THE DECLINE OF THE AMERICAN FAMILY?/DEFINING AND MEASURING DEVIANCE
March 2, 2008

WHAT ABOUT THE 1950S?

- 1950s weren’t as we remember them
  - < 60% of children lived in “traditional” family
  - Many women were unhappy with non-work role
  - Blacks faced worse discrimination than later decades
- 1950s family was “experimental,” not “traditional”
  - Dad-works, mom-stays-home model began in 19th century
  - Women began entering office jobs in 1920s
  - After WWII many women left factories for home
  - But female labor market participation began rising again in 1950s

WHAT ABOUT THE 1950S?

- What was different about the 1950s?
  - Divorce rate, high during Depression & WWII, dropped
  - Age of marriage fell to 100-year low
  - Birth rate soared (Baby Boom)
- What led to the 1950s family experiment?
  - Women were forced out of jobs after WWII
  - Economic growth and government programs allowed for prosperity with one wage earner
  - Ideal of dad-works, mom-stays-home family established
  - New ideal was supported by experts and media

WHY DID THE 1950S EXPERIMENT END?

- 1950s conditions allowed both preferred family form and preferred family lifestyle
  - Form: dad works, mom stays at home
  - Lifestyle: requires purchasing latest consumer goods
- By 1970s many families changed form to maintain lifestyle, e.g., two wage earners, postponing marriage
- During 1970s and 1980s, economic changes resulted in fewer families able to afford preferred form at all
**SIGNS THAT MARRIAGE WILL PERSIST**

- Percentage of women who never marry is lower now than at turn of 20th Century
- Higher divorce rates may indicate higher expectations for marriage
- Most divorced people re-marry; “serial monogamy” is common pattern
- Many gays and lesbians want to marry (and can in three states)

**SOCIAL CONTROL**

Social control: various means by which a society encourages conformity to its rules and expectations

**DEFINING DEVIANCE**

- Deviance: behavior, belief or condition that violates social norms
  - By defining what is normal, society defines what is deviant (relativist approach to deviance)
  - Origin of term is in statistics—“deviation” is the difference between the value of a given case and the group average
  - Sociologists began using “deviance” in 1950s to encompass four major topics—crime and delinquency, mental illness, drug use/addiction, sexual misbehavior
- Different approaches to studying deviance:
  - Why do people commit deviant acts? (causation approach)
  - Why are some people labeled as deviant and what are effects of label? (labeling theory)
  - Why do rules and punishments benefit some groups more than others? (conflict theory)
  - Why are some forms of deviance considered problems and others are not? (social problems approach)
Fearing “Random Crime”

- People most fear “random crime” (Joel Best)
  - Patternless: It can happen to anyone
  - Increasing: Crime is getting worse
  - Pointless: Criminal motives make no sense
- But none of these claims are true
  - Crime is not random: it is stratified by gender, race, class and age
  - Official crime has been declining over the past decade or longer (but may have risen slightly in recent years)
  - Criminals have reasons for committing crimes