussing how she and her sister organize their personal lives and job schedules to make sure their mother gets a visit every day, "we became just another statistic for the people who claim baby boomers are too selfish to do their family duty."

Barbara is part of the "sandwich generation," the unprecedented number of families and individuals who have elders and children de-

*Not her real name.

pendent on them *at the same time*. More than a quarter of caregivers to the elderly are in this situation.²⁷

Elder care takes a tremendous toll on families. Twenty-two percent of caregivers have not had a vacation away from their responsibilities for a year or more. Marital relations fray; aging caregivers find that their own health suffers; and the children of "sandwich generation" caregivers get reduced time and attention. Corporations report that elder-care problems are at least as great a cause of absenteeism and employee stress as are child-care ones. And the financial burden is stunning. The average bed in a nursing home costs \$30,000 a year; special medical bills can triple or quadruple this. Private insurance plans pay less than 2 percent of nursing home expenses, and Medicare covers a maximum of one hundred days of acute services in a rehabilitative center.²⁸

More than half the total nursing-home bill in America is paid by patients and their families out of their pockets. When their pockets run dry, Medicaid steps in, but the fact that it does so only after all other resources are exhausted creates painful dilemmas. While Peter Ferrara of the Cato Institute argues that government should not tax us to pay the bills of someone with \$50,000 in assets, elders are understandably dismayed at the idea of losing a lifetime's savings in less than a year: Those bumper stickers announcing "We're spending our children's inheritance" begin to sound a lot less selfish. However, patients who spend down to the required limit sometimes find that they have lost their ability to pay rent or other expenses if they do get well enough to move home!²⁹

The Technological Revolution in Reproduction: Separation of Sex from Procreation

Another major, and probably irreversible, shift in the contours of family life is the revolution in contraceptive and reproductive technology that permits an almost total dissociation of the sex act from the act of procreation. Human beings have always attempted to separate sex and procreation: Every known society has some form of birth control and some arenas of sexual activity that are not expected to produce children. But there has always been a tether, sometimes longer, sometimes shorter, that prevented one from getting too far from the other. As late as 1960, virtually all contraceptive practice

was coitus-related. Today, the spread of oral contraceptives, intrauterine devices (IUDs), female sterilization, and vasectomies allow prevention of pregnancy to take place without any temporal relationship to actual sexual intercourse.

Conversely, new methods of in vitro fertilization, artificial insemination, sperm banks, and ovum transfers increasingly allow child-birth to occur with very little relation to actual intercourse or biological rhythms. "You can't fool Mother Nature," snaps columnist Midge Decter about proposals to include homosexual households in the definition of family; but as it turns out, you can. Scientists have even discovered how to allow menopausal women to bear children. While this last feat fails to exhilarate most older women whom I know, it does suggest that alternatives to traditional biological constraints are likely to become more widespread, not less.³⁰

The Changing Role of Sexuality in Society

Perhaps the most dramatic, and certainly the most emotionally loaded, reconfiguration of the family terrain has occurred in the realm of sexual behavior and expression. The "sexual revolution" did not occur as suddenly as most people think: In fact, there have been two sexual "revolutions" in the twentieth century, and their roots go back to demographic and economic changes in the nineteenth century. Even when put in historical perspective, however, the transformations in sexuality seem profound.

In early America, reproductive and productive activity took place in the same settings, and both were subject to extensive community supervision. Many sexual norms and rules were directly linked to regulation of household work and social hierarchies, which meant that the notion of a purely private sexual life or personal sexual identity was unthinkable. Such regulation, we should note, was perfectly compatible with a wide range of sexual expressiveness and an understanding that people's sexual urges extended beyond the procreative act. In one Puritan adultery case, for example, the wife admitted that she had taken a lover but justified her behavior because her husband spent so much time hunting and fishing that he had neglected his conjugal duties. The court sentenced not only the woman and her lover to sit in the stocks, but also her husband, since he had clearly driven her to it.³¹

As the family ceased to be the site of labor regulation, intimate

personal relationships became much more sharply distinguished from economic and political ones. They became less subject to supervision by social superiors and community institutions; it was even possible to imagine that intimate affiliations and feelings could be detached from social roles, productive assignments, and authority relations. People's initial reaction to these increased opportunities for personal sexual choice, at least among the middle class whose economic success depended on impulse control and careful planning, was to substitute self-regulation for community regulation.

The widespread nineteenth-century hysteria about masturbation, or "self-pollution," highlighted a strong connection in people's minds between sexual control and the requirements of democratic capitalism. Doctors and purity reformers preached against masturbation in the same phrases that economists used about the work ethic. "Reserve is the great secret of power everywhere." "Careless waste," it was said, in either sexual energy or finances, was the greatest danger of the age. Neither time, money, nor semen should be wasted: "The fancies, once turned in this direction, wear a channel, down which dash the thoughts, gathering force like a river as they move away from the fountain-head." In the second half of the century, early concerns about masturbation gave way to general attempts to "desexualize" all arenas of society—people began to refer to the "white meat" and "dark meat" of poultry in order to avoid naming body parts, such as thighs and breasts. Fears of unregulated sexuality merged with new concerns about loss of social control over immigrants and workers to produce a shift from self-control to outright repression.³²

The separation of sexuality from both productive and reproductive relations, however, went on apace, even in the middle class. By 1900, white middle-class women had reduced their fertility rates by more than 50 percent. Urban centers provided havens for sexual subcultures such as those of prostitutes or early networks based on homoerotic ties. The Victorian moral order was "in crisis" well before 1900.³³

The First Sexual Revolution and Its Impact

In the early 1900s, a series of economic, political, and cultural factors further weakened the institutions and ideologies reinforcing sexual restraint. Economic and educational innovations allowed youth-

ful peer groups in high schools, colleges, work settings, and urban boarding houses to take over a large part of the socialization process from parents and to establish new areas of heterosexual interaction. The expansion of commercial recreation gave people movie houses, dance halls, and amusement parks to congregate in, away from the view of family and neighbors. Heightened urbanization and the experience of the First World War brought more individuals into contact with alternative sexual mores. The growth of a consumer economy meant that demands for personal fulfillment were no longer necessarily in conflict with economic priorities. Sex came to be seen as a new cement for marriage rather than as a threat to its stability.³⁴

By the 1920s, a radical reorientation of popular culture and courtship had occurred in America, making sexual expressiveness "normative" for young heterosexuals and introducing a generation gap at least as wide as that of the 1960s or 1970s. At the end of the nineteenth century, writes historian Ellen Rothman, middle-class courtship had been "more carefully supervised and more formal than at any time since the Revolution." Thirty years later, that courtship structure was almost completely dismantled. It was replaced by the dating system, which moved courtship out of the home and into the public world, replacing family surveillance with peer supervision in an increasingly age-specific youth culture.³⁵

Couples in 1900 had gotten to know each other on the front porch of their parents' home. By the 1920s they went out on dates—perhaps to participate in the "petting parties" that were a national craze, perhaps to take advantage of the nonfamilial privacy afforded when the boy had a car. Youths, no longer dependent on introductions by friends or family, met at school or work or picked each other up at dance halls, restaurants, and cabarets.

While the increase in youthful premarital coitus was not as dramatic as that in the 1960s, there was a pronounced eroticization of noncoital relations and a greatly liberalized definition of what kinds of physical interactions were permissible between unmarried persons of the opposite sex. And, in some groups at least, premarital sex became more common, too: A 1938 study of 777 married women found that only 26 percent of those born between 1890 and 1900 had lost their virginity before marriage, but two-thirds of those born after 1910 had done so. One sign of the new sexual freedom was that a young man was increasingly likely to have his first sexual encounter with a girlfriend rather than with a prostitute; among men born between 1900 and 1909, sex with prostitutes declined by over 50 percent. Once married, couples were able to explore their sexual-

ity further, as new sex manuals expanded their knowledge of techniques and they gained greater access to birth control.³⁶

Sexuality not only entered the public sphere during the 1920s but also became a major source of identity and self-discovery. Freudianism reached America just in time to validate and accelerate this process, which was very much a new cultural construction. The ancient Greeks had interpreted dreams about sex as being *really* about political power and economic fortune; Americans, by contrast, enthusiastically adopted Freud's view that dreams about almost everything were really about sex. Advertisers found in sexuality a common denominator that they thought could reach a mass audience; doctors and sociologists considered it the wellspring of human growth and the main explanation of health or disease.³⁷

The impact of this sexualization of interpersonal relations was complex. In some ways, it was clearly liberating. The partial replacement of gender by sex as a mode of self-definition fostered a new "companionate" ideal of marriage, in which both men and women reached higher levels of sexual and emotional compatibility. Emphasis on the sex act as the logical, indeed inevitable, outcome of sensual interaction allowed women and men to explore techniques of giving and receiving pleasure. But there were also new constraints inherent in this elevation of sexuality to center stage.

People's interpretation of physical contact became extraordinarily "privatized and sexualized," so that all types of touching, kissing, and holding were seen as sexual foreplay rather than accepted as ordinary means of communication that carried different meanings in different contexts. This sexualization of touching invested adult-child interactions with some tension. It could lead to qualms about touching, as in doctors' strict instructions never to let a child climb into the parents' bed; it is also possible, though, that the association of touching with sexual release paved the way for an erosion of old inhibitions about engaging in sex with children.³⁸

The new focus on the sex act as the culmination of intimacy undermined an earlier tolerance for a continuum of sensual and erotic relations. It is not that homosexuality was acceptable before; but now a wider range of behavior opened a person up to being branded as a homosexual. The passionate female bonds discussed in chapter 3 were stigmatized and labeled perverse. The romantic friendships that had existed among many unmarried men in the nineteenth century were no longer compatible with heterosexual identity; old frontier habits of sharing beds or "rolling up together around campfires to keep each other warm" were ruled out of bounds. Increasingly, either

genital sex between men or careful physical and emotional distancing "crowded out more sublimated erotic relations" and replaced more nuanced male friendships.³⁹

The institution of dating delivered youth from much parental control, but also "shifted power from women to men." In the older courtship system, a young man was invited to come "calling" at the girl's home; the initiative lay with the girl and her family. Etiquette books were firm: It was as improper for a male of the early 1900s to suggest that he would like an invitation to call as it was for a girl of the 1950s to hint that she would like to be asked out. A date, by contrast, was an invitation into the public world, involving consumption of goods and services in the market. It was therefore initiated by men, who were more familiar with that world and had the economic resources to operate within it. A date often represented the only way that a girl could gain access to the new world of public consumption, but the question immediately arose of what she owed in return for the money that was spent on her. While the dating system may have helped lessen prostitution, it also heightened the element of sexual commerce in everyday heterosexual interactions among peers. Many of the elaborate dating codes that emerged between the 1920s and 1960s represented the effort of women to reshape the system to limit male prerogatives within it.⁴⁰

Rising standards of intimacy and sexual compatibility gave women a new kind of influence over men, and new arenas of communication with them, but the dependence of marriage on sexual attractiveness and excitement gave both men and the mass media more influence over standards of beauty. Women began to try to live up to new expectations promulgated by movies, advertisers, and marriage experts. Acknowledgment of female sexuality also meant its incorporation into a competitive, consumerist model of behavior; it coincided with the dissolution of the organized women's movement that had emerged in the late nineteenth century. Psychology professor Howard Gadlin suggests that the move to liberalize and equalize sex tended to substitute for a more substantive equalization of *gender*.⁴¹

The Second Sexual Revolution

The sexual liberalism established in the 1920s continued to gain ground during the next three decades, albeit at a slower pace and

with some countervailing trends. During the 1950s, the ongoing sexualization of dating and marriage was combined with a campaign against "abnormal" sex: homosexuality, lesbianism, or even attempts by heterosexual women to assert their own sexual desires against unrealistic definitions of "normal" female sexual response. All but two states dropped their bans on contraceptive information or devices. At the same time, though, restrictions on "obscene literature" and abortions mounted. It is estimated that 250,000 to a million women a year sought illegal abortions, and that these were responsible for 40 percent of all maternal deaths.⁴²

The 1960s saw a dramatic acceleration of sexual liberalization and a reversal of most opposing trends of the 1950s. The first component of this sexual revolution was the growth of a singles culture, predating the rise of political and cultural protest, that accepted sexual activity between unmarried men and women. A second stage was reached when women began to demand that this singles culture be readjusted to meet their needs. A third came in the 1970s, as a gay movement questioned the exclusive definition of sexual freedom in terms of heterosexuality.

Many different social forces and demographic changes contributed to these developments: the rising age for marriage; educational convergence of men and women; women's growing autonomy; invention of birth-control methods that were independent of coitus (first the oral contraceptive pill, introduced in 1960, then the IUD); the sheer rise in the absolute number of singles as the baby-boom generation reached sexual maturity; and revulsion of a politically active generation against what they saw as the hypocrisy of their elders. The process was both advanced and redirected by attempts of American manufacturers to tap into these demographic, social, and political changes.⁴³

Not all the forces worked toward the same ends. Political radicals tended to be contemptuous of the way that advertisers and the mass media romanticized sex and attached it to commodities; feminists felt that too many political radicals were pushing a kind of "liberation" that denied women the right to say no; gays and lesbians argued that the feminist movement was too oriented toward the impulses of heterosexual women. It is often forgotten that the second sexual revolution not only fought for abortion rights and against restrictions on the behavior of consenting adults, but also demanded the restriction and criminalization of nonconsenting sex, as in campaigns against rape and sexual harassment.

Nonetheless, the cumulative result was an increase in the acceptability, prevalence, and early initiation of sexual activity. In the 1970s, there was a huge surge in the proportion of single girls having had coitus and a comparable shift in attitudes accepting of this behavior. According to one survey, three-fifths of males aged fifteen to nineteen and 53 percent of females the same age had experienced sexual intercourse as of 1988. The median age of first sexual intercourse for female teens was sixteen. Twenty-two percent of boys and 7 percent of girls, another survey found, had lost their virginity by age thirteen.⁴⁴

Even more disconcerting for many has been the unprecedented openness, even exhibitionism, about sexuality. This has gone far beyond the "coming out" of gays and lesbians during the 1970s or the refusal of young heterosexual couples to keep their sexual activity secret from their parents. Today, talk-show guests parade the most intimate details of their sex lives before audiences; neighbors videotape a couple having sex in an apartment where the blinds have been left open; and reporters research the minutiae of public figures' sexual behavior and preferences. A 1987 study by Planned Parenthood estimated that 65,000 sexual references were broadcast on prime-time television each year—and that was before the debut of shows such as Fox's "Studs," in which three women date the same two men and then compare notes in front of a live audience. (One young woman described her date as having "buns to die for.")⁴⁵

The high point of the sexual revolution may have come in the 1970s. Polls have registered a sharp drop in approval of promiscuity since then, and since 1979 there has been a slight decline in the percentage of never-married females aged seventeen or younger who have had sexual intercourse. (While this seems to contradict the fact that starting in 1986, there was a rise in the number of teens aged fifteen to seventeen who gave birth, the increase is probably linked to the declining availability of abortion, or similar factors, rather than to greater sexual activity.) Since 1979, there has also been a decline in the proportion of males who had intercourse before their fifteenth birthday. For older individuals, disillusionment with the amount of "liberation" connected to sexual promiscuity has combined with fear of AIDS and the natural slowing down of an aging baby-boom generation to produce a new caution about sexuality in America.⁴⁶

However, caution should not be confused with sexual conservatism. "The sexual revolution is over because it was won," remarks Cheryl Russell, a researcher for *American Demographics* magazine.

Neither the prevalence nor the cultural acceptance of sex outside marriage is likely to be reversed, despite widespread distaste for the obsessive and indiscriminate sexuality with which we are bombarded by the media. Relatively early commencement of sexual intercourse is also probably here to stay, as is a general acceptance of gay and lesbian activity. The double standard has waned, and youthful peer groups seem less concerned to enforce the "dating game" of male pursuit and female "holding out."⁴⁷

Assessing the Impact of the Second Sexual Revolution

Extreme claims come easily to those who seek to assess the extent and consequences of recent trends in sexual behavior. Cultural conservatives, for example, greatly exaggerate the amount of sexual activity that goes on in modern America. One recent book has compared the escalation of the "sex revolution" to the "drug revolution." In fact, there is a lot more sex on television than there is in the bedroom. Most premarital sex among teens occurs with only one partner, and on the average, youths who report themselves as "sexually experienced" have spent six of the last twelve months without any sexual partner. Four out of five adults surveyed by the National Opinion Research Center in 1988 reported that they were monogamous during the prior year. Only 1.5 percent of the married couples reported having an affair in the previous year. A 1991 survey found that the average adult has had seven sex partners since age eighteen but only one in the past year. Married people had sex an average of sixty-seven times during the year, while divorced and never-married singles had it fifty-five times.⁴⁸

Cultural liberals, on the other hand, tend to exaggerate the decline of the double standard and the degree of enlightenment reached by most sexually active individuals. Actually, the most striking aspect of the sexual revolution is its unevenness. As research sociologist Lillian Rubin points out, women still get "wildly mixed" messages about acceptable sexual behavior, preventing them from being clear about what they really want or need in a relationship. A 1991 survey of sixth- through ninth-grade students in Rhode Island found that a majority believed a woman was "asking" to be raped if she went out at night in a "seductive" outfit; 80 percent thought a man had a right to force a woman to have sex if he were married to her. There has

been no clear progression from "ignorance to wisdom," even when it comes to the facts of life. When the Kinsey Institute recently gave people a quiz on fundamental facts of biology and sexual behavior, the majority flunked: Fifty-five percent answered more than half the questions incorrectly.⁴⁹

Contrary to predictions that sexual liberalization would defuse the tensions associated with sex, allowing it to become a normal, non-problematic area of life, our acceptance of sex has not become more matter-of-fact. American culture invests sex with much more emotional freight and conflicting messages than do most other developed nations. We allow more sex and violence on afternoon television than do most European countries, but we are less forthright than they about nudity, sex education, and birth control. We also are far more apt to have periodic bouts of hysteria about whether high school literature classes can read novels with four-letter words. Perhaps Americans are so much more preoccupied by sex than are Europeans precisely because they are still much more likely to consider it dirty.⁵⁰

British psychiatrist John Ashton suggests that Americans fantasize about sex more than do other national groups at the same time as they treat it less realistically. Studies of U.S. teenagers' fantasies, for example, reveal an obsession with every detail of seduction and foreplay but a complete failure to consider the practical matters of avoiding pregnancy or exposure to disease. Male teenagers fear that prior discussion of preventive measures will botch the seduction; females think it will spoil the romance or their reputation or both.⁵¹

To understand this unevenness, we need to go beyond analyses that stress the role of feminism, 1960s student radicals, or the gay and lesbian movement in charting modern sexual boundaries. While the feminist and gay movements had considerable influence in expanding the notion that a person should have the right to choose (or refuse) sex, ultimately the most powerful and visible models of sexual "liberation" have been provided by advertisers and the mass media. As two recent historians of American sexuality point out, the revolutionary hopes of feminists and gay liberationists "never materialized." Instead, "the consumerist values that had already made sex a marketable commodity" were increasingly applied to female and gay sexuality as well as to traditional gender roles and marriage, for purposes dictated by a multibillion-dollar sex industry, not the aims of personal liberation or social transformation.⁵²

By the early 1980s, sexually permissive attitudes had entirely lost

their initial association with political radicalism or liberalism. In 1984, more than 60 percent of people aged twenty-three to thirty-eight approved of casual sex, as compared to only 28 percent of those over thirty-eight, yet more of the younger generation than their elders were willing to support a U.S. war either to "stop the spread of communism" or to "protect our economic interests." Books advocating extremely conservative gender roles had begun to give explicit instructions to women on how to get and keep a man by varying their sexual techniques.⁵³

Several theorists have suggested that the convergence of sexual permissiveness with political conservatism is no accident. Herbert Marcuse, for example, characterizes the twentieth-century eroticization of society as a "repressive desublimation" that fosters depoliticization and facilitates elite social control. Michel Foucault argues that modern sexuality emerged out of a medical discourse that regulated human behavior through classification, surveillance, seduction, and control.⁵⁴

Such sweeping critiques of the sexual revolution are as one-sided as are blanket endorsements of the "new pluralism." Changes in family, sex, and reproductive behavior have had mixed effects. Few people who lived through the anxiety and pain of 1950s sexual repression would advocate reversing sexual liberalization. Even though sexual freedom has made marriage less automatic and less permanent, it has also eased the misery of many marriages, relieved paralyzing guilt feelings, and permitted self-acceptance for people whose sexuality or temperament is not suited to marriage. Yet it is clear that the sexual revolution has problematized some areas of life that were once thought safe from the misuse of sexuality; its effects on the experience of childhood seem particularly troublesome. Historian Lawrence Birken suggests that the sexualization of childhood, for all its dangers, may be related to an extension of personhood to youngsters that has made us more aware of their mistreatment. The fact remains, however, that important boundaries between childhood sensuality and adult sexuality seem to have been blurred.⁵⁵

New reproductive technologies are similarly complex in their effects. They have brought joy to many infertile couples and set back the "biological clock" that worries so many women in their thirties. But this technology has also confronted women with agonizing choices, tempted them into costly experiments with low success rates, created the dilemmas of genetic counseling and surrogate motherhood, and led to custody disputes over fertilized ova. Many

women complain that there has been an objectification of the birth process: Women's own voices have been drowned out by the high-tech babble of scientists who talk of "bombing" women's ovaries with fertility drugs, "harvesting" ova, "screening" the fetus, and finding "nubile young wombs," not to mention the excited jabber of venture capitalists who have discovered that working in this market is "easier than selling soap."⁵⁶

Such problems stem from a combination of factors: cultural lag, where old values prevent people from coping realistically and responsibly with changing behavior; rejection of sexual hypocrisy without acceptance of an alternative ethic; and, in many cases, economic and social conditions that distort and deform the liberating possibilities of new options, turning them into new fetters. America's teenage pregnancy patterns reveal these factors in operation.

Teenage Mothers and the Sexual Revolution

Judging from the number of op-ed pieces about children having children, one would think that teen pregnancy reached unprecedented proportions in the 1980s. The first thing to note about the so-called "epidemic" of teen parenthood is that it is far past its peak. The highest rate of teenage childbearing in twentieth-century America was in 1957, when more than 97 out of every 1,000 women aged fifteen to nineteen gave birth. Today, only half as many teenagers bear children. Although birth rates among the youngest teens, aged ten through fourteen, have increased in the past two decades, this is a very small phenomenon: Only 2 percent of all births to teenagers occur to girls under fifteen.⁵⁷

The real source of most people's concern lies in two rather different facts. First, America has a dramatically higher incidence of teen pregnancy than does any other contemporary industrial democracy. From 1980 to 1989, according to a recent United Nations report, both the birth *and* the abortion rates of U.S. teens were twice those of other countries in the developed world. Second, an increasing proportion of teen births occur out of wedlock. In 1960, 15.4 percent of all teen births were to unmarried mothers; by 1970, that proportion had doubled; and by 1986, it had doubled again, with the result that a majority of all teen births today are to unmarried mothers.⁵⁸

There are some serious problems associated with very early sexual

activity, especially with early pregnancy. Teenagers have a higher level of sexually transmitted diseases than do other groups of the population. Teenagers who give birth are more likely to have children with a variety of physical, emotional, or cognitive deficits, while those who have abortions are more likely to have traumatic experiences with the abortion. Teen mothers who marry are three times more likely to be separated or divorced within fifteen years than are women who postpone childbearing; married or single, teen mothers attain lower educational levels and earn lower wages than do older mothers.⁵⁹

But are these problems, as the Rockford Institute claims, an outcome of the "New Freedom" established by the sexual revolution of the 1960s? Is teen pregnancy a result of "liberated" women embracing "hedonism" and demanding sexual satisfaction?⁶⁰ The evidence suggests quite a different interpretation. It is important to note that most problems with teen sex occur among very young teens. There is a considerable difference between the ability of a fourteen-year-old and an eighteen-year-old to handle sex. Among the teens most likely to become sexually active at a very young age and most likely to impregnate a partner or to become pregnant, what strikes the observer most forcefully is not their "liberation" but their inhibition and ignorance about sexuality, their tenacious double standard, and their limited horizons in general.

Most sexually active young teens are startlingly unaware of their own sexual responses and biological processes. One of the major contributors to high teen-pregnancy rates is the denial of youngsters, to themselves and to others, that they *are* sexually active. Girls in particular are likely to feel that it's okay to be "swept away," but that "nice girls" don't plan for sex. One girl explained her reasons for not using a contraceptive: "If I did, then I'd have sex more. It would be too easy." Teens whose parents are frank with them about their bodies and sexual drives, by contrast, are more likely than are others to postpone initial coitus until age sixteen or later.⁶¹

For many male teens who impregnate their partners, sex is something you "get away with" or "put over" on someone rather than an act that flows naturally from an intimate relationship. Girls who become sexually active at an early age, far from being feminist in outlook, tend to have exceptionally strong dependency needs. They are more often motivated by a desire to please their partners than by a search for their own sexual satisfaction, and frequently they seem to receive very little pleasure from the sex act itself. Girls who have pos-

itive attitudes toward education and clear goals for their future are less likely to start sex at a very early age and less liable to become pregnant once they become sexually active.⁶²

But it is not merely cultural lag at work here. In general, teen pregnancy rates seem to be related to poor life prospects. In 1981, only 3 percent to 5 percent of all teens who had good academic skills and lived above the poverty line were mothers, as compared to 20 percent of poor teens with below-average academic skills. These rates were the same for whites, Hispanics, and blacks, but black teen mothers were much less likely to be married, a fact that is more related to the employment and earnings crisis among young black men than to major differences in values about marriage.⁶³

Teenagers with the fewest options, not the most, are those likely to get pregnant. Teen pregnancy, in or out of wedlock, is more frequently associated with old economic, gender, and racial inequalities than with the "New Freedom" that has allowed some women to choose unwed motherhood as a positive alternative for both themselves and their children.⁶⁴

Finding Our Way Through the New Reproductive Terrain

We will not solve any of the problems associated with the new family terrain by fantasizing that we can return to some "land before time" where these demographic, cultural, and technological configurations do not exist. Much of the new family topography is permanent. It is the result of a major realignment of subterranean forces, much like plate tectonics and continental drift. Women will never again spend the bulk of their lives at home. Sex and reproduction are no longer part of the same land mass, and no amount of pushing and shoving can force them into a single continent again.

This is not to say that we should simply ignore the problems raised by shifting realities. Many problems, however, are not inherent in the changes themselves but in the choices that have been made about where to draw new boundaries or how to respond to the transformations. The dilemmas of reproductive technology, for example, might be quite different if women were more involved in setting priorities for research or if venture capitalists were less involved. Too often, people waste time bemoaning the changes instead of debating the choices they pose.

Take the example of America's aging population. Many commentators claim that the crisis of rising health costs in America is a direct, inevitable result of the aging of our population; newspapers are full of dire tales about how the elderly are monopolizing our medical resources. This leads to a zero-sum approach in which we blame the deterioration in the well-being of America's children on the gains that elders have made, instead of recognizing the stake that each generation has in the well-being of other generations.⁶⁵

The population of Denmark is already more elderly than the U.S. population will be in 2015. Although it has a generous care network for elders, Denmark spends only half as much of its GNP on health care as does the United States, and it has actually reduced the share spent on medical care over the past decade. As health finance researcher Thomas Getzen points out, the American health-care crisis "is a result of political and professional choices, rather than the outcome of objective trends in demography, morbidity, technology or other relentless forces beyond our control." Getzen's comment on how to develop an effective approach to modern health-care dilemmas applies equally well to modern family dilemmas: "We must first halt the search for someone else to blame—the poor, the old, the disabled, the drug abuser, the bureaucrat—" and turn our attention toward constructing a system that provides us with better choices.⁶⁶

Or consider modern marital trends. Accessible, low-cost divorce has been an important reform for people trapped in abusive or destructive relationships. Yet the living standards of women and children tend to drop sharply after divorce and bitter custody disputes leave tremendous scars on all concerned, most especially on the children who may have to take sides. The majority of women who gain custody of children receive inadequate child support payments, while the children often lose contact with their fathers entirely. Law professor Mary Ann Glendon argues that most of our divorce laws are "no responsibility" rather than "no fault."⁶⁷

But these ill effects of divorce are not inevitable and do not prevail in many other societies. As I shall show in the next chapter, in the absence of serious financial loss or bitter custody disputes between parents, divorce does not necessarily have disastrous results. Attempting to solve the financial and emotional inequities of divorce by making it harder or reintroducing adversarial proceedings would only exacerbate the conflict that is associated with the *worst* outcomes for children. It would also do little to improve the situation of women: Most recent research shows, contrary to some well-

publicized studies during the 1980s, that no-fault divorce has *not* left women worse off overall than has adversarial divorce; it has simply failed to mitigate the economic losses that women have *always* experienced after divorce. There is no point in forcing bad marriages to continue, but there is no reason we cannot establish more equitable "exit rules" for marriage, parenting, or other social, economic, and personal commitments. Just because a relationship changes does not mean that its obligations end, a point that can be applied to corporate relocations as well as to familial ones.⁶⁸

Putting Our Family Maps in Perspective

Ancient Chinese maps of the world put China at the center and the "barbarian" world at the periphery; modern American maps place North America in the middle and cut Asia in half. Similarly, many "maps" of modern family patterns accentuate one or another feature at the cost of distorting the total panorama of reproductive and marital change.

One of the worst things about distorted maps is that when people reach dead ends, they are falsely blamed for "losing their way." Policy-makers assume that if people would just avoid the one exaggerated feature on their particular ideological map, all would be well: If couples would stay together, if mothers would stay home, if women would have babies only when they were safely married, if parents would revive older childraising values—then we wouldn't face the problems we do today.

Chapter 9 examines how such myths lead to unwarranted parent bashing. Both contemporary studies and historical experience show that children are resilient enough to adapt to many different innovations in family patterns: When they cannot adapt, this is caused more often by the economic and social context in which those innovations take place than by their parents' "wrong turns" away from traditional family patterns.

9

Toxic Parents, Supermoms, and Absent Fathers: Putting Parenting in Perspective

AMERICAN parents get it coming and going. Pictures of kidnapped children stare out from supermarket bags. Newspapers detail lurid stories of pornography rings, satanist cults, and day-care workers engaging in ritual sexual abuse of children. "No town is safe—no child is safe—from the sick, sadistic monsters and killers who roam our country at random," declares the anguished father of one murdered boy. "It can be anybody," warn the television ads. "You can never tell." Never leave your child with someone you don't thoroughly know and trust, we are told; the only safe place is home.¹

Yet on closer examination, home is an even scarier place. Ninety-nine percent of kidnappers and the large majority of physical and sexual abusers of children are their parents. More youngsters run away from unhappy homes each year than are kidnapped. The well-publicized (and greatly exaggerated) poisonings of children on Halloween generally turn out to have been perpetrated by family members. And we are constantly reminded of the psychological injuries that we inflict on our children by every addition to the various support groups for "adult children" of alcoholics, divorced parents, or other "dysfunctional families."²

Best-selling author John Bradshaw claims that "the major source of human misery" is the "neglected, wounded child" inside each of us. A flourishing business in self-help books, tapes, seminars, and group therapy has grown up around the idea that all our adult woes stem from the various ways that parents blighted our childhoods.

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Chapter 9

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