islands and Australia. They tried to identify universal behaviours and social structures, and to explain how specific practices were integrated into the entire culture. Later, the American Margaret Mead (1901–78) was one of the first female anthropologists to carry out field research among South Pacific cultures and to focus primarily on gender, family and sexuality. The ideas of these researchers were widely debated among educated citizens as well as academics at the time.

The third stream in the origin of family sociology came from American studies of social interaction, of small groups and of the family as a 'social institution'. These researchers gathered material on dating, courtship, marriage patterns, family decision-making and marital satisfaction. The American sociologist Talcott Parsons (1902–79) and his collaborator Robert Bales researched and theorised about the American family in the 1950s and 1960s from a structural functionalist perspective, which we will discuss in more detail in Chapter 2.

Before we discuss family trends in the three nations, we need to clarify the meaning of 'family'. This term is used in different ways by governments, academics and ordinary people, but also varies by culture within each country.

THE MEANING OF FAMILY

When we talk about 'family', we could be referring to one of a number of different social entities. The great variety of living arrangements in modern societies has led to some confusion about what the word actually means. Definitions of family have always varied according to who developed the definition and for what purpose.

In everyday language, one meaning involves the presence of children. When we ask a young married couple if they have a family, we are usually asking them if they have produced offspring from their relationship. In contrast, the terms 'couple' or 'partners' are used for husband and wife without children, as well as for two unmarried people (either heterosexual or gay/lesbian) who are sexually and emotionally involved with each other. If we ask a lost child where her family is, we usually mean her mother or father (and perhaps her siblings). If we ask an immigrant where his family comes from, we usually mean the wider kin group consisting of parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles. We sometimes use the term family when we really mean 'household', but this term technically refers to all those sharing a dwelling, whether or not they are related by blood, marriage or adoption, or are sexually or emotionally involved.

Academic definitions

Social researchers have used the term 'nuclear family' to refer to a husband and wife and their biological or adopted children who share a dwelling and other resources. Anthropologists writing in the early twentieth century, such as Malinowski, argued that this type of family was universal or nearly universal as the basic living unit. Although marriage and family forms vary widely throughout the world, the nuclear family has been the most prevalent living arrangement in industrialised countries. Since the seventeenth century, only a minority of people in Europe and North America have lived in extended families, including poorer people who needed to share accommodation, couples with parents in need of constant care, and certain cultural minorities (Goldthorpe 1987). Historical research suggests that extended families have not been considered an ideal arrangement in most of Europe within the past few centuries or among the European settlers to Canada, Australia or New Zealand (Nett 1981, Goldthorpe 1987, Toynbee 1995). In contrast to the nuclear families seen among Europeans, extended families were more prevalent among the indigenous people of these countries at the time of European contact.

Currently, nuclear families form the majority of households in very few parts of the world. In Caribbean nations, such as Grenada, St Kitts and Nevis, sole mothers head about 45 per cent of households (United Nations 1991, p. 18). In many parts of Africa and Asia, people typically live in extended families. Even in New Zealand, only 30 per cent of households consisted of couples with children in the 1996 census (Statistics NZ 1998b, p. 21). The remainder of New Zealand households consisted of couples without children, individuals living alone, one-parent families, couples living with children and others, multi-family households and multi-person households. Furthermore, extended families remain widespread among many immigrant groups, such as Pacific Island peoples who migrate to Australia or New Zealand.

In the English language, we also use the word 'family' to refer to a larger kin group that includes grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, married brothers and sisters, older parents and in-laws. Within the social sciences, we might describe these relationships as part of an 'extended family'. An extended family involves three or more generations, or several married siblings and their children, sharing the same household. In some regions, such as India, Indonesia and some parts of southern Europe and the Middle East, married couples typically live with maternal or paternal parents from the beginning of their marriage until the death of those parents. Extended families have also been common among migrants from these regions. In

addition, most of the indigenous people of all three countries (First Nations' tribes in Canada, Maori in New Zealand, and Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders in Australia) have always lived either in extended families or 'modified extended families' (nearby households).

A type of extended family prevalent in industrialised western societies comprises a nuclear family plus a widowed parent no longer able to live alone. In 1996, about 10 per cent of New Zealanders aged 65 and over lived with their children (Statistics NZ 1998e, p. 41). About 12 per cent of Maori lived in households containing two or more families (extended families) compared to 4.3 of non-Maori (Statistics NZ 1998d, p. 39). In Australia, about 6.2 per cent of indigenous family households were classified as 'multi-family households' compared to 1.2 per cent of the entire population (ABS 1999a, p. 108).

Academic researchers continue to argue about definitions of family. Back in 1949, the American anthropologist George Murdock defined family as a 'social group characterized by common residence, economic co-operation, and reproduction' (Murdock 1949, p. 1). In the 1950s and 1960s, North American sociologists typically defined family as a sexually involved man and woman with their offspring, joined by blood, marriage or adoption. These family members shared a division of labour and a common residence, had sex, reproduced and raised their children together, as well as pooling resources such as money, shelter and food. They also protected and supported each other (Parsons and Bales 1955, Goode 1963, Nett 1988). The family was seen as both the basic unit of society and a microcosm of the larger society.

Before the 1980s, sociologists often dealt with family variations by viewing the nuclear family as the 'norm', both statistically and morally, and defining other forms as 'deviant'. Anthropologists have always been more willing than sociologists to acknowledge the extent of cultural variations and have long reported that many people around the world live in extended families. In some cultures, a man is legally permitted to marry several wives and to live together with their children in an extended family or kin group. Many cultures continue to live in multi-family households consisting, most often, of brothers and their wives and children. Despite these significant variations, earlier sociology reflected a bias toward the 'normative' nuclear family. In the 1960s, for example, extended families were viewed as unfortunate, and one-parent families were labelled as 'broken homes'. By the 1980s, feminist critiques of family studies and greater cultural awareness curtailed many of these biases.

The myth of the monolithic family

Feminist scholars, such as Canadian sociologist Margrit Eichler, helped to erode the 'myth of the monolithic family' (Eichler 1988, 1997). Now, many sociologists accept her idea that some pre-1980s family research tended to over-represent the experiences of the white middle-class men who designed the studies and assumed that others lived the way they did. While sociologists from the 1950s to the 1980s said that they were discussing 'the family', they were really focusing on the male breadwinner/female caregiver family, which was not as typical throughout the world as they initially thought. Much of the pre-1980s American research talked about families as involving heterosexual marriage. Historically, however, some same-sex couples have always lived together and shared resources, although social and institutional homophobia often prevented them from openly admitting that they were sexually involved. Gay and lesbian 'families of choice' did not fit into pre-1980s conceptions of family (Nardi 1992, Weeks, Donovan and Heaphy 1999).

Pre-1980s researchers also assumed that a closer emotional bond existed between heterosexual marriage partners than between them and their parents or siblings, yet this is not always the situation in extended families (Nanda 1991, p. 248). Furthermore, households containing grandparents and unmarried siblings were always common in working-class Britain, among indigenous people in the three countries, among many immigrant households, and in much of the Pacific Islands, South Asia, Indonesia and Africa. Many of these arrangements included strong ties between same-sex siblings, between mothers and daughters, and between fathers and sons. Different cultural groups have always lived with varying concepts of marriage and family (Metge 1976, Adair and Dixon 1998).

American research from the 1950s and 1960s assumed that adult partners in families shared a heterosexual sex life and were monogamous, but the American Kinsey studies of the 1940s had already told us that many men (and some women) had extramarital affairs. In pre-revolutionary China, middle-class men often enjoyed and financially supported concubines or mistresses with whom they also reproduced. In fact, only 20 per cent of the world's families were officially monogamous even by the end of the 1940s, according to the anthropological research of George Murdock (1949).

American sociological research, particularly, assumed that all adults were parents, yet in the 1990s about 16 to 25 per cent of women in countries such as Canada and New Zealand would never reproduce (Cameron 1997, p. 33; Dumas and Bélanger 1997, p. 41). Furthermore, rates of celibacy and childlessness were higher at the beginning of the 1900s than they are now (Baker 1993, McDaniel

and Tepperman 2000). Finally, sociological research always assumed that children in a family were the offspring of both parents. Conservative policy-makers are increasingly concerned about the implications of current divorce and remarriage rates for children's upbringing and emotional security, yet historically many children have always been raised by relatives or step-parents, especially in non-European families and in places where maternal death rates were high (Metge 1970, Bettina Bradbury 1996).

Sociologists have tended to discuss the family as a unit and to assume that the interests of all family members were the same, but back in the 1960s and 1970s American sociologist Jessie Bernard (1972) found that men and women held different perceptions and expectations of marriage. She argued that American marriage was a more favourable experience for men than for women, basing this conclusion on demographic and health statistics as well as sociological research. She found, for example, that men remarry more rapidly than women after divorce or widowhood and express more romantic views of marriage. Married men appear to be more emotionally stable than unmarried men and tend to live longer and healthier lives, whereas the same trend is not apparent for women. In the 1950s and 1960s, sociological research often assumed that any family member could accurately report family interactions. We now know that there are different family experiences and versions of reality, especially if we compare the views of children with those of their parents, as well as the experiences of husbands and wives (Bittman and Pixley 1997).

In the three nations, government statistics indicate that a growing percentage of families consists of a mother and her children, with or without a live-in partner of the opposite or the same sex. Sociologists now acknowledge that former definitions of family need to be revised because they have been based on 'monolithic' models favouring a particular type of family characterised by gender differentiation and legal affiliation, rather than by gender equality and patterns of affection or emotional support (Eichler 1997, p. 7). In addition, new reproductive technologies have altered family relationships and the meaning of concepts such as 'mother' and 'father'. Postmenopausal women can now give birth to the genetic children of their own children, and a woman can become a surrogate mother to enable another couple to raise her child.

Sociological definitions of family used to focus on who constituted a family and their legal obligations to each other. Now more researchers and theorists are emphasising *what* makes a family. This approach downplays the sexual preference of the couple and the legality of the relationship, and focuses instead on patterns of caring and intimacy (Inglis and Rogan 1994, Eichler 1997, p. 25).

Government definitions of family

Government definitions of family usually differ from those of sociologists and feminist scholars, as government officials need strict definitions for collecting census data, planning social infrastructure, determining eligibility for social benefits, or considering which family members immigrants are permitted to bring into the country. The Australian Bureau of Statistics, Statistics New Zealand and Statistics Canada share a similar definition of family for the census. A family is a husband and wife (either legally married or living in a *de facto* or common-law relationship), with or without children who have never been married, or a lone parent of any marital status, with one or more children who have never been married, living in the same dwelling.

This definition is close to the nuclear family, yet sociologists might inquire why a couple without children is considered to be the same kind of social group as two parents raising children. Why have gay couples not been included in this definition, even when they are sharing financial resources and raising children together? Why do these governments proclaim that the children must never have married? Despite the fact that census definitions have changed over the years, governments still tend to see families as small groups based on affiliation and legal relationships, rather than their feelings or deeds.

The Canadian and Australian governments collect data on the percentage of 'multi-family households' or 'two or more family households', which is as close as they come to the social science concept of extended family households. Statistics New Zealand collect data using the same terminology, although their publications on Pacific Island families and households use the term 'extended family'. From the statistics these governments provide, we can see that the percentage of extended family households is quite low and declined in some jurisdictions during the 1970s and 1980s. For example, the percentage of such households in Canada declined from 6.7 per cent in 1951 to only 1.1 per cent in 1986, despite the fact that during that period more immigrants came from countries with extended families (Ram 1990, p. 44). This decline may be explained by the fact that most Canadians during that period came to consider living alone more acceptable and feasible for single persons, lone parents and elderly widows. In the past, more of these unattached individuals lived with their relatives rather than establishing autonomous households.

Governments also use the concept of the 'economic family', which refers to related persons sharing a household and resources. In addition, they use the term 'household' for all people living in the same

unit (flat, apartment or house), whether or not they are related. When governments are targeting social benefits to those 'in need', their definitions of family are often expanded to include related persons who share a household, or those deemed to be related. These people can then be treated as family members and expected to provide financial support, reducing eligibility for government income support. Many governments, for example, disallow a low-income mother from receiving income support if she lives with her parents or with an employed man in a 'marriage-like' relationship. The man is assumed to be her 'husband' and is considered to be the family breadwinner for both her and her children. By making such assumptions, governments do not need to provide all low-income citizens with social benefits and thereby save public resources.

In contrast, government definitions of family for immigration purposes usually are more restrictive and often exclude never-married children under a certain age. If an Indian husband/father applied for immigration status for himself and his family, his 23-year-old unmarried daughter would not automatically be permitted to enter as part of his family, even though the father would probably view her as his dependent. This same man might also retain financial responsibility for his younger married brother and his brother's wife and children, but immigration officers would not consider them to be part of the applicant's family. This example suggests that official definitions of family might differ from the definitions held by potential immigrants, many citizens (especially from cultural minorities) and academic researchers. Definitions might also vary by government department, even within the same jurisdiction.

Family diversity

Many social researchers now use the term 'families' in the plural, to connote the variations in family life, instead of referring to 'the family', which implies that there is only one acceptable form (Baker 1996a, p. 5). Furthermore, they try to be as specific as possible about the type of living arrangement or relationship by adding an adjective to make the definition clearer. Social researchers refer to nuclear families, extended families, one-parent families, common-law families, blended families, census families and economic families. Students may think that it is inconsequential how we define any word, yet accurate information about family life is essential for all social researchers, especially when they are gathering data for governments.