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Article Review I

Introduction to the Family

By Richie Heinlein

Coontz, Stephanie (1998). The Way We

Wish We Were: Defining the Family

Crisis. In Andrew J. Cherlin (Ed.),

Public and Private Families: A Reader.

New York: McGraw-Hill

In her essay, "The Way We Wish We Were", Stephanie Coontz argues that the very definition of family is based on imitation of a mix of family cohorts. Coontz supports this claim by studies and polls done in the last several decades. It is clear that she is thinking that there are a lot of myths out there about the "traditional family". Coontz is trying, based on these studies to burst the various and sometimes comfortable bubbles of these myths. She wants her readers to look closer at what family life is and tell them what family is not.

Her most stunning when she compared and contrasted nostalgic people about what family should be vs. what family is today and was in the past. This would include the unrealistic medium of the television and media. Then she, in my opinion, played a hypothetical game of "What If". In other words if a person got his/her wish, what would life truly be like? This means both good and bad. Coontz then backs her statements up with statistics and historic data and polls.

I agree with Coontz's essay. I especially agree with the Victorian style of family. Coontz writes that some people would want to go back to the 1830's and 1840's variety of family values. Coontz writes however, that these same people wouldn't want the whole package deal of child labor. Nor would they want the sexual immorality perhaps of the colonial family times if a person wanted that kind of life. This says to me that people are grossly uninformed about our history. However the studies listed in this article could be biased and may need to be taken with a grain of salt because it is hard to make a study with no bias in it and the studies are open to interpretation. Coontz may have hinted at this when she was comparing and contrasting the studies in this article.

She compared two sets of data from the same study with stark contrasts. Coontz was talking about the number of two-parent families with only the father working for wages being down from past years in 1990, 1991. One of Coontz's sources said the dip was due to the recession. So, this would mean the statistics were flawed. Because of this and a few other stats like this, I agree with Coontz.