criticisms of Aries' research. Many historians, especially Linda Pollock (1983), have refuted some of Aries' claims and have exposed the dangers of using paintings as a major source of evidence. Rubinstein replicates Aries technique: She deduces societal attitudes and practices from paintings as a representation of social reality. Moreover, in summarizing the research of other scholars in an unreflexive way, she presents history as uncontested fact. Her claims would be more persuasive if she had inserted a few evaluative comments about the nature of her primary and secondary evidence. Without such commentary, many paragraphs feel like a superficial abstract of more complex issues, deserving of more discussion.

This book is most useful as a compendium of historical snapshots and visual images to help instructors prepare either a single lecture or a series of lectures on changes in the social circumstances of children's lives and in Western ideas about childhood. I highly recommend that instructors supplement their lectures with slides of several paintings, preferably in color, to help students better imagine what it was like to be a child in a different society. Selected chapters paired with Aries' chapter on "Children's Dress" would work well for either a lower-level undergraduate audience or an upper-level seminar for courses on childhood, family, stratification, gender, or social change.

As a strategic hook to begin and end the book, Rubinstein poses the question, "Is childhood disappearing?" to counter the common lament that contemporary children increasingly are taking on adult-like appearances and behaviors. It comes as no surprise to this reader that Rubinstein answers with a firm no. Childhood is not disappearing; it is just changing—once again.

Reference

Pollock, Linda A. 1983. *Forgotten Children: Parent-Child Relations from 1500–1900.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Families, Households, and Society, by **Graham Allan** and **Graham Crow.** New York: Palgrave, 2001. 246 pp. $65.00 cloth. ISBN: 0333-69306-X.

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Allan and Crow's well-written text uses the tension between choice and constraint to frame the story of family diversity and change in recent decades. Published in conjunction with the British Sociological Association, the book focuses primarily on Britain in its empirical story and in the literature it reviews. Although American readers will benefit from the review of British research on family questions, they should not expect comprehensive cross-national comparisons. Instead, the authors turn to research from the United States when there are gaps in the British research, as with the effects of divorce on children. However, the trends and issues are similar enough to those in the United States to make the book useful for advanced undergraduate or graduate courses with either a British or international comparative focus.

After a theoretical and empirical overview, the book features chapters on families and households at each stage of the life course, including leaving home, cohabitation and marriage, divorce and single parenthood, and stepfamilies. In their story, Allan and Crow seek to avoid both untheorized description and overly broad functionalist theories. Once the assumption is dropped that family forms are the simple outcome of broader social forces, they attempt to integrate several perspectives. Individuals may be seen as making active choices about how to connect with those around them; families and households themselves may be seen as distinctive interested units "into which individuals fit with varying degrees of ease or difficulty"; and finally, one may examine "the links between family forms and wider social forces in which causal influences do not all run from the latter to the former but suggest instead more of a two-way relationship" (p. 9).

This theoretical framing is what makes Allan and Crow's book most appealing. The authors place family and household trends within sociological theories of modernity,

especially those of Anthony Giddens, but also Marx and others. They tie changes in the nature and type of families and living arrangements to the transformations of late modernity and Giddens' "self as a project" (p. 8). At the same time, while people increasingly choose to live outside of traditional or expected arrangements, others have that choice thrust on them by broader social forces: Both dynamics are part of the individualization characteristic of late modernity. In this latter aspect, the authors take off from Marx's formulation of people making their own history, but under circumstances not of their own making. "While we may perceive ourselves as actively constructing our family relationships," they write, "these relationships are all in reality enacted within the constraints imposed by the configuration of other social and economic relations within which our lives are embedded. As with all social relations, agency and structure go hand in hand" (p. 20).

The agency-structure approach here repeatedly draws on several important themes, including state intervention and structural inequalities, which are juxtaposed with the trend toward democratizing family relationships. Here in particular, unfamiliar U.S. readers will benefit from the British perspective, which offers useful contrasts with the U.S. experience. Regarding the dynamic of state intervention and social development, the authors cite the history of divorce in England and Wales. Although there is a clear upward trend in the number of divorces from the 1930s through the 1960s, the divorce rate increased 130 percent in just three years between 1969 and 1972, following divorce law reform that essentially legalized no-fault divorce. The rate then continued upward at a much more modest pace into the 1990s. The centrality of inequality also figures into this example, as the legal and financial difficulty of obtaining a divorce before the new divorce law meant that many couples, especially among the poor, ended their marriages informally.

While paying close attention to continued structural inequalities, Allan and Crow also describe circumstances of decreased inequality, especially within marriages. In this, their optimistic orientation toward changing family and household structures emerges. For example, in discussing the rise of "marital breakdown," they rephrase it as "perhaps more accurately, the increased tendency for unhappy marriages to be legally and socially terminated" (p. 117), and they further note that 70 percent of divorces in England and Wales are initiated by women. If the divorce law, changing norms, and increased economic alternatives for women have all given women (and men) more freedom to leave marriages, it must be noted that the persistence of women's financial dependence and disproportionate child-raising burdens make it more important for them to obtain legal divorces. That the authors maintain this sort of balance throughout the book greatly increases its intellectual and educational value.

From This Day Forward: Commitment, Marriage, and Family in Lesbian and Gay Relationships, by **Gretchen A. Stiers.** New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000. 236 pp. $14.95 paper. ISBN: 0-312-22964-x.

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What is marriage? What are the meanings of intimate relationships? During a time in which many of our society's fundamental beliefs about marriage and family life are in flux, these are useful questions. Gretchen Stiers' *From This Day Forward* asks us to consider the meanings of lesbian and gay relationships. Drawing on interviews with 90 gay men and lesbians living in Massachusetts in the early 1990s, Stiers asks us to consider the debates around same-sex marriage and commitment from the perspective of lesbians and gay men themselves.

Stiers' book is a timely entry in a fast-moving political debate. When it was first printed, Hawaii seemed poised to become the first state in which lesbians and gay men might legally marry. By the time of the second printing, Hawaiian voters had passed a constitutional amendment restricting marriage to heterosexual couples. Since then, the state of Vermont has become the only state granting same-sex couples the same kinds of legal rights and benefits accorded heterosexual marriages by enabling same-sex couples to register their partnerships in "civil unions." Debates about same-sex marriages have also