

BRYAN STRONG | THEODORE F. COHEN

THE MARRIAGE AND FAMILY EXPERIENCE

INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS IN
A CHANGING SOCIETY 13E



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13TH EDITION

The Marriage and Family Experience

Intimate Relationships in a Changing Society

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Australia • Brazil • Mexico • Singapore • United Kingdom • United States

***The Marriage and Family Experience:
Intimate Relationships in a Changing
Society, Thirteenth Edition***

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Production Service, Composition, and
Illustration: MPS Limited

Photo and Text Researcher: Lumina
Datamatics

Copy Editor: Heather McElwain

Text Designer: Diane Beasley

Cover Designer: Irene Morris

Cover Image: Gillian Laub/Stone/
Getty Images

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2015960735

Student Edition:

ISBN: 978-1-305-50310-6

Loose-leaf Edition:

ISBN: 978-1-305-67713-5

Cengage Learning

20 Channel Center Street

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Printed in the Canada

Print Number: 01 Printed Year: 2016

I dedicate this edition to my mother, Eleanor Schoenberg Cohen, who passed away in May 2015. In her 65-year-long marriage to my father, Kalman, she demonstrated what it means to give of oneself lovingly and unconditionally. Throughout my life, she was a role model of how to be a loving and devoted parent. She is greatly missed.

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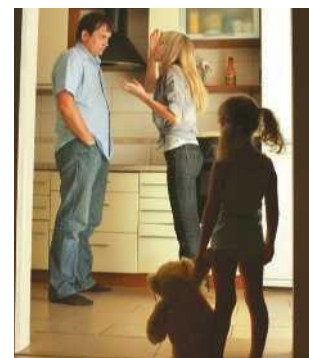
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Preface

This edition is the 13th in the long literary lifetime of *The Marriage and Family Experience*. Stretching across more than three decades, its contents have changed greatly in keeping with the immense social, cultural, and familial shifts that have occurred since Bryan Strong wrote the first edition. We have witnessed considerable change in definitions of who and what counts as a family, including most recently with the legal recognition of same-sex marriage in 2015. The expectations and experiences people have of their intimate relationships, their marriages, and their relationships with their parents and their children continue to change, alongside shifts in the economy, advances in technology, and changes in the culture, perhaps most notably around issues related to gender, sexuality, and intimacy. The book you have before you is a product of and reflects those changes.

However, in its objectives, much remains the same. From its first to its present edition, *The Marriage and Family Experience* has sought to engage students from a range of academic and applied disciplines across a number of different types of institutions, and to stimulate their curiosity about families. The present edition retains that mission by characterizing and conveying the rich diversity of family experience, the dynamic nature of both the institution of family and of individual families, and the many ways in which experiences of relationships, marriages, and families are affected by the wider economic, political, social, and cultural contexts in which we live.

My personal involvement with *The Marriage and Family Experience* has a shorter history. By the time I entered its life, it was a successful textbook some seven editions old. Now, for the sixth time, I have had the opportunity to revise and update the text. Each time, I have incorporated the latest available research and official statistics on subjects such as sexuality (sexual orientation and expression), marriage, cohabitation, childbirth, child care, divorce, remarriage, blended

families, adoption, abuse, the division of housework, and connections between paid work and family life. Once again, there are hundreds of new references in this edition, drawn mainly though not exclusively from research in sociology, psychology, and family studies. I have again tried to feature some of the most interesting issues, controversies, and real-life examples, sometimes drawn straight from recent news stories, popular culture, or narrative accounts, to give readers a better appreciation for how the more academic content applies to real life and to stimulate their fascination with families.

Thinking about my own many years of involvement with *The Marriage and Family Experience*, I marvel at how much has changed, both in the wider society and in my own family. I have been reminded, on a profoundly personal level, of the range of family experiences people have and of the dynamic and unpredictable quality of family life. When I first began working on the eighth edition of this book, I was more than 20 years into a stable marriage and had no reason to imagine ever being single again or remarrying. My wife and I had two young teenagers who formed the center of our too-hectic life together. I was a husband and father, two roles that I valued above all others and that I juggled along with my career as a sociologist and teacher. In the years since, I have been a full-time caregiver when my wife became ill, a widower after her passing, a single parent, a partner in a long-distance relationship, a remarried husband, a stepfather, and an ex-spouse. Both my son, Dan, now 30 and living more than 2,000 miles away with his girlfriend, Marissa, and my daughter, Allison, now married and living with her husband, Joe, and their two cats, have wonderful and busy lives. Most important, both my kids and their partners seem happy. The two stepsons and stepdaughter that I gained when married to their mom have reached their own milestones: Daniel has graduated college, Molly is about to enter college, and

the youngest, Brett, is finishing his first year of high school. During my involvement with this book I have seen what a rollercoaster ride family life can feel like, with its many ups and downs. Just in the past year, I have had the joy of witnessing my daughter's wedding and the sadness of being at my mother's funeral. None of this is unique to my life. If anything, my experiences of marriage, fatherhood, caregiving, widowhood, single parenting, remarriage, stepfatherhood, separation, divorce, and parental loss all just serve to heighten my sensitivity to and appreciation of the many twists and turns that families take and the various roles and relationships covered in this book. They also are constant reminders to me of how—whether in a single lifetime or across a society—we can neither completely anticipate nor fully control the directions our families may take.

New to This Edition

The changes returning users will see in this edition are mostly content related. In updating the text, I have drawn heavily from reports by such sources as the Pew Research Center, the National Center for Family and Marriage Research, the National Council on Family Relations, the Council on Contemporary Families, or from official sources, such as the U.S. Census Bureau, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Institute of Justice, the World Health Organization, and many others. These, along with published research from books and journals, are incorporated, where relevant, throughout this revision. Furthermore, this edition continues to make great use of data from such national surveys as the National Survey of Family Growth, the National Survey of Sexual Health and Behavior, the Global Study of Sexual Attitudes and Behavior, the National Survey of Adoptive Parents, the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, and the National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence. As with previous editions, the 13th edition attempts to capture and characterize the current state of marriage and the family experience.

Second, attention to diversity remains one of the central themes of the book. Therefore, substantial and repeated attention is paid to how our experiences of intimate relationships, marriage, parenthood, work and family, divorce, remarriage, abuse, and so on, are differently experienced across lines of class, gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality. What is perhaps most noteworthy is the enlarged and more sustained

attention to gender and sexuality issues, most evident in Chapters 1, 4, 6, and 9. There is also increased attention to racial and ethnic diversity (including greater coverage of multiracial family experience), and continued attention to religion as it shapes people's attitudes, values, and experiences of many of the topics covered.

Third, I have attempted to reflect wider economic and technological changes as they impact family experiences. Thus, the recession and its aftermath are mentioned in a number of chapters. Even more notably, numerous examples throughout the text illustrate the impact of technological innovations on aspects of people's family experiences, including how people meet and form relationships, communicate with loved ones, and monitor or care for family members.

Fourth, I have made a number of additions to the features of the text that I hope will capture students' interest and engage their curiosity. Roughly two dozen of the almost 60 features are either new to this edition or significantly updated or enlarged. The *What Do You Think?* self-quiz at the start of each chapter has been extensively revised with new true/false questions that follow the content order of the chapter. The true/false quiz questions are treated almost like learning objectives, and instead of providing an answer key close to the quiz, the answers are now provided within the body of the text to highlight the key points made by each question. More specific additions and changes are as follows.

Content Changes by Chapter

The most notable changes in **Chapter 1**, "The Meaning of Marriage and the Family," include a new section, "Dramatic Changes, Increasing Diversity, and Continuing Controversy" addressing the challenges inherent in studying families. Other additions include coverage of the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, new material addressing cross-cultural data on marriage and extended families, and more attention to gender, sexuality, and race as sources of diversity in attitudes about family issues and in effects on families. I have updated statistics on marital status and household composition in the United States. Once again, I have changed or added to the chapter opening examples of controversial and contested family issues. The examples used in the new edition include a court case over ownership of frozen embryos, an updated discussion of the Kody Brown suit challenging Utah's antipolygamy law, and the domestic violence cases

of National Football League players Ray Rice and, especially, Adrian Peterson. As in the past, these are designed to reflect the chapter's continued emphasis on different and competing viewpoints about the meaning of family and the interpretation of changing family patterns. The chapter also contains an up-to-date discussion of the increase in multigenerational households. Changes and additions have been made to some of the boxed features. There is a new *Public Policies, Private Lives* feature on the Obergefell decision, an updated *Issues and Insights* box, "Red and Blue Families," which includes recent research (Wilcox and Zill) on the "reddest" and "bluest" states and on red and blue counties, and a new *Popular Culture* feature on a possible *Modern Family* effect on acceptance of gay marriage.

Chapter 2, "Studying Marriages and Families," contains updated data on exposure to popular culture, especially television, new examples of "reality television" programs on families, updated examples of the advice and information genre online, on air, and in print. In discussions of theories, there is a new example illustrating a functionalist approach to wedding rituals, and discussion of intersectionality in the section on feminist perspectives. In discussing research, there is a section on demography—what it is and why it is useful in studying families. Using comments by sociologist Paul Amato, the chapter concludes with more explicit mention of why it is impossible to formulate "universal laws" that apply to everyone's experience of family life.

In Chapter 3, "Variations in American Family Life," the coverage of American families across history now includes material from Andrew Cherlin's *Labor's Love Lost*, a history of working-class families in the United States, as well as two new sections—"Late Twentieth-Century Families" and "Families Today"—to better reflect the extent and nature of changes in family life over the past four decades. The section on social class variations now includes material on problems faced by affluent youth, neighborhood effects on opportunities for mobility, and effects of the recession on marriage and divorce, births, and multigenerational families. Data on poverty, the working poor, and children in poverty have all been updated with the latest data available. Material on racial and ethnic variations now includes a more detailed discussion of how the census has defined and measured race, a greatly enlarged discussion of multiracial families, and more attention to diversity of experiences within racial or ethnic groups. In discussing multiracial families,

attention is paid to racial socialization and to experiences of microaggressions, sometimes within one's own extended family. On diversity within groups, there is material differentiating experiences of African Americans and Caribbean black immigrants, and new material on diversity among Asian American groups in their educational attainment, life goals, and where marriage and parenthood rank in their priorities.

Chapter 4, "Gender and Family," is the most substantially changed chapter, so as to capture and characterize the recent and ongoing social and cultural changes in how we think about gender. In discussing the concept of gender, there are now sections addressing "what gender is" and "what gender isn't." These are offered as ways to address possible misconceptions as well as to show the breadth of how gender affects our lives. These sections reflect challenges to binary conceptualizations of gender, consideration of gender as a spectrum, and include considerable attention to transgender experience. The new material on transgender experience includes two new features and a later discussion of survey data on transgender family relationships and experiences. The remainder of the chapter has been updated with more recent data, including sections on gender inequality; gender, sexuality, and bullying; media as socialization; gender and religiosity; data on housework and child care; and data on attitudes in support of greater familial gender equality.

Chapter 5, "Intimacy, Friendship, and Love," includes much new and/or updated material on the use of websites, smartphones, and texting in initiating, maintaining, and/or ending dating relationships. Additionally, there is new material on women and emotion work; love and sexual intimacy among same-sex and heterosexual couples; friends with benefits relationships; "churning" or relationship cycling; dating in older adulthood; and recent data on breakups and their consequences. In talking about popular cultural emphasis on romantic love, there is also updated data on the romance fiction literary genre, and new popular culture references to love themes in film, using both 2013's *Her*, and 2014's *The Fault in Our Stars* as recent examples.

Chapter 6, "Understanding Sex and Sexualities," continues to look at recent data on sexual expression across the life span. It has been updated with data from more recent waves of the National Survey of Family Growth (2011–2013) and the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (2013) in discussing adolescent and young adult sexual experience, as well as more recent

General Social Survey data (on attitudes about different types of sexual expression), Pew Research Center data (survey of LGBT Americans), and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data on such issues as STI's, including HIV/AIDS. The chapter also contains significantly expanded coverage of LGB sexual issues and experiences, including population estimates, coming out experiences, experience of sexual stigma (including mention of monosexism and biphobia). The new boxed feature, "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: Trends in the Status of the LGBT Population in the U.S. and Abroad," focuses on positive indicators suggesting greater acceptance as well as negative indicators such as continued inequality and harassment/violence directed at the LGBT population. The boxed feature on sexting has been updated.

Chapter 7, "Communication, Power, and Conflict," has new material on each of the topics in the chapter title. New or updated material on communication includes discussions of sexual communication, aging, and the use of demand-withdraw communication, the question of problems in too much communication, and consideration of positive communication strategies (such as "intentional dialogue"). Material on conflict and conflict management has been updated, with specific sections continuing to focus on conflicts about sex, money, and housework. Material on destructive conflict management and on conflict in same-sex and heterosexual relationships has been updated. The Popular Culture feature, "Staying Connected with Technology," has been updated with data from the Pew Research Center's survey, "Couples, the Internet, and Social Media," as well as other recent research. The new feature, "Should I Stay or Should I Go? Should We Try or Should We Stop?" addresses a recent therapeutic strategy of discernment counseling.

In **Chapter 8, "Marriages in Societal and Individual Perspective,"** the most notable changes result from keeping up to date with data on changing marriage rates and shifting attitudes about marriage. The chapter has moved from a consideration of "the marriage debate," to a discussion that highlights the ambiguous status of marriage in the United States, which includes special attention to attitudes and outlooks of millennials. There is new consideration of earlier historical fluctuations in marriage rates, new material on weddings and their costs, new data on marriage and social ties (including to family and in volunteering and charitable giving). The discussion of religion and marriage has been broadened, and the data on racial homogamy versus intermarriage (and roles played by

education and income), religious homogamy, and age-discrepant marriages have all been updated. In the section on who we can marry, the attention to same-sex marriage now includes the *Obergefell* decision, and recent estimates of the numbers of married lesbian or gay male couples. The section on marriage typologies now also includes a typology from the work of John Gottman, and the chapter closing section on the future of marriage now includes reference to Cherlin's *Labor's Love Lost*. The new *Public Policies, Private Lives* feature, "Will You Marry Us?" examines the use of friends and family members as wedding officiants.

In **Chapter 9, "Unmarried Lives: Singlehood and Cohabitation,"** data on numbers of singles and the extent of cohabitation again have been updated. Pew Research Center data on why unmarried women and men haven't married are included. The chapter has updated discussions of both premarital and postmarital (prior to remarriage) cohabitation. There is updated and/or enlarged discussion of cohabitation and remarriage, pooling of finances among cohabiting couples, relationship satisfaction among cohabiting couples, and the impact of cohabitation and serial cohabitation on marriage. The material on same-sex cohabitation has been updated, and where available comparisons are made between same-sex and heterosexual married and cohabiting couples. The features titled "Living Apart Together," "Elective Co-Parenting by Heterosexual and LGB Parents," and on "Heterosexual Domestic Partnerships" all have been updated.

Chapter 10, "Becoming Parents and Experiencing Parenthood," once again contains updated statistics on fertility, births, unmarried childbirth, infant mortality, pregnancy, mistimed or unwanted pregnancies, pregnancy loss, adoption, voluntary childlessness, and infertility. Updated estimates are given from the U.S. Department of Agriculture on the costs associated with raising children. New data from the third wave of the "Listening to Mothers" survey are used to address women's experiences giving birth. The chapter also includes consideration of competing mothering ideologies ("intensive mothering" versus "extensive mothering"), comparisons of employed versus at-home mothers, and updated data on the wage impact of motherhood for women. More recent data are included on fathers, especially regarding housework and time spent with children. There are also updated discussions of single fathers and at-home fathers. Using the National Survey of Children's Health and the National Survey of America's Families, the

chapter consideration of the pleasures and pains of parenthood has been updated. New data or discussions about parents' self-assessments, contact between adults and aging parents, parenting adult children, grandparents raising children, and on nonparental households are included. The section on gay or lesbian parents has been updated and enlarged. A new *Popular Culture* feature looks at research on the potential effects of MTV's *16 and Pregnant* and *Teen Mom* on teen pregnancy and childbearing.

Chapter 11, "Marriage, Work, and Economics," contains updated employment and labor force participation data along with data on women's and men's work experiences and dual-earner households. In addressing how work impacts family life, we present 2015 Pew survey data of parental time strains, updated discussions of work-family conflict, and parental guilt by gender; American Time Use Survey data on time spent in housework; and a 2015 comparison of 50 years of time use data from 14 countries. We also update with 2014–15 data the costs of outside child care, and consider trends in unemployment, telecommuting, and flextime. Data on availability of family supportive policies have been updated.

Chapter 12, "Intimate Violence and Sexual Abuse," has much new material. This includes new examples to open, and later throughout the chapter reflecting the breadth of family violence and intimate partner violence. We include newer data from the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence survey, estimating the prevalence of "minor" and "more severe" intimate partner violence, emotional and psychological abuse (including threats, insults, and excessive efforts to monitor and control), and the impact of abusive behavior on recipients. In addressing dating violence and date rape, there is a new discussion of the concept of "affirmative consent." We have updated the data and discussion on child maltreatment, and consider age, race, parental age, and type of maltreatment. We include new data on sibling violence and on the estimated economic impact of family violence. The discussion of policies to address family violence now better reflect both the advocacy for and the criticisms of mandatory arrest and no-drop prosecution.

Chapter 13, "Coming Apart: Separation and Divorce," has updated data on divorce, custody, child support, and alimony, and enlarged coverage of these issues. This is accompanied by a brief discussion of the limitations of divorce data, due to incomplete reporting across the United States (data on divorce does not include data from all 50 states). The chapter uses

2013–14 data to illustrate the different measures of divorce rates. New to the chapter are discussions of the trend in "gray divorce," the risks involved in marrying either too young *or* too old, and the economic impact of divorce. New or updated box features include "Divorcing in Iran and India, but NOT the Philippines," "Making Personal Trouble Public: Sharing One's Divorce Online or in Print," and "Covenant Marriage as a Response to Divorce."

Chapter 14, "New Beginnings: Single-Parent Families, Remarriages, and Blended Families," offers updated discussions of trends in single parenting and remarriage, and of the economic status and diversity of living arrangements of single parents. The variations in single-parent households and in remarriage, especially by gender, race/ethnicity, and poverty status, are highlighted. The "benefits" of remarriage are considered, especially as they compare to the benefits of first marriage. In addition, the chapter pays more attention to stepfamilies, including new material on the effects of stepfamily life on marital quality, age differences in children's adjustment to stepfamily life, and the different ways children refer to stepfathers. Data on remarriage and stepfamily life include estimates of how many U.S. marriages are remarriages, how many adults have at least one step-relative, and how that varies along with education, age, and ethnicity.

Features

What Do You Think?

Self-quiz chapter openers let students assess their existing knowledge of what will be discussed in the chapter. We have found these quizzes engage students, drawing them into the material and stimulating greater interaction with the course.

Chapter Outlines

Each chapter contains an outline at the beginning of the chapter to allow students to organize their learning.

Public Policies, Private Lives

These 12 boxed features focus on legal issues and public policies that affect how we think about and/or experience family life. Among them are new features on the lack of adequate language and policies regarding transgender identities, the Supreme Court decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, and the trend toward having friends or family

conduct one's wedding, as well as updated features on sexting, the Family and Medical Leave Act, adoptions that dissolve, covenant marriage, and spanking.

Exploring Diversity

These 11 boxes let students see family circumstances from the vantage point of other cultures, other eras, or within different lifestyles in the contemporary United States. New to this edition are boxes on cross-cultural research on kissing; race, class, and the maintenance of kin ties; and positive and negative trends in the status of LGBT population, both domestically and abroad. Among returning features, the box on divorce in India and Iran now also looks at the lack of divorce in the Philippines. Other retained features address arranged marriage, collectivist versus individualistic cultural constructions of love, dating violence cross-culturally, and the phenomenon of posthumous marriage.

Issues and Insights

These 14 boxes once again focus on current and high-interest topics. They address such issues as virginity loss; gender, sexuality, and bullying; "living apart together"; and differences in obligations felt toward biological and stepfamily members. The two new Issues and Insights features focus on cross class marriage and discernment counseling for troubled couples. Two returning features on the uses and abuses of technology in families and relationships have been updated, as have the boxes on "red and blue" families, stepfather-stepchild relationships, and living apart together.

Popular Culture

These 11 features discuss the ways family issues are portrayed through various forms of popular culture. Topics new to this edition include boxes on the possible effects and implications of certain television portrayals, including features on a "Modern Family effect" on attitudes about gay marriage, race and class as portrayed in *Blackish*, and whether and how teen pregnancy rates may be affected by such programs as *16 and Pregnant* and *Teen Mom*. Another new feature, "Transgender Faces," looks at popular media attention on Caitlyn Jenner, Jazz Jennings, Chaz Bono, and Laverne Cox, and their possible influence on attitudes toward trans individuals. There is also a new feature,

"Making Personal Trouble Public: Sharing One's Divorce Online and in Print," on some ways in which divorced individuals choose to share their story.

Real Families

These 10 features give up-close, sometimes first-person, accounts of issues raised in the text as they are experienced by people in their everyday lives. In this edition, there are updated boxes on elective co-parenting by heterosexual and LGB parents, middle-class parenting, and heterosexual domestic partnerships. Returning features include those on blending and unblending families, family caregivers, and a feature on men and childbirth.

End-of-Chapter Features

Each chapter also has a *Chapter Summary* and a list of *Key Terms*, all of which are designed to maximize students' learning outcomes. The chapter summary reviews the main ideas of the chapter, making review easier and more effective. The key terms are boldfaced within the chapter and listed at the end, along with a page number where the term was introduced. Both chapter summaries and key terms assist students in test preparation.

Glossary

A comprehensive glossary of key terms is included at the back of the textbook.

Instructor and Student Resources

The Marriage and Family Experience, 13th edition, is accompanied by a wide array of supplements prepared for both instructors and students. Some new resources have been created specifically to accompany the 13th edition, and all of the continuing supplements have been thoroughly revised and updated.

Resources for Instructors

Instructor's Resource Center

Available online, the Instructor's Resource Center includes an instructor's manual, a test bank, and PowerPoint slides. The instructor's manual will help instructors organize the course and captivate students' attention. The manual includes a chapter focus

statement, key learning objectives, lecture outlines, in-class discussion questions, class activities, student handouts, extensive lists of reading and online resources, and suggested Internet sites and activities. The test bank includes multiple-choice, true/false, short answer, and essay questions, all with answers and text references, for each chapter of the text. The PowerPoints include chapter-specific presentations, including images, figures, and tables, to help build your lectures.

Cengage Learning Testing Powered by Cognero

Cognero is a flexible, online system that allows you to:

- Import, edit, and manipulate test bank content from *The Marriage and Family Experience* test bank or elsewhere, including your own favorite test questions.
- Create multiple test versions in an instant.
- Deliver tests from your LMS, your classroom, or wherever you want.

Resources for Students and Instructors

MindTap for The Marriage and Family Experience, 13th Edition

- MindTap engages and empowers you to produce their best work—consistently—by seamlessly integrating course material with videos, activities, apps, and much more, MindTap creates a unique learning path that fosters increased comprehension and efficiency.
- MindTap delivers real-world relevance with activities and assignments that help students build critical thinking and analytical skills that will transfer to other courses and their professional lives.
- MindTap helps students stay organized and efficient with a single destination that reflects what’s important to the instructor, along with the tools students need to master the content.
- MindTap empowers and motivates students with information that shows where they stand at all times—both individually and compared with the highest performers in class.

Additionally, for instructors, MindTap allows you to:

- Control what content students see and when they see it with a learning path that can be used as is or matched to your syllabus exactly.

- Create a unique learning path of relevant readings and multimedia and activities that move students up the learning taxonomy from basic knowledge and comprehensions to analysis, application, and critical thinking.
- Integrate your own content into the MindTap Reader using your own documents or pulling from sources like RSS feeds, YouTube videos, websites, Google Docs, and more.
- Use powerful analytics and reports that provide a snapshot of class progress, time in course, engagement, and completion.

Acknowledgments

This book remains the product of many hands. Bryan Strong and, later, Christine DeVault, created a wonderful book from which to teach or study families and relationships. I hope that once again I have retained their emphasis on the meaning and importance of families, along with their effort to engage students’ curiosity and interest. I am gratified to continue their efforts.

A number of people at Cengage Learning deserve thanks. Elizabeth Beiting-Lipps, sociology editor, showed considerable enthusiasm, consistent faith, and continued support for this book. I owe her much thanks and appreciation. My developmental editor, Trudy Brown, was truly outstanding. She provided encouragement, reminded me of deadlines (and helped me meet them), offered thoughtful suggestions and wise commentary as she read through the drafts of each chapter, and assisted in the selection of photos used throughout the text. This book has been made stronger, and the processes of writing and revising have been made easier and more gratifying because of her involvement.

I want to extend my thanks to Cheri Palmer, the senior production project manager at Cengage, who oversaw the complex production process with great skill. As always, with patience and flexibility, Jill Traut, project manager at MPS Limited, did an outstanding job on all phases of production. Heather McElwain was tremendously helpful and highly competent in the copyediting. The text looks and reads better because of their involvement. My appreciation also goes to Lumina Datamatics, for finding such good examples of what were occasionally vaguely requested subjects.

Once again, I wish to express deep appreciation to my colleagues and friends at Ohio Wesleyan University for the support they provided me. My

Ohio Wesleyan colleagues, Mary Howard, Jim Peoples, John Durst, Paul Dean, Alper Yalcinkaya and Pam Laucher make me very fortunate to have spent more than 30 years as a member of such a supportive department. They have been exceptional colleagues and remain always treasured friends. The many enthusiastic and curious students I have had in classes make me realize how very fortunate I have been to spend my academic career in Ohio Wesleyan classrooms. Their interest and curiosity about matters of families and relationships helps sustain my own.

I want again to express my appreciation to my family: my parents, Kalman and the late Eleanor Cohen, and my sisters, Laura Cohen and Lisa Merrill, who

always formed an especially supportive group. Most importantly, they have been there for me through many life changes and challenges. I cannot adequately thank them.

Finally, my son Dan and daughter Allison will always be in the center of my heart. They have brought more joy to my life than I ever could have expected. As they move through their now adult lives, they continue to make me incredibly proud and remind me how immensely fortunate I am to be their dad and their friend. They are wonderful legacies to their beautiful mother, the late Susan Jablin Cohen, who, in sharing a quarter century of her life with me, shared too in the pride and joy of raising two such incredible people.

The Meaning of Marriage and the Family

1



What Do You Think?

Are the following statements True or False? You may be surprised by the answers as you read this chapter.

- T F** 1. Now, same-gender couples may legally marry anywhere in the United States.
- T F** 2. Though many allow polygamy, all cultures throughout the world prefer monogamy—the practice of having only one husband or wife.
- T F** 3. Families are easy to define and count.
- T F** 4. Being related by blood or through marriage is not always sufficient to be counted as a family member or kin.
- T F** 5. Most families in the United States are traditional nuclear families in which the husband works and the wife stays at home caring for the children.
- T F** 6. All cultures traditionally divide at least some work into male and female tasks.
- T F** 7. The number of multigenerational households in the United States is increasing.
- T F** 8. There is widespread agreement about the nature and causes of change in family patterns in the United States.
- T F** 9. African Americans tend to express more conservative views on such family issues as premarital sex, divorce, and gay marriage.
- T F** 10. Researchers agree that when parents divorce, children inevitably suffer long-term trauma.

Chad Baker/Jason Reed/Ryan McVay/Photodisc/Getty Images

Chapter Outline

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and Wishful Thinking 2

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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, attend any lectures, and 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. These experiences and the relationships in which we have had them are likely among the most important experiences and closest relationships we have known. Whether with parents and siblings; past, present, or future partners and spouses; wider kin or even close nonkin who are “just like family,” we are, in part, products of those relationships.

Furthermore, each of us comes to this subject with some pretty strong ideas and personal 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 experiences in our families influence our thinking about what family life is or should be like. But if pressed, how should we describe family life in the United States? 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 spouses cheat on each other? Are same-sex couples and heterosexual couples similar or different in how they structure and experience their lives together? What happens to children when parents 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. In looking them over, consider not only what you believe to be correct but also why you believe what you do. In other words, think about what we know about families and where our knowledge comes from.

In this chapter, we examine how individuals and society define marriage and family, paying particular attention to the existence of different viewpoints and assumptions about families and family life along with the discrepancies between the realities of family life as

uncovered by social scientists and the impressions we may 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 in the remaining chapters.

■ Personal Experience, Social Controversy, and Wishful Thinking

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 along with those of people closest to us. How we respond to the issues and information presented throughout the chapters that follow may be influenced by what we have experienced, seen firsthand, and come to believe about families.

Experience versus Expertise

For some of us, family experiences have been largely loving ones, and our family relationships have remained stable. For others, family life has been characterized by conflict and bitterness, separations and reconfigurations. Most people experience at least some degree of both sides of family life, the love and the conflict, whether or not their families remain intact.

The temptation to draw conclusions about families from personal experiences of particular families is understandable. Thinking that experience translates into expertise, we may find ourselves tempted to generalize from what we experience to what we assume 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 both highly subjective and narrowly limited.

We “see” things, in part, as we *want* to see them. Likewise, we overlook some things because we don’t want to accept them. Our own family members are likely to have different perceptions and attach different meanings to even those same experiences and relationships. Thus, the understanding we have of our families is very likely a somewhat distorted one.

Furthermore, no other family is exactly like one’s own family. We don’t all live in the same places, and we don’t all possess the same financial resources, draw from the same cultural backgrounds, face the same circumstances and build on the same sets of experiences. These make our families somewhat unique. No matter how well we might think we know our own families, they are poor sources of more general knowledge about the wider marital or family issues that are the focus of this book.

Dramatic Changes, Increasing Diversity, and Continuing Controversy

Learning about marriage and family relationships can be challenging for other reasons. Family life continues to undergo considerable social change. As we will begin to explore in more detail in Chapter 3, for a variety of reasons and in response to a number of influences, the contours and characteristics of U.S. families are in flux.

The rise in cohabitation, the increase in the never-married and formerly married populations, the prevalence of dual-earner couples and single-parent households, and the legalization of same-sex marriage, are some of the more notable examples of how families have changed in recent decades and where we continue to see quite dramatic change. Hence, talking about “marriage and family” as well as writing and reading about them can be difficult given the pace and extent of change. For example, when the previous edition of this textbook went to press, some nine states had legalized same-sex marriage. As these words were first being typed for this edition, same-sex couples could marry legally in 36 states. Then on June 26, 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court rendered a decision in the case of *Obergefell v. Hodges*, which legalized same-sex marriage throughout the United States.

Similarly, technology continues to contribute to changes in the ways we meet potential partners, interact with loved ones, bear and later monitor and raise

our children, and manage our home and work lives. Communications technology has enabled a level of access and interaction between romantic partners or spouses, parents and children, and other family members previously not possible. This raises new questions about such things as how much access we should expect and how frequent our communication should be.

Advances in reproductive science have enabled some individuals and couples who previously would have been infertile to bear children. Equally true, same-sex couples can, if they so choose, use surrogates and sperm or egg donors to have children who are biologically related to at least one of the partners. In the past year the United Kingdom legalized an in vitro fertilization technique that could help prevent children from being born with mitochondrial disease. The process uses the genetic material of three people (by mixing the mother’s egg nucleus, with a donor’s mitochondria, and then fertilizing the egg with sperm from the father). Reaction to news of such a procedure led some to fear that such “three-parent babies” could be a first step toward “designer babies” (Gallagher 2015).

In part as a by-product of changes such as these and in part as a reflection of the considerable cultural, ethnic, racial, economic, sexual, and religious diversity of the wider population, “the marriage and family experience” differs greatly, even within the United States. Commencing with Chapter 3 but extending throughout the remainder of the text, we strive to capture and convey some of the richly different ways family life is experienced and expressed. The reality of such diversity, however, makes it difficult to capture all the different ways things such as marriage, parenting, and divorce are experienced within a single population, and limits many generalizations, even if they illustrate how most people experience things.

Finally, few areas of social life are more controversial than family matters. Just consider the following recent examples of some family matters. What underlying issues can you identify? What is your position on such issues?

- The practice of polygamy, in which one has more than one spouse at a time, has been illegal in the United States since a U.S. Supreme Court decision in 1879, because it was considered a potential threat to public order (Tracy 2002). Despite this, over the past decade many Americans became more aware of the existence of polygamous families

True

1. Now, same-gender couples may legally marry anywhere in the United States.

living openly in parts of the southwestern United States, especially among some fundamentalist Mormon groups. One of the most well-known examples is the Brown family, of TLC's television series, *Sister Wives*, consisting of Kody Brown, his four wives, Meri, Janelle, Christine, and Robyn, and their 17 children. The Browns successfully challenged part of the Utah law banning bigamy, and asked specifically that the prohibition against unmarried people living together and having sexual relations together be overturned. On August 27, 2014, U.S. District Court Judge, Clark Waddoups, issued a ruling that struck down part of Utah's antipolygamy law, contending that its provision prohibiting cohabitation violated the Browns' freedom of religion. The ruling made it legal for Utah residents to be legally married to one spouse but live with others they also consider to be their spouses (Whitehurst 2014a, 2014b). Yet polygamy remains illegal in Utah and the other 49 states in the United States. Thus, Kody Brown can be married legally to only one of his wives. In February 2015, he divorced Meri, his first wife, and married Robyn, his most recent wife, to provide her children with certain protections. The Browns, along with perhaps 30,000 to 40,000 other individuals living "polygamist lifestyles" in the United States exemplify what legal scholar Ashley Morin characterizes as an "illogical middle ground," in which polygamy laws are only selectively enforced and "even when polygamists openly display their lifestyle," law enforcement generally ignores the practice (Morin 2014). Although most polygamist families reside in Utah and other western states, there are also polygamous Muslim families living elsewhere in the United States, such as Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (Dobner 2011; Morin 2014; Whitehurst 2014a; Young 2010).

- When couples with children separate or divorce, decisions about child custody loom large. For same-gender couples with children, decisions to separate or divorce often take on additional complexity. So it was for a lesbian couple in Florida who had separated after more than a decade together. Years into their loving, committed relationship, they'd decided to have a child together. Because one of the women was infertile, her partner donated the egg that was fertilized with sperm from an anonymous donor and then implanted into the womb of the infertile partner. Their daughter was born in January 2004, given a hyphenated version of both

women's last names, and came to consider both women as her parents. Unfortunately, after the couple split up, in keeping with Florida law, only the woman who gave birth to the girl was legally considered the mother, and, therefore, was awarded custody. However, on December 23, 2011, an appeals court overturned the initial ruling and ruled that both women had parental rights to the child. In its decision, the appellate court asked the Florida Supreme Court to consider and clarify the following issue, "Does a woman in a lesbian relationship who gives her egg to her partner have no legal right to the child it produces?" (Stutzman 2011). On November 12, 2013, the Florida Supreme Court ruled that, in fact, both women had parental rights to the child (Farrington 2013).

- Other legal complexities arise from advances in reproductive medicine. On June 12, 2015, a Chicago appeals court ruled that Dr. Karla Dunston could use embryos that she and her ex-boyfriend, Jacob Szafranski, created. Dr. Dunston was receiving cancer treatment when she and Mr. Szafranski reached an agreement for him to donate sperm to create embryos that could be used once her cancer treatment ended. Because they broke up while she was in treatment and before the embryos could be used, Mr. Szafranski was denying her permission to use them. After three court cases, the embryos were awarded to Dr. Dunston, though Mr. Szafranski is again appealing. According to *New York Times* journalist Tamar Lewin, throughout the United States, hundreds of thousands of embryos "in storage" are left over from in vitro fertilization (Lewin 2015).
- Decisions to get or stay married are assumed to be decisions based on falling in or out of love. Sometimes, though, as was the case for Bo and Dena McLain of Milford, Ohio, such decisions are also heavily influenced by much more practical and mundane motives, such as the need to attain or retain health insurance. The McLains married so that Dena could be added to Bo's health insurance plan and thus meet the requirement for insurance imposed by her nursing school. Likewise, many couples whose marriages have effectively ended may stay married to retain health insurance coverage and other benefits that they would lose if they divorced. Most such couples do separate and, though they may live apart, remain married, sometimes for years. Journalist Pamela Paul called them "the un-divorced" (Paul 2010), while Juliet

Bridges, writing in *The Telegraph* in the United Kingdom, called them “not quite married.” Much like the McLains’ decision to marry, the decision to remain less-than-happily married often partly reflects the privileges found in marriage. Health insurance, pensions, tax advantages, eligibility for Social Security benefits—all may be among the practical matters that sustain such marriages. In the words of couples therapist Toni Coleman, such couples “. . . enjoy the benefits of being married: the financial perks, the tax breaks, the health care coverage. . . . [T]hey just feel they can’t live together” (Paul 2010; Sack 2008).

- During the 2014 National Football League season, the league was rocked by arrests of some of its star players for sexual and/or domestic violence. Baltimore Raven running back Ray Rice was suspended after video evidence surfaced revealing him assaulting his fiancé in a hotel elevator and dragging her unconscious body from the elevator. Minnesota Viking, Adrian Peterson, was indicted by a Texas grand jury on charges of reckless or negligent injury to a child after he used a tree branch to spank his four-year-old son, causing “cuts and bruises to the child’s back, buttocks, ankles, legs, and scrotum, along with defensive wounds to the child’s hands” (Boren 2014). These and other cases led to much public discussion and scrutiny of the National Football League’s handling of acts of violence perpetrated by current and former players. As

At a hearing on charges of reckless or negligent injury to a child, Adrian Peterson of the National Football League’s Minnesota Vikings consults his attorney, Rusty Hardin. Peterson’s case was one of a number of high profile cases that led the league to form a special committee to deal with players charged with family violence and abuse.



David J. Phillip-Pool/Getty Images

part of its response, the NFL suspended the players involved and formed a special committee of four women with expertise on issues related to sexual and domestic violence. The league ultimately reformed its personal conduct policy to reflect a strengthened stance against sexual assault and domestic violence. While the Rice case was met by fairly uniform condemnation of Ray Rice’s behavior, the Peterson case triggered somewhat more divided discussions about corporal punishment, race, and parenting, even among those who agreed that Peterson had crossed the line in the discipline of his young son.

Stories such as these illustrate just some of the kinds of topics and issues raised throughout the remainder of this book. They also raise interesting questions that frequently lack clear answers. For example, how much should the state restrict people’s marriage choices? How do policies that privilege married couples influence decisions to enter, exit, or remain in a marriage? How do wider economic conditions influence the internal dynamics of and decisions made by families? Has family law kept pace with advances in reproductive technology, and is it adequate to address diverse sexual lifestyles? At what point should the protection of children take precedence over the privacy of family life? As a society, we are often divided, sometimes strongly and bitterly, on many 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, yourself, were less connected or invested. 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 Marriage? What Is Family?

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, you may be surprised at the greater complexity involved as you attempt to define these words.

Defining Marriage

Globally, there is much variation in the percentage of adults who are married and what marriage is like. Sociologists Laura Lippman and W. Bradford Wilcox, reporting on the prevalence of marriage across 43 different countries, state that adults 18 to 49 are most likely to be married in countries in Asia and the Middle East and least likely to be married in Central and South America. Countries in Africa, Europe, North America, and Oceania are said to fall in between. More than 60 percent of adults in South Korea and Malaysia, and more than 70 percent of adults in Indonesia and India are currently married. Among the Middle Eastern countries in their sample, the percentage of adults who are married ranges from 55 percent in Israel to over 60 percent in Turkey and Jordan, to a high of 80 percent in Egypt. At the other end of the spectrum, at 20 percent married, Colombia represents the worldwide low.

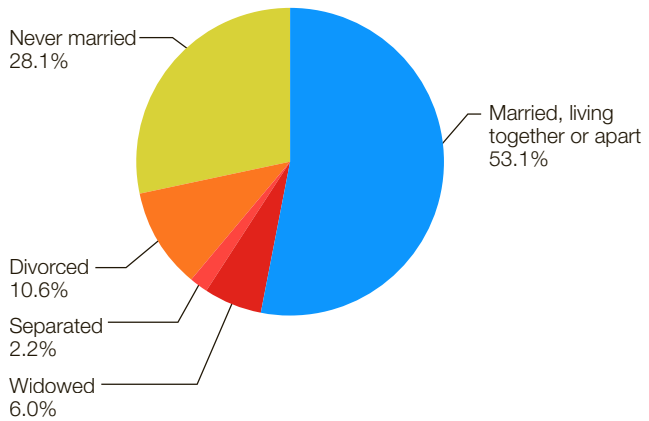
As shown in Figure 1.1, slightly over half (53.1 percent) of all adults in the United States, age 18 and older, are married (including those married and living apart). If one includes those currently separated but not divorced, the percentage reaches 55.3 percent. Among males, 54.9 percent are currently married, living with or apart from their spouse. Another 1.9 percent are separated but not divorced and, all told, 68.7 percent have at least experienced marriage (this is, are married, divorced, separated, or widowed). Although a smaller percentage of females is currently married (51.5 percent) or separated (another 2.5 percent), 74.9 percent of females 18 and older are or have at some time been married (U.S. Census Bureau 2014).

Family relationships are often the focus of popular movies. In 2014, *This is Where I Leave You*, featured and exposed the tensions resulting from the coming together of adult siblings and their widowed mother after the death of their father.



Warner Bros./Everett Collection

Figure 1.1 Marital Status, U.S. Population 18 and Older



SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, Families and Living Arrangements in the United States, Table 1A.

What is it that these many men and women have at some point entered and experienced? As one goes about trying to define marriage, one might proceed in a number of different directions. Thinking mostly about marriage in the 21st-century United States, for example, might lead one to emphasize marriage as a deeply emotional, sexually intimate, and highly personal relationship between two people in love. Given the past two decades worth of effort expended on marriage equality for gay men and lesbians, one might be inclined to emphasize the legal recognition and more than a thousand rights and protections that accompany marriage in the United States. Still others might approach marriage as a religiously sanctioned relationship. Fans of television programs such as *Say Yes to the Dress* or *Bridezilla*s might even associate marriage mostly with the ceremonial celebrations and rituals accompanying weddings. In some ways, all of these have merit, as they reflect the multiple dimensions of marriage.

Anthropologists James Peoples and Garrick Bailey point out that there is so much cultural diversity in how societies define marriage that it is difficult to arrive at a single comprehensive definition that includes all the meanings marriage conveys. Perhaps minimally, **marriage** is a socially and legally recognized union between two people, in which they are united sexually, cooperate economically, and may give birth to, adopt, or rear children. The union is assumed to be permanent, as in “till death do we part,” though it may be and often is 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 (Peoples and Bailey 2014). 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 or not children are seen as the responsibility of both partners (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 six 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 as well as in certain parts of Africa (e.g., the Nuer of Sudan) and Europe (e.g., France), marriages are sometimes arranged in which one or both parties are deceased.

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, historian Stephanie Coontz notes that in some "small-scale societies," the act of eating together alone 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.

Sociologists Laura Lippman and W. Bradford Wilcox, authors of *The World Family Map 2014*, acknowledge that "across time and space, in most societies and cultures, marriage has been an important institution for structuring adult intimate relationships and connecting parents to one another and to any children that they have together" (Lippman and Wilcox 2014, 14)." 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.
- Additionally, as anthropologists James Peoples and Garrick Bailey (2015) note, marriage assigns the responsibility of caring for and socializing children to the spouses or their relatives.

Many Americans believe that marriage is divinely instituted; others assert that it is a civil institution involving only 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 a priest. By the 13th century, the ceremony was required to take place in a church. As states competed with organized religion for power, governments began to regulate marriage. In the United States today, a marriage must be validated through government-issued marriage licenses to be legal, regardless of whether the ceremony is officiated by legal or religious officials.

Who May Marry?

Who may marry has changed over the past 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 1967, when the U.S. Supreme Court declared, in *Loving v. Virginia*, that such prohibitions

Looking across cultures, many marriage customs may strike most Americans as unusual. Few, if any, can rival the custom of a marriage where one or both spouses are deceased. A number of versions of so-called ghost, spirit, or posthumous marriages are found among some African countries, in parts of rural China, and in France. In Sudan, among the Nuer, a dead groom can be replaced by a male relative (e.g., a brother) who takes his place at the wedding. Despite being deceased, he—not the living substitute—is considered the husband. Any children born subsequently will be considered children of the deceased man who is recognized socially as the father. In this way, a man who died before leaving an heir can have his family line continue. Among the Iraqw of Tanzania, the “ghost” groom could be the imagined son of a woman who never had a son.

In some parts of rural China, parents of a son who died before marrying may “procure the body of a (dead) woman, hold a ‘wedding,’ and then bury the couple together,” in keeping with the Chinese tradition of deceased spouses sharing a grave (*Economist* 2007). As reported in the *New York Times*, the custom of “minghun” (afterlife marriage) follows from the Chinese practice of ancestor worship, which holds that people continue to exist after death and that the living are obligated to tend to their wants—or risk the consequences. Traditional Chinese beliefs also hold that an unmarried life is incomplete, which is why some parents worry that an unmarried dead son may be an unhappy one (Yardley 2006).

Parents whose daughters had died might sell their daughter’s body for economic reasons but also are motivated by the desire to give such daughters a place in Chinese society. As stated by sociologist Guo Yuhua, “China is a paternal clan culture. . . . A woman does not belong to her parents. She must marry and have children

of her own before she has a place among her husband’s lineage. A woman who dies unmarried has no place in this world” (Yardley 2006).

In France, in 1959, Parliament drafted a law that legalized “postmortem matrimony” under certain circumstances. These included proof of the couple’s intention to marry before one of the partners died and permission from the deceased’s family. After a request is submitted to the president, it is passed to a justice minister and ultimately to the prosecutor who has jurisdiction over the locality in which the marriage is to occur. It is then the prosecutor’s responsibility to determine whether the conditions have been met and the marriage is to be approved. In June 2011, 22-year-old Frenchwoman Karen Jumeaux sought and received permission from President Nicolas Sarkozy to marry Anthony Maillot, her deceased fiancé and father of her 2-year-old son. Maillot had been killed in an accident, two years earlier at age 20. In a 2009 article in *The Guardian*, it is reported that French government figures estimate that “dozens” of such marriages occur each year (Davies 2009). Such posthumous marriages are largely for sentimental reasons. In fact, French law prevents spouses from any inheritance. Nonetheless, the marriages are retroactive to the eve of the groom’s demise. They allow the woman to “carry her husband’s name and identify herself as a widow” on official documents. If the woman is pregnant at the time of the man’s death, the children are considered legitimate heirs to his estate (Smith 2004). As Jumeaux reported after the posthumous wedding ceremony, “He was my first and only love and we were together for four years. We expected to bring up our son together. I never wanted to do it alone, but fate decided otherwise. Now I am his wife and will always love him” (*Daily Mail Reporter* 2011). ●

were 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.

Of course, the greatest controversy regarding legal marriage over the past two decades has been over the question of same-sex marriage.

During the revision of this text, on June 26, 2015, the United States Supreme Court ruled that based on the 14th Amendment of the United States Constitution, all 50 U.S. states were required to recognize and

license marriages between same-sex couples and to recognize all marriages that were lawfully performed out of state. This decision allowed same-sex couples to legally marry, with all the rights, benefits, and privileges marriage entails. We more fully explore legal aspects of marriage (such as the age at which one can marry, whom one may marry, and so on) in Chapter 8. For now, though, it should be noted that legal marriage bestows literally hundreds of rights, privileges, and protections on couples who marry. Cohabiting couples, whether heterosexual or same-gender couples, do not automatically acquire those same benefits.

“No union is more profound than marriage, for it embodies the highest ideals of love, fidelity, devotion, sacrifice, and family. In forming a marital union, two people become something greater than once they were . . . marriage embodies a love that may endure even past death.” (Schwartz 2015)

Those are the eloquent words of Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy, writing for the majority in the historic decision that legalized same-sex marriage.

The case, known as *Obergefell v. Hodges*, also included suits brought by couples in Michigan, Kentucky, and Tennessee against their state’s gay marriage bans. But it will forever be known as *Obergefell*, and it will reflect the very personal and poignant struggle James Obergefell and John Arthur faced.

Heterosexuals rarely stop to think about the privileges that their sexual orientation confers. One such privilege had long been the right to marry. Those couples who do marry receive many more rights and protections than couples who don’t marry. For heterosexuals, marriage versus cohabitation is a matter of choice. Heterosexual couples who choose cohabitation may do so because they prefer the more informal arrangement. They, too, will lack the protections and privileges that accompany marriage, but they elect to cohabit anyway. For many same-sex couples, the historical *inability* to marry has cost them many protections, including the following examples:

- The right to enter a premarital agreement
- Income tax deductions, credits, rates, exemptions, and estimates
- Legal status with one’s partner’s children
- Partner medical decisions
- Right to inherit property
- The right to a divorce
- Award of child custody in divorce proceedings
- Payment of worker’s compensation benefits after death of spouse
- Right to support from spouse

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. So it was for James Obergefell and John Arthur of Cincinnati, Ohio.

James Obergefell and his partner, John Arthur, were together more than 20 years. When John became ill with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, an incurable progressive neurological disease, Jim reacted much as loving spouses

or partners do; he stayed by John’s side, even as John’s mobility and speech grew weaker. When the U.S. Supreme Court ruled the Defense of Marriage Act to be unconstitutional in 2013, the couple wanted to celebrate by getting married. As residents of Ohio, where same-sex marriage was not legally recognized, they ultimately decided to go out of state to marry. Given John’s poor health, travel would not be easy and would require a kind of medical transport that was not inexpensive. They decided to fly to Maryland to get married. They were married in a seven-and-a-half-minute ceremony on the plane by John Arthur’s aunt, Paulette Roberts, who had been ordained with the hope of someday marrying Jim and John (Zimmerman 2014). Now legally married in Baltimore, Maryland, they returned home to Cincinnati, Ohio, where their marriage would not be recognized. Not even on John Arthur’s death certificate would there be any indication that he and Obergefell were wed. Under Ohio law, Jim Obergefell would not be listed as John Arthur’s surviving spouse (Lerner 2015). This motivated Obergefell to bring suit against the state of Ohio, in the case *Obergefell v. Hodges* (Richard Hodges was the director of the Ohio Department of Health).

Obergefell said, “They were going to say, ‘No, you don’t exist.’ It ripped our hearts out. So we filed suit against the state of Ohio” (Ziv 2015).

In authoring the majority opinion, Kennedy spoke about the meaning of marriage:

Marriage responds to the universal fear that a lonely person might call out only to find no one there. It offers the hope of companionship and understanding and assurance that while both still live there will be someone to care for the other. ●

Holding a photo of himself and his late husband, John Arthur, James Obergefell filed suit against the Ohio Attorney General to have his name listed on his spouse’s death certificate. The case became the U.S. Supreme Court case, *Obergefell v. Hodges*, which resulted in the Court’s decision in June 2015, to legalize same-sex marriage throughout the United States.



The Washington Post/Getty Images