**Chapter 10: Family: Partner-Taking, People-Making, and Contract Breaking**

**This American Life**

**Recommended Readings**

Stephanie Coontz, The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia TrapThis book demonstrates that the “traditional” family demonstrated in sitcoms like Leave it to Beaver actually represented a large change over what families had been like prior to the 1950's. Here, Coontz debunks many of the myths surrounding the “traditional American family.”

Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, a History: How Love Conquered Marriage*

This book continues Stephanie Coontz’ position that marriage has not always been what we think it is. She provides a detailed history of marriage from ancient Babylon to the Victorian era to demonstrate how recent the idea of marrying for love really is—and how this very emotion may be the undoing of the institution of marriage.

Kathryn Edin and Maria Kefalas, Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women Put Motherhood Before MarriageFor this book, Edin and Kefalas lived among poor single mothers for several months to determine why they choose to have children before getting married. They find that a perceived shortage of “quality,” marriageable men and a high value placed on children leads to large numbers of single mothers among this group.

Sharon Hays, The Cultural Contradictions of MotherhoodHays explores the contradictory messages that women receive about motherhood. Women are expected to be competitive and assertive at work to help provide for their children, but nurturing and caring at home. New ideas about the intense investment children “require” only make parenting more stressful for working women.

Arlie Hochschild, The Second ShiftIn this book, Hochschild interviews couples to describe and explain the extra housework and parenting duties that women are expected to take on after getting home from their paid jobs. She finds that couples use a variety of strategies to rationalize why women must work the Second Shift while men are not given this responsibility.

Annette Lareau, Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family LifeLaureau interviews black and white families to examine the benefits and drawbacks of the different parenting strategies used by poor, working and middle class families.

Pamela Stone, Opting Out? Why Women Really Quit Careers and Head HomeStone interviewed white, professional women who left the workforce to stay at home with their children. She found that the reason the quit working was not because they had a strong desire to be stay at home moms. Instead, it was because they were unable to meet the huge demands of their workplaces while raising their families.

Mark Strasser, Legally Wed: Same-Sex Marriage and the ConstitutionStrasser uses a variety of past cases and state policies to examine the reasons behind banning gay marriage and argues that legal arguments against gay marriage are weak.

Nicholas Townsend, The Package Deal: Marriage, Work, and Fatherhood in Men's LivesIn this book, Townsend details the pressures faced by contemporary men to not only provide for their families, but also to be involved fathers and husbands.

Joanna Gregson, *The Culture of Teenage Mothers*

In this book, Gregson draws from her ethnographic research studying teenage mothers in high schools to describe the social and structural forces impacting teen mothering. Gregson skillfully uncovers the social stigma these teen mothers face and how they give meaning to their parental experiences.

Chrys Ingraham, *White Weddings: Romancing Heterosexuality in Popular Culture*

Ingraham, in this work, deconstructs rituals and beliefs surrounding the modern wedding to show how it romanticizes beliefs about heterosexuality. Ingraham argues that the social construction of weddings has created a “wedding-industrial complex” that feeds classism, racism, sexism, and heterosexism through the materialistic pursuit of a perfect wedding in modern society.

Kathleen Gerson, *The Unfinished Revolution: How a New Generation is Reshaping Family, Work, and Gender in America*

Gerson studies the life histories of over 100 young adults in the New York area to uncover how children born after the women’s movement were impacted by being raised after the Third Wave of feminism. Gerson examines how divorce, step-parenting, working mothers, and blended families impacts young adults’ beliefs about work, family, and relationships.

Paul R. Amato, Alan Booth, David R. Johnson, Stacy J. Rogers. *Alone Together: How Marriage in America Is Changing.*

The researchers outline the two main perspectives in how marriage has changed. Some think it is in decline, that the growth of individualism has made it increasingly difficult to achieve satisfying and stable relationships. Others believe that changes, such as increasing gender equality, have made marriage a better arrangement for men as well as women. Based on two studies of marital quality in America twenty years apart, this book takes a middle view, showing that while the divorce rate has leveled off, spouses are spending less time together—people may be “bowling alone” these days, but married couples are also eating alone. Indeed, the declining social capital of married couples—including the fact that couples have fewer shared friends—combined with the general erosion of community ties in American society has had pervasive, negative effects on marital quality. However, family income has increased, decision-making equality between husbands and wives is greater, marital conflict and violence have declined, and the norm of lifelong marriage enjoys greater support than ever.

Hertz, Rosanna, and Nancy L. Marshall. *Working Families: The Transformation of the American Home*. Two sociologists look at the rise of dual-income families and the social dynamics of work and parenthood.