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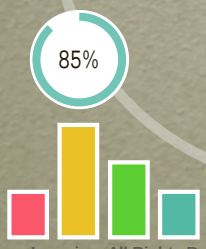

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Sr. Art Director: Bethany Casey

Internal Design: Joe Devine/ Red Hangar Design

Cover Design: Lisa Kuhn: Curio Press, LLC/Trish & Ted Knapke: Ke Design

Cover Image: Hero Images/Getty Images

Title Page, Back Cover, and In Book Ad Images: Computer/tablet illustration: iStockphoto.com/furtaev; Smart Phone illustration: iStockphoto.com/dashadima; Students: Rawpixel.com/Shutterstock.com

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2016955678

Student Edition ISBN: 978-1-337-11697-8

Student Edition with Online ISBN: 978-1-337-11696-1

Cengage Learning
20 Channel Center Street
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Printed in the United States of America
Print Number: 01 Print Year: 2017

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BRIEF CONTENTS

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1 Exploring Marriages and Families Today 2
2 Making Choices about Singlehood, Hooking Up, Cohabitation, and Living Apart Together 26
3 Revealing Gender in Relationships 46
4 Examining Love and Relationship Development 64
5 Integrating Technology and Communication in Relationships 94
6 Enhancing Sexuality in Relationships 114
7 Examining GLBTQIA Relationships 132
8 Exploring Diversity in Marriage Relationships 152
9 Integrating Work and Relationships 176
10 Reacting to Abuse in Relationships 190
11 Deciding about Children 208
12 Rearing Children 226
13 Managing Stress and Crisis in Relationships 248
14 Coping with Divorce and Getting Remarried 268
15 Enjoying the Later Years 292

References 308
Name Index 328
Subject Index 337

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CONTENTS

1 Exploring Marriages and Families Today 2

1-1 Marriage 3
1-2 Family 7
1-3 Differences between Marriage and the Family 10
1-4 Changes in Marriage and the Family 10
1-5 Ways of Viewing Marriage and the Family 12
1-6 Choices in Relationships: View of This Text 16
1-7 Research in Marriage and Family 21
1-8 Trends 22
SELF-ASSESSMENT: Attitudes toward Marriage Scale 23

2 Making Choices about Singlehood, Hooking Up, Cohabitation, and Living Apart Together 26

2-1 Singlehood 27
2-2 Ways of Finding a Partner 32
2-3 Long-Distance Relationships 37
2-4 Cohabitation 38
2-5 Living Apart Together 40
2-6 Trends in Singlehood 43
SELF-ASSESSMENT: Attitudes toward Singlehood Scale 43
SELF-ASSESSMENT: Living Apart Together (LAT) Scale 45

3 Revealing Gender in Relationships 46

3-1 Terminology of Gender Roles 47
3-2 Theories of Gender Role Development 51
3-3 Agents of Socialization 53
3-4 Consequences of Traditional Gender Role Socialization 55
3-5 Changing Gender Roles 60
3-6 Trends in Gender Roles 61
SELF-ASSESSMENT: Gender Role Attitudes: Family Life Index 62

4 Examining Love and Relationship Development 64

4-1 Ways of Viewing Love 65
4-2 Social Control of Love 71
4-3 Love Theories: Origins of Love 71
4-4 Love as a Context for Problems 73
4-5 How Love Develops in a New Relationship 75
4-6 Cultural Factors in Relationship Development 77
4-7 Sociological Factors in Relationship Development 78
4-8 Psychological Factors in Relationship Development 81
4-9 Engagement 84
4-10 Delay or Call Off the Wedding If… 85
4-11 Trends in Love Relationships 88
SELF-ASSESSMENT: Involved Couple's Inventory 89
SELF-ASSESSMENT: Love Attitudes Scale 92

5 Integrating Technology and Communication in Relationships 94

5-1 Communication: Verbal and Nonverbal 95
5-2 Technology and Communication in Romantic Relationships 96
5-3 Choices for Effective Communication 100

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5-4 Gender and Communication 104
5-5 Self-Disclosure and Secrets 105
5-6 Dishonesty, Lying, and Cheating 107
5-7 Theories of Relationship Communication 108
5-8 Fighting Fair: Steps in Conflict Resolution 109
5-9 Trends in Communication and Technology 111
SELF-ASSESSMENT: Supportive Communication Scale (SCS) 112

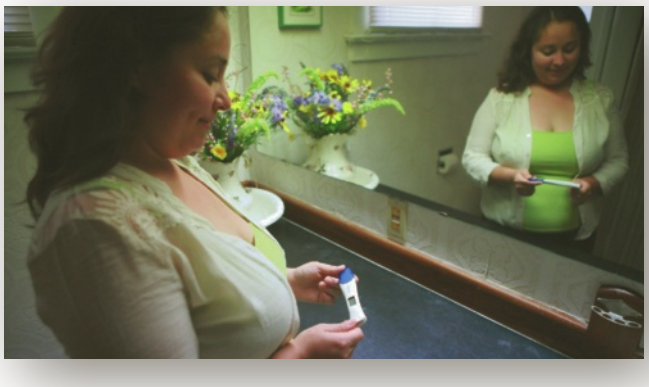
6 Enhancing Sexuality in Relationships 114
6-1 Alternative Sexual Values 115
6-2 Sources of Sexual Values 120
6-3 Sexual Behaviors 123
6-4 Sexuality in Relationships 125
6-5 Sexual Fulfillment: Some Prerequisites 127
6-6 Trends in Sexuality in Relationships 130
SELF-ASSESSMENT: Conservative–Liberal Sexuality Scale (CLSS) 131

7 Examining GLBTQIA Relationships 132
7-1 Terminology and Identification 133
7-2 Sexual Orientation 135
7-3 Heterosexism, Homonegativity, Etc. 136
7-4 Coming Out 139
7-5 GLBT Relationships 143
7-6 Same-Sex Marriage 145
7-7 GLBT Parenting Issues 146
7-8 Trends 148
SELF-ASSESSMENT: Self-Report of Behavior Scale (SRBS) 149

8 Exploring Diversity in Marriage Relationships 152
8-1 Motivations, Functions, and Transition to Egalitarian Marriage 153
8-2 Weddings and Honeymoons 154
8-3 Changes after Marriage 157
8-4 Diversity in Marriage 159
8-5 Marriage Success 168
8-6 Trends in Marriage Relationships 172
SELF-ASSESSMENT: Attitudes toward Interracial Dating Scale 173
SELF-ASSESSMENT: Satisfaction with Marriage Scale 174

9 Integrating Work and Relationships 176
9-1 Money and Relationships 177
9-2 Work and Marriage 178
9-3 Effects of the Mother's Employment on the Spouses and Marriage 182
9-4 Work and Family: Effects on Children 184
9-5 Balancing Work and Family Life 185
9-6 Trends in Money, Work, and Family Life 188
SELF-ASSESSMENT: Maternal Employment Scale (MES) 188

10 Reacting to Abuse in Relationships 190
10-1 Types of Relationship Abuse 191
10-2 Reasons for Violence and Abuse in Relationships 194
10-3 Sexual Abuse in Undergraduate Relationships 197
10-4 Abuse in Marriage Relationships 200
10-5 Effects of Abuse 201
10-6 The Cycle of Abuse 202
10-7 Trends in Abuse in Relationships 205
SELF-ASSESSMENT: Abusive Behavior Inventory 206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11 Deciding about Children 208
11-1 Do You Want to Have Children? 209
11-2 How Many Children Do You Want? 210
11-3 Infertility 216

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11-4 Adoption 218
11-5 Foster Parenting 219
11-6 Abortion 220
11-7 Trends in Deciding about Children 223
SELF-ASSESSMENT: Childfree Lifestyle Scale (CLS) 224
SELF-ASSESSMENT: Abortion Attitude Scale (AAS) 225

12 Rearing Children 226
12-1 Parenting: A Matter of Choices 227
12-2 Roles of Parents 228
12-3 Transition to Parenthood 230
12-4 Parenthood: Some Facts 234
12-5 Principles of Effective Parenting 237
12-6 Single-Parenting Issues 243
12-7 Trends in Parenting 245
SELF-ASSESSMENT: Spanking versus Time-Out Scale 246

13 Managing Stress and Crisis in Relationships 248
13-1 Definitions and Sources of Stress and Crisis 249
13-2 Positive Stress-Management Strategies 251
13-3 Harmful Stress-Management Strategies 253
13-4 Five Individual, Couple, and Family Crisis Events 253
13-5 Relationship/Marriage Therapy 263
13-6 Trends Regarding Stress and Crisis in Relationships 265
SELF-ASSESSMENT: Family Hardiness Scale (FHS) 266

14 Coping with Divorce and Getting Remarried 268
14-1 Deciding Whether to Continue or End a Relationship/Get a Divorce 269
14-2 Macro Factors Contributing to Divorce 271
14-3 Micro Factors Contributing to Divorce 274
14-4 Consequences of Divorce for Spouses/Parents 278
14-5 Negative and Positive Consequences of Divorce for Children 279
14-6 Prerequisites for Having a "Successful" Divorce 284
14-7 Remarriage 285
14-8 Stepfamilies 287
14-9 Trends in Divorce and Remarriage 289
SELF-ASSESSMENT: Children's Beliefs about Parental Divorce Scale 290

15 Enjoying the Later Years 292
15-1 Age and Ageism 293
15-2 Caregiving for the Frail Elderly: The "Sandwich Generation" 295
15-3 Issues Confronting the Elderly 297
15-4 Successful Aging 302
15-5 Relationships and the Elderly 302
15-6 The End of One's Life 305
15-7 Trends and the Elderly in the United States 307

References 308
Name Index 328
Subject Index 337

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1 Exploring Marriages and Families Today

SECTIONS

1-1 Marriage

1-2 Family

1-3 Differences between Marriage and the Family

1-4 Changes in Marriage and the Family

1-5 Ways of Viewing Marriage and the Family

1-6 Choices in Relationships: View of This Text

1-7 Research in Marriage and Family

1-8 Trends

After finishing this chapter go to PAGE 23 for STUDY TOOLS

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Marriage is a covered dish.

—SWISS PROVERB

Diversity and change—these two words reveal the state of marriage and family today. Same-sex marriages, single-parent families, and interracial marriages are examples of diversity. Delay in getting married, fewer marriages, and fewer children are examples of change. And this is just the beginning. The forecast for marriage and family is increased diversity and change.

This text is focused on the human connection and relationship choices. Nothing is more important. It is something we all have in common—the search for meaningful love connections which result from deliberate, thoughtful, considered choices in one's relationships. Many of these intense and sustained love relationships end up in marriage and having a family—the bedrock of society. All individuals were born into a family (however one defines this concept), and most will end up in a family of their own.

The top values of 9,949 undergraduates (in order) are "having a happy marriage," "having a career I love," and "financial security" (Hall & Knox, 2016). While popular media spin tales of doom about marriage and the family, the data show otherwise. In this chapter, we define marriage and family, the various ways of studying these phenomena, how marriage and family are changing , and trends.

1-1 MARRIAGE

While young adults think of marriage in terms of love and a committed life together, the federal government regards **marriage** as a legal relationship that binds a couple together for the reproduction, physical care, and socialization of children. Each society works out its own details of what marriage is. In the United States, marriage is a legal contract between two people of any sexual orientation and the state in which they reside, that specifies the economic relationship between the couple (they become joint owners of their income and debt) and encourages sexual fidelity.

Self-Assessment: Attitudes toward Marriage Scale

Take the "Attitudes toward Marriage Scale" in the self-assessment section at the end of this chapter to assess your view of marriage.

National Data

Of adult women and men in the United States over the age of 65, 96% have married at least once (*Proquest Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2016,* Table 32).

Various elements implicit in the marriage relationship in the United States are as follows.

1-1a Elements of Marriage

No one definition of marriage can adequately capture its meaning. Rather, marriage might best be understood in terms of its various elements.

LEGAL CONTRACT Marriage in U.S. society is a legal contract into which two individuals (heterosexual or homosexual) who are of legal age may enter when they are not already married to someone else. The age required to marry varies by state and is usually from 16 to 18 (most states set 17 or 18 as the requirement). In some states (e.g., Alabama) individuals can marry at age 14 with parental or judicial consent. In California, individuals can marry at any age with parental consent. The marriage license certifies that a legally empowered representative of the state perform the ceremony, often with two witnesses present. The marriage contract gives power to the state over the couple—should they decide to divorce, the state can dictate the terms—in child custody, division of property, and child support. One of the reasons some individuals cite for not marrying is to "keep the government out of my business."

Under the laws of the state, the marriage license means that spouses will jointly own all future property acquired and that each will share in the estate of the other. In most states, whatever the deceased spouse owns is legally transferred to the surviving spouse at the time of death. In the event of divorce and unless the couple has a prenuptial agreement, the property is usually divided equally regardless of the contribution of each partner. The license also implies the expectation of sexual fidelity

marriage a legal relationship that binds a couple together for the reproduction, physical care, and socialization of children.

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in the marriage. Though less frequent because of no-fault divorce, infidelity is a legal ground for both divorce and alimony in some states.

The marriage license is also an economic authorization that entitles a spouse to receive payment from a health insurance company for medical bills if the partner is insured and to collect Social Security benefits at the death of one's spouse. Spouses are also responsible for each other's debts. One mother warned her son, "If you marry her, you are taking on her $80,000 in student loan debt."

Though the courts are reconsidering the definition of what constitutes a "family," the law is currently designed to protect spouses, not lovers or cohabitants. An exception is **common-law marriage**, in which a heterosexual couple who cohabit and present themselves as married will be regarded as legally married in those states that recognize such marriages. Common-law marriages exist in 14 states (Alabama, Colorado, Georgia, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Montana, New Hampshire, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, and Texas) and the District of Columbia. Even in these states, not all persons can marry by common law—they must be of sound mind, be unmarried, and must have lived together for a certain period of time (e.g., three years). Persons married by common law who move to a non-common-law state are recognized as being married in the new state to which they move.

common-law marriage a heterosexual cohabiting couple presenting themselves as married.

EMOTIONAL RELATIONSHIP Ninety-three percent of married adults in the United States point to love as their top reason for getting married. Other reasons include making a lifelong commitment (87%), companionship (81%), and having children (59%) (Cohn, 2013). American emphasis on love as a reason to marry is not shared throughout the world. Individuals in other cultures (e.g., India) do not require feelings of love to marry—love is expected to follow, not precede, marriage. In these countries, parental approval and similarity of religion, culture, education, and family background are considered more important criteria for marriage than love. While love is an important motivation for marriage, it is companionship in the United States which promotes a couple in courtship to remain committed and move toward marriage (Ogolsky et al., 2016).

Maria McDonald

SEXUAL MONOGAMY Marital partners expect sexual fidelity. Almost two-thirds (66%) of 9,661 undergraduates agreed with the statement, "I would divorce a spouse who had an affair" (Hall & Knox, 2016). There is also a stigma associated with couples who are nonmonogamous (Cohen, 2016).

LEGAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR CHILDREN Although individuals marry for love and companionship, one of the most important reasons for the existence of marriage from the viewpoint of society is to legally bind a male and a female for the nurture and support of any children they may have. In our society, child rearing is the primary responsibility of the family, not the state.

Marriage is a relatively stable relationship that helps to ensure that children will have adequate care and protection, will be socialized for productive roles in society, and will not become the burden of those who did not conceive them. Even at divorce, the legal obligation of the noncustodial parent to the child is maintained through child-support payments.

PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT The legal binding of a couple in a public ceremony is often preceded by an engagement announcement. Following the ceremony there is a wedding announcement in the newspaper. Public knowledge of the event helps to solidify the commitment of the partners to each other and helps to marshal social and economic support to launch the couple into married life.

1-1b Benefits of Marriage

When married people are compared with singles, the differences are strikingly in favor of the married

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TABLE 1.1 BENEFITS OF MARRIAGE AND THE LIABILITIES OF SINGLEHOOD

	Benefits of Marriage	Liabilities of Singlehood
Health	Spouses have fewer hospital admissions, see a physician more regularly, and are sick less often. They recover from illness/surgery more quickly.	Single people are hospitalized more often, have fewer medical checkups, and are sick more often.
Longevity	Spouses live longer than single people.	Single people die sooner than married people.
Happiness	Spouses report being happier than single people.	Single people report less happiness than married people.
Sexual satisfaction	Spouses report being more satisfied with their sex lives, both physically and emotionally.	Single people report being less satisfied with their sex lives, both physically and emotionally.
Money	Spouses have more economic resources than single people.	Single people have fewer economic resources than married people.
Lower expenses	Two can live more cheaply together than separately.	Costs (e.g., housing) are greater for two singles than one couple.
Drug use	Spouses have lower rates of drug use and abuse.	Single people have higher rates of drug use and abuse.
Connected	Spouses are connected to more individuals who provide a support system—partner, in-laws, etc.	Single people have fewer individuals upon whom they can rely for help.
Children	Rates of high school dropouts, teen pregnancies, and poverty are lower among children reared in two-parent homes.	Rates of high school dropouts, teen pregnancies, and poverty are higher among children reared by single parents.
History	Spouses develop a shared history across time with significant others.	Single people may lack continuity and commitment across time with significant others.
Crime	Spouses are less likely to commit a crime.	Single people are more likely to commit a crime.
Loneliness	Spouses are less likely to report loneliness.	Single people are more likely to report being lonely.

(see Table 1.1). The advantages of marriage over singlehood have been referred to as the **marriage benefit** and are true for first as well as subsequent marriages. Explanations for the marriage benefit include economic resources (e.g., higher income/wealth/can afford health care), social control (e.g., spouses ensure partner moderates alcohol/drug use, does not ride a motorcycle), and social/emotional/psychosocial support (e g., in-resident counselor, loving and caring partner).

1-1c Types of Marriage

Although we think of marriage in the United States as involving two spouses, other societies view marriage differently. **Polygamy** is a generic term for marriage involving more than two spouses. There are three forms of polygamy: polygyny, polyandry, and pantagamy.

POLYGYNY IN THE UNITED STATES **Polygyny** involves one husband and two or more wives and is practiced illegally in the United States by some religious fundamentalist groups. These groups are primarily in Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah (as well as Canada), and have splintered off from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (commonly known as the Mormon Church). To be clear, the Mormon Church does not practice or condone polygyny (the church outlawed it in 1890). Those that split off from the Mormon Church represent only about 5% of Mormons in Utah. The largest offshoot is called the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints (FLDS). Members of the group feel that the practice of polygyny is God's will. Joe Jessop, an elder of the FLDS in his late 80s, had 5 wives, 46 children, and 239 grandchildren. Although the practice is illegal, polygynous individuals are rarely prosecuted because a husband will have only one

Courtesy of E Fred Johnson, Jr.

marriage benefit when compared to being single, married persons are healthier, happier, live longer, have less drug use, etc.

polygamy a generic term for marriage involving more than two spouses.

polygyny type of marriage involving one husband and two or more wives.

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Diversity in Other Countries

Jacob Zuma, the president of South Africa, is a polygamist with 4 wives and 20 children.

legal wife while the others will be married in a civil ceremony. Women are socialized to bear as many children as possible to build up the "celestial family" that will remain together for eternity.

It is often assumed that polygyny in FLDS marriages exists to satisfy the sexual desires of the man, that the women are treated like slaves, and that jealousy among the wives is common. In most polygynous societies, however, polygyny has a political and economic rather than a sexual function. Polygyny, for members of the FLDS, is a means of having many children to produce a celestial family. In other societies, a man with many wives can produce a greater number of children for domestic or farm labor. Wives are not treated like slaves (although women have less status than men in general); all household work is evenly distributed among the wives; and each wife is given her own house or private sleeping quarters. In FLDS households, jealousy is minimal because the female is socialized to accept that her husband is not hers alone but is to be shared with other wives "according to God's plan." The spouses work out a rotational system for conjugal visits, which ensures that each wife has equal access to sexual encounters, while the other wives take care of the children.

POLYANDRY Tibetan Buddhists foster yet another brand of polygamy, referred to as **polyandry**, in which one wife has two or more (up to five) husbands. These husbands, who may be brothers, pool their resources to support one wife. Polyandry is a much less common form of polygamy than polygyny. The major reason for polyandry is economic. A family that cannot afford wives or marriages for each of its sons may find a wife for the eldest son only. Polyandry allows the younger brothers to also have sexual access to the one wife that the family is able to afford.

polyandry type of marriage in which one wife has two or more husbands.

pantagamy a group marriage in which each member of the group is "married" to the others.

PANTAGAMY **Pantagamy** describes a group marriage in which each member of the group is "married" to the others. Pantagamy is a formal arrangement that was practiced in communes (e.g., Oneida) in the 19th and 20th centuries. Pantagamy is, of course, illegal in the United States. Some polyamorous individuals see themselves in a group marriage.

National Data

Based on responses from 1,934 students aged 18–50 who borrowed money, 20% reported that they have delayed getting married (28% have put off having children) because of student debt (Byrne & Gelles, 2016).

Our culture emphasizes monogamous marriage and values stable marriages. One cultural expression of this value is the existence of family policies in the form of laws and services designed to support the family (see the Family Policy section for marriage education, which is designed to improve mate selection and strengthen marriage relationships).

1-1d Is Marriage Obsolete?

News media regularly suggest that marriage is done for, that it is no longer relevant to the needs of individuals, and that it will slowly cease to exist. Nonsense. Only 12% of a national sample agreed that "marriage is old fashioned and out of date" (Karpowitz & Pope, 2015). While there is a decline in the percentage of individuals choosing to marry, "this group is primarily those without college degrees who are struggling economically" notes Paul Amato (2015b), past president of the National Council on Family Relations. He notes that among the college educated who have degrees and salaries, marriage remains a popular choice. It is only with the loss of well-paying jobs (and the availability of alternatives such as cohabitation) that marriage rates have dropped. As the number of individuals who have both

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Family Policy: Marriage Preparation/Relationship Education

While the terms (e.g., marriage preparation, premarital counseling, marriage education, couple and relationship education) and content (e.g., conflict resolution, communication skills) differ, the federal government has a vested interest in premarriage, marriage, and relationship education programs. One motivation is economic since divorce sometimes plunges ex-spouses into poverty and results in their dependency on public resources. The philosophy behind marriage preparation education is that building a fence at the top of a cliff is preferable to putting an ambulance at the bottom. Hence, to the degree that people select a mate wisely and have the skills to manage conflict/communicate/stay married, there is greater economic stability for the family and less drain on social services in the United States for single-parent mothers and the needs of their children (Schramm et al., 2013).

African American clergy have been particularly involved in marriage preparation. In a study comparing 141 members of seven primarily African American denominations with 793 clergy from the 15 largest, predominantly White, congregations, African American clergy were significantly more likely than clergy in the comparison group to address premarital content, to use a skills-based approach, to require a longer waiting period/more sessions/more homework assignments, and to consider marriage preparation an important part of their ministry (Wilmoth & Blaney, 2016).

Over 2,000 public schools nationwide offer a marriage preparation course. In Florida, all public high school seniors are required to take a marriage and relationship skills course. Researchers Toews and Yazedjian (2013) emphasized that these programs provide the tools necessary for building and maintaining healthy relationships. They noted that the most positive effects occur when both partners attend the programs and when the programs are integrated into the existing educational curriculum. Significant positive increases in attitudes, knowledge, communication skills, and relationship characteristics result when undergraduates/emerging adults experience these programs (Cottle et al., 2014, 2015). Similarly, Ma et al. (2013) found in a study of 1,604 students that those exposed to relationship material had fewer faulty relationship views (e.g., one true love, love conquers all) and more realistic views about cohabitation (e.g., cohabitation does not ensure marital success). Couple and relationship education (CRE) programs are also effective for lower income couples (Hawkins & Erickson, 2015) and individuals, particularly females (Spuhler et al., 2014). Regardless of the source—school, child welfare, communication, or clergy—marriage education supplies positive outcomes at any time in a couple's relationship, and in either the first or subsequent marriage (Lucier-Greer et al., 2012).

In spite of the benefits, there is opposition to marriage preparation education in the public school system. Opponents question using school time for relationship courses. Teachers report that they are overworked, and an additional course on marriage can be a burden. In addition, some teachers lack the training to provide relationship courses (however, many schools already have programs in family and consumer sciences, and teachers in these programs are trained in teaching about marriage and the family). A related concern with teaching about marriage and the family in high school is the fear on the part of some parents that the course content may be too liberal. Some parents who oppose teaching sex education in the public schools fear that such courses lead to increased sexual activity.

college degrees and good jobs increases, the marriage rate increases. "Marriage is not passé or irrelevant to most Americans" (p. 3). Lee (2015) also noted that it is the loss of good-paying jobs for American men who cannot afford to marry/support a family that contributes to lower marriage rates.

1-2 FAMILY

Most couples who marry want to have children. However, the definition of what constitutes a family is sometimes unclear. This section examines how families

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Call it a clan, call it a network, call it a tribe, call it a family. Whatever you call it, whoever you are, you need one.

—JANE HOWARD, THE LATE ENGLISH NOVELIST

are defined, the various types, and how marriages and families have changed in the past 50 years.

1-2a Definitions of Family

The U.S. Census Bureau defines **family** as a group of two or more people related by blood, marriage, or adoption. This definition has been challenged because it does not include foster families or long-term couples who live together. In a survey of 105 faculty members from 19 PhD marriage and family therapy programs, the researcher found no universal agreement on the definition of the family (Marshall, 2013). Same-gender couples, children of same-gender couples, and children with nonresidential parents were sometimes excluded from the definition of the family (this study was conducted before same-sex marriage became legal).

The answer to the question "Who is family?" is important because access to resources such as health care, Social Security, and retirement benefits is involved. Unless cohabitants are recognized by the state in which they reside as in a "domestic partnership," cohabitants are typically not viewed as "family" and are not accorded health benefits, Social Security, and retirement benefits of the partner. Indeed, the "live-in partner" may not be allowed to see the beloved in the hospital, which may limit visitation to "family only."

family a group of two or more people related by blood, marriage, or adoption.

transnational family family in which the mother and child live in another country from the father.

civil union a pair-bonded relationship given legal significance in terms of rights and privileges.

domestic partnerships relationships in which cohabitating individuals are given some kind of official recognition by a city or corporation so as to receive partner benefits (e.g., health insurance).

The definition of who counts as family is being challenged. In some cases, families are being defined by function rather than by structure—for example, what is the level of emotional and financial commitment and interdependence between the partners? How long have they lived together? Do the partners view themselves as a family?

Friends sometimes become family. Due to mobility, spouses may live several states away from their respective families. Although they may visit their families for holidays, they often develop close friendships with others on whom they rely locally for emotional and physical support. Persons in the military who are separated from their parents and siblings (or deployed spouse) often form close "family" relationships with other military individuals, couples, and families.

Diversity in Family Relationships

Dragojlovic (2016) interviewed 24 women from Europe, Australia, or the United States who had vacationed in Bali, fell in love with a Balinese man, and had one or more children. While there were variations in the various patterns of commitment and relationships, a common theme was that the women were "playing family" by living/rearing their children in their native land while maintaining a relationship with the father of the children. Even though he may be married to and have other children with a Balinese woman, the woman would visit annually to maintain the relationship with the partner/father of the child. These nonconventional **transnational families** challenge the nuclear family norm.

Sociologically, a family is defined as a kinship system of all relatives living together or recognized as a social unit, including adopted people. The family is regarded as the basic social institution of society because of its important functions of procreation and socialization; the family is found in some form in all societies.

Same-sex couples (e.g., Ellen DeGeneres and her partner Portia de Rossi) certainly define themselves as family. Short of marriage, in some countries committed gay relationships may be recognized as **civil unions** (pair-bonded relationship given legal significance in terms of rights and privileges).

Over 24 cities, 11 states, and numerous countries (including Canada) recognize some form of domestic partnership. **Domestic partnerships** are relationships in which cohabitating individuals are given some kind of official recognition by a city or corporation so as to receive partner benefits (e.g., health insurance). The Walt Disney Company recognizes domestic partnerships. Domestic partnerships do not confer any federal recognition or benefits.

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Pets are regarded as family members with over $58 billion spent on their care annually (Kanat-Maymon et al., 2016). Examples of treating pets like children include requiring a fenced in backyard for where one rents or buys an apartment/house, staying only in pet friendly motels, feeding the pet a special diet, hanging a stocking and/or buying presents for the pet at Christmas, buying "clothes" for the pet, and leaving money in one's will for the care of one's pet. Some cohabitants get a puppy which symbolizes their commitment to "family." Some pet owners buy accident insurance—Progressive insurance covers pets. And pets are often identified in divorce papers the custody and visitation rights being assigned.

Pets are regarded as family members and sources of enormous companionship and enjoyment.

In addition to meeting one's psychological need for connectedness/well-being beyond the human connection (Kanat-Maymon et al., 2016), positive outcomes in terms of decreased behavioral outbursts and increased social interactions have been observed for autistic children interacting with animals (Zemanek, 2014).

1-2b Types of Families

There are various types of families.

FAMILY OF ORIGIN Also referred to as the **family of orientation**, this is the family into which you were born or the family in which you were reared. It involves you, your parents, and your siblings. When you go to your parents' home for the holidays, you return to your *family of origin*. Your parents remaining married (Amato, 2015b) and their high marital satisfaction is related to your remaining married and being happy in your own marriage (Kopystynska et al., 2015).

Siblings in one's family of origin also provide a profound influence on one another's behavior, emotional development, adjustment, and happiness (Incerti et al., 2015; McHale et al., 2012). The relationship with one's siblings, particularly the sister-sister relationship, often represents the most enduring relationship in a person's lifetime.

These siblings have forged a close relationship and are likely to remain in each other's lives.

FAMILY OF PROCREATION The **family of procreation** represents the family that you will begin should you marry and have children. Of U.S. citizens living in the United States 65 years old and over, 96% have married with most establishing their own family of procreation (*Proquest Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2016,* Table 32). Across the life cycle, individuals move from their family of orientation to their family of procreation.

NUCLEAR FAMILY The **nuclear family** refers to either a family of origin or a family of procreation. In practice, this means that your nuclear family consists either of you, your parents, and your siblings or of you, your spouse, and your children. Generally, one-parent households are not referred to as nuclear families. They are binuclear families if both parents are involved in the child's life, or single-parent families if only one parent is involved in the child's life.

TRADITIONAL, MODERN, AND POSTMODERN FAMILY Sociologists have identified three central concepts of the family (Silverstein & Auerbach, 2005). The **traditional family** is the two-parent nuclear family, with the husband as breadwinner and the wife as homemaker. The **modern family** is the dual-earner family, in which

family of orientation also known as the family of origin, the family into which a person is born.

family of procreation the family a person begins typically by getting married and having children.

nuclear family consists of you, your parents, and your siblings or you, your spouse, and your children.

traditional family the two-parent nuclear family, with the husband as breadwinner and the wife as homemaker.

modern family the dual-earner family, in which both spouses work outside the home.

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