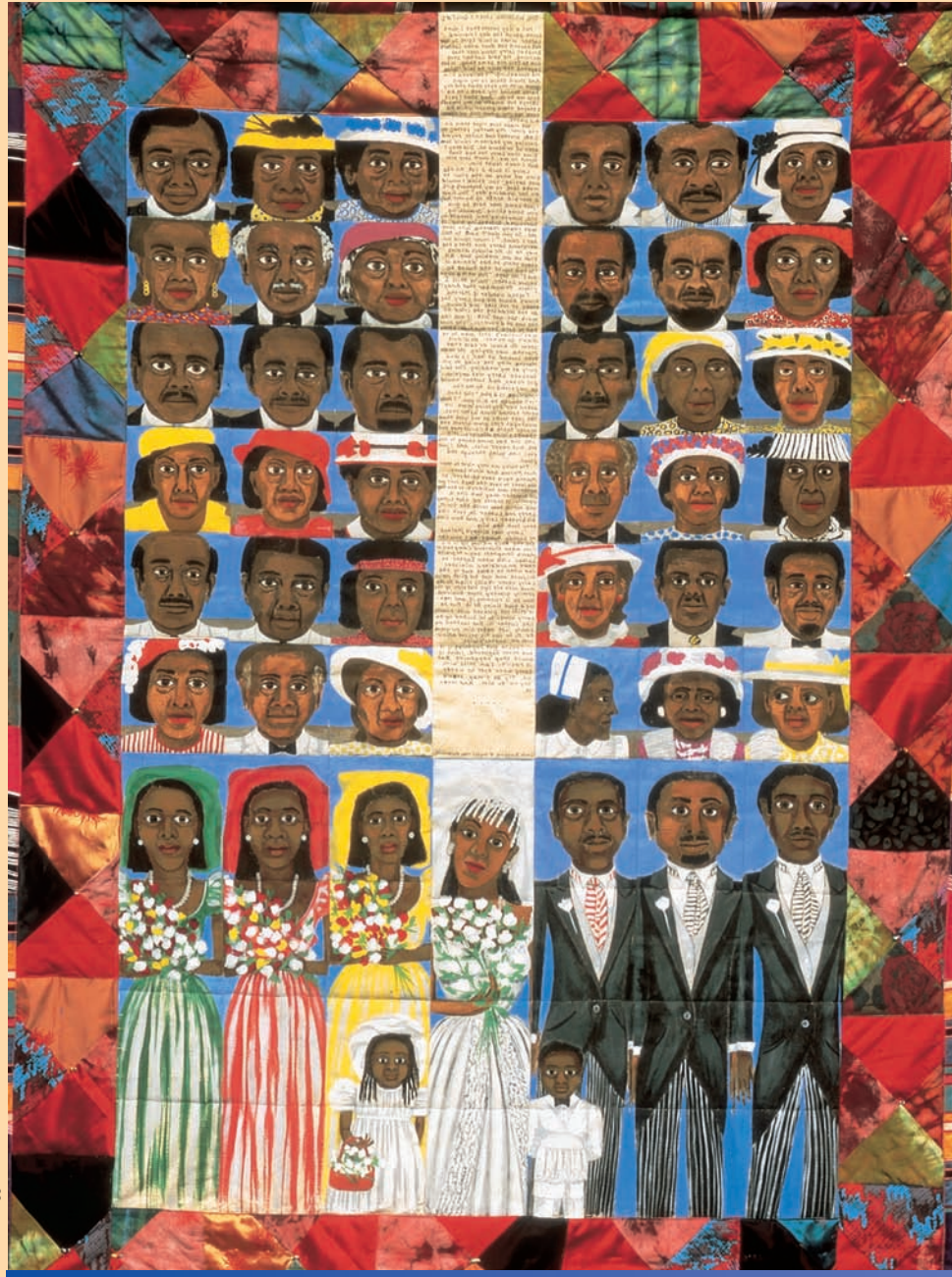


CHAPTER 1



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The Meaning of Marriage and the Family

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What Do YOU Think?

Are the following statements **TRUE** or **FALSE**?

You may be surprised by the answers (see answer key on the following page).

- | | | |
|----------|----------|---|
| T | F | 1 Most American families are traditional nuclear families in which the husband works and the wife stays at home caring for the children. |
| T | F | 2 Families are easy to define and count. |
| T | F | 3 No U.S. state prohibits interracial marriage. |
| T | F | 4 All cultures traditionally divide at least some work into male and female tasks. |
| T | F | 5 In the United States, all states recognize same-sex "civil unions." |
| T | F | 6 There is widespread agreement about the nature and causes of change in American family patterns. |
| T | F | 7 Most cultures throughout the world prefer monogamy—the practice of having only one husband or wife. |
| T | F | 8 Married men tend to live longer than single men. |
| T | F | 9 Most people who divorce eventually marry again. |
| T | F | 10 Nuclear families, single-parent families, and stepfamilies are equally valid family forms. |

A course in marriage and the family is unlike almost any other course you are likely to take. At the start of the term—before you purchase any books, before you attend any lectures, and before you take any notes—you may believe you already know a lot about families. Indeed, each of us acquires much firsthand experience of family living before being formally instructed about what families are or what they do. Furthermore, each of us comes to this subject with some pretty strong ideas and opinions about families: what they're like, how they should live, and what they need. Our personal beliefs and values shape what we think we know as much as our experience in our families influences our thinking about what family life is like. But if pressed, how would we describe American family life? Are our families “healthy” and stable? Is marriage important for the well-being of adults and children? Are today's fathers and mothers sharing responsibility for raising their children? How many cheat on each other? What happens when people divorce? Do stepfamilies differ from biological families? How common are abuse and violence in families? Questions such as these will be considered throughout this book; they encourage us to think about what we know about families and where our knowledge comes from.

In this chapter, we examine how marriage and family are defined by individuals and society, paying particular attention to the discrepancies between the realities of family life as uncovered by social scientists and the impressions we have formed elsewhere. We then look at the functions that marriages and families fulfill and examine extended families and kinship. We close by introducing the themes that will be pursued through the remaining chapters.

Answer Key for What Do You Think

1 False, see p. 7; 2 False, see p. 6; 3 True, see p. 9; 4 True, see p. 15; 5 False, see p. 12; 6 False, see p. 21; 7 False, see p. 12; 8 True, see p. 14; 9 True, see p. 13; 10 True, see p. 6.

Personal Experience, Social Controversy, and Wishful Thinking

Experience versus Expertise

As we begin to study family patterns and issues, we need to understand that our attitudes and beliefs about families may affect and distort our efforts. In contemplating the wider issues about families that are the substance of this book, it is likely that we will consider our own households and family experiences. How we respond to the issues and information presented over the 600-plus pages and 14 chapters that follow will be influenced by what we have experienced in and come to believe about families. For some of us, those experiences have been largely loving and the relationships have remained stable. For others, family life has been characterized by conflict and bitterness, separations and reconfigurations. Most people have experienced both sides of family life, the love and the conflict, whether their families remained intact or not.

The temptation to draw conclusions about families from personal experiences of particular families is understandable. Thinking that experience translates to expertise, we may find ourselves tempted to generalize from what we experience to what others must also encounter in family life. The dangers of doing that are clear; although the knowledge we have about our own families is vividly real, it is also highly subjective. We “see” things, in part, as we want to see them. Likewise, we overlook some things because we don't want to accept them. Perhaps, we want to pretend they don't exist. The meanings we attach to our experiences are affected by the emotions we feel within the relationships that comprise our families. Our family members are likely to have different perceptions and attach different meanings to even those same relationships. Thus, the understanding we have of our families is very likely a distorted one.

Furthermore, no other family is exactly like your family. We don't all live where you live or how you live, and we don't all possess the same financial resources, draw from the same cultural backgrounds, and build on the same sets of experiences that make your family unique. As well as we might think we know our

families, they are poor sources of more general knowledge about the wider marital or family issues that are the focus of this book.

Ongoing Social Controversy

Learning about marriage and family relationships is challenging for another reason. Few areas of social life are more controversial than family matters. Just consider the following news stories. Can you identify any underlying issues involved? What is your position on such issues?

- On September 9, 2005, Texas juvenile court judge Carl Lewis ordered that 13-year-old Katie Wernecke receive chemotherapy to treat her Hodgkin's disease, despite her parents' opposition. Custody of Katie was taken from her parents, Edward and Michelle Wernecke, after Michelle left the state with Katie. The Werneckes did not oppose medical treatment on religious grounds but rather opposed the high-dosage treatment because they felt it posed other medical problems (Associated Press, June 16, 2005). On October 31, 2005, state district court judge Jack Hunter returned Katie, whose health was declining, to the custody of her parents, who still wanted to seek alternative, mostly vitamin, treatments. Doctors estimated that Katie's chances for survival had dropped from 80% to 20% because of the incomplete treatment she received (Brezosky 2005).
- In May 2001, 52-year-old Tom Green became the first Utah man in more than 50 years to be prosecuted for bigamy. Green, a fundamentalist Mormon, proudly proclaimed that his family of five wives and their 33 children was an expression of his devout Mormon faith. For nonsupport and multiple counts of bigamy, he was convicted and sentenced to 5 years in prison. Subsequently, Green was then tried for child rape for having had sex with a 13-year-old girl who later became one of his wives and who gave birth to seven of his children. He was further sentenced to 5 years to life. At present, an estimated 30,000–50,000 people live in polygamous families in Utah.
- The 11 adopted special needs children of Michael and Sharen Gravelle were taken from their custody after it was discovered that 8 of the 11 were kept in "enclosures" or wooden cages, without pillows or mattresses, either overnight or as discipline (Associated Press, January 9, 2006). The children have disorders



AP Images/Lynn Ischay/THE PLAIN DEALER

- *Michael Gravelle stands next to a bunk bed Sunday, October 23, 2005, built over a clothing storage area in the room where four of his adopted children slept in cage-like enclosures. Gravelle and his wife Sharen lost custody of their eleven adopted special needs children when it was discovered that they made some sleep in cages.*

such as fetal alcohol syndrome, autism, human immunodeficiency virus, and pica, a disorder that involves eating nonfood items. Although the Gravelles claimed to stand behind their childrearing practices, they said they would give up the enclosures and be more lenient in their discipline to get their children back. Meanwhile, the Ohio agency responsible for overseeing children's needs came under severe criticism for allowing the situation to go unnoticed.

- On June 17, 2005, Tina Burch, lesbian partner of the late Christina Smarr, was awarded custody of Smarr's 5-year-old son by West Virginia's highest court. The women had been life partners for 4 years, had planned and arranged Smarr's pregnancy, and were raising Smarr's son. Smarr was killed in an auto accident in June 2002. A family court judge awarded Burch custody, only to have it overturned by a Clay County circuit court judge on the grounds that West Virginia law doesn't give gay partners the right to legal guardianship of a former partner's child. A divided West Virginia Supreme Court overturned the circuit court decision and declared that a "psychological parent" could be a biological, adoptive, foster, or

stepparent. The court decision was a milestone: for the first time a same-sex partner was accorded psychological parent status (Ramsey 2005).

Each of the preceding cases contain underlying family issues that spark considerable disagreement and social controversy. In determining both the medical care and the disciplinary methods to which children will be subjected, how much freedom and latitude should parents enjoy? How much should the state restrict people's choices of whom they wish to marry? How far do the rights of gays and lesbians extend in areas of marriage and parenting? This is but a partial list of the issues and implications of the aforementioned cases. And these cases are but a sampling of ongoing controversies to which we could add, for example, grandparents' rights, implications of advances in reproductive technology, divorce-related policy initiatives, custody and child support, and social policies and personal strategies of juggling paid work and family life. As a society, we are often divided, sometimes deeply and bitterly, on such family issues. That we are so deeply invested in certain values regarding family life makes a course about families a different kind of learning experience than if you were studying material to which you were less connected. Ideally, as a result, you will find yourself more engaged, even provoked, to think about and question things you take for granted. At minimum, you will be exposed to information that can help you more objectively understand the realities behind the more vocal debates.

What Is Family? What Is Marriage?

To accurately understand marriage and family, it is important to define these terms. Before reading any further, think about what the words *marriage* and *family* mean to you. As simple and straightforward as this may seem, as you attempt to systematically define these words, you may be surprised at the complexity involved.

Defining Family

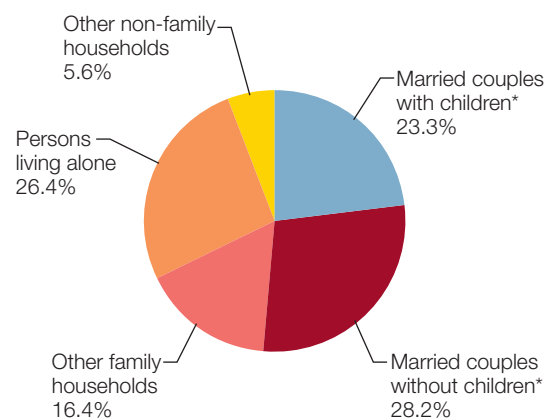
As contemporary Americans, we live in a society composed of many kinds of families—married couples, stepfamilies, single-parent families, multigenerational

families, cohabiting adults, child-free families, families headed by gay men or by lesbians, and so on. With such variety, how can we define family? What are the criteria for identifying these groups as families?

For official counts of the numbers and characteristics of American families, we can turn to the U.S. Census Bureau. The Census Bureau defines a **family** as “a group of two or more persons related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together in a household” (U.S. Census Bureau 2001). A distinction is made between a family and a **household**. A household consists of “one or more people—everyone living in a housing unit makes up a household” (Fields 2003). Single people who live alone, roommates, lodgers, and live-in domestic service employees are all counted among members of households, as are family groups. *Family households* are those in which at least two members are related by birth, marriage, or adoption (Fields 2003). Thus, the U.S. Census reports on characteristics of the nation's households *and* families (Figure 1.1). Of the 111,278,000 households in the United States in 2003, 75,596,000, or 68%, were family households (Fields 2003). Among family households, 76% (57,320,000) consisted of married couples, either with or without children (Fields 2003).

In individuals' perceptions of their own life experiences, *family* has a less precise definition. For example, when we asked our students whom they included as family members, their lists included such

Figure 1.1 ■ Household Composition, 2003



SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, *Current Population Survey*, March, 2nd Annual Social and Economic Supplements: 1970–2003

expected relatives as mother, father, sibling, spouse, as well as the following:

| | | |
|-------------|----------|--------------|
| best friend | lover | priest |
| boyfriend | minister | rabbi |
| girlfriend | neighbor | and teacher. |
| godchild | pet | |

Most of those designated as family members are individuals related by descent, marriage, remarriage, or adoption, but some are **affiliated kin**—unrelated individuals who feel and are treated as if they were relatives.

Reflections

Think about all the people you consider your family. What criteria—biological, legal, affectional—did you use? Did you exclude any biological or legal family? If so, whom and why?

Furthermore, being related biologically or through marriage is not always sufficient to be counted as a family member or kin. One researcher (Furstenberg 1987) found that 19% of the children with biological siblings living with them did not identify their brothers or sisters as family members. Sometimes an absent

or divorced parent was not counted as a relative. Step-parents, stepsiblings, or stepchildren were the most likely not to be viewed as family members (Furstenberg 1987; Ihinger-Tallman and Pasley 1987). Emotional closeness may be more important than biology or law in defining family.

There are also ethnic differences as to what constitutes family. Among Latinos, for example, *compadres* (or godparents) are considered family members. Similarly, among some Japanese Americans the *ie* (pronounced “ee-eh”) is the traditional family. The *ie* consists of living members of the extended family (such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins), as well as deceased and yet-to-be-born family members (Kikumura and Kitano 1988). Among many traditional Native American tribes, the **clan**, a group of related families, is regarded as the fundamental family unit (Yellowbird and Snipp 1994).

A major reason we have such difficulty defining *family* is that we tend to think that the “real” family is the **nuclear family**, consisting of mother, father, and children. The term “nuclear family” is less than 60 years old, coined by anthropologist Robert Murdock in 1949 (Levin 1993). What most Americans consider to be the **traditional family** is a mostly middle-class version of the nuclear family in which women’s primary roles are wife and mother and men’s primary roles are



PhotoFest

■ The strength and vitality of kin ties was a major theme in the popular 2002 movie, *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*. The film has grossed more than \$240 million.

husband and breadwinner. As shown in Chapter 3, the traditional family exists more in our imaginations than it ever did in reality.

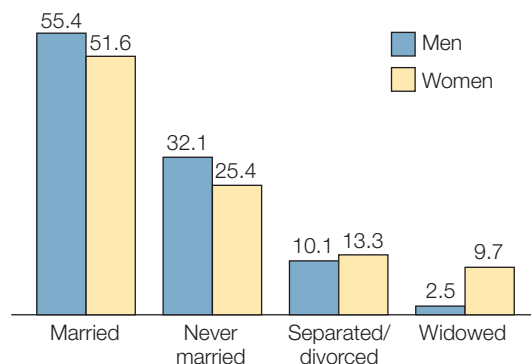
Because we believe that the nuclear or traditional family is the real family, we compare all other family forms against these models. To include these diverse forms, the definition of family needs to be expanded beyond the boundaries of the “official” census definition. A more contemporary and inclusive definition describes family as “two or more persons related by birth, marriage, adoption, or choice. Families are further defined by socio-emotional ties and enduring responsibilities, particularly in terms of one or more members’ dependence on others for support and nurturance” (Allen, Demo, and Fine 2000). Such a definition more accurately and completely reflects the diversity of contemporary American family experience.

Defining Marriage

More than half of the population of the United States, age 15 and older, is married (U.S. Census Bureau 2004). Among males, 55% are currently married and 68% have at least experienced marriage (that is, are married, separated, divorced, or widowed). Although a smaller percentage of females is currently married (51.6%), 75% of females 15 and older, are or have been married (Fields 2003) (see Figure 1.2).

With marriage being such a central part of adult life for so many, it seems marriage would be an easy phenomenon to define and understand.

Figure 1.2 ■ Marital Status of U.S. Population



SOURCE: Fields, Jason. 2003. *America's Families and Living Arrangements: 2003*. Current Population Reports, P20-553. U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC. (Figure 6) <http://www.census.gov/prod/2004pubs/p20-553.pdf>.

A **marriage** is a legally recognized union between two people, generally a man and a woman, in which they are united sexually, cooperate economically, and may give birth to, adopt, or rear children. The union is assumed to be permanent (although it may be dissolved by separation or divorce). As simple as such a definition may make marriage seem, it differs among cultures and has changed considerably in our society.

With one exception, the Na of China, marriage has been a universal institution throughout recorded history (Coontz 2005). Despite the universality of marriage, widely varying rules across time and cultures dictate whom one can, should, or must marry; how many spouses one may have at any given time; and where married couples can and should live—including whether husbands and wives are to live together or apart, whether resources are shared between spouses or remain the individual property of each, and whether children are seen as the responsibility of both partners or not (Coontz 2005).

Among non-Western cultures, who may marry whom and at what age varies greatly from our society. In some areas of India, Africa, and Asia, for example, children as young as 6 years may marry other children (and sometimes adults), although they may not live together until they are older. In many cultures, marriages are arranged by families who choose their children’s partners. In many such societies, the “choice” partner is a first cousin. And in one region of China, marriages are sometimes arranged between unmarried young men and women who are dead.

Considerable cultural variation exists in what societies identify as the essential characteristics that define couples as married. In many societies, marriage entails an elaborate ceremony, witnessed and legitimated by others, which then bestows a set of expectations, obligations, rights, and privileges on the newly married. Far from this relatively familiar construction of marriage, Stephanie Coontz notes that in some “small-scale societies” the act of eating alone together defines a couple as married. In such instances, as found among the Vanatinai of the South Pacific, for example, dining together alone has more social significance than sleeping together (Coontz 2005). Anthropological study of Sri Lanka revealed that when a woman cooked a meal for a man, this indicated that the two were married. Likewise, if a woman stopped cooking for a man, their marriage might be considered a thing of the past.

Although cultural and historical variation abounds, the following seem to be shared among all arrangements defined as marriages (Coontz 2005):

- Marriage typically establishes rights and obligations connected to gender, sexuality, relationships with kin and in-laws, and legitimacy of children.
- Marriage establishes specific roles within the wider community and society. It specifies the rights and duties of husbands and wives, as well as of their respective families, to each other and makes such duties and responsibilities enforceable by the wider society.
- Marriage allows the orderly transfer of wealth and property from one generation to the next.

Many Americans believe that marriage is divinely instituted; others assert that it is a civil institution involving the state. The belief in the divine institution of marriage is common to religions such as Christianity, Judaism, and Islam and to many tribal religions throughout the world. But the Christian church only slowly became involved in weddings; early Christianity was at best ambivalent about marriage, despite being opposed to divorce (Coontz 2005). Over time, as the church increased its power, it extended control over marriage. Traditionally, marriages had been arranged between families (the father “gave away” his daughter in exchange for goods or services); by the tenth century, marriages were valid only if they were performed by priests. By the thirteenth century, the ceremony was required to take place in a church (Gies and Gies 1987). As states competed with organized religion for power, governments began to regulate marriage. In the United States today, for marriages to be legal—whether they are performed by ministers, priests, rabbis, or imams—they must be validated through government-issued marriage licenses. This is a right for which many gay men and lesbians continue to fight.

Matter of Fact

In 2003, 58.8% of the adult population in the United States (age 18 and older) were married. This includes 60.7% of men and 57.1% of women (U.S. Census Bureau 2004-2005, Tables 51 and 53).

Who May Marry?

Who may marry has changed over the last 150 years in the United States. Laws once prohibited enslaved African Americans from marrying because they were regarded as property. Marriages between members of different races were illegal in more than half the states until 1966, when the U.S. Supreme Court declared such prohibitions unconstitutional. Each state enacts its own laws regulating marriage, leading to some discrepancies from state to state. For example, in some states, first cousins may marry; other states prohibit such marriages as incestuous. We will more fully explore such legal aspects of marriage (such as the age at which one can marry, whom one may marry, and so on) in Chapter 9.

The greatest current controversy regarding legal marriage is over the continuing question of same-sex marriage. As you read this book, we remain amid potentially revolutionary change. Before we look at current developments, let’s glance back at the recent past.

Beginning in the 1990s, countries such as Germany, France, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Norway enacted legislation extending marital rights or marriage-like protections to gay couples. Some stopped short of allowing gay or lesbian couples to legally marry, but in the Netherlands, Belgium, Canada, and Spain, as well as in Massachusetts in the United States, the right to marry extends to same-sex couples. Sometime in 2006 (as this book is in production), South Africa will extend the right to marry to gay couples. In addition, a number of countries—including Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, Iceland, France, Germany, Finland, Luxembourg, Britain, Portugal, Slovenia, Australia and New Zealand, as well as the states of Connecticut and Vermont in the United States—grant recognition to same-sex couples who register as “domestic partners” or enter “civil unions.” With the issue in such a dynamic state of change, by the time you read this that list may well have grown.

In the United States, the issue of gay marriage has been in flux for more than a decade. In the 1990s, U.S. courts rendered decisions that seemed to pave the way toward American legalization of same-sex marriage. The two most notable cases were in Hawaii and Vermont. In 1993, the Hawaii Supreme Court ruled that denying gay men and lesbians the right to marry was unconstitutional in that it violated the equal protection clause of the state constitution. This decision led many to anticipate the eventual legalization of

same-sex marriage. It also caused opponents of gay marriage to take action. A number of state legislatures, along with the federal government, passed laws that declared marriage to be the union of one man and one woman, which prevented the forced acceptance of gay or lesbian marriages should the Hawaiian decision stand up to an appeal.

In 1996, Congress passed the **Defense of Marriage Act**, and President Bill Clinton signed it into law. This act denied federal recognition to same-sex couples and gave states the right to legally ignore gay or lesbian marriages should they gain legal recognition in Hawaii or any other state. But the earlier Hawaiian decision did not stand. In a November 1998 ballot, 69% of Hawaiian voters chose to amend the state constitution, giving lawmakers the power to block same-sex marriage and limit legal marriage to heterosexual couples.

Similar laws were passed in more than half of the 50 states by November 1998. As 1999 drew to a close, the state of Vermont took a major step toward what some believed would be the eventual legal recognition of gay marriage.

There, three same-sex couples filed lawsuits, challenging a 1975 state ruling prohibiting same-sex couples from marrying. On December 20, 1999, the Vermont Supreme Court ruled that the state legislature had to either grant marriage rights to same-sex couples or assure them a legal equivalent to marriage,

providing them the same range of state benefits enjoyed by married heterosexuals.

On April 26, 2000, Vermont Governor Howard Dean signed into law legislation recognizing same-sex “civil unions.” Although they are not marriages, “civil unions” are officially entered, offer the same rights and protections as marriages, and must be officially dissolved when they fail. As of January 2005, more than 7,500 such civil unions had been recorded in Vermont, more than 1,100 between state residents and another 6,400 involving residents of almost every state, the nation’s capital, and several other countries, including Canada (Vermont Guide to Civil Unions, <http://www.sec.state.vt.us/otherprg/civilunions/civilunions.html>).

In October 2001, California passed Chapter 893, a law granting gay or lesbian domestic partners many benefits (including tax benefits, stepparent adoption, sick leave, and permission to make medical decisions) otherwise restricted to married couples. Although far less sweeping in scope than Vermont’s civil union legislation, Chapter 893 provided same-sex couples more benefits than found anywhere in the United States other than Vermont (Vermont Guide to Civil Unions 2005). In June 2002, Connecticut passed more limited legislation, giving gay or lesbian couples certain partnership rights and responsibilities.

On June 26, 2003, in the case of *Lawrence and Garner v. Texas*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled 6–3 that

■ *Same sex marriage is now legal in the U.S., but as of 2006, only in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.*



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Issues and Insights The Rights and Benefits of Marriage



Lieutenant Laurel Hester, 49 years old and a long-time officer for the Ocean County, New Jersey, county prosecutor's office, was dying of lung cancer. For months, as her disease spread, Hester fought against the Ocean County freeholders, seeking the right to have her pension benefits pass to her same-sex partner, Stacie Andree. For a variety of expressed reasons, the freeholders rejected her plea. In fact, had she worked in a different New Jersey County or for the New Jersey state government, she would have had the right to leave her benefits to a domestic partner. But pension benefits for those in the Police and Fire Retirement System could only be passed to spouses (Bonafide 2006), and New Jersey state law does not allow same-sex couples to marry. Just weeks prior to her death, Ocean County freeholders relented. Facing considerable public outcry, Ocean County freeholders voted to allow the \$13,000 benefit to be transferred to Andree.

Heterosexuals rarely stop to think about the privileges that sexual orientation offers. One such privilege is the right to marry. Those couples who do marry receive many more rights and protections than couples who don't marry.

For heterosexual cohabitants, this is a matter of choice; they do so because they prefer the more informal arrangement. For many same-sex couples, the historical *inability* to

marry has cost them many protections, some of which are listed below. It is the lack of these rights and protections that state courts in the United States (Hawaii, Vermont, and Massachusetts, for example) have found unconstitutional.

- Accidental death benefit for the surviving spouse of a government employee
- Appointment as guardian of a minor
- Award of child custody in divorce proceedings
- Burial of service member's dependents
- Control, division, acquisition, and disposition of community property
- Death benefit for the surviving spouse for a government employee
- Disclosure of vital statistics records
- Division of property after dissolution of marriage
- Funeral leave for government employees
- Income tax deductions, credits, rates exemption, and estimates
- Legal status with partner's children
- Partner medical decisions
- Nonresident tuition deferential waiver
- Payment of worker's compensation benefits after death
- Permission to make arrangements for burial or cremation
- Proof of business partnership
- Public assistance from the Department of Human Services
- Qualification at a facility for the elderly

- Right of survivorship to custodial trust
- Right to change names
- Right to enter into a premarital agreement
- Right to file action for nonsupport
- Right to inherit property
- Right to support after divorce
- Right to support from spouse
- Spousal privilege and confidential marriage communications
- Spousal immigration benefits
- Status of children
- In vitro fertilization coverage

There are also potential personal and emotional benefits related to the right to marry. Knowing that the wider society recognizes, accepts, or respects a relationship may cause feelings of greater self-validation and comfort within the relationship. On the other hand, knowing that people do not respect, accept, or recognize a commitment may cause additional emotional suffering and personal anguish for the partners involved. Opposition to same-sex marriage is rarely based on issues such as legal rights. Opponents most often question the moral acceptability of gay or lesbian relationships. They often refer to religious grounds for their rejection of gay marriage. Morality is harder to address objectively than the question of legal rights. Clearly, those who can and do marry receive substantial privileges and protections that those who don't or can't must live without.

SOURCE: Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, "What Is Marriage, Anyway?" <http://www.pflag.org/education/marriage.html>.

existing laws against sodomy, in Texas and 12 other states, were illegal invasions of privacy. The ruling, which struck down the 13 remaining state sodomy

statutes, stemmed from a 1998 arrest of two Houston men, John Lawrence and Tyron Garner, who were having sex when police entered their home on a false

emergency call. The men were arrested, jailed overnight, and fined \$200 under the Texas sodomy statute. Texas was one of four states whose sodomy statute pertained only to same-sex relations. The remaining nine statutes pertained to heterosexuals and homosexuals. All 13 were nullified with the Court's decision. Although the ruling was about private, consensual sex, not about same-sex marriage, many perceived it as a potential step further down the path toward gay marriage.

Of greatest significance, the Massachusetts Supreme Court ruled November 18, 2003, that the state's ban of same-sex marriage was unconstitutional. The ruling gave the state legislature 6 months to remedy the situation. Although Vermont's response was to create civil unions that provided the same rights and benefits as legal marriage, the Massachusetts court's decision specified the *right to marry* (that is, not the right to enter something similar to marriage). Although the Massachusetts legislature and governor remained opposed to same-sex marriage, on February 4, 2004, the state supreme court ruled 4–3 that a “civil union” solution was unacceptable in that it would constitute “an unconstitutional, inferior, and discriminatory status for same-sex couples.” Writing in the *Boston Globe*, journalist Raphael Lewis quoted the court: “For no rational reason the marriage laws of the Commonwealth discriminate against a defined class; no amount of tinkering with language will eradicate that stain. . . . The [civil unions] bill would have the effect of maintaining and fostering a stigma of exclusion that the Constitution prohibits” (Lewis 2004).

As you read these words, Massachusetts has had more than 2 years of fully legal gay marriage recognized in the United States for the first time. In the first 16 months of the law, 6,500 gay or lesbian couples married in Massachusetts.

It is difficult to predict what level of opposition to gay marriage will continue in Massachusetts or what effect it will have. It is also difficult to predict what may happen elsewhere in the United States. Some states may eventually recognize civil unions performed in Vermont or same-sex marriages performed in Massachusetts. Other state legislatures might create their own domestic partner legislation. In January 2006, five states—New Jersey, New York, Washington, Iowa, and California—had cases pending much like the Hawaii case that led to civil union legislation there (<http://www.lambdalegal.org>, 2006). Also, some form of civil union or domestic partnership is available to same-

sex couples in six states: Hawaii, Vermont, Connecticut, New Jersey, Maine, and California. It is hard to predict how many additional states may enact similar legislation.

We have witnessed continued reluctance to legalize gay marriage as more than forty other states have since enacted legislation modeled on the Defense of Marriage Act, passing constitutional amendments limiting marriage to heterosexual couples. Ohio, for example, enacted some of the most restrictive defense-of-marriage legislation in the country. The bill, signed by Governor Bob Taft on February 5, 2004, explicitly defined and prohibited gay marriage as “against the strong public policy of the state.” It further denies benefits to state employees' unmarried partners, whether they be heterosexuals, gay men, or lesbians. Without reciprocal recognition (i.e., other states acknowledging and supporting same-sex marriages performed in Massachusetts), more civil suits are certain to follow.

Forms of Marriage

In Western cultures such as the United States, the only legal form of marriage is **monogamy**, the practice of having only one spouse at one time. Monogamy is also the only form of marriage recognized in *all* cultures. Interestingly, and possibly surprisingly, it is not the *preferred* form of marriage in most other cultures. Among world cultures, only 24% of the known cultures perceive monogamy as the ideal form of marriage (Murdock 1967). The preferred marital arrangement worldwide is **polygamy**, the practice of having more than one wife or husband. One study of 850 non-Western societies found that 84% of the cultures studied (representing, nevertheless, a minority of the world's population) practiced or accepted **polygyny**, the practice of having two or more wives (Gould and Gould 1989). **Polyandry**, the practice of having two or more husbands, is actually quite rare: where it does occur, it often coexists with poverty, a scarcity of land or property, and an imbalanced ratio of men to women.

Even within polygynous societies, monogamy is the *most widely practiced* form of marriage. In such societies, plural marriages are in the minority, primarily for simple economic reasons: they are a sign of status that relatively few people can afford and require wealth that few men possess. As we think about polygyny, we

may imagine high levels of jealousy and conflict among wives. Indeed, problems of jealousy may and do arise in plural marriages—the Fula in Africa, for example, call the second wife “the jealous one.” Based on data from 69 polygynous societies (56% of which were in Africa), Jankowiak, Sudakov, and Wilreker suggest that co-wife conflict and competition for access to the husband is common, but there are also circumstances that reduce conflict (for example, when the wives are sisters, when one is fertile and one barren or post-menopausal). For both the men and the women involved, polygyny brings higher status.

Even though conflict and competition among co-wives is often found in polygynous societies, the level is probably less than would result if our monogamous society was to suddenly allow people multiple spouses. In part because of our culture’s traditional roots in Christianity, polygamy has been illegal in the United States since a U.S. Supreme Court decision in 1879. Polygamy was prohibited because it was considered a potential threat to public order (Tracy 2002). As a result, polygamy was looked on as strange or exotic. However, it may not seem so strange if we look at actual American marital practices. Considering the high divorce and remarriage rates in this country, monogamy may no longer be the best way of describing our marriage forms. For many, our marriage system might more accurately be called **serial monogamy** or **modified polygamy**, a practice in which one person may have several spouses over his or her lifetime although no more than one at any given time. In our nation’s past, enslaved Africans tried unsuccessfully to continue their traditional polygamous practices when they first arrived in America; these attempts, however, were rigorously suppressed by their masters (Guttman 1976). Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, more commonly known as Mormons, practiced polygamy from the 1830s until the late nineteenth century, when they officially abandoned the practice as a condition of Utah’s becoming a state. The U.S. Supreme Court decision *Reynolds v. the United States* asserted that polygamy was not protected by the Constitution. Just four years later, in 1882, Congress passed the Edmunds Act, making “bigamous cohabitation” a crime. In 1890, the leadership of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints formally advised members to refrain from polygamy because it was in violation of the law. After numerous warnings, the church leadership began excommunicating members who continued to prac-

tice polygamy. These excommunicated Mormons became the fundamentalists that continue, even through today, to practice plural marriage and live polygamously. The offices of Utah’s and Arizona’s attorneys general jointly report that there are at least a dozen fundamentalist Mormon groups, ranging in size from 100 to 10,000, living polygamously in parts of the southwest. The two largest, the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the Apostolic United Brethren, each claim perhaps as many as 10,000 members. The former lives a fairly isolated and secluded lifestyle. The latter tends to be integrated into the wider society (Shurtleff and Goddard 2005). As explained in a manual jointly published by the Utah and Arizona attorney general’s offices, rather than crack down on the polygamy itself (which is criminal, as seen earlier in the case of Tom Green), most law enforcement efforts are focused on crimes committed within polygamous communities, such as tax evasion, child or spouse abuse, sexual assault, or fraud (Shurtleff and Goddard 2005). Although all wives may live as married in polygamous unions, only the first wife has legal status as a wife.

Functions of Marriages and Families

Whether it is the mother–father–child nuclear family, a married couple with no children, a single-parent family, a stepfamily, a dual-worker family, or a cohabiting family, the family generally performs four important functions: (1) it provides a source of intimate relationships; (2) it acts as a unit of economic cooperation and consumption; (3) it may produce and socialize children; and (4) it assigns social roles and status to individuals. Although these are the basic functions that families are “supposed” to fulfill, families do not have to fulfill them all (as in families without children), nor do they always fulfill them well (as in abusive families).

Intimate Relationships

Intimacy is a primary human need. Human companionship strongly influences rates of illnesses such as cancer or tuberculosis, as well as suicide, accidents, and mental illness.

Studies consistently show that married couples and adults living with others are generally healthier and have a lower mortality rate than divorced, separated, and never-married individuals (Ross, Mirowsky, and Goldstein 1991). Although some of this difference results from what is known as the *selection* factor—wherein healthier people are more likely to marry or live with someone—both marriage and cohabitation yield benefits to health and well-being. This holds true for Caucasians and African Americans (Broman 1988). Chapter 9 will consider in more detail whether it is the selection into marriage of healthier individuals or the protective benefits of marriage that accounts for the health benefits of marriage.

Family Ties

Marriage and the family usually furnish emotional security and support. This has probably been true from the earliest times. Thousands of years ago, in the Judeo-Christian Bible, the book of Ecclesiastes (4:9–12) emphasized the importance of companionship:

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up. Again if two lie together, they are warm; but how can one be warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one, two will withstand him. A three-fold cord is not quickly broken.

It is in our families we generally seek and find our strongest bonds. These bonds can be forged from love, attachment, loyalty, obligation, or guilt. The need for

intimate relationships, whether they are satisfactory or not, may hold unhappy marriages together indefinitely. Loneliness may be a terrible specter. Among the newly divorced, it may be one of the worst aspects of the marital breakup.

Since the nineteenth century, marriage and the family have become even more important as sources of companionship and intimacy. They have become “havens in a heartless world” (Lasch 1977). As society has become more industrialized, bureaucratic, and impersonal, it is within the family that we increasingly seek and expect to find intimacy and companionship. In the larger world around us, we are generally seen in terms of status. A professor may see us primarily as students; a used-car salesperson relates to us as potential buyers; a politician views us as voters. Only among our intimates are we seen on a personal level, as Jen or Matt. Before marriage, our friends are our intimates. After marriage, our spouses are expected to be the ones with whom we are *most* intimate. With our spouses we disclose ourselves most completely, share our hopes, rear our children, and hope to grow old together.

Pets and Intimacy

The need for intimacy is so powerful that many rely on pets as additional or even substitute sources for satisfaction of those needs. Animals have been important human companions since prehistoric times (Siegel 1993). They have been important emotional figures in our lives, especially if our other relationships are not fulfilling. Unmarried adults, for example, are more attached to their pets than are married men and women (Stallones et al. 1990).

■ *A major function of marriages and families is to provide us with intimacy and social support, thus protecting us from loneliness and isolation.*



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This does not mean, however, that we reject Fido or Fluffy when we become romantically involved or married. What often happens is that the pet may become less important—he or she becomes more an “animal” and less “someone” to whom we are emotionally attached.

However, we should neither overstate this change nor assume that it is inevitable. After all, studies of the role of pets in human relationships suggest that the most prized aspects of pets, especially dogs and cats, are their attentiveness to their owners, their welcoming and greeting behaviors, and their role as confidants—qualities valued in our intimate relationships with humans. Pets give children an opportunity to nurture, and they provide a best friend, someone to love. As recent developments in family law reveal, for many people the relationships with their pets outlast their marriages, even becoming the source of custody disputes between divorcing spouses. Consider the case of a San Diego couple who spent close to \$150,000 in their efforts to resolve their “custody” dispute over their dog, Gigi. As reported in the *Seattle Times*, to resolve the dispute the judge called on the expertise of an animal behaviorist and viewed a videotape, depicting a “Day in the Life of Gigi” (Gigi seen under the couch, around her bowl, romping through water). The video was designed to help the judge determine whether the dog’s lifestyle was better suited for life with the husband or the wife.

Such custody cases, now part of the growing legal subspecialty of animal law, are described by Adam Karp, a lawyer who specializes in them, as more bitterly fought, with more “dirt” thrown back and forth, than even child custody cases (Aviv 2004). More than three dozen law schools, including those at Harvard University and Yale University, now offer animal law courses, most of which cover the issues surrounding pet custody (Aviv 2004). Although there is interesting research on the ways in which we attach human qualities and familial connections to pets, the remainder of this text will consider human experiences in their intimate relationships and their interactions in families.

Economic Cooperation

The family is a unit of economic cooperation that traditionally divides its labor along gender lines—that is, between males and females (Fox and Murry 2000; Ferree 1991). Although a division of labor by gender is characteristic of virtually all cultures, the work that males and females perform varies from culture to culture. Among the Nambikwara in Africa, for example, the fathers take care of the babies and clean them when they soil themselves; the chief’s concubines, secondary wives in polygamous societies, prefer hunting over domestic activities. In American society, from the last century until recently, men were expected to work away



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■ *Pets are often considered to be members of the family. They often provide their owners with comfort and a sense of intimacy.*

from home whereas women were to remain at home caring for the children and house.

Such tasks are assigned by culture, not biology. Only a man's ability to impregnate and a woman's ability to give birth and produce milk are biologically determined. And some cultures practice *couvade*, ritualized childbirth in which a male gives birth to the child's spirit and his partner gives physical birth.

We commonly think of the family as a consuming unit, but it also continues to be an important producing unit. The husband is not paid for building a shelf or bathing the children; the wife is not paid for fixing the leaky faucet or cooking.

Although children contribute to the household economy by helping around the house, they generally are not paid (beyond an "allowance") for such things as cooking, cleaning their rooms, or watching their younger brothers or sisters (Coggle and Tasker 1982; Gecas and Seff 1991). Yet they are all engaged in productive labor.

Over the past decade, economists have begun to reexamine the family as a productive unit (Ferree 1991). If men and women were compensated monetarily for the work done in their households, the total would be equal to the entire amount paid in wages by every corporation in the United States.

As a service unit, the family is dominated by women. Because women's work at home is unpaid, the productive contributions of homemakers have been overlooked (Ciancanelli and Berch 1987; Walker 1991). Yet women's household work is equal to about 44% of the gross domestic product, and the value of such work is double the reported earnings of women. If women were paid wages for their labor as mothers and homemakers according to the wage scale for chauffeurs, physicians, babysitters, cooks, therapists, and so on, many women would make more for their work in the home than most men do for their jobs outside the home. One economic estimate of a typical homemaker's work placed the yearly value at more than \$60,000 (Crittenden 2001). Because family power is partly a function of who earns the money, paying the stay-at-home partner for household work might significantly affect marital relations.

Reproduction and Socialization

The family makes society possible by producing (or adopting) and rearing children to replace the older members of society as they die off. Traditionally, reproduction has been a unique function of the married family. But single-parent and cohabiting families also perform reproductive and socialization functions. As we will look at in some detail in Chapter 10, technological change has also affected reproduction. Developments in contraception, artificial insemination, and in vitro fertilization have separated reproduction from sexual intercourse.

Depending on their contraceptive choices, couples can engage in sexual intercourse with relatively high confidence that they will not become parents.

Innovations in reproductive technology permit many infertile couples to give birth. Such techniques have also made it possible for lesbian couples to become parents.

The family traditionally has been responsible for **socialization**—the shaping of individual behavior to



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■ Much childhood socialization occurs in nonfamily settings such as preschools or day-care centers.

conform to social or cultural norms. Children are helpless and dependent for years following birth. They must learn how to walk and talk, how to take care of themselves, how to act, how to love, and how to touch and be touched. Teaching children how to fit into their particular culture is one of the family's most important tasks.

This socialization function, however, often includes agents and caregivers outside of the family. The involvement of nonfamily in the socialization of children need not indicate a lack of parental commitment to their children or a lack of concern for the quality of care received by their children. Still, nonparental sources of childrearing, which will be addressed in Chapter 11, may be one of the most significant societal changes in our lifetimes. Since the rise of compulsory education in the nineteenth century, the state has become responsible for a large part of the socialization of children older than age 5. Increasing numbers of dual-earner households and employed single mothers have resulted in placing many infants, toddlers, and small children under the care of nonfamily members, thus broadening the role of others (such as neighbors, friends, or paid caregivers) and reducing the family's role in childrearing.

Assignment of Social Roles and Status

We fulfill various social roles as family members, and these roles provide us with much of our identities.

During our lifetimes, most of us will belong to two families: the family of orientation and the family of procreation. The **family of orientation** (sometimes called the *family of origin*) is the family in which we grow up, the family that orients us to the world. The family of orientation may change over time if the marital status of our parents changes. Originally, it may be an intact nuclear family or a single-parent family; later it may become a stepfamily. We may even speak of *binuclear families* to reflect the experience of children whose parents separate and divorce. With parents maintaining two separate households and one or both possibly remarrying, children of divorce are members in two different, parentally based nuclear families.

The common term for the family formed through marriage and childbearing is **family of procreation**. Because many families have stepchildren, adopted children, or no children, we can use a more recent term—**family of cohabitation**—to refer to the family formed

through living or cohabiting with another person, whether we are married or unmarried. Most Americans will form families of cohabitation sometime in their lives.

Much of our identity is formed in the crucibles of families of orientation, procreation, and cohabitation. In a family of orientation, we are given the roles of son or daughter, brother or sister, stepson or stepdaughter. We internalize these roles until they become a part of our being. In each of these roles, we are expected to act in certain ways. For example, children obey their parents, and siblings help one another.

Sometimes our feelings fit the expectations of our roles; other times they do not.

Our family roles as offspring and siblings are most important when we are living in a family of orientation. After we leave home, these roles gradually diminish in everyday significance, although they continue throughout our lives. In relation to our parents, we never cease being children; in relation to our siblings, we never cease being brothers and sisters. The roles simply change as we grow older.

As we leave a family of orientation, we usually are also leaving adolescence and entering adulthood. Being an adult in our society is defined in part by entering new family roles—those of husband or wife, partner, father or mother. These roles formed in a family of procreation take priority over the roles we had in a family of orientation. In our nuclear family system, when we marry we transfer our primary loyalties from our parents and siblings to our partners.

Later, if we have children, we form additional bonds with them. When we assume the role of spouse or bonded partner, we assume an entirely new social identity linked with responsibility, work, and parenting.

In earlier times, such roles were considered lifelong. Because of divorce or separation, however, these roles today may last for considerably less time.

The status or place we are given in society is acquired largely through our families. Our families place us in a certain socioeconomic class, such as blue collar (working class), middle class, or upper class. We learn the ways of our class through identifying with our families. As shown in Chapter 3, different classes experience the world differently. These differences include the ability to satisfy our needs and wants but may extend to how we see men's and women's roles, how we value education, and how we rear our children (Lareau 2003; Rubin 1976, 1994).

Our families also give us our ethnic identities as African American, Latino, Jewish, Irish American, Asian American, Italian American, and so forth. Families also provide us with a religious tradition as Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Greek Orthodox, Islamic, Hindu, or Buddhist—as well as agnostic, atheist, or New Age. These identities help form our cultural values and expectations. These values and expectations may then influence the kinds of choices we make as partners, spouses, or parents.

Why Live in Families?

As we look at the different functions of the family we can see that, at least theoretically, most of them can be fulfilled outside the family. For example, artificial insemination permits a woman to be impregnated by a sperm donor and embryonic transplants allow one woman to carry another's embryo. Children can be raised communally, cared for by foster families or childcare workers, or sent to boarding schools. Most of our domestic needs can be satisfied by microwaving prepared foods or going to restaurants, sending our clothes to the laundry, and hiring help to clean our bathrooms, cook our meals, and wash the mountains of dishes accumulating (or growing new life-forms) in the kitchen. Friends can provide us with emotional intimacy, therapists can listen to our problems, and sexual partners can be found outside of marriage. With the limitations and stresses of family life, why bother living in families?

Sociologist William Goode (1982) suggests that there are several advantages to living in families:

- *Families offer continuity as a result of emotional attachments, rights, and obligations.* Once we choose a partner or have children, we do not have to search continually for new partners or family members who can better perform a family task or function such as cooking, painting the kitchen, providing companionship, or bringing home a paycheck. We expect our family members—whether partner, child, parent, or sibling—to participate in family tasks over their lifetimes. If at one time we need to give more emotional support or attention to a partner or child than we receive, we expect the other person to reciprocate at another time. We further expect that we can enjoy the fruits of our labors together. We count on our family members to be there for us in multiple ways. We rarely have the same extensive expectations of friends.
- *Families offer close proximity.* We do not need to travel across town or the country for conversation or help. With families, we do not even need to leave the house; a husband or wife, parent or child, or brother or sister is often at hand (or underfoot). This close proximity facilitates cooperation and communication.
- *Families offer an abiding familiarity with others.* Few people know us as well as our family members, because they have seen us in the most intimate circumstances throughout much of our lives. They have seen us at our best and our worst, when we are kind or selfish, and when we show understanding or intolerance. This familiarity and close contact teach us to make adjustments in living with others. As we do so, we expand our knowledge of ourselves and others.
- *Families provide many economic benefits.* They offer us economies of scale. Various activities, such as laundry, cooking, shopping, and cleaning, can be done almost as easily and with less expense for several people as for one. As an economic unit, a family can cooperate to achieve what an individual could not. It is easier for a working couple to purchase a house than an individual, for example, because the couple can pool their resources. Because most domestic tasks do not take great skill (a corporate lawyer can mop the floor as easily as anyone else), most family members can learn to do them. As a result, members do not need to go outside the family to hire experts. For many family tasks—from embracing a partner to bandaging a child's small cut or playing peekaboo with a baby—there are no experts to compete with family members.

These are only some of the theoretical advantages families offer to their members. Not all families perform all of these tasks or perform them equally well. But families, based on mutual ties of feeling and obligation, offer us greater potential for fulfilling our needs than do organizations based on profit (such as corporations) or compulsion (such as governments).

Extended Families and Kinship

Society “created” the family to undertake the task of making us human. According to some anthropologists, the nuclear family of man, woman, and child is universal, either in its basic form or as the building block for other family forms (Murdock 1967). Other

Understanding Yourself

How Nuclear Is Your Family?

Think about your family. Would you categorize it as nuclear or extended? Are you among the 4 million multigenerational households in the United States, or do you live in a household with your parent or parents and, perhaps, siblings? What, if any, role or roles have your grandparents played in your life? Did they babysit for you when you were younger? Did you visit them regularly? Talk on the phone? Exchange gifts? What part did they play in your development? Even in the absence of sharing a household, grandparents and other extended kin may be important figures in your life and, hence, broaden and enrich your family experiences beyond the nuclear households in which you may live or have lived. If so, you are in good company and part of a growing trend, according to *New York Times* reporter Tamar Lewin.

In an article for the *New York Times*, “Financially Set, Grandparents

Help Keep Families Afloat” (July 14, 2005), Lewin notes how the presence of grandparents in our lives has increased. If you are in the typical college-age population (late teens to 20s), the likelihood that you have a living grandmother is greater than a same age counterpart in 1900 had a living mother. Sociologist Peter Uhlenberg estimates the former at 91% and the latter at 83%. And the importance of grandparents includes but goes well beyond those instances in which they either share the households of or provide childcare for their young grandchildren.

Sociologist Vern Bengston has 20 years of data that he has gathered from his undergraduates about how they finance their college educations. Bengston contends that among his own students, grandparents are now the third most frequently mentioned source, behind parents and scholar-



ships but ahead of both jobs and loans.

Lewin suggests that “in many families, grandparents are the secret ingredients that make the difference between a life of struggle and one of relative ease.” They may provide assistance that allows their grandchildren to go to camp, get braces for their teeth, go on vacation, and get music lessons or necessary tutoring, all of which enrich their grandchildren’s lives beyond where parents alone could manage.

We should note that there are many instances in which adults help their elderly parents. In either direction, such assistance and support remind us that even if we live within nuclear family households, extended families are important sources of aid and support for one another.

Now, think again about your family experience. What roles did your grandparents play in your life?

anthropologists disagree that the father is necessary, arguing that the basic family unit is the mother and child *dyad*, or pair (Collier, Rosaldo, and Yanagisako 1982). The use of artificial insemination and new reproductive technologies, as well as the rise of female-headed single-parent families, are cited in support of the mother-child model.

Extended Families

The **extended family**, as already described, consists not only of the cohabiting couple and their children but also of other relatives, especially in-laws, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and cousins. In most non-European countries, the extended family is often regarded as the basic family unit.

For many Americans, especially those with strong ethnic identification and those in certain groups (discussed in Chapter 3), the extended family takes on

great importance. Sometimes, however, we fail to recognize the existence of extended families because we assume the nuclear family model as our definition of family. We may even be blind to the reality of our own family structure.

When someone asks us to name our family members, if we are unmarried, most of us will probably name our parents, brothers, and sisters. If we are married, we will probably name our husband or wife and children. Only if questioned further will some bother to include grandparents, aunts or uncles, cousins, or even friends or neighbors who are “like family.” We may not name all our blood relatives, but we will probably name the ones with whom we feel emotionally close, as shown earlier in the chapter.

Although most family households in the United States are nuclear in structure, there are more than 4 million multigenerational households in the United States. Looking only at the three most common multigenerational households (householder-householder’s

parent–householder’s child, householder–householder’s child–householder’s grandchild, householder–householder’s parent–householder’s child–householder’s grandchild), Census 2000 reported that such households represent 3.7% of all U.S. households (Simmons and O’Neil 2001). Such extended family households are somewhat more common among immigrants and where economic necessity dictates. They can be found in greater proportion in states where there are large concentrations of certain ethnic populations. For example, in Hawaii, which has a large Asian population, more than 8% of households are multigenerational. Among families in California, where there is a large Hispanic population, close to 6% of households fall under this arrangement (Max 2004).

The most common type of multigenerational household is one in which the householder lives with both his or her child or children and grandchild or grandchildren. In 2000, these 2.6 million households made up nearly two-thirds of all multigenerational households. Another third, or 1.3 million households, consist of the householder, sandwiched between his or her child or children and parent (or parent-in-law). Only 2% of multigenerational households, numbering 78,000, contain four generations living under one roof (Simmons and O’Neil 2001). But even in the absence of multigenerational households, many Americans maintain what have been called *modified extended families*, in that care and support are shared among extended family members even though they don’t share a residence.

Kinship Systems

The **kinship system** is the social organization of the family. It is based on the reciprocal rights and obligations of the different family members, such as those between parents and children, grandparents and grandchildren, and mothers-in-law and sons-in-law.

Conjugal and Consanguineous Relationships

Family relationships are generally created in two ways: through marriage and through birth. Family relationships created through marriage are known as **conjugal relationships**. (The word *conjugal* is derived from the Latin *conjungere*, meaning “to join together.”) In-laws, such as mothers-in-law, fathers-in-law, sons-in-law, and daughters-in-law, are created by law—that is, through marriage. **Consanguineous relationships** are

created through biological (blood) ties—that is, through birth. (The word *consanguineous* is derived from the Latin *com-*, “joint,” and *sanguineous*, “of blood.”)

Families of orientation, procreation, and cohabitation provide us with some of the most important roles we will assume in life. The nuclear family roles (such as parent, child, husband, wife, and sibling) combine with extended family roles (such as grandparent, aunt, uncle, cousin, and in-law) to form the kinship system.

Kin Rights and Obligations

In some societies, mostly non-Western or nonindustrialized cultures, kinship obligations may be more extensive than they are for most Americans in the twenty-first century. In cultures that emphasize wider kin groups, close emotional ties between a husband and a wife are viewed as a threat to the extended family. A remarkable form of marriage that illustrates the precedence of the kin group over the married couple is the institution of spirit marriage, which continues today in Canton, China. According to anthropologist Janice Stockard (1989), a **spirit marriage** is arranged by two families whose son and daughter died unmarried. After the dead couple is “married,” the two families adopt an orphaned boy and raise him as the deceased couple’s son to provide family continuity.

In another Cantonese marriage form, women do not live with their husbands until at least 3 years after marriage, as their primary obligation remains with their own extended families. Among the Nayar of India, men have a number of clearly defined obligations toward the children of their sisters and female cousins, although they have few obligations toward their own children (Gough 1968).

In American society, the basic kinship system consists of parents and children, but it may include other relatives as well, especially grandparents. Each person in this system has certain rights and obligations as a result of his or her position in the family structure. Furthermore, a person may occupy several positions at the same time. For example, an 18-year-old woman may simultaneously be a daughter, a sister, a cousin, an aunt, and a granddaughter.

Each role entails different rights and obligations. As a daughter, the young woman may have to defer to certain decisions of her parents; as a sister, to share her bedroom; as a cousin, to attend a wedding; and as a

granddaughter, to visit her grandparents during the holidays.

In our culture, the nuclear family has many norms regulating behavior, such as parental support of children and sexual fidelity between spouses, but the rights and obligations of relatives outside the basic kinship system are less strong and less clearly articulated. Because neither culturally binding nor legally enforceable norms exist regarding the extended family, some researchers suggest that such kinship ties have become voluntary. We are free to define our kinship relations much as we wish. Like friendship, these relations may be allowed to wane (Goetting 1990).

Despite the increasingly voluntary nature of kin relations, our kin create a rich social network for us. Studies suggest that most people have a large number of kin living in their areas (Mancini and Blieszner 1989). Adult children and their parents often live close to one another; make regular visits; and help one another with childcare, housework, maintenance, repairs, loans, and gifts. The relations among siblings also are often strong throughout the life cycle (Lee, Mancini, and Maxwell 1990).

We generally assume kinship to be lifelong. In the past, if a marriage was disrupted by death, in-laws generally continued to be thought of as kin. But today, divorce is as much a part of the American family system as marriage. Although shunning the former spouse may no longer be appropriate (or polite), no new guidelines on how to behave have been developed. The ex-kin role is a role with no clearly defined rules.

The Major Themes of This Text

Throughout the many chapters and pages that follow, as we examine in detail intimate relationships, marriage, and family in the United States, we will introduce a range of theories, provide much data, and look at a number of family issues and relationships in ways you may never have considered before. As we do so, we will visit and revisit the following points:

Families Are Dynamic

As we will see shortly (in Chapter 3) and throughout the text, the family is a dynamic social institution that has undergone considerable change in its structure and functions. Similarly, values and beliefs about

families have changed over time. We are more accepting of divorce, employed mothers, and cohabitation. We expect men to be more involved in hands-on childcare. We place more importance on individual happiness than on self-sacrifice for family.

In Chapter 3, we explore some of the major changes that have occurred in how Americans experience families. Then, throughout the text, as we address topics such as marriage, divorce, cohabitation, raising children, and managing employment and family, we ask, In what ways have things changed, and why? What consequences and implications result from these changes? Because familial change is often differently perceived and interpreted (see the final theme in this section), we also present different possible interpretations of the meaning of change. Are families merely changing, or are they declining?

Throughout much of the text we also look at how individual family experience changes over time. From the formation of love relationships, the entry into marriage, the bearing, raising, and aging of children, the aging and death of spouses, families are ever changing.

Families Are Diverse

Not all families experience things the same way. Beginning with Chapter 3, we look closely at a variety of factors that create differences in family experience. We consider, especially, the following major sources of patterned variation in family experience: race, ethnicity, gender, social class, sexuality and lifestyle choice.

“Race” and Ethnicity

There were more than 240 different native cultures that lived in what is now the United States when the colonists first arrived (Mintz and Kellogg 1988). Since then, American society has housed immigrant groups from the world over who bring with them some of the customs, beliefs, and traditions of their native lands, including those about families. Thus, we can speak of African American families, Latino families, Asian families, Native American families, European families, Middle Eastern families, and so on. In Chapter 3, we provide a brief sketch of the major characteristics of the family experiences of each of these racial or ethnic groups. As we proceed from there, we compare and contrast, where relevant and possible, major differences in family experiences across racial and ethnic lines.

Social Class

Different social classes (categories of individuals and families that share similar economic positions in the wider society) have different experiences of family life. Because of both the material and the symbolic (including cultural and psychological) dimensions of social class, our chances of marrying, our experiences of marriage and parenthood, our ties with kin, our experience of juggling work and family, and our likelihood of experiencing violence or divorce all vary. And this is but a partial list of major areas of family experience that differ among social classes.

Gender

Although gender roles have changed considerably over time, gender differences still surface and loom large in each area of marriage and family on which we touch. Love and friendship, sexual freedom and expression, marriage responsibilities and gratifications, involvement with children, experience of abuse, consequences of divorce and becoming a single parent, and chances for remarriage all differ between women and men.

Sexuality and Lifestyle Variation

A striking difference between twenty-first-century families and early American families is the diversity of family lifestyles that people choose or experience. There is no family form that encompasses most people's aspirations or experiences. Statistically, the dual-earner household is the most common form of family household with children, but there is considerable variation among dual-earner households and between such households traditional or single-parent families.

Increasingly, people choose to cohabit our experiences of marriage and parenthood, increasing numbers of couples choose not to have children, and increasing numbers of others choose expensive procedures to assist their efforts and enable them to bear children. This diversity of family types and lifestyles will not soon abate. In the chapters that follow specific attention is directed at singles (with and without children), cohabitation, childless or child-free couples, and role-reversed households. In addition, we examine sexual orientation and, where data are available, compare and contrast how experiences of such things as intimacy, sexual expression, parenting, abuse, and separation differ among heterosexuals, gay men, and lesbians.

Family Experience Is Influenced by Social Institutions and Forces Outside of the Family

This book takes a mostly sociological approach to relationships, marriage, and families, in that we repeatedly stress the outside forces that shape family experiences. The family is one of the core social institutions of society, along with the economy, religion, the state, education, and health care. As such, the shape and substance of family life is heavily affected by the needs of the wider society in which it is located. In addition, other social institutions influence how we experience our families.

Similarly, cultural influences in the wider society, such as the values and beliefs about what families are or should be like and the norms (or social rules) that distinguish acceptable from unacceptable behavior, guide how we choose to live in relationships and families. Thus, although each of us as an individual makes a series of decisions about the kinds of family lives we want, the choices we make are products of the societies in which we live.

In addition, options available to each of us may not reflect what we would freely choose if we faced no constraints on our choices. So, for example, parents who might prefer to stay at home with their children might find such a choice impractical to impossible because economic necessity forces them to work outside the home. Working parents may find the time they spend with their children more a reflection of the demands of their jobs and the inflexibility of their workplaces than of their own personal preferences, just as some at-home parents might prefer to be employed, but find that their children's needs, the cost and availability of quality childcare, the jobs available to them, and the demands and benefits contained in those jobs push them to stay home.

Even the decision to marry requires a pool of potential and suitable spouses from which to choose and the preferred marital choice to be accepted within the society in which we live. We cannot marry if there are no "marriageable options available" (as may be the case in many inner-city, low-income areas) or if our choice of spouse is not legally allowed (as in gay or lesbian relationships).

Our familial lives reflect decisions we face, choices we make, and the opportunities and/or constraints we confront. In the wider discourse about families, we tend to encounter mostly individualistic explanations

for what people experience, focusing sometimes exclusively on personal choices. Throughout this text, we examine the wider environments within which our family choices are made and the ways in which some of us are given more opportunities whereas others face limited choices.

Healthy Families Are Essential to Societal Well-Being, and Societal Support Is Essential to Familial Well-Being

Family is the irreplaceable means by which most of the social skills, personality characteristics, and values of individual members of society are formed. Hope, purpose, and general attitudes of commitment, perseverance, and well-being are nurtured in the family. Indeed, even the rudimentary maintenance and survival care provided by families is no small contribution to the well-being of a community.

Some of the services provided by families are such a basic part of our existence that we tend to overlook them. These include such essentials as the provision of food and shelter—a place to sleep, rest, and play—as well as caretaking, including supervision of health and hygiene, transportation, and the accountability of family members involving their activities and whereabouts. Without families, communities would have to provide extensive dormitories and many personal-care workers with different levels of training and responsibility to perform the many activities in which families are engaged. On a more emotional level, without families individuals must look elsewhere to satisfy basic needs for intimacy and support. We marry or form marriage-like cohabiting relationships, have children, and maintain contact with other kin (adult siblings, aging parents, and extended kin) because such relationships retain importance as bases for our identities and sources of social and emotional sustenance. We bring to these relationships high affective expectations.

When our intimacy needs are not met (in marriage or long-term cohabitation), we terminate those relationships and seek others that will provide them. We believe, however, that those needs are best met in families.

To function effectively, if not optimally, families need outside assistance and support. Better childcare, more flexible work environments, economic assistance for the neediest families, protection from violent or

abusive partners or parents, and a more effective system for collecting child support are just some examples we consider of where families clearly have needs for greater societal or institutional support. The health and stability of our society depend largely on strong and stable families. When families fail, individuals must turn to society for assistance; social institutions must be designed to fill the voids left by failing families, and the pathologies created by weak family structures make society a less livable place. There are enormous costs that result from neglecting the needs of America's families and children.

Family Patterns Can Be Interpreted Differently Depending on Individual Values

As we noted at the outset of this chapter, marriage and family issues inspire much debate. With so much “noise” in the wider society around what family life is and should be like, how families are changing and whether those changes are good or bad, it may be difficult to know what conclusions to draw about family issues.

Many of the so-called culture wars over such “hot button” issues as the status of women, abortion, the effects of divorce, nonmarital births, and gay rights may really be conflicts over differing conceptions of family (Benokraitis 2000; Glenn 2000; Hunter 1991).

For instance, those who believe that families of male providers, female homemakers, and their dependent children living together, ‘til death do they part, are what families *should be* cannot be encouraged by the continued high rates of divorce and cohabitation or by the declining rates of marriage or full-time motherhood. Those on the “other” side who claim that there are basic inequities within the traditional family especially regarding the status of women, will not mourn the diminishing numbers of breadwinner–housewife families. Similarly, the question of gay marriage will divide those who believe marriage *must* be a relationship between a man and a woman from those who believe that we *must* recognize and support all kinds of families.

Given the lack of societal consensus, it is easy to become confused or be misled about what American families are really like. There is undeniable evidence that family life has changed, repeatedly and dramatically, throughout history, as familial “change . . . not

stability . . . has been the norm” since colonial days (Mintz and Kellogg, 1988). But not everyone sees change through the same lens. To some, contemporary family life is weaker because of cultural and social changes and is now, to some extent, endangered (Wilson 2002; Popenoe 1993).

More optimistic interpretations of changing family patterns celebrate the increased domestic diversity of numerous family types and the richer range of choices now available to Americans (Coontz 1997; Stacey 1993). Like the proverbial glass, some see the family as “half empty” others see it as “half full.” What makes the “half full, half empty” metaphor so apt is that even when looking at the same phenomenon or the same trend, some interpret it as evidence of the troubled state U.S. families are in and others see today’s families as different or changing. So, for instance, although the rates of divorce and marriage, the numbers of children in nonparental childcare, or the extent of increase in cohabitation can, like the volume of liquid in a partially filled glass, be objectively measured, the meaning of those measures can vary widely depending on perspective.

The following example nicely illustrates this. In October 2005, PBS (the public broadcasting network) conducted a poll of American attitudes and opinions on a host of family issues. Sampling 1,130 American adults for the program “Religion and Ethics Newsweekly,” the pollsters asked about a number of family issues. The survey garnered interesting results. Consider a few:

- 80% of respondents agreed that it is better for children if their parents are married.
- 71% believe that “God’s plan for marriage is one man, one woman, for life.”
- 49% agree that it is okay for a couple to live together without intending to marry.
- 52% agree that divorce is the best solution for a couple who cannot work out their marriage problems.
- 55% agree that “Love makes a family . . . and it doesn’t matter if parents are gay or straight, married or single.”
- When asked if the government should play a role in encouraging people to marry and stay married or the government should stay out, more than three-fourths say stay out.
- 73% agree that a “working mother” can have just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a stay-at-home mother.

Interestingly, within each of these items there were big differences in attitudes based on respondents’ religious backgrounds. Look again at some of these same items, comparing respondents of different religious backgrounds (see Table 1.1).

What the data clearly show is that big differences exist between those of more traditional or conservative Christian backgrounds and “mainline Protestants” or liberal Catholics (no other religious groups were included in the sample). Overall, the most liberal attitudes are held by those who identified themselves as having no religious preference (or as atheists or agnostics). Note, however, the differences between traditional and liberal Catholics and between evangelical Christians and mainline Protestants. Such differences are often obscured when we look at overall attitudes of Americans or even at attitude differences between Protestants and Catholics. Clearly, religious affiliation and degree of identification are among the sources of difference in attitudes about families.

This divisiveness is neither new nor unique to the United States. In the early twentieth century we witnessed considerable pessimism about whether families would survive the changing and liberalizing culture of sexuality, the increasing numbers of women delaying marriage for educational or occupational reasons, the declining birthrate and increases in divorce. In considering the same sorts of changes, others advocated that these trends were positive signs of families adapting to changes in the wider society (Mintz and Kellogg 1988).

In recent years, many other countries have faced similar cultural clashes over trends and changes in family life. In Spain, for example, there is a dispute pitting the Spanish socialist government against the Catholic Church, as governmental initiatives to legalize same-sex marriage, and make abortion and divorce easier or quicker have met with strong and vocal opposition from the church. Whereas some in the Spanish Socialist Party or among its allies such as the United Left Party believe Spain hasn’t gone far enough in recognizing and embracing change, organizations aligned with the church, such as the Institute of Family Policy, consider the climate in Spain “family phobic” (Fuchs 2004).

Ultimately, the ways we view families depend on what we conceive of *as* families. Such disagreements reflect both different definitions of family and different value orientations about particular kinds of families. Often the product of personal experience as much

Table 1.1 ■ Religious Differences in Attitudes toward Family Issues: Results from PBS “Faith and Family” Survey, October 2005

| Item | Total | Evangelical Christian (%) | Mainline Protestant (%) | Traditional Catholic (%) | Liberal Catholic (%) | No Preference/ Atheist/Agnostic (%) |
|--|-------|---------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Better for children if parents are married | 80 | 86 | 82 | 88 | 75 | 58 |
| God’s plan for marriage. . . | 71 | 92 | 62 | 91 | 60 | 31 |
| Divorce is usually best | 52 | 48 | 61 | 46 | 63 | 50 |
| All right to live together | 49 | 21 | 57 | 38 | 72 | 78 |
| Love is what makes a family | 55 | 33 | 62 | 41 | 77 | 80 |

as of religious background, these value positions reflect what we want families to be like and, thus, what we come to believe about the kinds of issues that are raised throughout this book.

In the wider, societal discourse about families, we can see opposing ideological positions on the well-being of families (Glenn 2000). The two extremes, which sociologist Norval Glenn calls conservative and liberal, are like the half empty–half full disagreement, a difference between pessimistic and optimistic viewpoints. Conservatives are fairly pessimistic about the state of today’s families. To **conservatives**, cultural values have shifted from individual self-sacrifice toward personal self-fulfillment. This shift in values is seen as an important factor in some major changes in family life that occurred in the last 3 or 4 decades of the twentieth century (especially higher divorce rates, more cohabitation, and more births outside of marriage).

Furthermore, conservatives believe that as a result of such changes, today’s families are weaker and less able to meet the needs of children, adults, or the wider society (Glenn 2000). Conservatives therefore recommend social policies to reverse or reduce the extent of such changes (recommendations to repeal no-fault divorce and the introduction of covenant marriage are two examples we examine later).

Compared with conservatives, liberals are more optimistic about the status and future of family life in the United States. **Liberals** tend to believe that the changes in family patterns are just that—changes, not signs of familial decline (Benokraitis 2000). The liberal position also portrays these changing family patterns as products of and adaptations to wider social and economic changes rather than a shift in cultural values (Benokraitis 2000; Glenn 2000). Such changes in family experience create a wider range of contemporary

household and family types and require greater tolerance of such diversity. Placing great emphasis on economic issues, liberal family policies are often tied to the economic well-being of families. Additional examples would include supportive policies for the increasing numbers of employed mothers and two-earner households.

According to Glenn, there is a third position in the discourse about families. **Centrists** share aspects of both conservative and liberal positions. Like conservatives, they believe that some familial changes have had negative consequences. Like liberals, they identify wider social changes (for example, economic or demographic) as major determinants of the changes in family life, but they assert greater emphasis than liberals do on the importance of cultural values. They note that too many people are too absorbed in their careers or too quick to surrender in the face of marital difficulties (Benokraitis 2000; Glenn 2000).

The assumptions within and the differences between these positions are more important than they might first appear to be. The perceptions we have of what accounts for the current status of family life or the directions in which it is heading influence what we believe families *need*. These, in turn, influence social policies regarding family life. As Nijole Benokraitis states, “Conservatives, centrists, liberals, and feminists who lobby for a variety of family-related ‘remedies’ affect our family lives on a daily basis” (2000, 19).

It should be noted that a similar difference of interpretation can be seen among social scientists who study families. In other words, changing family patterns, and trends in marriage, divorce, parenting, and childcare, are explained and interpreted differently even by the experts who study them. Consider, for example, the following two statements about the effects of divorce on children. The first, is by Constance

Popular Culture

The Family Values Debate Captures SpongeBob SquarePants



Who or what is SpongeBob? Whether or not you have ever been a regular viewer, many of you are likely familiar with the cartoon *SpongeBob SquarePants*, one of the most popular cartoons in recent memory.

Nearly 60 million people, 35% adults age 18–49 and another 23% teenagers, tune in each month to watch SpongeBob’s antics. However, you might be wondering why are you reading about him here? The answer is a little complicated but nicely illustrates the point made earlier about clashing views on families and family values.

SpongeBob is among a number of characters—besides Barney, the purple dinosaur; Kermit the Frog; and Winnie the Pooh—singing the disco-era hit “We are Family” in a video. The video was produced by the We Are Family Foundation and was de-

signed to be used in elementary schools around the country to teach tolerance, cooperation, unity, and appreciation of diversity (<http://www.wearefamilyfoundation.org>).

In January 2005, the video and organization that produced it became the target of Dr. James Dobson, the 70-year-old founder and board chairperson of Focus on the Family, a non-profit evangelical Christian organization Dobson started in 1977.

Dobson has been sought out by politicians such as Jimmy Carter, George W. Bush and Trent Lott, is heard on the radio daily in nearly 100 countries, and is seen on television on 100 stations throughout the United States. He is also the author of some three dozen books on parenting and marriage, including *Dare to Discipline* (which has sold more than 4.5 million copies).

To Dobson, the “We Are Family” video was an attempt by a gay-supporting organization to convince children to accept homosexuality, although no mention of homosexuality can be found in the video.

Addressing a George W. Bush presidential inauguration dinner, Dobson mentioned SpongeBob as he offered his warning regarding the “We Are Family” video. Although he later acknowledged that both the cartoon sponge and the “We Are Family” video are harmless, he was disturbed by the use for which he believed the video was intended. He claimed that the We Are Family Foundation’s efforts to use the video to teach “tolerance” and recognize “diversity” extended to teaching children that homosexuality is an acceptable lifestyle. Dobson contends that “tolerance and diversity . . . are almost always buzzwords for homosexual advocacy” (Dobson 2005).

After he made his remarks the issue exploded into controversy. Numerous media outlets reported that Dobson accused SpongeBob of being gay or that Dobson saw the *SpongeBob SquarePants* cartoon as promoting homosexuality or as a threat to the family. On the Focus on the Family website, Dobson is explicit: “One more time let me say that the

Ahrons, a noted scholar on family relationships and author of numerous articles and books on divorce. She is professor emerita of sociology at the University of Southern California. A member of the Council on Contemporary Families, Ahrons offers these encouraging words:

The good news about divorce is that the vast majority of children develop into reasonably competent individuals, functioning within a normal range. Studying the long-term effects of parental divorce on children is very complex and many of the research findings are equivocal. A review of the research literature reveals a strong bias towards using a deficit approach that focuses on the problems cre-

ated by divorce and relies on the “intact family” as the reference point. However, a small group of studies is emerging that explores the effects of divorce from a “strength and resilience” perspective. This perspective represents an important shift in our thinking. It will direct our attention to the life course of postdivorce families and those factors that mediate between the divorce and its long-term implications.

Overall, the findings thus far clearly indicate that it is not the divorce per se, but the quality of the relationship between divorced parents that has an important long term impact on adult children’s lives. Good or “good enough” divorces (characterized by parents who are able to minimize their

problem is not with SpongeBob or the other cartoon characters (in the video). It is with the way they will be used in the classroom as part of an effort that threatens the well-being

of American families.” So here is an issue that ensnared one of the most popular cartoon characters in a net of controversy. The mere fact that a controversy arose and that it pitted those

with more conservative views against those with more liberal views demonstrates that family issues are differently defined and interpreted, often in highly divisive and heated ways.



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■ *SpongeBob*

conflict and continue to share parenting, even if minimally) maintain the bonds of family and extended kinship ties.

Contrast Ahrons' comments with the following from David Popenoe, also a well-known sociologist, author, and/or editor of numerous books about contemporary American families. Popenoe, a Rutgers University sociologist and codirector of the National Marriage Project, provides a different perspective:

Divorce increases the risk of interpersonal problems in children. There is evidence, both from small, qualitative studies and from large-scale, long-term empirical studies, that many of these problems are long lasting. In fact, they may even become worse

in adulthood. . . . While it found that parents' marital unhappiness and discord have a broad negative impact on virtually every dimension of their children's well-being, so does the fact of going through a divorce. In examining the negative impacts on children more closely, the study discovered that it was only the children in high-conflict homes who benefited from the conflict removal that divorce may bring. In lower-conflict marriages that end in divorce—and the study found that perhaps as many as two-thirds of the divorces were of this type—the situation of the children was made much worse following a divorce.

Based on the findings of this study, except in the minority of high-conflict marriages, it is better for

the children if their parents stay together and work out their problems than if they divorce.

Although there are ways to reconcile the two seemingly contrary points of view, clearly they come from different overall perspectives about marriage, divorce, and the well-being of children. Thus, it is important to realize that, just as the wider society and culture is fraught with conflicting opinions and values about marriage and family relationships, the academic disciplines that study family life suffer lack of consensus.

As we set off on our exploration of marriage and family issues, it is important to realize that many of the topics we cover are part of the ongoing debates about families. As you try to make sense of the material we introduce, we do not require you to take a particular viewpoint but rather to keep in mind that multiple interpretations are possible. Where different interpretations are particularly glaring (as in the

many issues surrounding divorce, for example), we present them and allow you to decide which better fits the evidence presented.

Hopefully, as you now begin studying marriage and the family, you will see that such study is both abstract and personal. It is abstract insofar as you will learn about the general structure, processes, and meanings associated with marriage and the family, especially within the United States. In the chapters that follow, the things that you learn should also help you better understand your own family, how it compares to other families, and why families are the way they are. In other words, as we address family more generally, in some ways it is *your* present, *your* past, and *your* future that you are studying. By providing a wider sociological context to marriage, family, and intimate relationships, we show you how and where your experiences fit and why.

Summary

- Marriage is a legally recognized union between a man and a woman in which they are united sexually; cooperate economically; and may give birth to, adopt, or rear children. Marriage differs among cultures and has changed historically in our own society. In Western cultures, the preferred form of marriage is *monogamy*, in which there are only two spouses, the husband and wife. *Polygyny*, the practice of having two or more wives, is commonplace throughout many cultures in the world.
- Legal marriage provides a number of rights and protections to spouses that couples who live together lack.
- The current legal definitions of marriage are changing in the United States and in many other countries. The greatest change relates to same-sex marriage.
- Defining the term *family* is complex. Most definitions of family include individuals related by descent, marriage, remarriage, or adoption; some also include affiliated kin. *Family* may be defined as one or more adults related by blood, marriage, or affiliation who cooperate economically, who may share a common dwelling, and who may rear children. There are also ethnic differences as to what constitutes family.
- Four important family functions are (1) the provision of intimacy, (2) the formation of a cooperative economic unit, (3) reproduction and socialization, and (4) the assignment of social roles and status, which are acquired both in a *family of orientation* (in which we grow up) and in a *family of cohabitation* (which we form by marrying or living together).
- Advantages to living in families include (1) continuity of emotional attachments, (2) close proximity, (3) familiarity with family members, and (4) economic benefits.
- The *extended family* consists of grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and in-laws. It may be formed *conjugal* (through marriage), creating in-laws or stepkin, or *consanguineously* (by birth) through blood relationships.
- The *kinship system* is the social organization of the family. In the *nuclear family*, it generally consists of parents and children, but it may also include members of the extended family, especially grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Kin can be *affiliated*, as when a nonrelated person is considered “kin,” or a relative may fulfill a different kin role, such as a grandmother taking the role of a child’s mother.

- Unmarried *cohabitation* is a relationship that occurs when a couple lives together and is sexually involved.

Key Terms

| | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| affiliated kin 6 | liberals 25 |
| centrists 25 | marriage 8 |
| clan 7 | modified polygamy 13 |
| conjugal relationship 20 | monogamy 12 |
| consanguineous relationship 20 | nuclear family 7 |
| conservatives 25 | polyandry 12 |
| extended family 19 | polygamy 12 |
| family 6 | polygyny 12 |
| family of cohabitation 17 | serial monogamy 13 |
| family of orientation 17 | socialization 16 |
| family of procreation 17 | spirit marriage 20 |
| household 6 | traditional family 7 |
| kinship system 20 | |

Resources on the Internet

Companion Website for This Book

<http://www.thomsonedu.com/sociology/strong>

Gain an even better understanding of this chapter by going to the companion website for additional study resources. Take advantage of the Pre- and Post-Test quizzing tool, which is designed to help you grasp difficult concepts by referring you back to review specific pages in the chapter for questions you answer incorrectly. Use the flash cards to master key terms and check out the many other study aids you'll find there. Visit the Marriage and Family Resource Center on the site. You'll also find special features such as access to InfoTrac[®] College Edition (a database that allows you access to more than 18 million full-length articles from 5,000 periodicals and journals), as well as GSS Data and Census information to help you with your research projects and papers.