BRYAN STRONG | THEODORE F. COHEN

THE MARRIAGE AND FAMILY EXPERIENCE

INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS IN A CHANGING SOCIETY 13E

13TH EDITION

The Marriage and Family Experience

Intimate Relationships in a Changing Society

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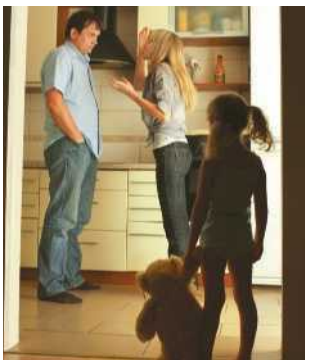

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Preface

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, widowerhood, 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 of 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.

1 The Meaning of Marriage and the Family

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

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.

Chapter Outline

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 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.

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

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

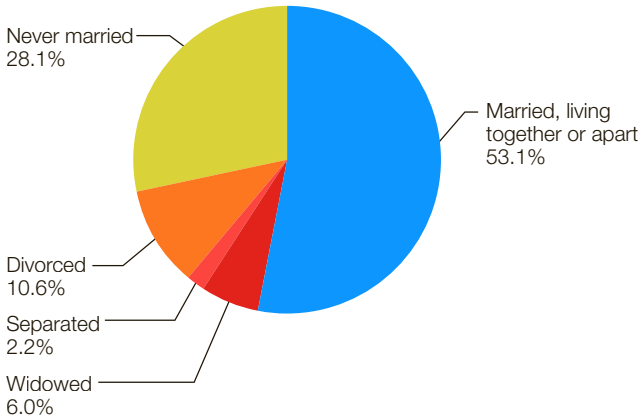
Globally, there is much variation in the percentage of adults who are married and what marriage is like. Sociologists Laura Lippman and W. Bradford Wilcox, reporting on the prevalence of marriage across 43 different countries, state that adults 18 to 49 are most likely to be married in countries in Asia 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 *Bridezillas* 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

Exploring Diversity Ghost or Spirit Marriage

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

Forms of Marriage

In Western cultures such as the United States, the only legal form of marriage is **monogamy**, the practice of having only one spouse at one time. Thus, the fundamentalist Mormon polygamists depicted earlier as well as Muslim polygamists living in the United States are in violation of state marriage laws.

Monogamy is also the only form of marriage recognized in *all* cultures. Interestingly, and possibly surprisingly, it is not always the *preferred* form of marriage. The most commonly preferred marital arrangement in many Middle Eastern societies as well as some indigenous African, Southeast Asian, and Melanesian populations is **polygamy**, specifically polygyny—the practice of having two or more wives. One study of 850 non-Western societies found that 84 percent of the cultures studied (representing, nevertheless, a minority of the world's population) practiced or accepted **polygyny**, the practice of having two or more wives. In fact, in more than a quarter of these societies, more than 40 percent of the marriages were polygamous (Ember, Ember, and Low 2007). James Peoples and Garrick Bailey report that prior to colonialism's impact, 70 percent of all societies allowed men to marry more than one wife. Where polygyny is allowed, it tends to be the preferred or most highly valued form of marriage (Peoples and Bailey 2014). Conversely, **polyandry**, the practice of having two or more husbands, is actually quite rare: Where it does occur, it often coexists with poverty, a scarcity of land or property, and an imbalanced ratio of men to women.

False **2.** Although monogamy is the only recognized form of marriage in all cultures, it is not always the preferred form.

Even within polygynous societies, monogamy is the *most widely practiced* form of marriage (Ember, Ember, and Low 2007). In such societies, plural marriages are in the minority, primarily for simple economic reasons: They are a sign of status that relatively few people can afford, and they require wealth that few men possess. As we think about polygyny, we may imagine high levels of jealousy and conflict among wives. Indeed, problems of jealousy may and do arise in plural marriages—the Fula in Africa, for example, call the second wife "the jealous one." Based on data from 69 polygynous societies (56 percent of which were in Africa), Jankowiak, Sudakov, and Wilreker (2005) suggest that co-wife conflict and competition for access to the husband is common, especially in situations where wives are materially dependent on the husband, but there are also circumstances that can reduce conflict (e.g., when the wives are sisters, or when one is fertile and one barren or postmenopausal). Even though conflict and competition among co-wives is often found in polygynous societies, the level is probably a good deal less than would result if our monogamous society was to suddenly allow people multiple spouses. For both the men and the women involved, polygyny brings higher status.

False **3.** Families are not easy to define and count.

To many in the United States, the idea of being married to more than one spouse or sharing one's spouse with co-wives or co-husbands may seem strange or exotic. However, it may not seem so strange if we look at actual marital practices in the United States. Considering the high divorce and remarriage rates in this country, monogamy may no longer be the best way of describing our marriage forms. In fact, among 40 percent of couples married in 2013, one or both spouses had been married before (Livingston 2014a). Thus, for many, our marriage system might more accurately be called **serial monogamy** (or even *modified polygamy*), a practice in which one person may have several spouses over his or her lifetime despite being wed to no more than one at any given time.

Defining Family

As contemporary Americans, we live in a society composed of many kinds of families—married couples, stepfamilies, single-parent families, multigenerational families, cohabiting adults, child-free families, families headed by gay men or by lesbians, and so on. With such variety, how should we define family? What are the criteria for identifying these groups as families?

In its efforts to count and characterize families in the United States, the U.S. Census Bureau defines a **family** as "a group of two people or more (one of whom is the householder) related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together; all such people (including related subfamily members) are considered as members of one family" (U.S. Census Bureau 2015a). A distinction is made between a family and a **household**. A household consists of "all the people who occupy a housing unit," whether or not related

(U.S. Census Bureau 2015a). Single people who live alone, roommates, lodgers, and live-in domestic service employees are all counted among members of households, as are family groups. *Family households* are those in which at least two members are related by birth, marriage, or adoption, though unrelated individuals who reside in a household along with the householder and his or her family are counted as family household members (U.S. Census Bureau 2015a). Table 1.1 contains Census data on numbers and kinds of family and non family households. Thus, the U.S. Census reports on characteristics of the nation's households *and* families (see Figure 1.2). Of the 123,229,000 households in the United States in 2014, 81,353,000 or 66 percent were family households. Among family households, 73.3 percent (59,204,000) consisted of married couples, either with or without children. Married couples made up less than half (48.4 percent) of all households in the United States in 2014, and married couples with children under 18 years of age represented 29.4 percent of family households and just under one-fifth (19.4 percent) of all U.S. households (U.S. Census Bureau 2015a).

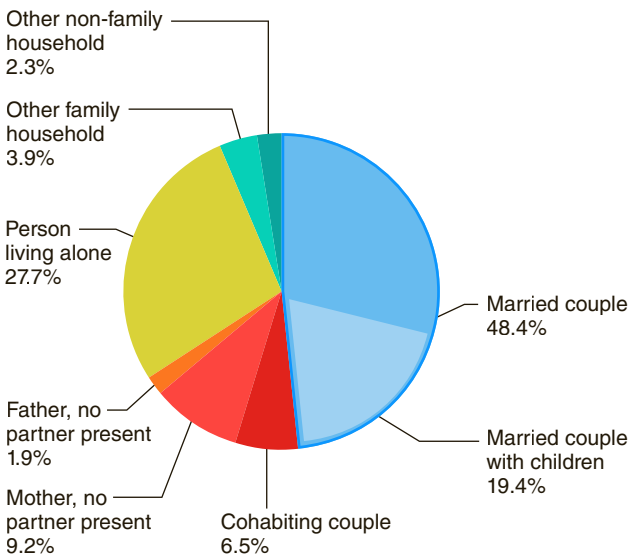
In individuals' perceptions of their own life experiences, family has a less precise and more varying definition. For example, when we have asked our students whom they include as family members, their lists have included such expected relatives as mother, father, sibling, and spouse. Most of those designated as family members are individuals related by descent, marriage, remarriage, or adoption, but some are **affiliated kin or fictive kin**—unrelated individuals who feel and are treated as if they were relatives, such as the following:

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

True

4. Being related by blood or through marriage is not always sufficient to be counted as family member or kin.

Figure 1.2 Household Composition, 2010



SOURCE: U.S.Census, 2012 Statistical Abstract, Table 59, Households, Families, Subfamilies, and Married Couples

TABLE 1.1 U.S. Households, 2014

	Households (in thousands)	Percent of Households
Total Households	**123,229**	**100%**
Family households	81,353	66.0%
Married couples	59,629	48.4%
With children under 18	23,933	19.4%
Cohabiting couples	8,046	6.5%
With children under 18	2,961	2.4%
Mother, no partner present	11,365	9.2%
With children under 18	7,041	5.7%
Father, no partner present	2,367	1.9%
With children under 18	1,245	1.0%
Other family households	4,769	3.9%
Female, living alone	19,034	15.4%
Male, living alone	15,151	12.3%
Other, nonfamily households	2,869	2.3%

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

Furthermore, being related by blood or through marriage is not always sufficient to be counted as a family member or kin. Some individuals consider stepparents or stepsiblings to be family members and even extend that status to *former* stepparents or stepsiblings. Others may draw different distinctions and differentiate between steprelationships and their "real families," thus not counting stepfamily members as part of their families. For individuals, emotional closeness may be more important than biology or law in defining family.

There are also some ethnic differences as to whom people consider to be family. Among Latinos, for example, *compadres* (or godparents) are considered family members. Similarly, among some Japanese Americans, the *ie* (pronounced "ee-eh") is the traditional family. The *ie* consists of living members of the extended family (such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins) as well as deceased and yet-to-be-born family members (Kikumura and Kitano 1988). Among many traditional Native American tribes, the **clan**, a group of related families, is regarded as the fundamental family unit (Yellowbird and Snipp 1994). Among many African Americans, **fictive kin** are considered to be like family and are treated and expected to act as such (Taylor et al. 2013).

False

5. Most families in the United States are not traditional nuclear families.

To reflect the diversity of family types that coexist within the wider society, the definition of family needs to be expanded beyond the boundaries of the "official" census definition. A more contemporary and inclusive definition describes family as "two or more persons related by birth, marriage, adoption, *or choice* [emphasis added]. Families are further defined by socioemotional ties and enduring responsibilities, particularly in terms of one or more members' dependence on others for support and nurturance" (Allen, Demo, and Fine 2000). Such a definition more accurately and completely reflects the diversity of contemporary American family experience.

What Families Do: Functions of Marriages and Families

Whether it is a mother/father/child nuclear family, a married couple with no children, a single-parent family, a stepfamily, a dual-worker family, or a cohabiting family, the family generally performs important societal functions and meets certain needs of individuals. Sociologists have identified the following four functions as ways families contribute to social stability as well as to societal and individual well-being: (1) Families provide a source of intimate relationships; (2) families act as units of economic cooperation and consumption; (3) families may produce and socialize children; and (4) families assign social statuses and roles to individuals. Although these are the basic functions that families are "supposed" to fulfill, families do not have to fulfill them all (as in families without children), nor do they always fulfill them well (as in abusive families).

Intimate Relationships and Family Ties

Intimacy is a primary human need. Chapter 5 will explore in more detail how intimacy is expressed and experienced in friendship and love relationships, and how such experience varies, especially by gender. In addition, research consistently indicates that human companionship strongly influences rates of illnesses, such as cancer or tuberculosis, as well as suicide, accidents, and mental illness. Thus, it is no surprise that studies consistently show married couples and adults living with others to be generally healthier and have lower mortality rates than divorced, separated, and never-married individuals. Although some of this difference results from what is known as the *selection* factor—wherein healthier people are more likely to marry or live with someone—both marriage and cohabitation yield benefits to health and well-being.

Marriage and the family usually furnish emotional security and support. In our families, we generally seek and find our strongest bonds. These bonds can be forged from and sustained by love, attachment, loyalty, obligation, or guilt. The need for intimate relationships, whether or not they are satisfactory, may hold unhappy marriages together indefinitely. Loneliness may be a terrible specter. Among the newly divorced, it may be one of the worst aspects of the marital breakup.

As we will detail in Chapter 3, since the 19th century, marriage and the family have become ever more important sources of companionship and intimacy. As society became more industrialized, bureaucratic, and impersonal, individuals increasingly sought and expected to find intimacy and companionship within their families. In the larger world around us, we are generally seen in terms of some more formal status. A professor may see us primarily as students, a used car salesperson relates to us as potential buyers, and

A major function of marriage and family is to provide us with intimacy and social support, thus protecting us from loneliness and isolation.

Corbis

a politician views us as voters. Only among our intimates are we seen on a personal level, as Maria or Matthew. Before marriage, our friends are our intimates. Upon marrying or cohabiting, our spouse or partner is expected to be the one with whom we are *most* intimate. Especially with our spouse, we are thought to be able to disclose ourselves most completely, share our hopes, express our fears, rear our children, and hope to grow old together.

Economic Cooperation

The family is a unit of economic cooperation and interdependence. Traditionally, heterosexual families divide responsibilities along gender lines—that is, between males and females, thus fostering interdependence. Although a division of labor by gender is characteristic of virtually all cultures, the work that males and females perform varies from culture to culture (see Chapter 4). Among the Nambikwara in Africa, for example, the fathers take care of the babies and clean them when they soil themselves; the chief's concubines, secondary wives in polygamous societies, prefer hunting over domestic activities. In U.S. society, from the late 19th century through much of the 20th, men were expected to work away from home, whereas women were to remain at home caring for the children and house. Such gendered tasks are assigned by culture, not biology. Only a man's ability to impregnate and a woman's ability to give birth and produce milk are biologically determined.

We commonly think of the family as a consuming unit, but it also continues to be an important producing unit. Family members often are sources of goods and services that if produced or provided by outsiders would require expenditure of considerable sums of money. Within families, one is not paid for building a shelf or bathing the children, fixing a leaky faucet or cooking.

Although children contribute to the household economy by helping around the house, they generally are not paid (beyond an "allowance") for such things as cooking, cleaning their rooms, or watching their younger brothers or sisters. Yet they are all engaged in productive, sometimes essential, labor (Dodson and Dickert 2004).

More often women perform the family's role as a service unit. Because work at home is unpaid, the productive contributions of at-home spouses, typically at-home wives, have been overlooked. Furthermore, when employed, women find that greater needs for their "services" await them when they return from their paid jobs. Because family power is partly a function of who earns the money, stay-at-home partners who get no paycheck may have less power because their financial contribution to the family is less visible, whereas their economic dependence is more easily recognized.

Reproduction and Socialization

The family makes society possible by producing (or adopting) and rearing children to replace the older members of society as they die off. Traditionally, reproduction has been a unique function of the married family. But single-parent and cohabiting families also perform reproductive and socialization functions. Technological advances in assisted reproductive techniques such as artificial insemination and in vitro fertilization also have separated reproduction from sexual intercourse and now allow for the participation of others (e.g., sperm or egg donors, surrogate mothers, and so on) in the reproductive process.

Innovations in reproductive technology also permit many otherwise infertile couples to give birth. Such techniques have also made it possible for lesbian couples and single women without partners to become parents.

The family traditionally has been responsible for **socialization**—the shaping of individual behavior to conform to social or cultural norms. Children are helpless and dependent for years following birth. They must learn how to walk and talk, how to take care of themselves, how to act, how to love,

True

6. All cultures traditionally divide at least some work into male and female tasks.

Real Families The Care Families Give

In talking with sociologist David Karp, 37-year-old Angie reflected on her relationship with her brother who has mental illness. Her words convey her effort to determine where her obligations to care for her family members begin and end:

> It's kind of hard to put . . . into words. I mean I love my parents dearly and I love my brother, and I think you're raised to know what's right and wrong. And I do feel like your family comes first. But by the same token, how much . . . is realistic for a sibling to give up? Are you supposed to give up your life . . . your career . . . your hopes? . . . Just where do you draw the line? Do you do what's right for your family and just do it unselfishly? It's a hard thing. It's easy to say, "Yeah, I'd do anything for my family" until you really have to, until you are faced with it (Karp 2001, 130).

Karp interviewed 60 people with family members who were suffering from diagnosed mental illness. He spoke with parents dealing with a child's mental illness as well as "children of emotionally sick parents, spouses with a mentally ill partner, and siblings of those suffering from depression, manic depression, or schizophrenia" (p. 14). His 60 interviewees each presented a story that is somewhat distinctive. Yet his sociological approach sought to detail "the consistencies and uniformities" that surfaced (p. 24). He raises the following provocative questions—"What do we owe each other?" "What are the moral boundaries of family relationships?" and "To what extent are we bound to care for each other?" (p. 30)—and speaks of "the extraordinary power of love" displayed by his interviewees:

> Even when an ill person treated them with anger and disdain, denied that they were sick, completely disrupted the coherence of everyday life, and did things that were incomprehensible, distressing beyond measure, socially repugnant, or downright dangerous, love kept caregivers caring (p. 16).

Sandra Dorne, 57, would most likely affirm Karp's assertion through her own display of "the extraordinary power of love" for her physically ill sister. Ms. Dorne left behind her life in Orlando, Florida, bought a one-way plane ticket to Allentown, Pennsylvania, and then boarded a bus to Brooklyn, New York, to care for her 69-year-old sister, Patricia Trivisani. Ms. Trivisani suffers from a host of physical ailments, including hypertension, fibromyalgia, osteoporosis, and congestive heart failure. She had been taking 50 pills a day and was hospitalized after having been found on the floor by a neighbor after accidentally overdosing. Now, Ms. Dorne is seeing to her sister's well-being. "Me and Pat's always been close," she stated to reporter Anastasia Economides. "She took care of me because I was the baby sister." With plans to never leave her sister, she claims, "If I caught anyone hurting her, I'd beat them senseless" (Economides 2011).

David Karp found a hierarchy of caring, in which obligations to siblings fall behind those to our spouse, children, or parents. However, as Angie and Sandra illustrate, siblings can and sometimes do step in when their brothers or sisters are in need. Karp suggests that families have been "abandoned" by U.S. society, left on their own without social supports to solve any problems individual members may face. Still, his interviews with caregiving spouses, parents, children, and siblings reveal an "extraordinary reservoir of love, caring, and connection that holds families together, even at a time when family life is so meagerly supported" (Karp 2001, 26).

Although families remain responsible for much of early childhood socialization, preschools and day care centers also often play a large role.

Robert Kneschke/Shutterstock.com

and how to touch and be touched. Teaching children how to fit into their particular culture is one of the family's most important tasks.

This socialization function, however, is shared by agents and caregivers outside the family. The involvement of nonfamily in the socialization of children need not indicate a lack of parental commitment to their children or a lack of concern for the quality of care received by their children. The most common family among those raising children is a dual-earner couple. Single parents—both mothers and fathers—are likely employed. Thus, many infants, toddlers, and small children are under the care of nonfamily members, thus broadening the caregiving and socialization roles of others, such as neighbors, friends, or paid

caregivers. Additionally, since the rise of compulsory education in the 19th century, the state has become responsible for a large part of the socialization of children older than age 5. In Chapter 10, we will address parenting and the care and socialization of children.

Assignment of Social Statuses and Roles

We occupy various social statuses or positions as family members and we play multiple roles. These statuses and roles provide us with much of our identities. During our lifetimes, most of us will belong to at least two families: the family of orientation and the family of procreation. The **family of orientation** (sometimes called the *family of origin*) is the family in which we grow up, the family that orients us to the world. The family of orientation may change over time if the marital status of our parents changes. Originally, it may be an intact **nuclear family** or a single-parent family; later, it may become a stepfamily. We can even speak of **binuclear families** to reflect the experience of children whose parents separate and divorce. With parents maintaining two separate households and one or both possibly remarrying, children of divorce are members in two different, parentally based nuclear families (Ahrons 1994, 2004).

The common term for the family we form through marriage and childbearing traditionally has been the **family of procreation** (Parkin 1997). Given some of the major changes in family patterns, "the traditional definition of the family must be expanded beyond marriage" (Wu 2003, 173). Because so many families have stepchildren, adopted children, or no children, *and* given the dramatic increases in couples living together outside of marriage, we might use some other term, such as *family of cohabitation,* to refer to the family we form through living or cohabiting with another person, whether we are married or unmarried. Most Americans will form such families sometime in their lives.

Much of our identity is formed in the crucibles of families of orientation, procreation, and cohabitation. In a family of orientation, we are given the roles of son or daughter, brother or sister, stepson or stepdaughter. We internalize these roles until they become a part of our being. In each of these roles, we are expected to act in certain ways. For example, children are expected to obey their parents, and siblings are expected to help one another. Sometimes our feelings fit the expectations of our roles; other times they do not. We may not wish to follow our parents' suggestions or loan money to an unemployed sister and yet feel compelled to do so because of the role expectations we face.

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

As we leave a family of orientation, we usually are also leaving adolescence and entering adulthood. Adulthood is defined in part by entering new family roles—those of spouse, partner, or parent. These roles typically take priority over the roles we had in a family of orientation. In our nuclear family system, when we marry, we transfer our primary loyalties from our parents and siblings to our partners. Later, if we have children, we form additional bonds with them. When we assume the role of spouse or bonded partner, we assume an entirely new social identity linked with responsibility, work, and parenting. In earlier times, such roles were considered lifelong. Because of divorce or separation, however, these roles today may last for considerably less time.

Our families influence the status or place we are given in society. Our families place us in a certain socioeconomic class, such as blue collar (working class), middle class, or upper class. We learn the ways of our class through identifying with our families. As shown in Chapter 3, people in different classes experience the world differently. These differences include the ability to satisfy our needs and wants but may extend to how we see men's and women's roles, how we value education, and how we bear and rear our children (Edin and Kefalas 2005; Lareau 2003). Our families also give us our ethnic identities as African American, Latino, Asian American, Italian American, and so forth. Families also commonly provide us with a religious tradition as Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Greek Orthodox, Islamic, Hindu, or Buddhist—as well as agnostic, atheist, or New Age. These identities help form our cultural values and expectations. These values and expectations may then influence the kinds of choices we make as partners, spouses, or parents.

Why Live in Families?

As we look at the different functions of the family, we can see that most of them can be fulfilled outside the family. For example, artificial insemination permits a woman to be impregnated by a sperm donor, and embryonic transplants allow one woman

to carry another's embryo. Children can be raised communally, cared for by foster families or child care workers, or sent to boarding schools. Most of our domestic needs can be satisfied by microwaving prepared foods or going to restaurants, sending our clothes to the laundry, and hiring help to clean our bathrooms, cook our meals, and wash the mountains of dishes accumulating (or growing new life forms) in the kitchen. Friends can provide us with emotional intimacy, therapists can listen to our problems, and sexual partners can be found outside marriage. Communications technology allows us to meet and friend many people in or well outside the geographic areas in which we live. These individuals can become important partners in day-to-day interaction. With the limitations and stresses of family life, why bother living in families at all?

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

- *Families offer continuity as a result of emotional attachments, rights, and obligations.* Once we choose a partner or have children, we do not have to search continually for new partners or family members who can better perform a family task or function, provide companionship, or bring home a paycheck. We expect our family members—whether partner, child, parent, or sibling—to participate in family tasks over their lifetimes. If at one time we need to give more emotional support or attention to a partner or child than we receive, we expect that the other person will reciprocate at another time. We count on our family members to be there for us in multiple ways. We rarely have the same extensive expectations of friends.
- *Families offer close proximity.* Although communication technologies and social media have reduced the importance of shared space, the fact that family members are physically close by is still of importance. We do not need to travel across town or the country for conversation or help. With families, we do not even need to leave the house; a husband or wife, parent or child, or brother or sister is often at hand (or underfoot). This close proximity facilitates a level of cooperation and communication from which individuals may draw great comfort.
- *Families offer intimate awareness of others.* Few people know us as well as our family members because they have seen us in the most intimate circumstances throughout much of our lives. They have seen us at our best and our worst, when we are kind or selfish, and when we show understanding or intolerance. This familiarity and close contact teach us to make adjustments in living with others. As we do so, we expand our knowledge of ourselves and others.
- *Families provide many economic benefits.* They offer us economies of scale. Various activities, such as laundry, cooking, shopping, and cleaning, can be done almost as easily and with less expense for several people as for one. As an economic unit, a family can cooperate to achieve what an individual could not. It is easier for a working couple to purchase a house than an individual, for example, because the couple can pool their resources. These are only some of the theoretical advantages families offer to their members. Not all families perform all these tasks or perform them equally well. But families, based on mutual ties of feeling and obligation, offer us greater potential for fulfilling our needs than do organizations based on profit (such as corporations) or compulsion (such as governments).

Extended Families and Kinship

The **extended family** consists not only of a cohabiting or married couple and their children but also of other relatives, especially in-laws, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and cousins. In most non-European countries, the extended family is often regarded as the basic family unit. Extended families are more common in countries in Asia, the Middle East, Central and South America, and sub-Saharan Africa. According to sociologists Laura Lippman and W. Bradley Wilcox, in most countries in these regions, at least 40 percent of children live in households containing adults other than their parents (Lippman and Wilcox 2014). In certain countries in Africa (such as South Africa, Tanzania, and Nigeria), Asia (e.g., India), South America (e.g., Colombia and Nicaragua), and the Middle East (e.g., Turkey), more than half of children live with and are likely affected by relations with extended kin such as grandparents, aunts and uncles, and cousins (Lippman and Wilcox 2014).

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

Gerstel 2012). Census data estimate that there were over 3.7 million multigenerational family households in the United States, consisting of three or more generations residing together in 2012. This amounted to 4.6 percent of all U.S. family households, though the prevalence of such extended families varied among different groups. Among Hispanics and Blacks, such multigenerational families represent over 8 percent of their family households, followed by Asians at 6.3 percent and non-Hispanic whites at 3.0 percent (Vespa, Lewis, and Kreider 2013). Data from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2009–2011 American Community Survey reveals that multigenerational households were reported most commonly among Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander families, followed by American Indian and Alaskan Native families (Lofquist 2012).

The Census Bureau's Current Population Survey indicates that more than four million U.S. households included both grandchildren and grandparents in 2012. An estimated 10 percent of all children (about seven million children) in the United States lived in households that contained at least one grandparent. Of those children who lived with a grandparent, 20 percent had no parent present in the households (Ellis and Simmons 2014).

Sometimes, especially among those who don't have firsthand experience living in such households, extended kin may be left out of how they describe and/or define family, because of an assumption that when we speak of *family,* we really mean the nuclear family. That is the model that has come to epitomize what we mean by family. Thus, when someone asks us to name our family members, if we are unmarried, many will probably name our parents, brothers, and sisters. If we are married, we will probably name our spouses and, if we have any, our children. If we cohabit, we are likely to include our partners. Only if questioned further will some bother to include grandparents, aunts or uncles, cousins. Others may go on to include friends or neighbors who are "like family." We may not name all our blood relatives, but we will probably name the ones with whom we feel emotionally close, as shown earlier in the chapter.

True

7. The number of multigenerational households in the United States is increasing.

Even among those who don't experience living in multigenerational *households,* many Americans maintain what have been called **modified extended families**, which are extended families in which members share contact, care, and support even though they

The numbers of three-generational households has increased in recent years.

Kayte Deioma/PhotoEdit

don't share a residence. Think about your own family. What, if any, role or roles have your grandparents played in your life? Did they babysit for you when you were younger? Did you visit them regularly? Talk on the phone? Exchange gifts? The point is that, even in the absence of sharing a household, grandparents and other extended kin may be important figures in your life and, hence, broaden and enrich your family experiences beyond the nuclear households in which you may live or have lived.

Journalist Tamar Lewin suggests that "in many families, grandparents are the secret ingredients that make the difference between a life of struggle and one of relative ease." They may provide assistance that allows their grandchildren to go to camp, get braces for their teeth, go on vacation, and get music lessons or necessary tutoring, all of which enrich their grandchildren's lives beyond what parents alone could manage. Sociologist Vern Bengtson compiled 20 years of data that he gathered from his undergraduates about how they finance their college educations. Bengtson found that among his own students, grandparents were the third most frequently mentioned source, behind parents and scholarships but ahead of both jobs and loans. And the importance of grandparents includes but goes well beyond those instances in which they either share the households of or provide child care for their young grandchildren. We should note that there are also many instances in which adults help their elderly parents. In a survey conducted by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), 25 percent of "baby boomers"

expected to have their parents move in with them at some point in time (Green 2009). In either direction, such assistance and support remind us that extended families are important sources of aid and support for one another.

Kinship Systems

The **kinship system** is the social organization of the family. It is based on the reciprocal rights and obligations of the different family members, such as those between parents and children, grandparents and grandchildren, and mothers-in-law and sons-in-law. Nuclear family roles (such as parent, child, husband, wife, and sibling) combine with extended family roles (such as grandparent, aunt, uncle, cousin, and in-law) to form the kinship system.

Conjugal and Consanguineous Relationships

Family relationships are generally created in two ways: through marriage and through birth. Family relationships created through marriage are known as **conjugal relationships.** (The word *conjugal* is derived from the Latin *conjungere,* meaning "to join together.") In-laws, such as mothers-in-law, fathers-in-law, sons-in-law, and daughters-in-law, are created by law—that is, through marriage. **Consanguineous relationships** are created through biological (blood) ties—that is, through birth. (The word *consanguineous* is derived from the Latin *con-*, "joint," and *sanguineous*, "of blood.") Relationships between adopted children and parents, though not related by blood, might be considered "fictive consanguineous" relationships in that they are culturally treated as having the same kinds of ties and obligations.

Kin Rights and Obligations

In some societies, mostly non-Western or nonindustrialized cultures, kinship obligations may be more extensive than they are for most Americans in the 21st century. In cultures that emphasize wider kin groups, close emotional ties between a husband and a wife may even be considered a threat to the extended family.

In a marriage form found in Canton, China, women do not live with their husbands until at least three years after marriage, as their primary obligation remains with their own extended families. Under the traditional marriage system among the Nayar of India, men had a number of clearly defined obligations toward the children of their sisters and female cousins, although they had few obligations toward their own children (Gough 1968).

In U.S. society, the basic kinship system consists of parents and children, but as we have seen, it may include other relatives as well, especially grandparents. Each person in this system has certain rights and obligations as a result of his or her position in the family structure. Furthermore, a person may occupy several positions at the same time. For example, an 18-year-old woman may simultaneously be a daughter, a sister, a cousin, an aunt, and a granddaughter. Each role entails different rights and obligations. As a daughter, the young woman may have to defer to certain decisions of her parents; as a sister, to share her bedroom; as a cousin, to attend a wedding; and as a granddaughter, to visit her grandparents during the holidays.

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

Despite the increasingly voluntary nature of kin relations, our kin create a rich social network for us. Adult children and their parents often live close to one another, make regular visits, and/or help one another with child care, housework, maintenance, repairs, loans, and gifts. The relations among siblings often remain strong throughout the life cycle. In fact, as vividly illustrated by sociologist Karen Hansen's research on "networks of care," kin are frequently essential supports in the ever-more complicated tasks associated with raising children in dual-earner households or single-parent households. Although they are invisible when we focus so intensively on nuclear families, to effectively raise children may require the help of "'other mothers,' aunties, grandmothers and child care workers (as well as) . . . uncles, grandfathers and male friends" (Hansen 2005, 215). Where kin are unavailable or where certain family members are either uncooperative or deemed to be unsuitable, these networks might expand to include neighbors, friends, and paid caregivers.

Issues and Insights Cyber Caregiving and Technological Togetherness

The maintenance of wider kin ties has been enhanced by technological innovations from bicycles, through telephones and automobiles, and most recently through advances made in information technology. Just as wheels allowed family members to visit kin some distance away, and telecommunications allowed people to speak with relatives nearly anywhere in the world, more recent innovations make it possible to have "family get-togethers," monitor each others' actions, and even engage in caregiving activities, despite being separated by great distance.

Via software that allows group video calling, three or more family members can be "brought together" online. For example, you have children or grandchildren off at different colleges or universities, or family members in different parts of the country. Just put them all in a group on Skype and click the call button, and you'll have yourself a big old family reunion that's the next best thing to being face-to-face in the same room!" (https://techboomers.com/t/skype-video-chat). Though limited to four hours per video call, ten hours of video calls per day, and 100 hours per month, group video calls can allow family members to "visit" even when scattered across a number of countries. Google also offers voice and video chat, with similar features. Thus, a man in Ohio could "get together" with his daughter and her husband in Portland, Oregon, his son and son's girlfriend in Las Vegas, his sisters—one in New York and one in New Jersey, where his newly widowed 86-year-old father also lives. People with aging parents have an increasing number of ways to do more than visit. They can oversee their parents' care and ensure their well-being, even from hundreds or thousands of miles away. Consider the following family: Widowed, 70-year-old Elizabeth Roach lives in her home in Virginia. Her son, Michael, lives in Denver. Through a system marketed as GrandCare, movement sensors placed around Ms. Roach's house record and relay her movements, her exact weight, and blood pressure readings to Michael. Michael receives detailed information sent to him via email, text message, or voice mail about what time his mother got into and out of bed, when she opened or closed certain doors, and whether, when, and for how long she opened her refrigerator. In this way, he can determine whether Elizabeth has taken her medications and eaten her meals. In addition to ensuring his mother's well-being, GrandCare helps Michael cope with his feelings about being so far away from his mother. As he told journalist Hilary Stout, "I have a large amount of guilt. I'm really far away. I'm not helping to take care of her, to mow her lawn, to be a good son" (Stout 2010).

Stout proceeds to talk about additional systems that help bridge distance and tend to caregiving activities. For example, there is a medication management system called MedMinder that operates as a computerized pillbox. Once the proper doses of one's medications have been arranged into boxes, the system provides beeps and flashes to remind one to take his or her medication. More than that, the system also alerts others to whether or not a person took the needed medicines. Rachel Meyers receives a tape-recorded phone call at her Brooklyn home notifying her whether her 84-year-old mother, Harriet, has taken her medication. Her brother in Australia gets email notification. BeClose is a wireless monitoring system that, through sensors placed in her widowed aunt's bed, notifies Susan Oertle via email and phone that her 83-year-old aunt went to sleep (Stout 2010).

Innovations such as these have obvious appeal for those who wish to bridge physical distance to maintain a sense of togetherness that transcends geographic boundaries. They can be used to connect spouses separated for work assignments or military deployment, parents and their college-age children, noncustodial divorced parents and their children, or adults and their aging but distant parents. In fact, in providing a kind of "technological togetherness" and "cyber caregiving," these new technologies have the potential to "re-extend" families and allow for the maintenance of ever-closer contact between kin living in geographically dispersed households.

Multiple Viewpoints of Families

As we noted earlier, marriage and family issues inspire much debate. For instance, those who believe that families of male providers, female homemakers, and their dependent children living together, 'til death do they part, are what families *should be* would not be encouraged by the continued high rates of divorce, increases in cohabitation, or the declining rates of marriage or full-time at-home motherhood. Those on the "other" side who claim that there are basic inequities within the traditional family, especially regarding the status of women, will not mourn the diminishing numbers of breadwinner–housewife

families. Similarly, the question of gay marriage divides those who believe that marriage *must* be a relationship between a man and a woman from those who believe that we *must* recognize and support all kinds of families and provide equal marriage rights to all people.

Divisiveness on family issues is neither new nor unique to the United States. In the early 20th-century U.S., there was considerable pessimism about whether families would survive the changing and liberalizing culture of sexuality, the increasing numbers of women delaying marriage for educational or occupational reasons, and the declining birthrate and increases in divorce. In considering the same sorts of changes, others advocated that these trends were positive signs of families adapting to changes in the wider society (Mintz and Kellogg 1988).

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

In Poland, "stormy parliamentary debate" ensued over whether to endorse and sign into law a Council of Europe convention on fighting domestic violence and violence against women, which presses governments and organizations to penalize such violence, help victims, and teaches about tolerance. In the Polish debate, more socially and politically conservative and Catholic lawmakers argued that the regulations went against traditional Polish gender and family roles. A statement on behalf of Poland's Catholic bishops claimed that the lawmakers don't see the "good of the marriage, of the family, of Poland's future demography as their priority." On the other side, Deputy Parliament Speaker and women's rights activist, Wanda Nowicka, contested such accusations and emphasized that the regulation is badly needed to protect Polish women (Scislowska 2015).

False

8. There is not widespread agreement about the nature and causes of change in family patterns in the United States.

Within the United States two of the more prominent sources of differences in viewpoints on family issues and family change are one's racial or ethnic background and one's religion. With regard to racial and ethnic differences, African Americans have tended to express somewhat more conservative attitudes than whites on a number of family issues such as premarital sex, cohabitation, spanking, gay marriage, and gay parenting. For example, using data from the 2004 to 2014 General Social Survey reveals that compared to whites, blacks are 20 percent more likely to say that homosexual relations are "always wrong" (60.8 percent of blacks versus 40.5 percent of whites) and are 8.5 percent more likely to disagree or strongly disagree that a lesbian couple could raise a child as effectively as a heterosexual couple (47.5 percent vs. 39 percent), and 11 percent more likely to disagree or strongly disagree that a gay male couple could. In addition, Blacks are twice as likely as whites to say that the most important quality in a child is to obey (23.6 percent among blacks, 11.7 percent among whites) and are 14.5 percent more likely to strongly agree (36.7 percent vs. 22.2 percent among whites) that spanking is an effective way to discipline a child. Regarding cohabitation, blacks were 16 percent less likely to agree or strongly agree that living together was an acceptable option (44.7 percent among blacks vs. 60.6 percent among whites). On a number of other family issues, such as attitudes toward extramarital sex, divorce, whether it is better for men to be breadwinners and females to tend home, and whether one approves of supplying birth control to 14- to 16-year-olds, there were very small to no real race differences.

Attitudes toward homosexuality and gay marriage have been among the largest and more consistent areas of racial and ethnic differences. In comparison with whites and other ethnicities, African Americans have been more opposed to same-sex marriage. Although African Americans may be no less supportive of extending "basic civil rights to speech and employment" to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people, their opposition to gay marriage remained strong, even as whites and others became more supportive of extending marriage rights to same-sex couples. More recently, though the attitudes of African Americans have also changed, they are still less accepting than those of whites (Sherkat, de Vries, and Creek 2010).

In explaining African Americans' positions, one can point to the second of the sources previously noted above, the influence of religion. Darren Sherkat, Kylan de Vries, and Stacia Creek contend that compared to more secular influences, African Americans' high rates of church attendance and their membership in more conservative Protestant denominations shape their attitudes toward gay marriage (Sherkat, de Vries, and Creek 2010). This influence of religion is not unique to African Americans; across racial lines, membership in more conservative sectarian Protestant denominations has been associated with a greater likelihood to believe that homosexuality is wrong and to be opposed to extending marriage rights to same-gender couples. Members of mainline Protestant denominations, along with Catholics, Jews, and those without religious affiliation, have been more likely to support the legalization of same-gender marriage.

More generally, religious affiliation and participation surface as prominent influences on attitudes toward a host of family issues, including divorce, cohabitation, premarital sex, and gay marriage. For example:

True

9. African Americans tend to express more conservative views on such family issues as premarital sex, divorce, and gay marriage.

- Individuals who report being affiliated with any religious group are more likely to hold more conservative attitudes about family issues than are those with no religious affiliation.
- Conservative religious beliefs are often accompanied by more traditional gender and family attitudes. As expressed by sociologist Jennifer Roebuck Bulanda, ". . . conservative religious traditions espouse the idea of 'traditional' family structure and complementary roles for men and women in family life" (Bulanda 2011, 180).
- Americans who more frequently attend religious services or who believe the Bible to be the Word of God are more likely than their less religious or nonreligious counterparts to support stricter divorce laws (Stokes and Ellison 2010).
- Like the differences between Evangelical Christians and mainline Protestants, differences surface *within* other faiths as well. For example, Reformed Jews tend to be among the most liberal on "family issues," whereas Orthodox Jews are much more conservative. Traditional Catholics hold more conservative views on such issues as divorce, cohabitation, and same-gender marriage than do liberal Catholics. In fact, differences within any particular faith may be greater than differences between faiths. So, for example, in the Public Broadcasting System's Faith and Family Survey of 2005 (Sherkat, de Vries, and Creek 2010), Evangelical Christians (at 92 percent) and traditional Catholics (at 91 percent) were equally and overwhelmingly in agreement with the statement, "God's plan for marriage is one man, one woman, for life." Much smaller and nearly identical majorities of liberal Catholics and mainline Protestants (60 percent and 62 percent, respectively) agreed. Such differences are often obscured when we look at either overall attitudes of Americans or at differences between Protestants, Catholics, Jews, and others.
- Those who identify themselves as having no religious preference (or as atheists or agnostics) tend to express the most liberal attitudes on family issues.

Jennifer Roebuck Bulanda offers a cautionary note to those who would simply infer that the traditional family attitudes that accompany any particular set of religious beliefs translates into traditional family behavior, or that it does so among all members of those faiths. She suggests that researchers resist the assumption that those who are members of conservative faiths or denominations will all behave in accordance with the ideology of their faiths. She points out that other factors—including gender, race, ethnicity, and social class—likely moderate the relationship between religion and family (Bulanda 2011).

Ultimately, the ways we view families depend on what we conceive of *as* families. Such disagreements, then, reflect both different definitions of family and different values regarding particular kinds of families. Often the product of personal experience as much as of religious background, personal values reflect what we want families to be like and, thus, what we come to believe about the kinds of issues that are raised throughout this book.

Half Full versus Half Empty

With so much "noise" in the wider society around what family life is and should be like, how families are changing, and whether those changes are good or bad, you may find it difficult to know what conclusions to draw about family issues. Given the lack of societal consensus, it is easy to become confused or be

misled about what American families are really like. To some, contemporary family life is weaker because of cultural and social changes and is now, to some extent, endangered. More optimistic interpretations of changing family patterns celebrate the increased domestic diversity of numerous family types and the richer range of choices now available to Americans. Like the proverbial glass, some see the family as "half empty," whereas others see it as "half full." What makes the "half full, half empty" metaphor so apt is that even when looking at the same phenomenon or the same trend, some interpret it as evidence of the troubled state U.S. families are in, and others see today's families as different or changing. So, for instance, although the rates of divorce and marriage, the numbers of children in nonparental child care, or the extent of increase in cohabitation can be objectively measured, like the volume of liquid in a partially filled glass, the meaning of those measures can vary widely, depending on perspective.

Conservative, Liberal, and Centrist Perspectives

In the wider, societal discourse about families, we can identify opposing ideological positions on the well-being of families. The two extremes, which sociologist Norval Glenn called conservative and liberal, are like the half empty–half full disagreement, a difference between pessimistic and optimistic viewpoints. Conservatives are fairly pessimistic about changes in family life and the state of today's families. To **conservatives**, cultural values have shifted from individual self-sacrifice toward personal self-fulfillment. This shift in values is seen as an important factor in accounting for some of the major changes in family life that occurred beginning with the last three or four decades of the 20th century (especially higher divorce rates, more cohabitation, and more births outside marriage). Conservatives further believe that because of such changes, today's families are weaker and less effective, especially when it comes to raising and meeting the needs of children. Thus, conservatives often recommend policies and programs to reverse or reduce the extent of such changes (repeal of no-fault divorce, introduction of covenant marriage, and programs to promote marriage are all examples).

Compared with conservatives, liberals are more optimistic about the status and future of family life in the United States. **Liberals** tend to believe that the changes in family patterns are just that—changes—and should not be viewed as signs of familial decline (Benokraitis 2000). The liberal position also typically portrays changing family patterns as products of and adaptations to wider social and economic changes rather than a shift in cultural values (Benokraitis 2000; Glenn 2000). Such changes in family experience lead to a wider range of contemporary household and family types and require greater tolerance of such diversity. Placing great emphasis on economic issues, liberal family policies are often tied to the economic well-being of families, such as the increasing numbers of employed mothers and two-earner households.

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

Attitudes Toward Changes in Family Living: Accepters, Skeptics, and Rejecters

A similar three-way division emerges when examining attitudes regarding various trends in the structure of U.S. family life. A Pew Research Center survey of a nationally representative sample of 2,691 adults asked respondents to assess the following trends as either "good for society," "bad for society," or "makes no difference": more unmarried couples raising children; more same-sex couples raising children; increased numbers of single women having children and raising them on their own; more couples living together without getting married; more mothers of young children employed outside the home; increasing numbers of interracial marriages; and increases in numbers of women choosing to not have children. Roughly a third (31 percent) of respondents can be considered **accepters** who see the trends as making no difference to society or as good for society. Almost the same percentage of respondents (32 percent) has been labeled **rejecters,** in that they tend to see these changes as bad for society. The remaining 37 percent has been identified as **skeptics** who share in the relatively tolerant views of the accepters but do express concern about the

potential impact of the trends. Typically, accepters are the most tolerant, skeptics less so, and rejecters tend to disapprove of most of the changes about which they were asked.

On many of the trends, accepters and skeptics were much more similar than different. The one major difference between them was their view of the increase in single motherhood. Whereas 99 percent of skeptics saw this increase as bad for society, close to 90 percent of accepters said it had made no difference (74 percent) or has been a good thing (13 percent). On most other issues, both accepters and skeptics were fairly similar and differed greatly from rejecters. Close to or more than 90 percent of rejecters saw the upward trends in couples living together without getting married, unmarried couples raising children, and gay and lesbian couples raising children as "bad for society." Conversely, more than half of accepters and skeptics saw these same trends as "making no difference" (Morin 2011).

There were other interesting differences in the Pew data. When asked which type of marriage—breadwinner/housewife or dual-earner—provided a "more satisfying way of life," half of rejecters favored the male breadwinner household. Nearly three-quarters (73 percent) of accepters favored a dual-earner model, as did 70 percent of skeptics. There were also noteworthy differences in whether different kinds of household arrangements were considered to be families. Although the vast majority of accepters (84 percent) and skeptics (75 percent) both considered a same-sex couple with children to be a family, less than a third (31 percent) of rejecters shared this viewpoint. Just slightly over half of rejecters (55 percent) claimed to consider an unmarried couple with children to be a family. In contrast, 96 percent of accepters and 87 percent of skeptics agreed that such groups were indeed families. Accepters are also more likely to consider unmarried childless couples (60 percent) and same-sex couples without children (68 percent) as families. This same attitude was true for less than half of skeptics and a fifth or less of rejecters.

Looking closer at the composition of each of these clusters exposes demographic differences that may help explain the difference in attitudes. Older people, people who are more religious, whites, married adults, and Republicans tend to have the more pessimistic views that place them among rejecters. Younger people, less religious people, unmarried adults, Hispanics, Democrats, and women express attitudes that place them among accepters or skeptics.

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

Disagreement Among Family Scientists

It should be noted that social scientists are similarly divided in how they perceive contemporary families. In other words, changing family patterns and trends in marriage, divorce, parenting, and child care are explained and interpreted differently even by the experts who study them. For example, in considering the effects of divorce on children, one can find a range of viewpoints, each of which comes from published research rather than personal opinion. The differences between such viewpoints are hard to reconcile.

Constance Ahrons, a noted scholar, member of the Council on Contemporary Families, and author of numerous articles and books on divorce, offers a somewhat encouraging point of view. She contends that "The good news about divorce is that the vast majority of children develop into reasonably competent individuals, functioning within the normal range. . . . (I)t is not divorce per se, but the quality of the relationship between divorced parents that has an important long-term impact on adult children's lives."

In contrast to Ahrons's comments, David Popenoe, also a well-known sociologist, author, and/or editor of numerous books about contemporary American families, and codirector of the National Marriage Project, provides a different perspective. He states, "Divorce increases the risk of interpersonal problems in children." He contends that research suggests that many such problems are long-lasting and may become worse in adulthood. More emphatically, he suggests that, "except in the minority of high-conflict marriages, it is better for the children if their parents stay together and work out their problems than if they divorce." Although these statements are not entirely irreconcilable, they do reveal and may themselves contribute to different overall perspectives about marriage, divorce, and the well-being of children. Thus, it is important to realize that, just as the wider society and culture are fraught with conflicting opinions and

Issues and Insights Red and Blue Families

Law professors Naomi Cahn and June Carbone offered another interesting way to look at some of the opposing positions on family issues. In their book, *Red Families v. Blue Families: Legal Polarization and the Creation of Culture,* Cahn and Carbone (2010) built upon the popular political distinction often drawn between conservative "red states" that tend to vote Republican and more liberal "blue states" that more often vote Democratic to look at some major differences in family values and experiences that separate the lives of people in different parts of the United States.

Using statewide comparisons, they described patterns of family life found more frequently in "red states," in the Mountain West, the rural plains, and the South. These include younger ages at marriage and at childbirth, higher teen pregnancy rates, greater emphasis on abstinence outside of marriage and less support for contraceptive availability, greater opposition to abortion and gay marriage, and higher divorce rates. Red families advocate a more traditional family system, where traditional gender roles are "critical to marital stability" (2007, 3). They stress the "unity of sex, marriage, and procreation," and promote delaying becoming sexually active until marriage (Cahn and Carbone 2010).

In contrast, "blue states," such as those on both U.S. coasts, endorse a family model that "celebrates more egalitarian gender roles," delays childbearing, and invests in educational and career goals for both genders. Contraception is "morally compelled," abortion is "the necessary (and responsible) fallback," and acceptance of gay marriage "a matter of basic equality" (Cahn and Carbone 2007, 2). Blue states tend to have lower rates of divorce, lower teen birthrates, lower percentages of teen births occurring within marriage, and higher use of abortion. Compared to their red counterparts, blue families tend to be wealthier, more educated, less religiously active, and have fewer children.

Two of the biggest factors separating the red and blue family models are age and religion. Red families are characterized by younger marriages and younger entries into parenthood. States with the lowest ages at marriage tend to be red, whereas states with the highest median age of marriage are blue (Cahn and Carbone 2007). Populations in red states are more likely to be religious fundamentalists, who believe literally in the words of the Bible. In red states, nearly half of voters identified themselves as fundamentalists compared to just over a fourth of voters in blue states (Cahn and Carbone 2010, 70).

Cahn and Carbone are careful to note that comparisons of rates of family behavior between states may obscure the diversity of experiences and attitudes within states. Although they have been criticized for skewing their analysis in favor of the blue family model, Cahn and Carbone point out problems characteristic of each family model. Despite their emphasis on tradition, red states have the highest divorce rates in the United States, and "their teens are also more likely to become pregnant and to give birth to children the parents are ill-equipped to raise" (Cahn and Carbone 2007, 3). Blue states have much higher numbers of women and men who will never marry, declining fertility rates, and high percentages of people living alone.

In continuing the "red" versus "blue" comparison, sociologist W. Bradley Wilcox and psychologist Nicholas Zill have pointed out that some of the most stable families can be found in some of the bluest (e.g., Massachusetts and Minnesota) and some of the reddest (e.g., Utah and Nebraska) states. They note that both the bluest and the reddest states are most likely to offer high levels of family stability (and low levels of nonmarital births), though the explanations for this may differ between red and blue states (Wilcox and Zill 2015). Wilcox and Zill suggest that low levels of nonmarital childbearing in the reddest states can best be explained by red state family culture (what they call "deep normative and religious commitments to marriage and to raising children within marriage"), whereas in the bluest states a key factor is higher levels of education. At least at the state level, "the bluest and the reddest states in America register the highest levels of family stability in the nation" (2015).

In a follow-up article, Wilcox moves from state- to county-level comparisons in recognition that "there are plenty of blue states with lots of red counties (think Pennsylvania), and vice versa (think Texas)," (2015, 2). He contends that counties that "gave a higher share of their vote to the Republican presidential candidate (Mitt Romney) have a higher share of their population that is married" (2015, 3). The same is said to hold for levels of nonmarital childbearing (lower in "red counties") and the likelihood that children live with their biological parents (higher in red counties). At the same time, divorce is more common in the southern United States, which as Wilcox notes is a "region that tilts red" (Wilcox 2015, 5). Wilcox also claims that one factor explaining why blue counties are more likely to have lower levels of marriage, more family instability, and higher levels of nonmarital childbearing is race: They have more African Americans. As we will examine in Chapter 3, patterns of marriage, childbearing, and child rearing vary across racial lines, though some of that variation is likely tied to class differences between the races.

Popular Culture — Has There Been a "Modern Family Effect"?

Any analysis of changing attitudes toward same-sex marriage would show how dramatic a change took place over the past 15 years. In 2001, data from the Pew Research Center showed that a majority of Americans were opposed to same-sex marriage, by a margin of 57 percent to 35 percent. For nearly a decade, from 2001 to 2009, there was small upward movement in the percentages of people who said they were in favor of allowing gay and lesbian couples to marry legally. In April 2009, 35 percent said they favored or strongly favored allowing gays and lesbians to legally marry. By 2015, even before the Supreme Court decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges,* 57 percent of Americans said they supported same-sex marriage, while 39 percent remained opposed. And although some groups remain opposed to gay marriage (e.g., white evangelical Protestants, blacks, Republicans, Conservatives) among all groups, there has been an increase since 2009 in those who say they are in favor of same-sex marriage. So what happened? What changed Americans' minds?

Although acknowledging that demographic shifts and political organizing efforts are likely part of the answer, journalist Spencer Kornhaber, writing in *The Atlantic* in the wake of the Obergefell decision, also raises the possibility that there was a "*Modern Family* effect" in which the successful sitcom's portrayal of the relationship between Mitchell and Cam may have helped to influence attitudes (Kornhaber 2015). Premiering in 2009, approximately ten million viewers watched weekly as the fictional Cam and Mitch were shown "navigating the challenges of being in a long-term relationship" and raising their adopted daughter Lily (Kornhaber 2015). Kornhaber, a staff writer at *The Atlantic* who covers pop culture, notes that in a 2012 *Hollywood Reporter* poll 27 percent of likely voters said that they'd become more pro–gay marriage from the ways in which gay characters were depicted on television. He also notes that "there are news accounts of people crediting their newfound sympathy toward gay people to *Modern Family*" (Kornhaber 2015).

Of course, it is risky to assume that any particular television series or set of characters is responsible for changing public opinion (and thus shaping social reality). As used by sociologists and other analysts of media content, the **reflection hypothesis,** suggests that *media content reflects the values and ideals of the audience.* Media images are said to reflect what people want to see or what already exists. Yet it is also well known that media content *can* shape the values and beliefs of the audience that consumes its content. In that vein, perhaps Cam and Mitch, by being "about as tame as anyone could ask . . . they rarely touch, never talk about sex, and make a big deal over kissing in public," have made gay couples less threatening "and more normal" to those who might have otherwise opposed gay marriage (Kornhaber 2015). They are not the only recent or current popular culture examples, nor are popular culture examples the only or most important factor in raising support for gay marriage. However, they likely factor into an explanation somewhere.

Cameron and Mitchell (Eric Stonestreet and Jesse Tyler Young) of the ABC situation comedy, *Modern Family*, at their wedding.

Peter 'Hopper' Stone/Disney ABC Television Group/Getty Images

values about marriage and family relationships, the academic disciplines that study family life occasionally contain a similar lack of consensus.

False **10.** Researchers do not agree about the impact of divorce on children.

As we set off on our exploration of marriage and family issues, it is important to realize that many of the topics we cover are part of similar ongoing debates about families. As you try to make sense of the material we introduce throughout this book, we require you not to take a particular viewpoint but rather to keep in mind that multiple interpretations are possible. Where different interpretations are particularly glaring (as, for example, in the many issues surrounding divorce), we present them and allow you to decide which better fits the evidence presented.

The Major Themes of This Text

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

Families Are Dynamic

As noted earlier, the family is a dynamic social institution that has undergone considerable change in its structure and functions. Similarly, values and beliefs about families have changed over time and continue to do so. We are more accepting of divorce, employed mothers, and cohabitation. We expect men to be more involved in hands-on child care. We place more importance on individual happiness than on self-sacrifice for family.

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

Throughout much of the text, we also look at how individual family experience changes over time. Families are ever changing—from the formation of love relationships to the entry into marriage or intimate partnerships, from the bearing, raising, and aging of children to the aging and death of parents and spouses.

Families Are Diverse

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

Social Class

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

Race and Ethnicity

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

Gender and Sexuality

To understand intimate relationships, marriage and family life requires us to pay sustained attention to gender (the attitudes and behavior expected of individuals because of the sex category into which they have been assigned, socialized, and/or with which they identify). Our cultural ideas and understanding of **gender** continue to change. Long characterized by a strict binary cultural construction of gender that emphasized and sometimes exaggerated differences between male and female experience, more recent ideas about gender contain a broader and more nuanced understanding of gender identities and variations within gender categories. This includes an increasing acceptance and visibility of **transgender** individuals, whose gender identities develop and are expressed in ways that differ from what their biological sex would otherwise predict, as well as a greater understanding of how gender intersects with other

social statuses (such as race, class, age, religion, and sexuality).

Gender affects many of the areas of family experience on which we touch in this book. Throughout the text, as we examine such topics as love and friendship, sexual freedom and expression, marriage responsibilities and gratifications, involvement with and responsibilities for children, experience of abuse, consequences of divorce and becoming a single parent, and chances for remarriage, we will identify where women's and men's experiences differ and where they don't. Although gender differences loom large in some areas of family experience, research suggests that on many characteristics and attributes "men and women, as well as boys and girls, are more alike than they are different" (Hyde 2005, 581).

Examining whether and how experiences of such things as intimacy, sexual expression, parenting, abuse, and separation do and don't differ among heterosexual, gay, and lesbian individuals and couples will further our attention to and understanding of the effects of gender and gender difference on relationships.

Diversity of Chosen Lifestyles

A striking difference between 21st-century families and earlier American families is the diversity of family lifestyles that people choose or experience. There is no family form that encompasses most people's aspirations or experiences. Statistically, the dual-earner household is the most common form of family household with children, but there is considerable variation among dual-earner households and between such households as traditional or single-parent families.

Increasingly, people are choosing to cohabit, either before or instead of marrying. Increasing numbers of couples choose not to have children, and increasing numbers of others choose expensive procedures to assist their efforts and enable them to bear and rear children. This diversity of family types and lifestyles will not soon abate. In the chapters that follow, specific attention is directed at singles (with and without children), cohabiters, childless or child-free couples, and role-reversed households.

Outside Influences on Family Experience

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

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

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

Our familial life reflects decisions we face, the choices we make, and the opportunities and/or constraints we confront. In the wider discourse about families, we tend to encounter mostly individualistic explanations for what people experience, focusing sometimes exclusively on personal choices. Throughout this text, we examine the wider environments within which our family choices are made and the ways in which some of us are given more opportunities whereas others face limited options.

The Interdependence of Families and the Wider Society

Following the prior theme, we indicate throughout the book how societal support is essential for family well-being. Equally true, healthy, well-functioning families are essential to societal well-being. To function effectively, if not optimally, families need outside assistance and support. Better child care, more flexible work environments, economic assistance for the

neediest families, protection from violent or abusive partners or parents, and a more effective system for collecting child support are just some examples we consider in later chapters of where families clearly have needs for greater societal or institutional support.

In turn, the health and stability of the wider society depend largely on strong and stable families. Families are the sources from which most of the social skills, personality characteristics, and values of individual members of society are formed. Ideally, successful families produce and nurture hope, purpose, and general attitudes of commitment, perseverance, and well-being. Indeed, even the rudimentary maintenance and survival care provided by families make significant contributions to the well-being of a community.

When families fail, individuals must turn elsewhere for assistance; social institutions must be designed to fill the voids left by failing families, as the pathologies created by weak family structures make society a less livable place. Ultimately, there are enormous costs that result from neglecting the needs of families and children in the United States.

Some of the services provided by families are such a basic part of our existence that we tend to overlook them. These include such essentials as the provision of food and shelter—a place to sleep, rest, and play—as well as caregiving, including supervision of health and hygiene, transportation, and the accountability of family members involving their activities and whereabouts. Without families, communities would have to provide extensive dormitories and many personal care workers with different levels of training and responsibility to perform the many activities in which families are engaged.

On a more emotional level, without families, individuals must look elsewhere to satisfy basic needs for intimacy and support. We marry or form marriage-like cohabiting relationships, have children, and maintain contact with other kin (adult siblings, aging parents, and extended kin) because such relationships retain importance as bases for our identities and sources of social and emotional sustenance. We bring to these relationships high affective expectations. When our intimacy needs are not met (in marriage or long-term cohabitation), we terminate those relationships and seek others that will provide them. We believe, however, that those needs are best met in families.

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

Summary

- Our experiences in our families and relationships affect the kinds of ideas about families and intimate relationships that we bring to a course such as this.
- Family life has changed greatly as can be seen in such things as the increase in cohabitation, singlehood, divorce, dual-earner couples and single-parent households, as well as the legalization of same-sex marriage.
- Technological innovation in communication and reproduction has influenced contemporary family roles and relationships.
- Countries vary widely in the prevalence of marriage. Within the United States a majority of adult women and men have been and are married.
- There is considerable cultural diversity in how societies define marriage and who may marry. At minimum, marriage is a socially and legally recognized union between two people that establishes rights and obligations connected to gender and sexuality, raising children, and relating to the wider community and society.
- In Western cultures, the preferred form of marriage is *monogamy,* in which there are only two spouses. *Polygyny,* the practice of having two or more wives, is preferred throughout many cultures in the world.
- In June 2015, the United States Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage throughout the United States.

- Defining the term *family* is complex. Most definitions of family include individuals related by descent, marriage, remarriage, or adoption; some also include affiliated kin.
- Four important family functions are (1) the provision of intimacy, (2) the formation of a cooperative economic unit, (3) reproduction and socialization, and (4) the assignment of social roles and status, which are acquired both in a *family of orientation* (in which we grow up) and in a *family of cohabitation* (which we form by marrying or living together).
- Advantages to living in families include (1) continuity of emotional attachments, (2) close proximity, (3) familiarity with family members, and (4) economic benefits.
- The *extended family* consists of grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and in-laws. It may be formed *conjugally* (through marriage), creating in-laws or stepkin, or consanguineously (by birth) through blood relationships.
- The *kinship system* is the social organization of the family. It includes our nuclear and extended families. Kin can be *affiliated,* as when a nonrelated person is considered "kin," or a relative may fulfill a different kin role, such as a grandmother taking the role of a child's mother.
- There are a range of viewpoints about the meaning and implications of various trends underway in family life in the United States. Race and religion are two of the prominent sources of differences in viewpoints. Even social scientists who study families often disagree about what the trends show about the state of contemporary family life.

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