FAMILY LIFE Now

THIRD EDITION

KELLY WELCH

FAMILY LIFE NOW

Third Edition

Dave, my love for you is more than a memory. It's all of me.
The next time I hold you, I'm never letting go.

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Kelly J. Welch
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SAGE Publications, Inc.
2455 Teller Road
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SAGE Publications Ltd.
1 Oliver's Yard
55 City Road
London EC1Y 1SP
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SAGE Publications India Pvt. Ltd.
B 1/I 1 Mohan Cooperative Industrial Area
Mathura Road, New Delhi 110 044
India

SAGE Publications Asia-Pacific Pte. Ltd.
18 Cross Street #10-10/11/12
China Square Central
Singapore 048423

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Welch, Kelly, author.

Title: Family life now / Kelly J. Welch, Kansas State University.

Description: Third edition. | Los Angeles : SAGE, [2022] | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2020040156 | ISBN 978-1-5443-7102-3 (paperback) | ISBN 978-1-5443-7103-0 | ISBN 978-1-5443-7104-7 (epub) | ISBN 978-1-5443-7105-4 (epub) | ISBN 978-1-5443-7106-1 (pdf)

Subjects: LCSH: Marriage. | Families. | Interpersonal relations.

Classification: LCC HQ734 .W43 2022 | DDC 306.85—dc23

LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2020040156

Acquisitions Editor: Josh Perigo
Editorial Assistant: Lauren Younker
Content Development Editor: Alissa Nance
Production Editor: Rebecca Lee
Copy Editor: Diana Breti
Typesetter: C&M Digitals (P) Ltd.
Proofreader: Jeff Bryant
Indexer: Integra
Cover Designer: Janet Kiesel
Marketing Manager: Jennifer Jones

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

21 22 23 24 25 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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/// PREFACE

FAMILY LIFE NOW: THE ENHANCED EXPERIENCE

Family Life Now provides students with a fresh, engaging, realistic, and academically informative introduction to the study of intimate relationships, marriages, and families. The third edition builds on the success of the first two editions and maintains its student-focused, conversational, down-to-earth tone. Comprehensive, contemporary, personally relevant, and relatable to today's diverse and complex individual, family, and societal issues, *Family Life Now* engages students through a balanced, integrated approach of the human development and family science disciplines. This text describes and promotes the ways in which those considering a helping profession career (such as social worker, therapist, psychologist, teacher, early childhood educator, child care provider, or health care provider) can employ strengths-oriented best practices to create and deliver effective, quality couple and family life education.

Family Life Now Is a Standout Experience

Traditionally, marriage and family books and courses adopt a sociological approach, a lens that emphasizes "the family" as a social institution and how this institution provides social stability. These books fall short of providing an in-depth understanding of individual development and how we develop our relational strengths and weaknesses within these systems. Traditional textbooks also often neglect the study of how development is influenced by the multiple processes that occur within the family system. By using a **family science** lens to understand today's couples and families, *Family Life Now* meets the needs of today's professionals by employing the scientific study of children, families, and close interpersonal relationships to gain a comprehensive understanding of the diversity of intimate partner and family living. In addition to social science research and theories, the third edition of *Family Life Now* implements the pillars of family science:

Relationship focused: An emphasis is placed on forming, strengthening, and maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships across the lifespan. Throughout the third edition, myriad couple and family experiences and processes are discussed at length.

Multi-disciplinary: There are many theoretical strengths and concepts found in other disciplines. All key aspects of the social sciences are drawn upon in a family science approach, and each chapter provides an exploration and investigation of major theoretical concepts.

Evidence based: When working with families and parents, family science professionals access research findings to develop and implement effective programs. This edition of *Family Life Now* provides substantially more attention to diversity, sexual orientation and identity experiences, and enhanced coverage of multicultural issues. Throughout the book, the research is significantly updated: Hundreds of current, relevant empirical studies and demographic trends are reported.

Strengths oriented: The core belief of family science is that all families have strengths. With this belief at the forefront, programs are designed and implemented that enable individuals and families to become self-sufficient. This book provides students with the understanding that *all* families have strengths, *all* families experience struggles, and that *all* families can learn to struggle well and to "do" relationships to their best capabilities.

Preventive: Rather than intervene after problems and difficulties crop up, the family science approach seeks to prevent problems through educational programs with individuals, couples,

and families. Students are given an in-depth look at family science career opportunities, such as family life educator (FLE) and couple and family therapist (CFT). This book also provides a robust discussion about government policies that affect family living.

Applied: Professionals trained in the family science paradigm possess the knowledge and skills to apply research findings to effectively service all couples and families in today's diverse and global society. To this end, by synthesizing the chapter subject matter with family life educators' practice guidelines, each chapter concludes with a Family Life Education discussion that applies the content to the real world:

Chapter 1 Family Life Education: Strengthening Families

Chapter 2 Family Life Education: Creating, Implementing and Evaluating Effective Family Programming

Chapter 3 Family Life Education: Forging Family Strengths

Chapter 4 Family Life Education: Practicing With Sensitivity and Respecting Diversity

Chapter 5 Family Life Education: Valuing Diverse Couple Experiences

Chapter 6 Family Life Education: Relating to Others With Respect, Sincerity, and Responsibility

Chapter 7 Family Life Education: Using Reinforcing Strategies to Aid Couple Formation and Maintenance

Chapter 8 Family Life Education: Identifying Social and Cultural Influences Affecting the Marital Experience

Chapter 9 Family Life Education: Advancing Healthy Sexual Well-Being From a Value-Respectful Position

Chapter 10 Family Life Education: Fostering Healthy Family Formation

Chapter 11 Family Life Education: Guiding and Influencing a Child's Development

Chapter 12 Family Life Education: Understanding and Assisting Families' Decisions

Chapter 13 Family Life Education: Educating and Assisting Families Through Transition and Change

Chapter 14 Family Life Education: Protecting Children's and Adults' Well-Being

Chapter 15 Family Life Education: Providing Knowledge and Skills

Chapter 16 Family Life Education: Removing Barriers and Assisting in Transitions

GLOBAL FEATURES

Family Life Now is intentionally written in a compelling, first-person voice that draws students into the conversation. Perhaps one of its greatest distinguishing features is that it is written *to* students and *for* them—not *at* them. To provide a rich, minds-on, applied learning experience for students, each chapter begins with a **chapter opener:** stories from my experiences in couple and family living and real-life stories shared by college students. Discussions in each chapter also include the five pillars of family science, and chapters close with an application of the subject matter. Each chapter also includes sound pedagogy to engage students with the content and to enhance their learning experiences:

- **Learning Objectives:** Introducing each chapter, the learning objectives can be used as learning targets or they can be rephrased to be used as essential questions. These are a great tool for students to check their understanding of the chapter subject matter.
- **Family Life Now:** In this feature a contemporary issue is introduced, and each side of the matter is discussed with supporting research. Students are then asked to form their

own informed opinion. This can be used for debate topics in class or online. Students' responses are insightful and thought provoking, and they lead to discussions of other topics and issues.

- **Taking Sides:** A favorite of students, this feature describes, from both sides, a relationship dilemma that is commonly experienced by families and couples.
- **Summaries:** Each chapter concludes with a summary of the content, and these points are tied directly to the Learning Objectives introduced in the beginning.
- **Key Terms** and **Glossary:** Not only do the key terms in boldface and the glossary of key terms give students an accurate source for definitions, they are essential for helping students to acquire the vocabulary of the discipline.

WHAT'S NEW IN THE THIRD EDITION

One of the things that makes the study of couple and family living so challenging is the rapidly changing nature of these experiences and the diversity that accompanies them. The changes in the experiences of individuals, couples, and families in our culture are happening so swiftly that there is sometimes a lag between people's experiences and research. Every effort has been made to bring you the most relevant, current information, and I think that you will find that this book provides the most thorough, comprehensive, and racially/ethnically sensitive material available today. Global changes, enhancements, and additions include the following:

- All chapters have been substantially updated with the newest available research.
- Trends and demographics have been updated.
- Diversity coverage has been significantly expanded and updated, and the concept of **intersectionality** is woven throughout.
- Revised and enhanced coverage of racial and ethnic experiences are discussed in each chapter, including new discussions regarding **undocumented individuals** and their families.
- There is new material on **social networking** and its impact on mate selection, dating experiences, jealousy, and breaking up.
- Extensive sexual orientation and sexual identity coverage has been added, including expanded and updated discussions about **LGBTQ+ families of choice**, **lesbian co-mothering**, **transgenderism**, **androgyny**, **LGBTQ+ dating scripts**, and **gender-based violence,** including intimate partner and dating violence experienced by LGBTQ+ individuals.
- New content about **mixed-orientation** relationships and marriages has been added.
- A **nonheteronormative** approach to pregnancy and childbirth introduces the term **gestational parent.**
- Discussion regarding the **Equal Rights Amendment** and the **Violence Against Women Act** has been added.
- The **COVID-19 pandemic** and its resulting stressors, including unemployment and the severe economic downturn in the United States, are discussed.
- An expanded, enhanced discussion about the burden of **student loan debt** and the effects on individual, couple, and family experiences has been added.

DIGITAL RESOURCES

This text includes an array of instructor teaching materials designed to save you time and to help you keep students engaged. To learn more, visit **sagepub.com** or contact your SAGE representative at **sagepub.com/findmyrep**.

A NOTE TO STUDENTS

Often, students ask me what leads me to teach, research, and write about marriages, families, and intimate relationships—and it's always a tough question to answer because there are so many reasons! I suppose the short answer to "why" I do what I do is because, to me, our families and our intimate partners are our foundation: They are our source for being nurtured and loved, and they are of the utmost importance in our lives. While it is safe to say that all families are far from perfect and have room for improvement (mine included!), our families—whether they are families created by couples or they are families of choice—are usually there for us when the rest of the world is not. And, however each of us experiences family and intimate relationships, most of us want to be supportive, active participants.

But our families also serve as models for learning to love and to be intimate. In many, many ways, the family that a person is raised in sets the stage for a person's relational future. How *do* we learn to love? To communicate? To resolve conflict? To be sexual? And, if our family life isn't/wasn't healthy, are we doomed to failure in our future relationships? I am passionate about what I do because I want to empower and equip you to "do" family and intimate relationships to the best of your capabilities. I consider it an *honor* and a *privilege* to be able to help you learn about this important area of study—a subject that affects your everyday life.

There are so many issues that intimate partners and families face today. Before I began to write this third edition, I spent a lot of time talking to my students and reading their e-mails so I could get to the heart of what *students really want to know.* As I write this, our nation is in isolation, locked away from others because of the pandemic COVID-19 virus. The full impact of this virus won't be known for some time: How will the 33 million U.S. citizens who lost their jobs financially rebound? Will they? Did the incidents of domestic violence, intimate partner violence, and child abuse increase due to the stressors associated with being home? How many individuals returned to addictions to help them cope? What will be the impact of a lost semester of school? My students are concerned not only about their families (Will my parents have to file bankruptcy? Will we lose our home? Will my dad get his job back?), but also themselves (Will I be able to graduate on time? Will I be able to complete my internship? Will I be able to get a job after I graduate?). Add these worries to those that students had before the pandemic, such as wondering how to deal with past and/or present effects of intimate partner violence, and the questions they had about sex. *All* of these are very real concerns, and each has the potential to severely impact individual and family health and well-being.

In this edition, I have included a lot of personal stories and stories from students. I've worked really hard to listen to what *students* want to learn and know so that I can bring you the most current, up-to-date research to guide you through your exploration of intimate and family life. It is my sincerest hope that you see yourself somewhere among the pages of this book. I think you'll find that this textbook is just what you are looking for—it's *real*, it's *transparent*, and it's *relevant* to your life.

As you work your way through this text, you may have questions or opinions you'd like to share with me. Please feel free to e-mail me your thoughts at drkellywelch@gmail.com. I look forward to hearing from you!

Your professor, instructor, and I are partners. With this book and their guidance, instruction, and care, you are sure to come away with the knowledge that allows you to enjoy rich and satisfying intimate and family relationships. Now, let's roll up our sleeves and get busy!

A NOTE TO INSTRUCTORS

It's been said that if knowledge is power, then enthusiasm pulls the switch—and I bring this third edition of *Family Life Now* to you with much enthusiasm!

As I began to research and write this third edition, I spent a great deal of time talking with students, colleagues, and even friends, to try to get to the heart of what people *want* and what they *need* today in a book that addresses marriage, family, and intimate relationship experiences. But, as I was writing this revision, my life as I knew it was seemingly destroyed. My husband of 37 years went to run a quick errand—and that was the last time I saw him. He suffered from early onset dementia and didn't return from his errand. He was missing for 7 weeks. Gone. Just gone. There I was—suddenly finding myself navigating a horrific, terror-filled, unimaginable experience (a missing loved one), an experience for which there is no social template, no script about how to handle everything that accompanied the situation (Just who *does* pick up his dental records?). It felt as though I had lost everything that I read about, write about, and teach about for a living. I *knew* and *understood* the workings of a family crisis, but despite this knowledge I felt helpless and lost. I *knew* and *understood* the systems nature of family living, yet the instability in my family was so confusing. Too many times to count, it seemed as though I was making things up as I went. And somewhere along that turbulent path, I thought, "How do people with no knowledge of intimate and family relationships do this? I've got any number of colleagues I can turn to, *where do people go who don't have immediate access to helping professionals? How do people even know where to start?*" During that 7-week period and in the subsequent days, weeks, and months after he was found deceased, there were times his loss felt truly unsurvivable. It wasn't "How do I make it through this day?" It was "How do I make it through this minute?"

But as time passed, I was again reminded that what we do as family practitioners and educators *really is life changing*—and so greatly needed in our hectic, uncertain, stress-filled society today. As difficult as life has been since his death, and as difficult as it has been to rebuild a life without him, the experiences have deepened the passion I have to educate and to inform others about how to "do" family to the best of their capabilities. And I have brought this passion to this textbook.

Having taught more than 35,000 undergraduate students in human development, sexuality, marriage, and family classes, I know from personal experience that teaching is a demanding and often daunting task—especially more so now that we are doing our best to educate our students in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Adding to this stress, in our field we are confronted with the difficulty that much of what we teach is value-laden and sometimes politically polarizing. From heterosexuality to LGBTQ, to sex inside and outside of marriage, to dating and cohabitation, to marriage and divorce, as instructors we are challenged to teach the material with balanced and equitable viewpoints so that we don't alienate any student and so they can come away with the "best of the best." Adding to this challenge, our students today must often at once cope with the demands of school and unprecedented stressors, such as experiencing the loss of a family home or the inability to get financial aid because of the recent economic downturn experienced in the Unites States. So, how do we best reach and teach them?

As you thumb through the pages of this book, I think you'll find a voice that is simultaneously informative and rigorous, humorous and entertaining, and always compassionate and heartfelt. I bring you and your students the most current, relevant information about the social and emotional aspects of relational and intimate living, and I present a candid, sensitive, inclusive, nonjudgmental balance of theory and "real life." The contemporary research in this book is accompanied by practical, minds-on, hearts-on activities that make your students feel comfortable and safe talking about everything from dating, to sex, to intimate partner violence. It is my hope that you find this to be a natural partner to your course and that your students discover a resource to help them make informed decisions about their personal and family relationships.

As students begin their process of discovery, they will notice a prominent theme woven throughout this text: We are all, as relational people, products of our intergenerational families of origin. Indeed, we do not develop our relationship capacities in isolation! From love,

to intimacy, to communication, to our experiences of sexuality, even to the experiences of divorce, this text shows students how we affect and are affected by those in our environments—both at family and societal levels.

This book adopts the **Family Life Education** framework to examine marriages, families, and intimate relationships. Throughout the text, theories from the fields of sociology, family studies, psychology, lifespan human development, and other social sciences are integrated, making this text applicable to students' everyday lives. I am proud to deliver to you a textbook that provides to you and your students a relevant, realistic approach to understanding intimate and family life. *Thank you* for entrusting your students to me. I look forward to partnering with you to provide a life-changing course for them.

All my best to you,
Kelly

/// ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Years ago, I overheard one of my son's phone conversations with a friend. He had been asked by the friend if we could all go out to dinner, and I heard him reply, "No, we can't. We're writing my mom's book." *We're* writing—truer words have never been spoken because I certainly didn't accomplish this on my own! There are so very many people who deserve to be recognized—and praised!—for their roles in helping to launch this book. I am especially moved as I express my gratitude, because after the death of my husband I was paralyzed by change and uncertainty—I didn't think I'd ever be able to write or to teach again. But with the help of so many, you moved me from fear to confidence, from uncertainty to purpose, from hopelessness to gratitude. *Thank you* for your outpouring of care and concern and for working together to make this a superb third edition.

THIRD EDITION REVIEWERS

Often, reviewers are the last group to be thanked in the writing process. I acknowledge them first because *without them, this book would not exist.* Although I have never met them, I owe them a *tremendous* amount of gratitude and many, many thanks for the insight, direction, and suggestions they provided. Their comments gave me clear direction and focus and guided me in making sure that all students who hold this book in their hands see themselves and their experiences somewhere in the pages. I especially thank Tina Marie Johnson and her student at the University of Louisville for their suggestions regarding gender experiences in contemporary society. Thank you also to the following:

Angie Andrus, Fullerton College

Rachel Arocho, Utah Valley University

Rhonda R. Buckley, Texas Woman's University

Stacey L. Callaway, Rowan University

Ian H. Cameron, University of Maine

Gary Dick, University of Cincinnati

C. Ryan Dunn, Weber State University

Jacob A. Esplin, The University of Southern Mississippi

Jill Gomez, UC Clermont College

Victor William Harris, University of Florida

Kim A. Horejs, Truckee Meadows Community College.

Daniel Hubler, Weber State University

Mark O. Jarvis, Salt Lake Community College

Melanie Evans Keyes, Eastern Connecticut State University

Kari Morgan, Kansas State University

Lisa Moyer, Auburn University

Julie K. Nelson, Utah Valley University

Timothy Phoenix Oblad, Texas A&M University–Kingsville

COLLEAGUES MORE PRECIOUS THAN TREASURES

I first and foremost wish to thank Dr. Rick Scheidt, professor of Family Studies and Human Services, Kansas State University. Without his rock-solid friendship and presence in my life and his confidence in my ability to bounce back, I'm not certain where I would be in my rebuilding journey. Rick, thank you for helping me to confront the reality of my situation and for helping me to always see beyond "tomorrow." Friends such as you are truly one of this life's most precious treasures.

I'd also like to thank my colleague Dr. Vic Harris, associate professor in the Department of Family, Youth, and Community Sciences, University of Florida. You share my passion and commitment to families and their health and well-being, and I cannot wait to see where our teaming up takes us! It is a privilege to call you "friend." And Dr. Dan Hubler, associate professor in the Department of Child and Family Studies, Weber State University, although we have never met face to face, I so greatly appreciate your selfless sharing of ideas, guidance, and insight with this new edition. Your direction has been priceless. Thank you!

I am also very appreciative and grateful to my mentors at Kansas State University:

- Dr. Ginny Moxley, former dean of the College of Human Ecology
- Dr. Morey MacDonald, past chair, School of Family Studies & Human Services
- Dr. Pat Bosco, retired vice president for student life
- Nancy Forsyth, SVP Sales and Services Learning & Development, North American Higher Education at Pearson (you changed my life and the lives of my children . . . thank you!)
- Sharon Geary, who encouraged me very early on in my writing career to focus on the words, the meanings, the pedagogy, and the learning. Those words are framed and have a permanent place in my office.

Each of you walked me through some very, very difficult days. Without your support, guidance, flexibility, and frequent yes-you-can words of encouragement, I think a part of me would have died with my husband. But because of your belief in me, you refused to let that happen. *Thank you.* I love you.

THE FOLKS AT SAGE

I am so richly blessed to be able to work with this remarkable group of people! I don't know how to thank Joshua Perigo, acquisitions editor for Family Sciences. Josh, you shared my vision to create a powerful and relevant tool that not only educates students, but also gives them a realistic approach on ways to successfully navigate and tackle the "everythings" that come with intimate relationships. No matter the obstacle in this process, with your calm, steady, and unflappable demeanor, you kept this project (and me) on course. You are, and will always be, a friend. Thank you for not listening to my first round of "no's." Alissa Nance, associate content developmental editor, you shepherded this book from start to finish, and your expertise knows no bounds! You have a remarkable talent and ability to massage the text to ensure that I was conveying what I really wanted to say. Thank you for pushing back when needed and for stepping back and stepping up when needed. It was truly a pleasure to work with you, and I look forward to future projects. You. Are. Amazing. I am also grateful to Lauren Younker, editorial assistant, who worked so diligently in preparing the manuscript for production. Your attention to detail is second to none! Finally, I owe a world of gratitude to Jeff Lasser, publisher for sociology titles. Jeff, it was your belief in me nearly 20 years ago that set me on the path to developing and writing textbooks. I'll never understand what you saw in me, and as I sit here remembering that first conversation we had about your vision for a relationship book, I still shake my head in disbelief that your dream came to fruition and that I was a part of that dream—and that writing textbooks is a part of my life today. You are a true and cherished friend. Thank you for believing in me, then and now.

TO THOSE CLOSER TO HOME

First, I have to thank my students. *You* are the reason I do this every day. You breathe life and energy into me. You make me look forward to coming to campus every day. You laugh at my stupid jokes and encourage the frustrated comedian within me. You put up with my crazy schedule as I prepared this manuscript. You found a path around the piles of research papers on the floor around my desk. And always, always, you turn my day around when you smile and say, "Hey Dr. Dub, what's up?!" I hope you know how much I truly love you.

Finally, I could not have written this book without my family and friends. They alone know the countless sacrifices they made:

- My Guys and Gals: Eric and Gretchen, Shawn and Lindsey, Dan and Kateland, and Kyle and Laura. Educators. Mentors. Servants to those in despair. Missionaries. Entrepreneurs. Adventurers. One of the most awesome things about being a parent is learning things from your kids. Eric, you taught me that love endures all things. Shawn, you taught me that that gentleness and tenderness are compassionate lenses and this is the way to view others' limitations. Danny, you taught me that no matter what, *laughter and joy* will carry us through. Always! Kyle, you taught me that silence is strength. Guys and gals, only you know the pain and torment this family has endured. No matter what happened, though, we never stopped loving. And that is the greatest legacy your dad could have given you.
- My siblings and their spouses: Terri and Pete, Tim and Michele, and Dan and Roxanne. You loved me through my worst, and I love and cherish you all.
- BreAnn: I'm so proud of you. So. Very. Very. Proud. Of. You. (hearts and more hearts)

Again, I sincerely hope that you enjoy reading and teaching from this book. I've worked so diligently to try to incorporate everything on your wish lists, and I have given my best to ensure that issues facing us all today are included. At the end of the day, I hope that students are presented a realistic picture of intimate and family life today and that they hold in their hands a book that is relevant to their lives. My very best to you!

Kelly

/// ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kelly J. Welch, PhD, CFLE, has vast experience as a human development and family science professor, author, researcher, program developer, and practitioner. An award-winning teaching professor, Dr. Welch's primary areas of research, writing, and practice include lifespan development, the formation and maintenance of interpersonal relationships, family processes across the lifespan, family crisis and change, and human sexuality across the life course. She has developed programming for individuals and families who are navigating medical crises, as well as programming for sexual and reproductive health. After 20+ years at Kansas State University as an associate professor of teaching in Human Development and Family Science, feeling a social responsibility to help empower and improve the lives of others, Dr. Welch recently transitioned to teaching Early Childhood Education courses in impoverished, diverse, at-risk public schools in Kansas; these schools often experience high rates of violent incidents and experience high teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted infection rates. Through creative, innovative programming, Dr. Welch seeks to bring parenting education to those who often need it the most but have little or no access to it. She hopes to begin to break intergenerational poverty in pockets of Kansas by equipping high school students, high school drop outs, and adult learners with the education needed to obtain the Child Development Associate certification through hands-on experiences in early childhood education centers, giving learners a solid footing to earn sustainable wages. Dr. Welch spends her summers volunteering in HIV clinics in the Caribbean, working with HIV+ mothers and their infants.

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CHAPTER 1

FAMILY LIFE NOW

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1.1 Examine the characteristics of marriage in a global society and how generational views differ regarding the function of marriages and families.

1.2 Describe the landscape and trends of various family structures in the U.S. today.

1.3 Summarize the similarities and differences between contemporary families.

1.4 Explain the ways in which societies and cultures influence the experiences of marriage and family life.

1.5 Assess the ways in which family practitioners and other helping professionals work to assist families to develop their full potential.

It has been nearly 39 years since my wedding day, and I remember it as if it happened yesterday—the dusting of snow on the ground, friends I knew I would never lose touch with, the tears in my mother's eyes, my husband-to-be's locked gaze on mine. And my father's words have stayed with me, spoken just seconds before we took that first step toward my chosen life mate: "When you take your first step down the aisle, you must do so as if the word 'divorce' does not exist—you must enter this marriage knowing that divorce is a possibility, but something that should be your very last resort. Because after today, I can guarantee you that along with the happiness and joy you are feeling at this very moment, marriage will bring with it sorrow. There will be heartbreak. There will be tragedy. There will be financial difficulties. Before I walk you down the aisle, you must know in your heart that marriage—and everything that comes with it—is truly what you want." I didn't fully understand then that marriage is beautiful and terrible things.

Characterizing couple relationships, marriage, and family life is a tall order. My youngest son once asked me, "Mom, why do you need to teach a class about families? Doesn't everyone have one?" He had no idea how complicated and lengthy my response would be! Intimate relationships, marriage, and family are a complex web of interwoven influences: intimacy, gender and gender roles, sex, childbearing and parenting, family conflict, divorce and remarriage, family stress, family distress, family communication patterns, dual careers, work/family conflicts, finances, and a wide array of realistic and not-so-realistic expectations. In addition to this potentially endless list of influences, we all experience family life from a different perspective: Each of us is an expert in our own interpretations and experiences of "family" and other intimate relationships. Because of these experiences, we often take our first steps into a serious intimate relationship thinking we *know* everything that comes with a commitment to a life partner.

But realistically speaking, none of us is equipped to tackle the "everything" that comes with coupling, marriage, and other intimate relationships. Parents may argue; they may experience financial hardship or the loss of a pregnancy; parents or children may become ill; sex may be less than ideal; and in-laws may be a point of contention. Couples may disagree about who should get the children off to school or daycare, or they may have difficulty getting used to each other's sometimes-annoying habits. In the course of a relationship, we may experience infidelity or family or partner violence. Events outside of our control, such as being deployed to a military zone overseas or falling victim to a national economic crisis, may forever shake our sense of reality. We change. Our partners change. Families change. We grow. Maybe together, maybe apart. And the "everything" we have in our relationships is different from what we expected.

WHAT IS MARRIAGE?

Our intimate relationships, marriages, families, and individual lives within the context of family are integral facets of who we are. Most of us don't need a course in family life to enable

us to be active family members. Some students taking this course do so because they hope to pursue careers in family services or policy, family therapy, ministry, or family education. Other students take this course because they want to deepen their understanding of the workings of family so that they may someday enjoy fulfilling, gratifying, and rewarding relationships of their own. Is it really possible to prepare for relationship life and family life? Is it possible, for example, to "divorce-proof" a marriage, or to understand how and why people communicate the way they do? If it seems our parents' relationship is in a crisis, or if a sibling is causing parents undue stress, does our understanding of the science of family life make a difference?

Your instructor and I are privileged to help you gain an understanding of how you affect and are affected by the intimate relationships in your life and to help you better understand the dynamics of your family life. By pointing you toward a path along which you make your own discoveries, we are helping you to gain insight into the intricacies of family life and intimate life. We begin our intriguing study of contemporary family life and intimate relationships by first gaining an understanding of the different facets of marriage. This discussion is followed by an examination of the composition of today's families.

Marriage in a Global Society

Marriage includes religious, legal, and social aspects, and people worldwide experience marriage and family differently. To some, marriage is only a piece of paper that has no significance or importance to the relationship. To others, marriage is believed to be a social union, wherein the partners declare a commitment to one another. And to others, marriage is a religious, holy, consecrated act.

Understanding Marriage as a Social or Civil Union

A **social union**—often referred to as a **civil union**—is a legal term that speaks to the commitment, or the marriage contract, made by the partners. In the United States, marriage is a union that is legally allowed between heterosexual couples or homosexual couples. In 2004, one state had legalized same-sex marriage, but in June 2015, the United States Supreme Court struck down all state bans on same-sex marriage, legalizing it in all 50 states. The decision also required that all states honor out-of-state same-sex marriage licenses. This social/civil union carries with it binding, legal obligations. Although the term *civil union* was once more commonly associated with same-sex partners who desired to socially declare their commitment to one another, the term is still used worldwide to acknowledge the legal status of marriages.

Social union: a legal relationship between two people that provides legal protections to the couple at the state level.

Students often ask me why couples need a piece of paper (a marriage license) in order for their state to recognize their union. According to the U.S. Supreme Court (1888), American marriage is defined as a *legally* recognized social union—a *legal* and binding civil contract that is thought to be permanent—between adults who meet the specified *legal* age requirements, and who are otherwise not *legally* married to another individual. And a marriage is not considered *legal* unless the couple obtains a government-issued marriage license. Thus, couples need a marriage license because, within the United States, marriage is a *legal* commitment, not a private bond between people.

Marriage is also a legal contract between the couple and the state in which the couple resides. The instant the couple says "I do," and the wedding officiate pronounces them to be wed, their relationship acquires legal status. As the Supreme Court observed in 1888, "The relation once formed, the law steps in and holds the parties to various obligations and liabilities."

Many of you may someday choose a marriage partner based on love and intimacy, your shared values and principles, and a desire for a similar lifestyle. Or, perhaps after completion of your studies, you will return to your home country where your life mate will be (or has already been) chosen for you. As you begin your study of couples, marriage, and family

White House Photo/Alamy Stock Photo

Marriage is a social or civil union, and it is a legal contract between spouses. In 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage in all 50 states. This ruling qualifies all married persons to receive the benefits of marriage, such as social security, tax, and veteran/military benefits.

life, it is important to keep in mind that marriages across cultures do not necessarily follow the Western process of selecting a life mate. In parts of the world today, for instance, child brides and forced marriages are commonplace social unions (Saad, 2002).

Child marriage is not specific to any one religion, culture, or ethnicity, and it occurs in regions across the globe. South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa have the highest rates of child marriage. In India, 15.5 million women aged 20 to 24 are married before the age of 18, making it the country with the highest number of child marriages (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, 2016). Niger has the highest rate of child marriage, with 76% of girls married before their 18th birthday (Institut National de la Statistique, 2013). These marriages occur for a variety of reasons, including poverty, gender norms, and lack of education (Girls Not Brides, 2020). Girls may be married off to relative strangers or even to family members. For example, in Bedouin communities in Egypt, some girls are forced to marry their paternal cousins. The Amhara people of Ethiopia negotiate marriages between two families, with a civil ceremony following to seal the contract. In Somalia, a man becomes engaged to the woman before she is even born. He makes the marriage arrangements with the expectant parents, to whom gifts are given to seal the marital rights. And in the United States, people often chose their future mates based on love or other interpersonal attraction reasons, without necessarily seeking their parents' approval.

Understanding the Social and Economic Aspects of Marriage. Marriage is an important social institution, or structure, and serves society on several levels. The structure of the 17th-century American family in Colonial Williamsburg protected the aristocratic family's wealth and political power; at the same time, the common family structure provided efficient production units for lower-class families, such as planters (farmers) and shopkeepers. It was within the family that children were educated and received religious instruction. It was also within the family that the elderly and disabled were cared for. Thus, the family was *the* basic political, religious, social, and economic unit of colonial living. Even today in contemporary America, the family is foundational to many levels of society. David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, co-founders of the National Marriage Project, maintain that the marital union is the "social glue," the "fundamental

social institution that contributes to the physical, emotional, and economic health of men, women, and children—and thus to the nation as a whole" (2002, p. 4).

In addition to forming a social union, many couples form an economic partnership by sharing economic resources such as bank and investment accounts, property, and cars. Each time a marriage takes place—whether heterosexual or same-sex—the new social unit takes on certain financial responsibilities that are necessary for the society's survival, such as rearing and socializing children either born or brought into the relationship (such as by foster parenting or adoption). We explore the economics of marriage at length in Chapter 12.

Marriage as a Religious Act. In the Christian, Islamic, Hindu dharma, and Jewish religions, marriage is considered to be divinely ordained, a sacred, religious act not to be entered into lightly. In these religions, marriage is viewed as a lifelong commitment between a woman and a man. Within these religious communities, the sacrament or act of marriage is believed to be the strongest of all social bonds around which the rest of society is organized. This bond, in turn, "initiates the new generations into the culture and traditions and facilitates further evolution of their civilization. It is the link that joins the past with the present and with the future in such a way that social transition and change can take place through a healthy and stable process" (Saad, 2002, p. 13). In Chapter 8, we'll examine the aspects of marriage as a religious commitment and sacred act.

Across the world, marriage is experienced as a civil union, a sacred act, a legal partnership or a social and/or economic union. There are also variations in marital types, such as monogamy and polygamy.

Marital Types. Marriages across the world are typically classified as either monogamous or polygamous. **Monogamy**, the legal structure of marriage recognized in the United States and in other Western civilizations, is a dyadic (two-person) form of marriage that involves the practice of having only one sexual partner. The sex partner reciprocates this exclusivity to his or her marital partner. The word *monogamy* refers solely to sexual exclusivity to one partner, but in the context of marriage there is also an expectation of exclusivity of emotional fidelity and love. **Monogamism** is the belief that monogamy is the only true morally and socially appropriate type of marriage or love relationship.

Monogamy:
a dyadic (two-person) form of marriage that involves the practice of having only one sexual partner.

Monogamism:
the belief that monogamy is the only true morally and socially appropriate type of marriage or love relationship.

In some non-Western cultures, exclusivity is not a right of marriage. Today, **polygamy**, the practice of having more than one marriage partner, is the more widely practiced form of marriage across the world, particularly in those regions where the Islamic faith dominates the culture, such as in sub-Saharan Africa. Generally, polygamy is a form of plural marriage wherein either multiple wives or multiple husbands exist. The practice is usually passed down from generation to generation, and has existed throughout the recordings of history. In the biblical Old Testament, for instance, Abraham, David, and Solomon (who had 700 wives and 300 concubines, or mistresses) practiced polygamy. Likewise, in the 1500s, Martin Luther tolerated polygamy in instances where he believed the practice would "ensure the success of the Reformation" (Stack, 1998, p. 2).

Polygamy:
the practice of having more than one marriage partner.

Polygyny is one form of polygamy or plural marriage, and involves the practice of a man having multiple wives at the same time. In the Islamic faith, polygyny is permitted by the Quran (Koran), and its practice is commonplace, with certain limitations. The popular television series *Sister Wives* depicts the daily lives of four women who are "married" to the same man. This family belongs to a nonconformist sect of Mormons. In a polygynous marriage, a woman is simultaneously the sister and co-wife of another. Along with small pockets of nonconformist Mormons who practice polygyny in the United States, many Native American tribes allow the practice of polygyny. In his essay on the practical aspects of polygamy, polygamist Samuel Chapman denotes the benefits of plural marriages for women, citing, among other things, the availability of built-in childcare, the lack of pressure that husbands may feel to commit adultery, and the availability of a female friend for life.

Polygyny:
the practice of a man having multiple wives at the same time.

Gladeiu/Getty Images

Although the practice of having more than one marriage partner was banned by the Mormon church in the late 1880s, today some nonconformist segments of the church still practice polygamy.

Why would a woman choose to live in a relationship with multiple wives? Why would a woman choose to emotionally, physically, and sexually share her husband with other women? Mary Ben David (2005) notes that many benefits of her polygamous marriage, particularly in the areas of shared housekeeping, cooking, and childcare. She furthers notes that with several women in her home, her identity "cannot be wrapped up in her husband's identity."

Polyandry: the practice of a woman having multiple husbands at the same time.

Polyandry is another form of polygamy in which women have multiple husbands at the same time. Researchers have identified 53 societies that permit polyandrous unions, and they note that although polyandry is rare, it is common in egalitarian (classless) societies (Starkweather & Hames, 2012). These husbands are typically brothers. In polyandrous relationships, the woman mates with more than one male. This is a rare sexual mating system, even in the animal kingdom. Polyandry is a common practice among families in Tibet, where it is considered a wealth-conserving kinship mechanism (Goldstein, 1987/2002). According to anthropologist Melvin Goldstein, polyandry is practiced as a means of preventing or prohibiting the family's estate from being divided too many ways and thereby diminishing the family's overall wealth. When brothers share a wife, it is seen as the means by which the family's quality of life is sustained and the way to maximize economic advantage, generation to generation.

Cenogamy: a form of marriage often referred to as "group marriage," in which every man and woman is married to each other at the same time.

Cenogamy is a form of marriage often referred to as "group marriage." In this type of marital community, every man and every woman is married to each other at the same time. This form of marriage allows casual, indiscriminate sexual activity among all its members. Today, the practice of cenogamy is most often found in communal living—when a group of people live together and share property and resources—such as in tribal cultures. This form of marriage is not legal in the United States.

Now that you have a good understanding of the historical and legal definitions of marriage and family, let's take a look at how people view couple relationships and marriage today.

Understanding Couple Relationships: Shifting Views

Our attitudes and beliefs about coupling, marriage, parenting, and family life are largely shaped by the society in which we live. Several distinct generations comprise the demographic fabric

of the United States. Not surprisingly, each generation's attitudes, behaviors, and lifestyles form the underpinnings of their approaches to intimate and family relationships.

The Silent Generation. Born between 1928 and 1945, the silent generation is often referred to as "traditionalists." Many fought in the Korean and Vietnam wars in an era of conformity. Although this generation ushered in the Civil Rights movement in 1964 and brought to light issues of racism and other issues of inequality, by and large they conformed to the traditional views of marriage, family, and divorce. Commonly, divorce wasn't viewed as a realistic option (Goldberg Jones, 2018).

Baby Boomers. Boomers were born between 1946 and 1965. This rebellious drug, sex, and rock and roll generation welcomed resistance to the established values and norms in U.S. culture. Pushing the traditional boundaries of the silent generation, this "Me generation" caused great cultural change by putting individual needs ahead of marriage and family needs. Baby Boomers emphasized climbing the career ladder over the importance of family. Living together before marriage increased. Because couples devoted more time to career success than to marriage and family, divorce increased. Women poured into the workforce, creating an increase in dual-income households. Birth control options freed women to dictate their fertility and childbearing. Still today, Baby Boomers divorce more than any other age group (Goldberg Jones, 2018).

Generation X. Generation X, or Gen Exers, were born between 1965 and 1980. Because Boomers experienced such high divorce rates, Gen X was the first generation to have divorced parents as a common experience. They were also the first generation to commonly experience stepfamily living. Interestingly, Gen Exers reacted to their parents' divorces by staying married for much longer and at much higher rates than their parents (Goldberg Jones, 2018).

Millennials. Born between 1981 and 1996, Millennials are blamed for just about all of society's problems—from killing shopping malls and bars of soap to dinner dates and straws. But unlike the generations before them, Millennials not only put off marriage longer, they're opting to start families before marriage or forgo marriage all together. Their views on established gender roles are also impacting society's traditional views on the meaning of "male" and "female" (Goldberg Jones, 2018).

Generation Z. Generation Z, or the "iGeneration," are those born after 1997. It's still too early to know how Generation Z will shape our society's views on couple relationships, marriage, and family. But one thing is for certain: Given the sway of technology on how people communicate and relate to one another, it will be interesting to see how the "*i* everything" impacts intimate and marital relationships and parenting practices. Just as the television changed Boomers' connections to their world, so, too, will technology change lifestyles and relationships (Dimock, 2019).

Just as there are differences in how we can experience marriage, there are also differences in how each of us defines and experiences family.

WHAT IS FAMILY?

What is "family?" How do you define it? In all likelihood, your definition may be entirely different from the federal government's definition, or from mine. The reason for these differences is that my definition and your definition of family are based on our *unique experiences within our own families.* Throughout this book, I will be sharing some of my family life experiences with you as I ask you to explore aspects of your family life that have helped shape who you are. Your professor or instructor may also share stories of family life, as may your classmates. As you exchange stories, you might find that you share similar family experiences. Most likely, you will have some experiences that are vastly different from any you have heard or read about.

Family:
two or more people related by birth, marriage, or adoption residing in the same housing unit.

Household:
all people who occupy a housing unit, regardless of relationship.

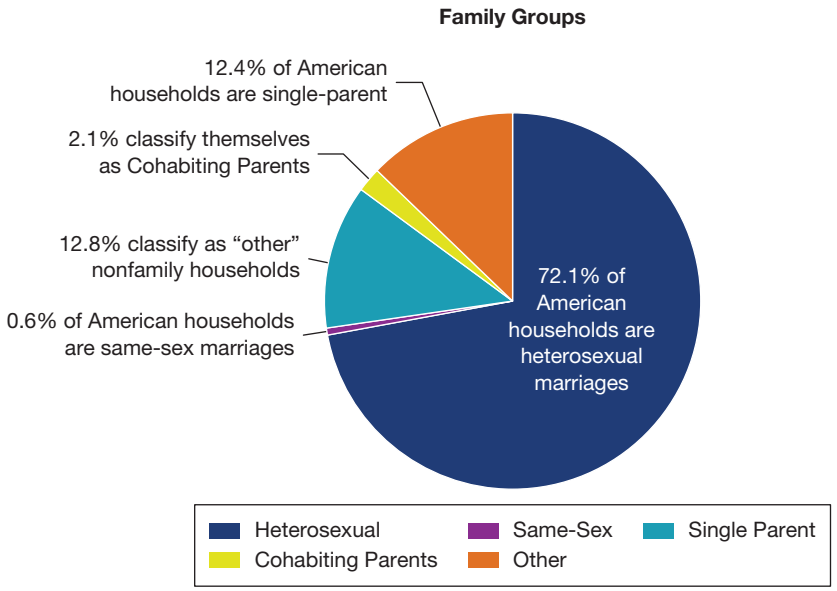
According to the United States Census Bureau (2019e), a **family** "is a group of two people or more (one of whom is the householder) related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together; all such people (including related subfamily members) are considered as members of one family." On the other hand, a **household** "consists of all the people who occupy a housing unit. A household includes the related family members and all the unrelated people, if any, such as lodgers, foster children, wards, or employees who share the housing unit. A person living alone in a housing unit, or a group of unrelated people sharing a housing unit such as partners or roomers, is also counted as a household." Thus, according to the federal government, a married couple and their children are considered to be a family, whereas intimate couples who live together who are not married make up a household. In nearly all societies the world over, the family is the social unit that is responsible for nurturing, protecting, educating, and socializing children (Barbour, Barbour, & Scully, 2005). Figure 1.1 illustrates for us the types of households in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019b). As you can see, nearly three-fourths (72 percent) of all households today are married-couple families, but there is great diversity in family forms (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019b). It's interesting to observe that nearly 13 percent of families today classify themselves as "other nonfamily households." A **nonfamily household** consists of a householder living alone, such as a widow, or a householder sharing the home with people to whom she/he is not related, such as a widow sharing her home with two friends. Not only has the distribution of households shifted over time, so too has the size of U.S. households. For example, in 1970 the average household size was 3.14, whereas today it is 2.53.

Nonfamily household:
a householder living alone, such as a widow, or a householder sharing the home with people to whom she/he is not related, such as a widow sharing her home with two friends.

The question arises, then, whether it is possible to arrive at a one-size-fits-all definition of "family," as the U.S. Census Bureau describes. Probably not, for there exist as many definitions or descriptions of "family" as there are students who are reading this textbook, and more. The concept of family is, indeed, a subjective notion.

Figure 1.1 /// Types of Households in the United States

Today, there is no such thing as a "traditional" family form in the United States. There is great diversity in the configurations of households.



Source: United States Census Bureau (2019b), Table F3.

Each of us begins our relational journey in our family of origin or family of orientation. Our **family of origin** is the family into which we are born or brought by adoption. It is the family in which we are raised and socialized to adhere to the customs and norms of the culture in which we live. And, just as important, it is within the family of origin we learn how to love and to be intimate with others. The **family of procreation** is the family unit that is formed when we marry and produce children. As we explore the nature of today's families, we use statistics to help us identify current patterns and trends. Although it is sometimes tempting to skip over statistics when reading, numbers are necessary because they present overall trends and provide us with an instant snapshot—and understanding—of U.S. families.

Family of origin:
the family into which we are born or brought by adoption.

Family of procreation:
the family unit that is formed when we marry and produce children.

Nuclear and Extended Families

Today, it is essential that students of intimate couple and family life know the differing arrangements of families because this understanding allows human service providers and other family professionals to more effectively support, value, and work with diverse families (Banks & McGee Banks, 2002).

In essence, **diversity** refers to the broad spectrum of demographic and philosophical differences among groups of people within a culture. When we talk about being **diverse**, or about diversity in the United States, we are referring to people's differences in age, gender, race, ethnicity, cultures, sexual orientation, sexual identity, and religion. When we talk about being diverse when studying families, we are referring to the varying ways in which people experience coupling and family life. When we study people from a diversity perspective, we not only broaden our knowledge base about the variances in marriage and family, but we value individuals and groups, free from bias and preconceptions. This, then, fosters a climate of equity and mutual respect. In the sections that follow, we'll first take a look at nuclear and extended family forms. We'll then examine the expanding family landscape in our culture today.

Diversity:
the broad spectrum of demographic and philosophical differences among groups within a culture.

Diverse:
people's differences in age, gender, race, ethnicity, cultures, sexual orientation, and religion.

Nuclear Family

The **nuclear family** consists of a father, a mother, and their biological or adopted children. In the truest sense of the definition, nuclear families consist of first-time married parents, their biological or adopted children, and no other family members living in the home. In 2019, the "typical" nuclear family form was found in about 65 percent of family households (Pew Research Organization, 2018b). Figure 1.2 illustrates the family configurations in which children in the United States live today. Notice that although the majority of children live in nuclear families, other family forms show the complexity of contemporary family living. For example, among parents living with a child, a growing share of unmarried parents are cohabiting: In 2017, 35 percent of unmarried parents were cohabiting, in comparison to 13 percent in 1968 (Pew Research Organization, 2018b). We'll discuss cohabiting parents at length later in this chapter.

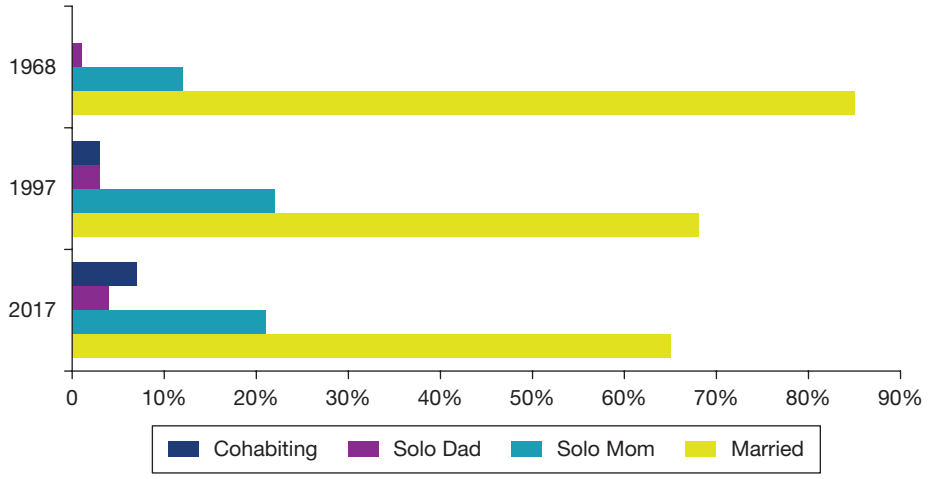
Nuclear family:
a father, a mother, and their biological or adopted children.

Often, the nuclear family is referred to as the *traditional* family. This term carries with it a conventional depiction of the family form and the accompanying family values and traditions. *Family values* is a term that is commonly used today by politicians and TV news reports, although it may mean different things to different people. Most often, **family values** refers to a society's paradigm or viewpoint that expects its members to adhere to perceived proper social roles, such as marrying and having children, remaining monogamous and faithful to the marriage partner, and opposing same-sex relationships, marriages, and parenting by gay or lesbian partners. The family values viewpoint also frowns on births to women outside of marriage. It evokes a certain set of ascribed gender roles; for example, the women fulfill homemaker and mothering responsibilities (the bread maker role), and the men fulfill the role of primary wage earner (the breadwinner role). This particular family form is also considered a patriarchy, wherein the male is dominant and is in charge of most decision making in the family.

Family values:
usually refers to a society's paradigm or viewpoint that expects its members to adhere to perceived proper social roles, such as marrying and having children, remaining monogamous and faithful to the marriage partner, and opposing same-sex relationships, marriages, and parenting by gay or lesbian partners.

Historian and author Peter McWilliams (1998) offers insight into the roots of the traditional family. He notes that the modern concept of two adults rearing their children under

Figure 1.2 /// Parents' Living Arrangements Over Time



Source: Pew Research Center (2018).

a single roof grew out of necessity during the Middle Ages, when the minimum number of people required to own and maintain a plot of land was two. In order to multiply their wealth, they needed others to work the land; children were free labor. Thus, in order to have the free labor provided by children, it was economically necessary that one of the adults was a man and the other was a woman—and they were thus paired until death. According to McWilliams, love had nothing to do with the pairing. "Even if a husband and a wife hated each other, all they had to do was wait a little while—with disease, war, childbirth, and an average lifespan of about 25, most marriages lasted less than five years. The departed partner was immediately replaced, and the system continued." Men and older children worked the land and the women tended to the livestock, the crops near the home, and the younger children. Because the system worked so well, the church eventually got involved and, over time, the one-man/one-woman for life theology emerged.

Gerlad Smith/NBCU Photo Bank/NBCUniversal via Getty Images

Which child abuses substances? Which child has behavioral problems in school? Which child copes with mental health issues? Is this a nuclear family or a stepfamily? In the 1950s, we would never know because these real-life problems were never addressed. The television and media portrayed an idealized image of the American family: The breadwinning dad, the bread maker mom, and the practically perfect children who all live in their always-perfectly-kept home.

If we were to identify a specific period in American history that the traditional family form was in vogue, we would look at the period of the 1950s in the United States (McWilliams, 1998). The high postwar marriage and birth rates, coupled with a prosperous economy in which a single wage earner could support a family, led to a national perception of the period as a "golden era" for families (McWilliams, 1998).

Through the television and the media, families tuned in to watch the idealized image of the American family: the wise, reassuring father who came home from a hard day at the office; the apron-clad homemaker mother (wearing pearls and heels and lipstick) who offered comfort and support to her hardworking husband and perfect children; the

clutter-free, immaculate home; and the homogenous neighborhood. Notes McWilliams (1998), the family life portrayed in the 1950s media was wholesome: There were no single parents (unless the father was a widower, such as with the fathers in *My Three Sons*, *The Andy Griffith Show,* and *Bonanza*), no infidelities, no divorce, no abuse, no teen runaways, no financial problems, no stress, and no prior marriages or children from prior marriages. There was no discussion about religion. Politics. The economy. No one lost his job. There was no violence in the home or school or neighborhood. There was no drug usage. No racism. No homosexuality. And no babies born out of wedlock.

Despite TV Land's depiction of the American family during this era, like *Leave It to Beaver,* it is questionable whether this idealized image of family really ever existed. Author and professor of comparative family history Stephanie Coontz notes the discrepancies between the idealized 1950s "good old days" family form portrayed in the media and the reality of family living during the 1950s (Coontz, 1992, 1999):

- About one-quarter of the population lived below the poverty line.
- The number of pregnant brides more than doubled from the 1940s.
- From 1944 to 1955, the number of babies born outside of marriage and relinquished for adoption rose 80 percent.
- Juvenile delinquency was so prevalent that in 1955 Congress considered nearly 200 bills to address the social problem.

As Coontz notes, the 1950s were a dismal time for women, minorities, gays and lesbians, and any other social group that did not "fit in" with the images typified on the television screen.

The traditional nuclear family is no longer predominant in the United States. In the 21st century, 1950s television shows like *I Love Lucy* have been replaced by shows such as *Family Guy, Modern Family, Black-ish,* and *A Million Little Things*, which better reflect the diversity found in today's families.

Extended Family

The **extended family** is typically defined as a family unit in which two or more generations of close family relatives live together in one household. There are three common extended family configurations:

Extended family: a family unit in which two or more generations of close family relatives live together in one household.

1. A mother and father with children (may be married or not), with one or more grandparents
2. A mother and father with children (may be married or not), with at least one unmarried sibling of the parents or another relative, such as a cousin
3. A divorced, separated, or never-married single parent with children, in addition to a grandparent, sibling, or other relative (Barbour et al., 2005)

This type of extended or multigenerational family structure was the basic element of slave life in the 19th century and remains today an integral part of the lives of many families, particularly families of color. For example, families with African roots often experience close-knit, multigenerational family groups—in addition to parents and children, family members may be grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Today, about 57 percent of African American/Black Caribbean children have lived in an extended family home, compared to 20 percent of white children (Banerjee, 2019). Similarly, about 35 percent of Hispanic children have lived in an extended family home. Overall, 17 percent of all children in the United States live in an extended family household (Banerjee, 2019). No data exist to determine how many extended family members live nearby (not necessarily with) other family members, but we know that multigenerational family members can provide much emotional and economic support, along with the richness of family legacy and heritage.

Is the American Family Deteriorating?

So prominent are the changes in the structures and experiences of the American family over the past 40 years that great debate erupted during many political campaigns in the 2018 election cycle about the "family values" of America. Is the American family deteriorating?

YES: Founder of the National Marriage Project, author David Popenoe asserts that the American family is in a state of deterioration. "It is well known that there has been a weakening of marriage and the nuclear family in advanced, industrialized societies, especially since the 1960s" (Popenoe & Whitehead, 2005). According to Dr. John DeFrain, professor of family studies for more than four decades, most families today in the U.S. are "doing well and are satisfied with their lives" (DeFrain, 2018). DeFrain does, however, point out that when looking at American families top down—from the *macro level*—there are difficulties families are facing; these difficulties, in turn, affect the form and functions of today's families:

- Increased number of couples opting to cohabit before marriage or instead of marriage
- Increased number of out-of-wedlock births
- Increased number of women in the workforce
- Increased number of children living in non-nuclear families
- Increased numbers of those living in poverty
- Increase in domestic and intimate partner violence
- Increase in alcohol-related problems
- Increase in substance use
- Decrease in marital satisfaction and happiness

Other research indicates that the changes in family structure significantly impact children's health and well-being (Anderson, 2014; Hadfield & Ungar, 2018). These findings align with what other family scientists were finding in 1996: That all of the trends seen in family structure—"the breakdown of family and the erosion of family values"—affect children significantly (National Issues Forum, 1996). These impacts are seen in the increased incidence of teen violence, teen pregnancy, and teen substance abuse (Hadfield & Ungar, 2018).

NO: Other scholars believe that the family is in a continuous state of change, as it always has been, in order to adapt to societal influences. For example, the first settlers in America experienced extended family forms in order to adjust to their harsh environmental conditions; as life improved, family structures reflected this change. A scientist for the Institute for Social and Behavioral Research, Rand Conger (Conger & Conger, 2002) studied today's emerging family systems and made these conclusions:

- The *quality* of parenting—not the experience of nuclear adult relationships—teaches children and adolescents how to behave in marital relationships.
- The *quality* of the parents' relationship did not directly influence how young adults experience their own adult relationships.
- The *quality* of parenting (nurturing and affectionate versus harsh and angry) influences whether children/adolescents use drugs, become teen parents, or engage in teen violence—not whether the child is reared in a single-parent home or stepfamily.

And some contend that the American family is not deteriorating but is adapting to the social changes brought by diversity of races, ethnicities, genders, and sexual orientations. Dr. John DeFrain (2018) echoes these findings. He asserts that if we examine families face-to-face—the *micro level*—we will see that families around the world are incredibly diverse and that *function* (not structure) is the most important aspect of family health and well-being. He rightly states, "Strong families tend to produce great kids" (p. 78).

What Do You Think?

1. Are the trends we see in today's families a result of change or deterioration?
2. Where do you see the American family in the year 2030? 2050?

Sources: National Issues Forum (1996); Popenoe and Whitehead (2005); Conger and Conger (2002).

THE EXPANDING FAMILY LANDSCAPE

In the United States today, there is no such thing as a "traditional" or "typical" family configuration. In order to better serve today's families and to help them reach their full potentials, we need to understand the changing compositions of contemporary families, as well as the racial and ethnic compositions of families.

Single-Parent Families

Today, one in four U.S. parents is unmarried (Cilluffo & Cohn, 2019). **Single-parent family** types can be the result of the choice of the parent or of circumstance; they can result from divorce, the death of a spouse, or unmarried parenthood. Trends indicate that single-parent households are on the increase in the American family: In the past 10 years, the number of children who live with two married parents has decreased from 68 to 65 percent (Institute of Family Studies, 2019). Table 1.1 illustrates children's living arrangements from 1970 to 2018. Although the percentage of children living with no parents has remained relatively stable over the past nearly 50 years, the percentage of children living with unmarried parents has increased, while those living with two parents has decreased. Understanding these trends in single-parenting experiences is important because as our study will show us in just a bit, single parents often live in poverty—which, in turn, affects their children's development.

Single-parent family: families with only one parent, as a result of the choice of the parent or of circumstance such as divorce, the death of a spouse, or unmarried parenthood.

Childless/Childfree Families

Couples may consider themselves **childless** if they are unable to conceive or bear children of their own or adopt children. Some couples today prefer to remain **childfree** as a conscious choice. And although they're waiting longer to have children, older women are more likely to have children today than a decade ago. Today, 86 percent of women aged 40 to 44 are mothers, in comparison to 80 percent in 2006 (Pew Research Center, 2018c). The U.S. Census Bureau measures the presence of children primarily by examining the **general fertility rate** (the ratio of the number of live births per 1,000 women of childbearing age). In 2018, there were 59 births for every 1,000 women aged 15 to 44; this is a decrease from 70 births for every 1,000 women aged 15 to 44 in 2010 (Pew Research Center, 2018c). The typical American family today has an average of 1.9 children under 18; this is a decrease from the average number of 2.44 children per family in 1970 (Pew Research Center, 2019).

Childless: couples may consider themselves childless if they are unable to conceive or bear children of their own or adopt children.

Childfree: people who deliberately choose not to have children.

General fertility rate: the ratio of the number of live births per 1,000 women of childbearing age.

It is important to note, however, that this is not the first generation of people who are deciding not to have children. Notes Philip Morgan, professor of sociology at Duke University, "Childlessness is not new, [but] in the past it was more closely connected with non-marriage than now. During the Depression, many Americans also chose not to have children because

Table 1.1 /// Children's Living Arrangements by Presence of Parents in the Home, 1970–2018

Percentage of children who live with. . . .	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2018
2 Parents	85.2	76.7	72.5	69.1	69.4	68.9
Single Parents	11.9	19.7	24.7	26.7	26.6	27.0
No Parents	2.9	3.7	2.8	4.2	4.1	4.1

Source: Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement (CPS-ASEC) 1970-2010 and CPS March, 2018. Retrieved April 10, 2019, from www.ifstudies.org.

they could not afford them. Childlessness levels no are not higher than those in the 1930s" (Taylor, 2005). Morgan adds that there are many factors involved in couples' decision to remain childfree today. We discuss the childless/childfree contemporary trends in depth in Chapter 10.

Stepfamilies

Stepfamily: a family formed when, after death or divorce, a parent marries again. A stepfamily is also formed when a never-married person marries someone who has children.

A **stepfamily** (or reconstituted family) is formed when, after death or divorce, a parent marries again. A stepfamily is also formed when a never-married parent marries and children from different biological families end up living with the new married couple for part of the time. In short, the presence of a stepparent, stepsibling, or half sibling designates a family as a stepfamily (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019b).

The U.S. Census Bureau no longer provides data related to marriage, divorce, and remarriage, so it is difficult to obtain accurate statistics about stepfamilies. But census experts today estimate that one in three Americans—about 33 percent—is now either a stepparent, a stepchild, a stepsibling, or some other member of a stepfamily (Gaille, 2017). Although the popular 1970s television show *The Brady Bunch* portrayed stepfamily living as an emotionally cohesive, trouble-free, happily adjusted family, this idealized concept of the stepfamily form is simply not the norm. (Because of the complexities of stepfamily living, an entire segment is devoted to this family form in Chapter 14).

Cohabiting Families

Cohabiting: unmarried partners who live together in a single household.

Unmarried partners who live together in a single household are referred to as **cohabiting** couples. Although once considered a scandalous, uncommon alternative lifestyle, cohabiting before marriage (or instead of marriage) is now the prevailing living arrangement of intimate partners—the next step following serious dating. The U.S. Census Bureau today estimates that 35 percent of couples in the United States are cohabiting (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019b). In 2018, cohabitation was a more common living arrangement of children than living with a single parent. For example, while 3.5 percent of children lived with an unmarried parent, 4.2 percent lived with a parent and the parent's unmarried partner (Institute of Family Studies, 2019). This is a significant increase from 2007, when the percentage of children living with unmarried single parents and cohabiting parents was nearly identical (2.6 percent and 2.9 percent, respectively). Today, an estimated 5.8 million American children live with cohabiting parents (Institute of Family Studies, 2019). In 2018, there were 8.5 million unmarried opposite-sex couples living together (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019b). Many of these couples have no plans for eventual marriage. Indeed, 51 percent of women's first marriages are preceded by cohabitation (Institute of Family Studies, 2019). The rates of cohabiting parents vary by race; these data are presented in Figure 1.3. We discuss the multifaceted aspects of cohabitation in Chapter 7.

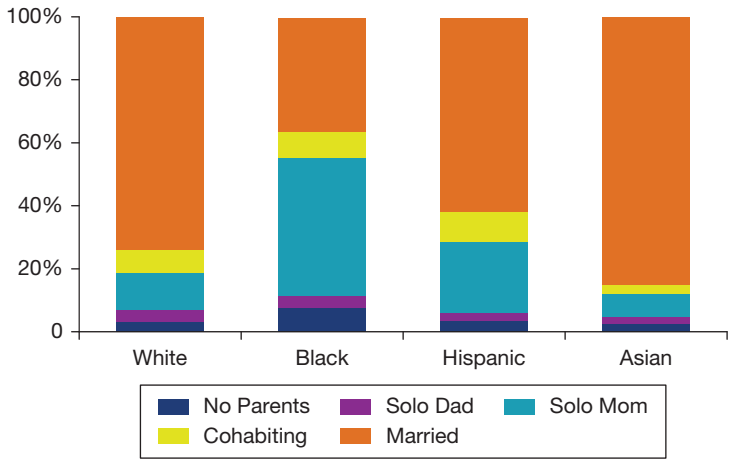
Gay and Lesbian Families

Lesbian and gay families consist of same-sex partners who live together in the same household; they may include either natural-born or adopted children. In the United States today, there are 935,000 same-sex households, up from 780,000 same-sex households in 2011 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019d). Census Bureau statisticians point out, however, that this increase reflects the fact that same-sex families were previously uncounted, undercounted, or underreported, and not that the numbers of gay or lesbian families have increased significantly (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019d). Same-sex family forms may or may not resemble traditional marriage roles, but they often do. Legally married today, they share property, expect sexual fidelity, and share joint responsibility in child rearing.

Chosen family: a type of informal family structure that is common among LGBTQ+ communities and is based on nonbiological kinship bonds.

In the LGBTQ+ community, **chosen family**—nonbiological kinship bonds—replaces blood family and becomes the bedrock of trust, support, and love; sometimes, LGBTQ+ individuals live with their chosen family (Carlson & Dermer, 2017; Hull, 2018). Kathleen Hull (2018), professor of sociology and gender, women, and sexuality studies, notes that many LGBTQ+

Figure 1.3 /// Children's Living Arrangements by Race/Ethnicity



Source: Institute of Family Studies (2019). Cohabitation is pervasive. Retrieved May 10, 2019, from www.ifstudies.org/blog/cohabitation-is-pervasive.

individuals do not receive support and acceptance from their blood relatives, and because of this they have formed nonbiological families with people who do love and support them. Another social scientist observes, "Until the world is a more inclusive place, [chosen family] will continue to exist within the LGBT community" (Mitchell, 2008).

Immigrant Families With Children

Immigrants are people who reside permanently in the United States but were not U.S. citizens at birth. Immigrant families with children are families in which at least one parent was born outside of the United States. From 1994 to 2017, the population of immigrant children

Immigrants: foreign-born people who have been granted the right to permanently live and work in the United States.

ZUMA Press Inc/Alamy Stock Photo

Today, there are nearly 1 million same-sex households in the United States, and nearly 200,000 children live with their same-sex parents.

in the U.S. grew by 51 percent, to 19.6 million. This number represents one-fourth of all U.S. children (Child Trends, 2018a). First-generation immigrant children are those who were born outside of the United States; second-generation immigrant children are those who were born in the U.S. to immigrant parents. The growth we've seen in numbers of immigrant children are due to second-generation immigrants. In 2017, more than one-half (54 percent) of all immigrant children were of Hispanic origin (Child Trends, 2018a). Non-Hispanic Asian children comprised 17 percent of immigrant children. About 25 percent of first- and second-generation immigrant children live below the federal poverty level (Child Trends, 2018a). In Chapter 10 we'll take an in-depth look at this growing family form.

Our study so far has shown us that in the 21st century, it is hard to encapsulate or sum up the "typical" American family—it simply doesn't exist today in our complex, multifaceted, ever-changing, global society. To get the full grasp of intimate, marriage, and family relationships, we now need to examine the racial and ethnic characteristics of contemporary families.

CONTEMPORARY FAMILIES

Is the American family in a state of decline, or is it in a state of change? As we have seen so far, the "traditional" family form is no longer the norm in American culture, and today's intimate relationships and families are experiencing a number of changes. The family structures, values, and attitudes we observe today are a result of changes that have evolved over the past five or six decades.

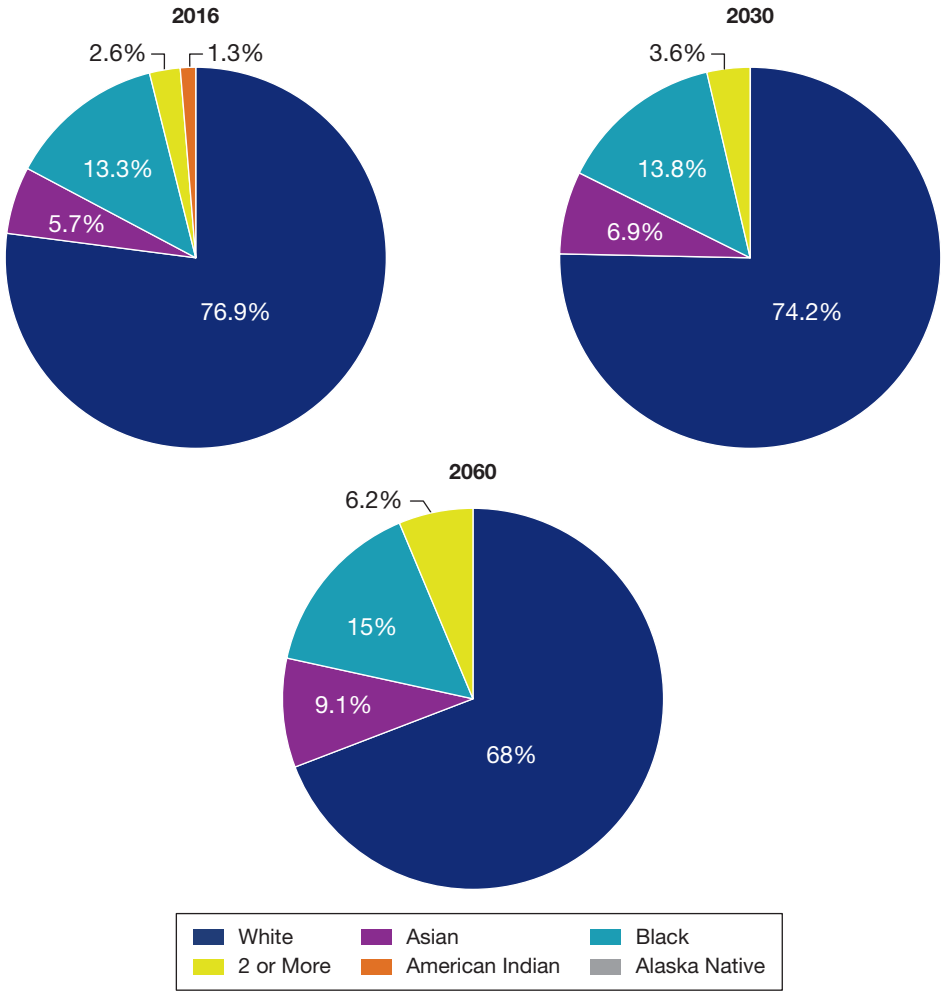
As the United States moved into the second half of the 20th century, a number of social, cultural, economic, and political changes occurred that continue to have an impact on today's 21st-century families and family living: Social and cultural changes include lower birth rates and an increase in nonmarital cohabitation; economic factors include the influx of women into the workforce; and political factors include legalized abortion in 1973 and the Civil Rights legislation of 1965, which bans racial, ethnic, sexual, and sexual orientation discrimination.

All of these factors worked in tandem to change the traditional family in this century. Experts in the field of marriage and family living, however, view the changes occurring during the last half of the 20th century differently. Those with more conventional, conservative, or religious outlooks are concerned about what they perceive to be a moral decline in family life—that is, the increase in nonmarital cohabitation and same-sex relationships and in the number of births outside of marriage. These groups prescribe a return to more conventional, long-held family values as a way to reverse the trends (Popenoe & Whitehead, 2005). Those with a more contemporary outlook hold that these trends represent both flexibility and adaptability in today's families and in the society at large (Solot & Miller, 2004). In spite of increasing relational and economic stresses faced by today's families, marriage represents the most frequently chosen family form, with approximately 93 percent of the population choosing marriage at least once (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019e).

In the United States, there is more diversity now than ever before. Families today are complex and diverse, ranging from traditional two-biological-parent family structures, to single-parent homes, to extended family forms, to married gay or lesbian couples. There is also greater diversity of racial, ethnic, economic, and religious composition, and so social workers, family life educators, psychologists, sociologists, and health and mental health professionals must be aware of the full range of diversity in families today (see Figure 1.4).

Knowing the racial and ethnic composition of U.S. families is important because it aids in our understanding of the complex, changing nature of family living. Here, we briefly examine the racial and ethnic compositions of families so that you have a firm understanding of the diversity within the United States.

Figure 1.4 /// Racial and Ethnic Composition of American Families: Projected Population by Race, 2016–2060



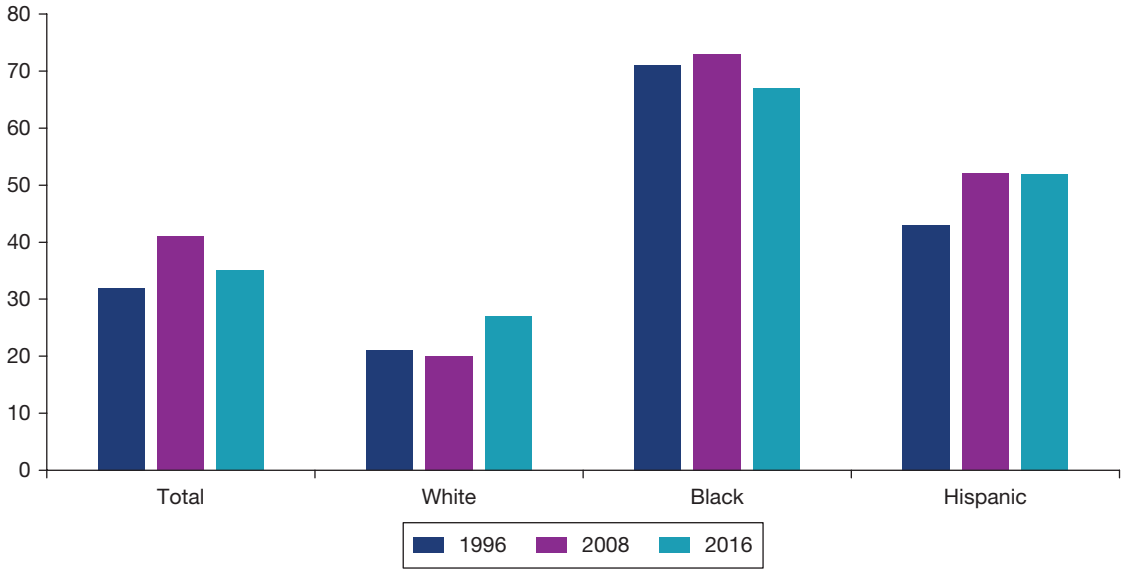
Source: Vespa, Jonathan, David M. Armstrong, and Lauren Medina, Demographic Turning Points for the United States: Population Projections for 2020 to 2060, Current Population Reports, P25-1144, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 2018.

African American/Black Caribbean Families

Historically, African American/Black Caribbean families assumed the traditional married-couple family structure, with children born inside the marital union. Today, it is common for Black children to be born to a single mother. As Figure 1.5 illustrates, nearly 70 percent of the births to Black women of all ages are to unmarried women (Child Trends, 2018b). In comparison to white families, where nearly one-fourth (24 percent) live in a single-parent home (Kids Count Data Center, 2019a), 65 percent of Black children live in a single-parent home (Kids Count Data Center, 2019b). Eventually, 37 percent of Black children reside in two-parent homes, but many of these families are formed with a child who was born outside of marriage (Kids Count Data Center, 2019b).

Multigenerational, extended family ties are common among Black families. Census bureau data estimate that about 26 percent of African American/Black Caribbean children live in some type of extended family (Pew Research Center, 2018a). According to a study by

Figure 1.5 /// Percentage of All Births That Were to Unmarried Women, by Race and Hispanic Origin



Source: Child Trends. (2018a). Births to Unmarried Women. Retrieved from https://www.childtrends.org/indicators/births-to-unmarried-women.

Noelle St. Vil and her colleagues (2018), characteristics of African American/Black Caribbean extended family networks include the following:

- Strong commitment to family and family obligation
- Availability of and willingness to provide childcare
- Reinforcement of social skills and family values in children
- Willingness to allow relatives and close nonrelatives to move into the family home
- Strong network of emotional support
- Strengthen marriages by protecting against the inability to meet responsibilities of multiple roles
- Close system of mutual aid and support

Because of the large numbers of female-headed households among African American/Black Caribbeans, some research suggests that the childrearing and economic support of extended kin is necessary; it is within the extended family networks of grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts, uncles, and cousins that children are cared for, socialized, educated, and have their emotional needs met (Taylor, 2000). Of all racial and ethnic groups in the United States, African American/Black Caribbean families suffer some of the highest levels of unemployment and poverty and the lowest median family income—slightly more than $40,000 annually (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018a).

Latinx Families

Latinx: people of Latin American origin or descent. The term is used as a gender-neutral alternative to Latino or Latina.

Latinx are people of Latin American origin or descent. This term is used as a gender-neutral alternative to Latino or Latina. Today, Latinx Americans account for slightly more than 18 percent of the total U.S. population; this figure does not include the 3 million residents of the U.S. territory Puerto Rico (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018b). This population trace their roots to Spain, Mexico, and the Spanish-speaking nations of Central America, South America, and

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Latinx families enjoy the rich, multigenerational relationships of extended family members and nonrelated kin who become as close as blood relatives. Latinx families embrace familism: The best interests of the family are placed ahead of the interests of the individual family member.

the Caribbean. The fastest-growing population in the United States because of the large proportion of Latinx women of childbearing age, the Hispanic population of the United States is nearly 59 million, making people of Hispanic origin the nation's largest ethnic or racial minority (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018b).

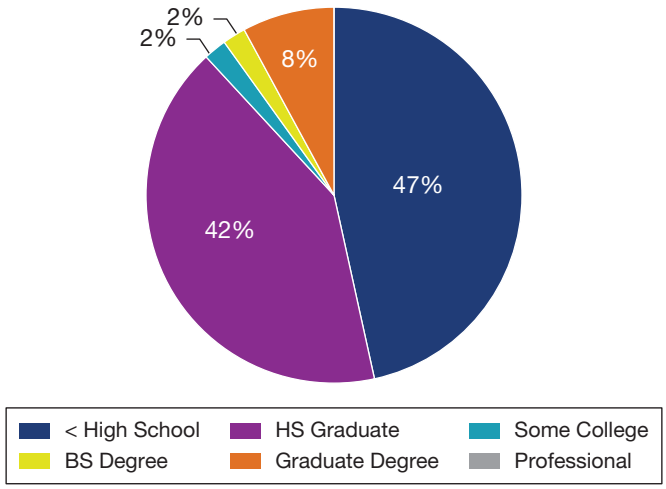
Latinx place a high value on familialism, which emphasizes the importance of family life, and close, interdependent relationships among the person, the family, and the community (among many, Constante, Marchand, Cross, & Rivas-Drake, 2019; Stein, Cavanaugh, Castro-Schilo, Mejia, & Plunkett, 2019). Typically, familialism also stresses the importance of extended family; thus, Latinx families are also composed of extended kinship networks (grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins). Within this family dynamic, family members are provided clothing, shelter, food, education, and emotional support. People of Hispanic origin further extend family relationships to **fictive kin** (nonrelated members), such as godparents and close friends. Within Latinx communities, the well-being of the family takes precedence over the well-being of the individual.

Fictive kin:
people who are not biologically related but who fulfill a family role.

As you saw earlier in this chapter, Latinx children often have families in which at least one parent is an immigrant—foreign born—or are themselves foreign born. Today, one out of four U.S. children is living in an immigrant family (Zong, Batalova, & Burrows, 2019). Latinx immigrants and their children commonly live within extended family forms during the first 10 years following immigration (Carranza, Gouveia, Cogua, & Ondracek-Sayers, 2002). Even as immigrants establish their own households, they do so nearby their families' homes. Second- and third-generation Hispanic Americans have even larger extended kin networks than do immigrants (Carranza et al., 2002).

About 76 percent of Latinx children live in two-parent families (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019f). Similar to the experiences of African American/Black Caribbean women, births to unmarried Latinx women have increased since the 1970s. Nearly 40 percent of all Hispanic origin births are to unmarried women (Child Trends, 2018a). Currently, nearly 20 percent of Latinx children live in a household with their mothers and have no father

Figure 1.6 /// Educational Attainment of Latinx People Residing in the United States



Source: United States Census Bureau (2019f).

present; 27 percent live in an extended, multigenerational family household with grandparents, and one-fourth live with their grandparents (Pew Research Center, 2018a; U.S. Census Bureau, 2019f).

Educational attainment varies among this population, as Figure 1.6 illustrates. In the United States today, Latinx families earn, on average, about $50,000 per year (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019f). It's important to keep in mind that many Hispanic immigrants may have had successful businesses in other countries or professional degrees from other countries, but because of the language barrier when they arrive in the United States, they are unable to secure high-paying jobs.

Asian American Families

Asian American families come to the United States from countries including Korea, Japan, China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia. Each Asian country has a unique culture, which accounts for the vast cultural and ethnic differences within this racial group. Like Latinx families, Asian American families place great emphasis on extended kinship ties and the needs of the entire family, rather than on the needs of the individual. About 61 percent of all Asian American children live with both biological parents; only 9 percent live in mother-only families, and about 4 percent live in father-only families (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019c). Today, about 13 percent of Asian women give birth outside of marriage (Child Trends, 2018b). With an annual income of more than $80,000 per year, Asian American families have the highest median household income of all racial groups in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019c). This is perhaps because Asian Americans have the highest educational attainment and qualifications of all ethnic groups in the United States—nearly 54 percent have earned at least a bachelor's degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019c).

Asian American families are child-centric. Within the Asian family structure a greater emphasis is placed on the parent–child relationship than on the husband–wife relationship. In exchange for the undivided loyalty and for sacrifices parents make for their children, Asian American parents expect respect and obedience from their children (Fong, 2002).

Native American/Alaska Native Families

The terms *Native American, American Indian, Alaska Native,* and *Indian* are often used interchangeably. Here, we use the term **Native American/Alaska Native** to refer to aboriginal peoples of the United States and their descendants who maintain tribal affiliation or community attachment. Today, about 2 percent of the total U.S. population reports that they are Native American or Alaska Native (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019a). About one-third of the population is under the age of 18, making this a young ethnic group (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019a). As with other racial and ethnic groups in the United States, Native American or Alaska Native communities are culturally diverse, with 561 federally recognized Native entities and an additional 365 state-recognized American Indian tribes (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019a). Native Americans prefer to be identified by tribal names, such as Wampanoag, Lakota, and Kickapoo (Fleming, 2007); our discussion here is generalized.

Native American/Alaska Native: the aboriginal peoples of the United States and their descendants, who maintain tribal affiliation or community attachment.

In order for us to accurately understand Native American marriage and family experiences, we must be aware of the unique qualities associated with this race. Unfortunately, comparatively little research has been conducted on Native American family life, and especially on Native American marriage. Despite this gap in the empirical literature, however, the census data do give us insight into some characteristics of Natives. For instance, nearly 67 percent of all Native American households are married couple households. Interestingly, more than one-third of households are nonfamily households; this means that a significant number of Native American families are headed by someone other than a parent, such as a grandparent, or even by nonfictive kin. Nearly 52 percent of Native grandparents assume responsibility for their grandchildren (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019a). Although nearly 80 percent of this population has at least a high school diploma, the median household income of single-race American Indian and Alaska Native households is slightly more than $39,000. This compares with $58,000 for the nation as a whole.

The predominance of extended family/nonfictive kin households among NA/AN is a reflection of the cultural roots of this racial group. Native Americans/Alaska Natives embrace a social identity that stresses the importance of family ties. For example, when Native Americans

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Native Americans/Alaska Natives embrace rich cultural heritages and an identity that stresses the importance of intergenerational family ties. Native spiritual and religious beliefs are numerous and diverse, and the beliefs often shape their attitudes toward marriage and family life.

introduce themselves to other Natives, they do so by telling them their maternal heritage, clans, and homelands (Makes Marks, 2007). In contrast to societies in which kinship is determined along patrilineal lines (the father's heritage), the roots of Native social and clan relationships are by and large matrilineal; that is to say, these societies trace their heritage from a female ancestor to a descendent of either sex. This is also referred to as a *uterine descent.* Within these societies, women are not given power per se because they are women—they are given power because of their status of mother, the power of female as mother.

Native Americans' spiritual traditions and religious beliefs are also numerous and diverse, and as such, the depth and dynamics of their religious experiences are difficult to categorize or classify. Even so, there is an underlying or essential principal belief that informs most Natives' spiritual practices: the belief in the existence of unseen powers, that something exists beyond them that is sacred and mysterious (Makes Marks, 2007). Within this belief are embedded tradition, respect, and reverence. But how these religious beliefs shape marital and family attitudes, norms, and behaviors is unknown, because Native Americans are among the most misunderstood and understudied ethnic group in our culture; this is because they are commonly culturally isolated (Hellerstedt, Peterson-Hickey, Rhodes, & Garwick, 2006).

Muslim/Arab Americans

Very little empirical information exists about Muslim American families, although their population is increasing in the United States. Coming from countries such as Afghanistan, Israel, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Turkey, the term *Arab American* does not refer necessarily to a racial group as much as it does geographic location and religion, which among Middle Eastern families is very diverse. There are no U.S. government demographics on the number of Muslim Americans because the U.S. Census Bureau does not track information and trends on the religious practices of those who reside in the United States. According to Pew Research Center (2017a), there are 3.45 million Muslims living in the United States; they account for about 1 percent of the total U.S. population. The fastest growing immigrant population today, 3 in 10 have immigrated to the United States since 2010 (Pew Research Center, 2017a). Nearly 42 percent of Muslim/Arab Americans are American citizens. Of those who were foreign born, nearly 70 percent have become naturalized U.S. citizens (Pew Research Center, 2017a).

The most common living situation among Muslim Americans is a multigenerational household; 57 percent live in this type of home configuration (Pew Research Center, 2017a). Nearly 20 percent live in a home with non-Muslims (such as a spouse). The Islamic faith is a sex-positive religion, wherein sex and sexuality are viewed as gifts from Allah (God); sexuality is thought to be the right of every person (Boellstorff, 2005). Marriage, then, is the social institution that organizes and controls sexuality. Further, within the Islamic faith anything that "violates the order of the world"—in this instance, marriage as an organizer of sexuality—is considered to be a source of evil and anarchy (Bouhdiba, 2001, p. 30). As a result of these tenets of the Muslim faith, heterosexual marriages and nuclear families are expected of devout Muslims (Boellstorff, 2005). Table 1.2 denotes the living arrangements of Muslim Americans today in the United States.

Table 1.2 /// Household Configurations of Muslim Americans

	% All U.S. Muslims	% Foreign Born
One-person household	23	22
Multiple-person household	75	75
Households with children	50	55
No children	46	43

Source: Pew Research Center (2017a).

It's very important to understand that Arab Americans differ widely in their religious beliefs and practices of religion (Arab American Institute, 2019). This is essential to know because cultural stereotypes of Muslim/Arab American women tend to lump religion (Muslim) and ethnicity (Arab) into one-and-the-same components of culture, portraying them as veiled Islamic traditionalists who are submissive, secluded in the home, and uneducated (Zahedi, 2007).

But, as sociology professor and researcher Jen'nan Ghazel Read of the University of California points out, understanding Muslim/Arab American culture is complicated (2003). On the one hand, as a group, Arab Americans are more highly educated and are more likely to earn $100,000 or more per year than any other ethnic or racial group in the United States (Arab American Institute, 2019; Pew Research Center, 2017b). On the other hand, Arab religious and cultural customs and rituals reinforce traditional gender roles wherein women raise and nurture the children and men protect and provide for the family. As a result, many Arab Americans' marital and family experiences are strongly shaped by traditional Arab views of honor, modesty, and gender, as well as by the historical values of Islam (Davis & Davis, 1993; Arab American Institute, 2019). A good example of the complexities of Arab American culture is Ilhan Abdullahi Omar, a Somali-American politician who was elected to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives in 2019; she and Rashida Tlaib are the first two Muslim American women to serve in Congress. Although in the U.S. it is commonplace for women to hold political office, only within the last decade have women in Arab countries made political inroads.

Without a doubt, there is great variation and diversity in our upbringing and our individual experiences with family and family living. It is virtually impossible in contemporary society to rely on the U.S. Census Bureau's rigid definition of *family* consisting of "two or more persons living together and related by blood, marriage, and adoption."

Talking With Children About Diversity

Because we live in a world that is not free from bias and discrimination, as parents, guardians, and teachers we impart to our children that *everyone* has the right to feel included. It is important to teach children that hate hurts and leaves emotional scars that can affect not only a person's self-worth but also every aspect of a person's life. Because a child develops his or her self-concept and beliefs about others well before entering kindergarten, anti-bias and antidiscrimination education must begin early in the home and in school. Parents, guardians, and teachers need to model attitudes and behaviors that help young children appreciate and value the differences in others. To avoid prejudice and discrimination, we must

- Model the values, attitudes, and behaviors we want our children to develop. This requires being aware of our own conscious and unconscious stereotypes and behaviors.
- Expose children to people and experiences from other cultures and belief systems.
- Encourage children to see that relationships with people who are different from themselves can be rich and rewarding experiences.
- Talk with children about the similarities and differences between themselves and others. Help them to see that being "different" from someone does not mean the person is "worse" than someone else.
- Integrate diversity information and communication into conversations and activities.
- Teach children to be sensitive, critical thinkers, so that through examining and questioning they can better understand any issue.
- Adopt a "zero tolerance" policy about racism, prejudice, bias, and discrimination. Teach them that words *do hurt*.

Despite the fact that today's families are diverse in structure, income level, and racial and ethnic composition, and despite the fact that today's families experience family living in

diverse ways, one particular theorist has been able to organize the different cultural contexts of family life so we can see the level of influence each context has on us. With this in mind, in the section that follows we'll take a look at Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model, a model noted for grouping the various contexts that surround us and influence our individual and family development.

FAMILIES IN CULTURAL CONTEXTS

John Donne, in his *Meditation*, reminds us that who we are is influenced by factors outside of ourselves and beyond our control. He says, *"No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main."* Each of us has needs for sustenance, clothing, shelter, security, intimacy, and emotional support. Because of these needs, we find ourselves interacting with others in some capacity throughout our lives.

As we begin our study of marriage, family, and intimate relationships, it is necessary to understand and embrace the idea that we do not develop in isolation. Who we are as human beings—every emotion, fear, thought, and behavior—is somehow linked to the family in which we were raised, both genetically and environmentally. It is also important to understand that there are many areas of family life that are affected and influenced by the broader culture in which we live, by the many facets of society that surround us. Often these influences are overlooked in the study of both individual development and the processes associated with family life.

Social Identity: All for One and One for All?

How individuals understand and practice their intimate and family relationships is influenced by the culture in which they live. It is important to understand that family life experiences are determined in large part by how a culture defines its **social identity**, or whether societal goals emphasize the advancement of the group's interest or individual interests. Particularly important is whether the culture defines itself as a *collectivist* culture or an *individualistic* culture because culturally approved beliefs influence our expectations, experiences, attitudes, and behaviors (Neto, 2007). It profoundly affects the ways we behave and respond to the world.

Social identity: whether the goals of a society/culture emphasize the advancement of the group's interests or individual interests.

Collectivist Cultures

Collectivist cultures: cultures that define their identity in terms of the relationships individuals hold with others, which takes priority over individual needs; group membership is important.

In **collectivist cultures**, individuals define their identity in terms of the relationships they hold with others. For instance, if asked, "Who are you?" a collectivist is likely to respond by giving the family's name or the region from which he or she originates (Triandis & Suh, 2002). The goals of the collective—the whole society—are given priority over individual needs, and group membership is important (Myers, 2008). In these cultures, members strive to be equal, contributing, beneficial members of the society, and their personal behavior is driven by a feeling of obligation and duty to the society (Triandis & Suh, 2002; Johnson, Kulesa, Cho, & Shavitt, 2005). Collectivist cultures promote the well-being and goals of the collective *group*, rather than the well-being and goals of the *individual*. Because of the desire to maintain harmony within the group, collectivist cultures stress harmony, cooperation, and promoting feelings of closeness (Kupperbusch et al., 1999).

Latinx, for example, value strong interdependent relationships with their families and they value the opinions of close friends (who, in many cases, are treated as family members); this, in turn, influences how they select mates and display and experience emotions, such as love and intimacy (Castañeda, 1993; Fernandez-Dols, 1999). Asians, too, accentuate the importance of the collective whole and they therefore emphasize family bonds in their experiences of love, including extended family members. People's self-concepts, personal goals, mate selection, sexual attitudes, expectations of family members, family experiences, and the larger society are inseparable in collective societies (Johnson et al., 2005).

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How couples and families experience their relationships is largely dependent on whether their culture adopts a *collectivist* or an *individualist* identity.

Individualistic Cultures

In **individualistic cultures**, individual goals are promoted over group goals, and people define their identity or sense of self in terms of personal attributes, such as wealth, social status, education level, and marital status (Myers, 2008). Unlike collectivists, individualists view themselves as truly independent entities from the society in which they live, and their personal needs and rights guide their behavior, rather than the needs of the society (Johnson et al., 2005). Individualistic cultures, such as those of the United States and some countries in western Europe, promote the idea of autonomy and individuation from the family; in turn, this autonomy promotes the practice of people selecting partners based on individual reasons (such as attraction, love, sex, money, security), rather than collective reasons (such as prearranged marriages in China and India) that might benefit the culture as a whole. Along these lines, when cultures promote the autonomy and independence of individuals (as seen in much of Western civilization), this autonomy, in turn, affects relationship satisfaction, the ease with which intimacy is established, and "love" as a basis for marriage (Dion & Dion, 1993). Relationship partners are free, by society's standards, to choose a partner that best suits their needs; it is thought that this freedom of choice enhances relationship satisfaction and the experiences of love, intimacy, and sex.

Individualistic cultures: culture in which individual goals are more important than the goals of the group. Individuals define their identity or sense of self by way of personal attributes (wealth, social status, education level, marital status, etc.).

As you saw earlier in this chapter, a culture's social identity shapes and directs the attitudes, norms, and behaviors of its members, such as how extended family members are important to Latinx and Asian families—these behaviors are the result of how collectivist ideals shape families. But there are other cultural factors that significantly influence and shape intimate and family life experience. The **social ecology** perspective recognizes that individual family members' experiences, along with outside social factors and policies, significantly affect the quality and the nature of their relationships (Alberts, 2002). In the section that follows, we examine the ways in which families are affected by the variety of contexts that surround them as we study the Ecological Model and the various contexts within that model: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem.

Social ecology: the perspective that recognizes that individual family members' experiences, as well as outside social factors and policies, significantly affect the quality and the nature of their relationships.

The Ecological Model: Culturally Specific Influences That Affect Family Life

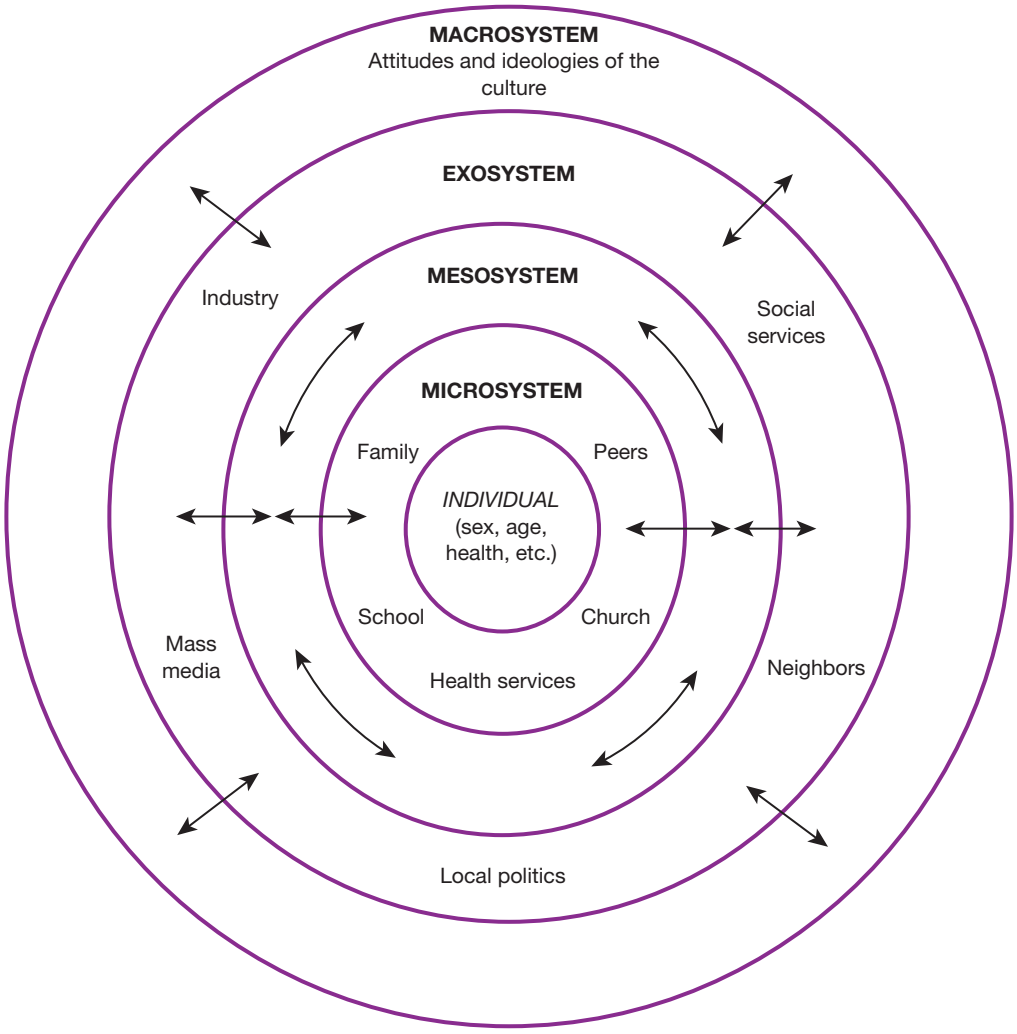
Ecological Model: a theory developed by Russian-born Uri Bronfenbrenner that explains the multiple influences that affect individuals' and families' development over their lifetimes. The central concept is that people develop in a variety of interacting contexts.

Contexts: areas of individual and family development that play a role in the relationship between people and their environments. These multiple environments surround individuals from birth; a person is in constant interaction with these different contexts.

To understand the multiple areas of individual and family development, we turn our attention to the **Ecological Model** developed by Uri Bronfenbrenner (1979). Central to this model is the concept that people develop in a variety of interacting contexts. **Contexts** are the areas of individual and family development that play a role in the relationship between people and their environments. These multiple environments surround individuals from birth and play a significant interactive role in development. In order to truly understand individual relationship behaviors (such as communication) and the development of family life, we must first understand the interactive relationships between and among the different factors within the various contexts of development (Huitt, 2003). For example, if we want to study the effects of divorce on a child's development, we can study the child separately, but we can also introduce or take away various factors within a certain context to better determine which has the greatest impact on a child's development. Similarly, if we want to better understand a couple's difficulty with sexual arousal and response, we can look at contextual factors, such as the stressors associated with employment, to see if they are exerting negative influences on the couple.

Figure 1.7 presents the Ecological Model. Notice that the person is located in the center of five concentric, nested circles that expand outward, similar to ripples on the surface of water.

Figure 1.7 /// Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model



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