

# **Chapter 1**

## **The Meaning of Marriage and the Family**

### **CHAPTER FOCUS**

Chapter 1 is an introduction to marriage and family studies, including definitions of marriage and the family, functions of marriage and the family, meanings of extended families and kinship, and the themes of the text.

### **CHAPTER OUTLINE**

#### **I. INTRODUCTION**

- A. We are all, in part, products of family relationships.
- B. Most of us approach the topic of marriage and family with strong opinions, personal experiences, and ideas of what marriage and family ought to be.
- C. This chapter explores discrepancies between our ideas about family and what social science tells us about marriage and family life.
- D. This chapter looks at how marriage and family are defined by individuals and society and at the functions that marriages and families fulfill.

#### **II. PERSONAL EXPERIENCE, SOCIAL CONTROVERSY, AND WISHFUL THINKING**

- A. We need to understand that our attitudes and beliefs about family may affect and distort our efforts to study family patterns and issues.
- B. Experience versus Expertise
  - 1. Family life can be loving and stable as well as conflicting and bitter.
  - 2. Our family is unique and our personal experiences cannot inform us about all families.
- C. Dramatic Changes, Increasing Diversity, and Continuing Controversy
  - 1. Studying marriage and family can be challenging for several reasons:
    - a. Families have changed in recent decades and writing and reading about them can be difficult given the pace and extent of change.
    - b. Technology contributes to changes in how we meet and create family:
      - i. Communication now enables a different type of access and interaction.
      - ii. This change raises questions about issues related to access and frequency of communication.
    - c. Advances in reproductive science have changed the ways we bear children.
    - d. There is considerable cultural, ethnic, racial, economic, sexual, and religious diversity in the wider population today.
    - e. Few areas of life are as controversial as family matters.
  - D. This course raises questions and discussions about family matters such as polygamy, child custody, legal matters related to reproductive advances, decisions on marriage, and issues of sexual and/or domestic violence.
    - 1. Learning more about family matters will expose you to information that will help more objectively understand the realities behind so many vocal debates in our world.

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### III. WHAT IS MARRIAGE? WHAT IS FAMILY?

#### A. Defining Marriage

1. Globally, there is much variation in the percentage of adults who are married and what marriage is like.
2. Because of the diversity, defining marriage can be difficult:
  - a. Most simply defined, **marriage** is a socially and legally recognized union between two people in which they are united sexually, cooperate economically, and may give birth to, adopt, or rear children.
  - b. With the exception of the Na in China, marriage has been a universal institution throughout recorded history.
3. There is considerable cultural variation in what societies identify as essential characteristics that define couples as married, but there are some shared attributes:
  - a. Marriage typically establishes rights and obligations connected to gender, sexuality, relationships with kin and in-laws, and legitimacy of children.
  - b. Marriage establishes individuals' specific roles within the wider community and society.
  - c. Marriage allows for the orderly transfer of wealth and property from one generation to the next.
  - d. Marriage assigns care and responsibility of children to spouses or their relatives.
4. Although many Americans believe that marriage is divinely instituted (as opposed to those who see it as a civil institution), early Christianity only slowly became involved in weddings and was ambivalent about marriage.

#### B. Who May Marry?

1. Who may marry in the United States has changed over the last 150 years:
  - a. African-Americans could not marry at one point because they were regarded as property.
  - b. Interracial marriage was illegal until 1967.
  - c. Over the past two decades same-sex marriage has been an ongoing controversy. On June 26, 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment requires states to recognize and license same-sex marriages (*Obergefell v. Hodges*).
2. Each state enacts its own laws regulating marriage, leading to some discrepancies from state to state.
3. Legal marriage bestows literally hundreds of rights, privileges, and protections on couples who marry.

#### C. Forms of Marriage

1. **Monogamy** is the practice of having only one spouse at a time; it is the only legal form of marriage in Western cultures, such as the U.S.
  - a. Monogamy is the only form of marriage recognized in *all* cultures.
  - b. Monogamy is not always the preferred form of marriage.
2. **Polygamy**, having more than one wife or husband, is the preferred marital arrangement worldwide:

- a. **Polygyny**, the practice of having more than one wife, is practiced or accepted in 84% of the world's cultures studied (representing, nevertheless, a minority of the world's population numerically).
  - i. Even in polygynous societies, monogamy is the most widely practiced form of marriage.
  - ii. Plural marriages are in the minority in these societies primarily because of economic reasons.
- b. **Polyandry**, the practice of having more than one husband, is rare.
  - i. It normally occurs in societies where there is a gender imbalance or scarcity of land or property.
- c. Within polygynous societies, plural marriages are a sign of higher status.
- 3. **Serial monogamy** or *modified polygamy*, a practice of having several spouses over a lifetime, although no more than one at any given time, is a more accurate description for practices in the U.S.

#### D. Defining Family

- 1. The U.S. Census Bureau defines a **family** as “a group of two or more (one of whom is the householder) related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together.”
- 2. A **household** consists of “all the people who occupy a housing unit,” whether or not they are related.
- 3. *Family households* are those in which at least two members are related by birth, marriage or adoption, though unrelated individuals can also be counted as family.
- 4. In individuals' lives, the concept of “family” as a less precise and more varying meanings:
  - a. Mostly those designated as family are related by descent.
  - b. Some are **affiliated kin** or **fictive kin** - unrelated individuals who feel and are treated as if they were relatives.
  - c. Emotional closeness may be more important than biology or law in defining family.
    - i. Among Latinos, *compadres* (godparents) are considered family members.
    - ii. Among some Japanese Americans, the *ie* (living members of the extended family as well as deceased and yet-to-be-born family members) is the traditional family.
    - iii. Among many traditional Native American tribes, the **clan** (a group of related families) is regarded as the fundamental family unit.
    - iv. Among many African-Americans, fictive kin are considered to be like family and are treated as such.
- 5. To reflect this diversity of family types that coexist, the definition of family needs to be extended beyond the idea of the “official” census definition.

#### E. What Families Do: Functions of Marriages and Families

- 1. The family performs important societal functions and meets certain individual needs as identified by sociologists (although not all of them do all of these or do these well):
  - a. Families provide a source of intimate relationships.
  - b. Families act as units of economic cooperation and consumption.
  - c. Families may produce and socialize children.

- d. Families assign social statuses and roles to individuals.
- F. Intimate Relationships and Family Ties
  - 1. Intimacy is a primary human need and strongly influences rates of illnesses, accidents, and mental illness.
  - 2. Married couples and adults living with others tend to be healthier and have lower mortality rates: some of this is due to selective factors, but cohabitation also yields benefits:
    - a. Marriage and the family furnish emotional security and support.
    - b. They serve as important sources of companionship and intimacy.
- G. Economic Cooperation
  - 1. The family is a unit of economic cooperation and interdependence.
    - a. Although the division of labor by gender is characteristic of almost all cultures, it varies greatly from culture to culture.
    - b. Gendered tasks are assigned by culture and not biology.
    - c. Only a man's ability to impregnate and a woman's ability to give birth and produce milk are biologically determined.
  - 2. The family is commonly thought of as a consuming unit, but it also continues to be an important producing unit.
    - a. If goods and services within a family were monetized, it would require a considerable amount of money.
    - b. Although children also contribute to the household customarily, they are generally not paid.
    - c. Most often women perform the family's role as a service unit.
- H. Reproduction and Socialization
  - 1. The family makes society possible by producing (or adopting) and rearing children to replace older members of society who have died.
  - 2. Technological change has affected reproduction and separated reproduction from sexual intercourse.
  - 3. The family traditionally has been responsible for **socialization** of children (the shaping of individual behavior to conform to cultural or social norms):
    - a. This is one of the family's most important roles.
    - b. Socialization is shared by agents and caregivers outside the family.
    - c. Since the rise of compulsory education in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the state has also served in the capacity of socialization of children.
- I. Assignment of Social Statuses and Roles
  - 1. We fulfill various social statuses or positions as family members; these roles provide us with much of our identity.
  - 2. During our lifetimes we will most likely belong to at least two families:
    - a. The **family of orientation** (sometimes called the *family of origin*) is the family one grows up in:
      - i. This may change over time, if the marital status of parents changes.
      - ii. Originally it may be a **nuclear family** or a single-parent family.
      - iii. It may also be a **binuclear family** to reflect the experience of children whose parents separate and divorce.

- b. **The family of procreation** is the family we form through marriage and childbearing. Sometimes this may also be a *family of cohabitation*.
  - 3. Much of our identity is formed in the crucibles of these families:
    - a. We internalize these roles until they become part of our bearing.
    - b. Leaving these families marks new biological periods of our lives.
    - c. Our families influence the status or place we are given in society.
- J. Why Live in Families?
  - 1. Families offer continuity as a result of emotional attachments, rights and obligations.
  - 2. Families offer close proximity.
  - 3. Families offer intimate awareness of others.
  - 4. Families provide many economic benefits.

#### IV. EXTENDED FAMILIES AND KINSHIP

##### A. Extended Families and Kinship

- 1. The **extended family** consists not only of the cohabiting couple and their children, but also of other relatives, especially in-laws, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and cousins.
  - a. In most non-European families the extended family is the basic unit.
  - b. Extended family households are somewhat more common for Americans with strong ethnic identification.
  - c. There are today more than 4 million U.S. households that conform to extended family type, even though we still basically identify with the nuclear family.
- 2. Many Americans maintain what have been called **modified extended families**, in that care and support are shared between extended family members despite the fact that they don't share a residence.
  - a. In the U.S. extended family members may play a significant role even if they do not share a residence.
  - b. Grandparents are often a most important resource for nuclear families in the U.S.

##### B. Kinship Systems

- 1. The social organization of the family, known as the **kinship system**, is based on the reciprocal rights and obligations of different family members.
- 2. Family relationships are generally created in two ways:
  - a. **Conjugal relationships** are extended family relationships created through marriage.
  - b. **Consanguineous relationships** are created through biological (blood) ties.
    - i. Relationships in adopted families constitute "fictive consanguineous" relationships.
- 3. In some societies (mostly non-Western or non-industrialized cultures), kinship obligations may be very extensive; close emotional ties between husband and wife are viewed as a threat to the extended family.
  - a. The precedence of the kin group and extended family over the married couple continues today in Canton, China.
  - b. Among the Nayar of India men had a number of clearly defined obligations toward the children of their sisters and female cousins.

- c. In the U.S. each person has certain rights and obligations as a result of his or her position in the family structure.
- 4. Despite the increasingly voluntary nature of kin relations, our kin create a rich social network for us.

## V. MULTIPLE VIEWPOINTS OF FAMILIES

- A. Marriage and family issues inspire much debate.
- B. Divisiveness on family issues is neither new nor unique to the U.S.:
  - 1. In Spain there is disagreement between the socialist government and the Catholic Church.
  - 2. In Poland there have been “stormy parliamentary debates.”
  - 3. In the U.S racial/ethnic background and religion are two sources of these different viewpoints:
    - a. In the U.S African Americans have tended to have more conservative ideas with regard to gay marriage.
    - b. There is also variation based on things such as premarital sex, cohabitation, spanking, etc.
- C. Religious affiliation and participation strongly influence viewpoints toward families and marriage.
  - 1. Individuals affiliated with any religious group tend to be more conservative than those with no religious affiliation.
  - 2. Conservative religious views are more associated with traditional gender and family attitudes.
  - 3. Religion also influences how people feel about divorce, with religiously conservatives supporting stricter divorce laws.
  - 4. It is important to note that there may be more difference within faiths than between them.
  - 5. Those who identify themselves with no religious affiliation tend to be the most liberal.
- D. The ways we view families depends greatly on how we conceive of families. The family is a dynamic social institution that has undergone considerable change in its structure and functions.
- E. There are two opposing ideological positions on the well-being of the family:
  - 1. **Conservatives** are often pessimistic about the state of today’s families: contemporary family life is weaker because of cultural and social changes and is now, to some extent, endangered.
  - 2. **Liberals** celebrate the increased domestic diversity of numerous family types and the rich range of choices that are now available to Americans.
  - 3. **Centrists** share aspects of both conservative and liberal positions.
- F. Attitudes Toward Changes in Family Living: Accepters, Skeptics, and Rejecters
  - 1. A three-way division emerges when examining attitudes regarding various trends in the structure of family life:
    - a. **Accepters** are people who see the trends as making no difference or as good for society, and they make up 31% of respondents.

- b. **Rejecters** see these changes as bad for society, and they make up 32% of respondents.
  - c. **Skeptics** are people who share in the relatively tolerant views of the accepters but do express concern about the potential impact of the trends.
- 2. Accepters and skeptics were much more similar than different.
  - a. When asked which type of marriage provided a more satisfying way of life, more rejecters favored the breadwinner/housewife model, while accepters and skeptics preferred the dual-earner couple mode.
- 3. Demographic variables may help explain the difference in attitudes
- G. Social scientists are similarly divided in how they perceive contemporary families:
  - 1. Changing patterns are interpreted differently by social scientists.
  - 2. As we go through the book try to keep in mind the multiple viewpoints of any of the area we are studying.

## VI. THE MAJOR THEMES OF THIS TEXT

### A. Families Are Dynamic

- 1. The family is a dynamic social institution that has undergone considerable change in its structure and functions.
- 2. Our values and beliefs about families have also changed over time:
  - a. We are now more accepting of divorce, employed mothers, and cohabitation.
  - b. We expect men to be more involved hands-on in child care.
  - c. We place more emphasis on individual happiness than self-sacrifice for the family.

### B. Families Are Diverse

- 1. Not all families experience the same things the same way:
  - a. Family experiences differ among different social classes.
  - b. There are major differences in families based on variations in race and ethnicity.
  - c. Our cultural ideas and understanding of **gender** continue to change:
    - i. Besides the traditional binary gender, we now include **transgender** individuals.
    - ii. Research suggests that across gender categories we have more in common than difference.
  - d. Over time there has also been a great deal of variation in the diversity of family lifestyles from traditional to singles, childless, cohabiters, or role-reversed households.

### C. Outside Influences on Family Experience

- 1. The family is one of the core social institutions of society, along with the economy, religion, the state, education, and health care.
- 2. Cultural influences in the wider society, such as the values and beliefs about what families are or should be like, and the norms (or social rules) that define acceptable from unacceptable behavior, guide how we choose to live in our relationships and families.
  - a. Our familial life reflects decisions we face, the choices we make, and the opportunities and/or constraints we face.

#### D. The Interdependence of Families and the Wider Society

1. Societal support is essential for family well-being.
2. The health and stability of the wider society depend largely on strong and stable families.
  - a. Family is the irreplaceable means by which most of the social skills, personality characteristics, and values of individual members of society are formed.
  - b. Some of the services provided by families are such a basic part of our existence that we tend to overlook them.
3. The study of marriage and the family is both abstract and personal and in the chapters that follow you will:
  - a. Learn about the general structure, processes, and meanings associated with marriage and the family.
  - b. Better understand your own family.

#### KEY TERMS

accepters, p. 22  
affiliated kin, p. 11  
binuclear families, p. 15  
centrists, p. 22  
clan, p. 12  
conjugal relationships, p. 18  
consanguineous relationships, p. 18  
conservatives, p. 22  
extended family, p. 16  
family, p. 10  
family of orientation, p. 15  
family of procreation, p. 15  
fictive kin, p. 11  
gender, p. 26  
household, p. 10  
kinship system, p. 18  
liberals, p. 22  
marriage, p. 6  
modified extended families, p. 17  
monogamy, p. 10  
nuclear family, p. 15  
polyandry, p. 10  
polygamy, p. 10  
polygyny, p. 10  
reflection hypothesis, p. 25  
rejecters, p. 22  
serial monogamy, p. 10  
skeptics, p. 22



socialization, p. 13  
transgender, p. 26

## IN-CLASS ASSIGNMENTS

1. **Half-Empty or Half-Full?** Review the liberal, conservative, and centrist views of the family. Have students get into groups, making sure that a variety of views are held in each. Provide the groups with statements from each position to debate. For example, students could debate the idea that “many of the problems of families today are a result of women working outside the home.” After initial discussion, have students switch positions from which to debate. Then have the class report on the pros and cons of each position. (Allow 30–45 minutes.)
2. **Same-Sex Marriage.** In June 2015 same-sex marriage was legalized throughout the United States. Discuss some of the controversies and topics that have been in the news following this event. Look back at newspaper coverage and editorials during the period immediately following the ruling and discuss how well (or how poorly) this cultural shift occurred in our country.
3. **Diversity in Marriage.** Ask students to find case studies of cultures in which each type of marriage is considered “normal.” They should have a minimum of three case studies – monogamy, polygyny, and polyandry. Compare and contrast the roles of each family member and how they vary depending on the type of marriage practiced. What do they feel are pros and cons of each marriage type?
4. **Defining Family.** Have students make a list of who they consider their family members. Do not define “family” first or give them parameters for choosing family members. Afterward, discuss who was included in the family—stepsiblings? Divorced parents? Pets? Great-aunts? Godparents? Foster families? Affiliated kin? Discuss what makes someone a family member.
5. **Ties That Bind.** Have students complete Handout 1:1 *Ties that Bind* and star three questions that they would be willing to share with classmates. When handouts are complete, have students work in groups of 2–4 and share their starred answers with other group members. The activity can be processed by having students share some of their answers with the class. They can also discuss how their answers differed from the answers of other group members and give their reactions to the exercise itself.
6. **Family Functions.** Have students complete Handout 1:2 *Family Functions* and then discuss with the class how the functions of their families compare to the functions described in the text.

## VIDEOS

### **Cinderella Man (2005)**

- What are the functions of this family?
- How can Goode's advantages of living in families be illustrated in this film?
- How was this family affected by the Great Depression?

### **Mending Ways: The Canela Indians of Brazil (1999)**

- What is the role of extramarital relations within this tribe?
- How do sexuality and relationship create Canela identity?
- What is meant by the concept of "mending ways"?

### **One Day in May (2009)**

- What is the debate on same-sex marriage? Why are some people fighting for same-sex marriage to be legalized while others are fighting against it?
- What are the functions of same-sex families?

### **Taboo: Marriage (2002)**

- How do we tend to view marriage in ethnocentric ways?
- Could the types of marriage ceremonies shown in the film ever be accepted in U.S. society?

## HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS

1. **Reflections.** Have students write their "Reflections" from the text. Consider having them keep a "Reflections Journal" throughout the course. To place their reflections in a larger context, at the end of the course ask the students to read their journal in its entirety and, as a final journal exercise, ask them to write about what they have learned about themselves and their families through journal writing. Students may write their responses in their journal or the instructor may require them to write this as a more formal course paper to be handed in.
2. **Controversial Issues in Family.** Reread the controversial issues presented at the beginning of the chapter. Select the one for which you hold the strongest opinion. Now look for information that seems to support the opposing view (this can be done by searching Google or Google Scholar) and write an argument for the opposing side. (For example, if you are anti-polygamy, search for clips on [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) for views supporting polygamy from members of the Church of the Latter Day Saints. Or if you support spanking, seek evidence against the practice of spanking.) Write a two-page paper in which both arguments are represented.
3. **Differing Views of Family?** Interview individuals who were raised in different family types (traditional family, same-sex parents, adopted, single parent household, and so on) and ask each person to define family. Also, ask them to describe the "perfect" family. Summarize

your findings by pointing out the common themes or qualities that emerge from these views. Present your findings in a brief paper.

4. **Family and Individual Identity.** The role of the family is critical in our development of individual identity. Consider multiple factors such as education levels, travel and exposure, interests and hobbies, religious practices, and career choices (as well as others significant in your family) and make notes on each person in the past three generations in your family. How much influence has your family had on your own practices and choices? How much impact have they had on your own identity? Write a summary presenting yourself as a partial product of your family life.
5. **Nuclear, Extended, and Modified Extended Families in the Media.** Find examples of nuclear, extended, and modified extended families on television. Describe each family and who is involved. Compare and contrast the roles of the family members in each type of family. Which form is preferable to you? Why? Report this in a 2–3 page paper.

## INTERNET SITES AND ACTIVITIES

Encourage students to utilize some of these Internet sites for research papers or other individual, group, or class projects and requirements. For group interaction and discussion, set up a requirement for each student to come to class with three Internet sites pertaining to the chapter or a topic within the chapter. Each student will select one of the three to share in class and discuss the site's value and relevance to the chapter. Some interesting websites are listed below.

### **Kearl's Guide to the Sociology of the Family**

<http://www.trinity.edu/~mkearl/family.html>

Good basic website with references to the family culture. Major topic areas include family structure, roles, relations, and parenting.

### **Family and the U.S. Census Bureau**

<https://www.census.gov/hhes/families/about/>

This site provides up-to-date definitions for households and families according to the U.S. government. It is interesting to consider how alike and different these are from the text.

### **Pew Social and Demographic Trends**

<http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/>

A tremendous amount of research on family roles, household and family structure, marriage and divorce, and other interesting topics.

### **Wedding Planner**

<http://bridesclub.com/docs/BridesClub.com-Wedding-Planner.pdf>

This site goes through some of the rituals and activities associated with wedding planning in the U.S. today.

### **Student Handout 1:1 *Ties that Bind***

Families have a powerful influence on their members. Answer each of the questions below and check three questions which you would be willing to discuss with classmates.

1. Who do you consider to be members of your “family”? What is your actual relationship to them?
2. Of these people, to whom do you feel the closest? Whom do you feel most distant from?
3. What are some expectations you have of your family?
4. How does your family fulfill some of the family functions mentioned in the text?
5. What television shows did you watch as a family growing up?
6. What are some messages you received from your family in terms of wellness?
7. How has ethnicity influenced your family?
8. What trait do you admire most in yourself that was a product of your family life?
9. What is the extent of your knowledge regarding the history of your family?
10. What is your favorite childhood memory about your family?

## **Student Handout 1:2 *Family Functions***

Chapter 1 states that families provide a source of intimate relationships, economic cooperation, reproduction and socialization, and assignment of social roles and status.

1. How does your family fill your intimacy needs?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. How does your family cooperate economically?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. How does your family socialize you?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. What social roles and status have been given to you through your family?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. Which of your family's functions could be replaced by someone outside your family?