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CHOICES IN RELATIONSHIPS

An Introduction to Marriage and the Family

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 1.1 Understand the “choices” view of relationships and factors influencing those choices.
- 1.2 Describe the theoretical frameworks for studying marriage and the family.
- 1.3 Specify the elements and types of marriage.
- 1.4 Define the concept of family and identify the various types.
- 1.5 Explain the research process.

Two-hundred and fifty-five undergraduates responded to this question in an online survey: “In what way did the COVID-19 pandemic impact the relationship with your partner?” (Florimonte et al., 2022). Among the answers were these:

I learned how much we really loved each other. We had to care for each other. I tested positive twice.

It made us get angry at each other sometimes because we were stuck in the same apartment all the time.

It made it easier to spend time with each other since everything was online.

We were not able to see each other as often.

The pandemic forced me to go online, where I met my partner.

The COVID-19 pandemic that began in 2020 caused profound changes in our relationships. With restaurants and bars closed, casual relationships and hook-ups virtually stopped. Loneliness increased, and physical health declined (Bierman et al., 2021). Individuals experienced increased anxiety related to “a loss of trust in the world as a safe place, a loss of certainty about health care, education, employment” (Boss, 2021). The pandemic also led to a shift toward more employees working from home—a shift that cognitive psychologist Daniel Levitin finds troubling: “A major shift to home-based work isn’t a good idea for a lot of human-relations reasons. People need to be in each other’s presence, looking into each other’s eyes” (quoted in Leviton, 2022). The negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on physical and mental health, financial stability, and social connectedness were higher for LGBTQ+ people, especially gender-minority people, compared to cisgender, heterosexual people (Nowaskie & Roesler, 2022).

During COVID-19 quarantines, spouses and partners, parents and children spent more time together. For some, it was a time of reconnecting. The divorce rate dropped due to increased bonding during lockdowns and fear of entering a new relationship while contagion risk was high. Many couples planning a family decided to delay pregnancy due to economic uncertainty (Wilcox et al., 2021). But for other couples and families who were already estranged and in conflict, domestic abuse increased.

The COVID-19 pandemic required individuals, couples, and families to make choices they had never before faced—choices about maintaining social distance, wearing face masks, getting the COVID-19 vaccination, continuing or changing employment, education, and child care arrangements. And tragically, many people faced end-of-life choices for themselves or their loved ones.

Our choices affect not only ourselves, but others as well. Public health campaigns during COVID-19 emphasized that the choices to wear a face mask, maintain social distance, and get vaccinated affected not only our own risk of becoming infected with COVID-19, but also those with whom we live, work, and interact. Making thoughtful choices involves considering how our choices affect others, including our partners, children, parents, and other family members.

As the title of this text implies, the choices we make in our relationships are among the most important in our lives. Choices in relationships include, “When and with whom do I choose to be sexually active? Should I try internet dating sites or apps? Do I want to get married? Have children? Should I stay in a relationship that feels stale or toxic? Am I being authentic in my sexual and gender identity? Should I take a job that offers more flexibility for family life or that pays more? What are my relationship dealbreakers?”

We all face innumerable choices in our lives, some of which are identified in Table 1.1.

TABLE 1.1 ■ One-Hundred Plus Choices in Relationships

<p>LIFESTYLE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Singlehood? Marriage? Cohabitation? Live apart together? Intentional community? Single parent by choice? Live in a city, suburb, rural area? <p>MARRIAGE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Person to marry? Age to marry? Getting a ring? Wedding and honeymoon planning? Handling in-laws? What side of the bed? Egalitarian versus traditional? Commuter marriage? Interracial marriage? Interreligious marriage? International marriage? Age-discrepant marriage? Military marriage? College marriage? Reasons to marry? Know how long before marriage? Live together before marriage? Arranged marriage? Importance of parental approval? Premarital counseling? Prenuptial agreement? Keep or change last name? Together or separate vacations? Partner’s night out? Live with parents? Live with others? Polyamorous marriage? <p>LOVE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prerequisite for marriage? Romantic or realistic view? Polyamorous view? Prerequisite for sex? <p>SEX</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear and active consent? Communication about pleasure? How much sex how soon? Acceptable behavior? Hooking up? 	<p>MONEY/EMPLOYMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How much debt is acceptable? Discuss large purchases? Responsible for each other’s debts? One- or two-income relationship? Save for retirement? Joint or separate tax filing? Each partner what percentage of income? Separate or joint bank accounts? Preference to have job or career? Work part- or full-time? Preference regarding telework? Type of work? Willingness to pay for partner’s career? Hire housekeeper/yard worker? Responsibility for what chores? Back to work after child born? Age to retire negotiated with partner? <p>BIRTH CONTROL/ABORTION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of contraceptive? Which contraceptive? Partner responsible for contraception? Sterilization? Which partner? Consider abortion? Or adoption? <p>CHILDREN</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have children? Child-free a desired lifestyle? Biological or adoptive children? Number of children? Timing and spacing of children? Child-rearing approach? Participation in activities and sports? Ideal age to have first child? Artificial insemination by husband? Artificial insemination by donor? Ovum transfer? Have surrogate pregnancy/birth? In-vitro fertilization? Method of childbirth? Day care for child? Traditional or homeschool children? Public or private school? Use of spanking? Time-out? Consult family counselor? Consult family counselor? Religious rearing of children?
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(Continued)

TABLE 1.1 ■ One-Hundred Plus Choices in Relationships (*Continued*)

<p>Monogamous marriage? Swinging? Open relationship? Threesome? Anal sex? Require condom for intercourse? Require STI tests before sex? LGBTQ+? Asexual? Pansexual? Consult sex therapist? Pornography—alone or with partner? Disclose sexual fantasies? Use sex toys?</p> <p>COMMUNICATION</p> <p>How much of past to disclose? Learn effective communication skills? How to handle conflicts? Discuss or avoid issues? Seek marriage therapist if needed? How honest to be with partner? Keep secrets? Attend marriage enrichment retreats? Ask for what I need from partner? Disclose previous sexual abuse? Disclose mental health issues? Disclose previous abortions? Discuss acceptable use of alcohol and substances?</p>	<p>DIVORCE</p> <p>Seek marriage counselor? Stay married for children? Hire lawyers or divorce mediator? Shared parenting with ex-partner? When and how to tell parents? Friends? When and what to tell children? Relationship with ex-partner? Relationship with ex-partner's family? When to resume dating? Child support? Spousal support?</p> <p>REMARRIAGE</p> <p>Whether to remarry? How soon after divorce? Remarry person with children? Remarry against children's wishes? Have baby with new partner? Bond with new partner's children?</p> <p>WIDOWHOOD</p> <p>Preplan funeral arrangements for self and spouse? Power of attorney document? Living will and end-of-life documents? Establish life insurance policy? Keep deceased partner's belongings? Continue to wear wedding ring? Living and care arrangements? When to resume dating? Financial planning after the death of spouse? Remarry after death of spouse? How soon to marry after being widowed? Live with one's children? Live with a companion? Living apart together arrangement?</p>
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CHOICES IN RELATIONSHIPS—VIEW OF THE TEXT

Whatever your relationship goals, in this text we encourage a proactive approach, taking charge of your life and making wise relationship choices. Making the best choices in your relationships, including marriage and family, is critical to your health, happiness, and sense of well-being. Though structural and cultural influences are operative, a choices framework emphasizes that individuals have some control over their relationship destiny by making deliberate choices to initiate, nurture, or terminate intimate relationships.

Facts About Choices in Relationships

Facts to keep in mind when making relationship choices include the following.

Not to Decide Is to Decide

Not making a decision is a decision by default. If you don't make a deliberate choice to end a relationship that is unfulfilling or going nowhere, you have made a choice to continue that relationship and eliminate the possibility of getting into a more positive and flourishing relationship. If you don't make a decision to be sexually faithful to your partner, you have made a decision to be vulnerable to having

sex with other people. See the Personal Choices section for more examples of taking charge of your life by making deliberate choices.



Not using a condom in a new relationship is to risk exposure to contracting an STI.

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PERSONAL CHOICES

RELATIONSHIP CHOICES—DELIBERATELY OR BY DEFAULT?

It is a myth that you can avoid making relationship decisions because, by default, not making a decision is a decision. Some examples follow:

- If you do not make a decision to end an emotionally or physically abusive relationship, you have made a decision to remain in a context of abuse.
- If you don't make a decision to pursue a relationship with a particular person, you have made a decision (by default) not to have a relationship with that person.
- If you do not decide to do the things that are necessary to improve your current relationship, you have made a decision to let the relationship slowly disintegrate.
- If you do not make a decision to be faithful to your partner, you have made a decision to be open to situations and relationships that may result in infidelity.
- If you do not make a decision to delay having intercourse, you have made a decision to have intercourse early in a relationship.
- If you are sexually active and do not make a decision to use birth control or a condom, you have made a decision to expose yourself to getting pregnant or to contract an STI.

Throughout the text, as we discuss various relationship choices, consider that you automatically make a choice by being inactive—that not to make a choice is to make one. We encourage a proactive style whereby you make deliberate relationship choices.

Action Must Follow a Choice

Making a decision but not acting on it is tantamount to no decision at all. Consider following up on decisions by taking action. If you decide to only have safe sex, you must buy condoms, have them available, and use them. If you choose to come out to your parents as gay, you must make a plan and follow

through on it. If you decide to end a relationship, you must consider how you will do this and then do it: Take action!

Choices Involve Trade-Offs

By making one choice, you relinquish others. Every relationship choice you make will have a downside and an upside. If you decide to hook up with someone, you may enjoy the sexual excitement, but you may feel regret in the morning. If you decide to marry, you will give up your freedom to pursue other emotional or sexual relationships or both. But your marriage may result in a stable lifetime of shared memories.

Any partner that you select will also have characteristics that must be viewed as a trade-off. One woman noted of her partner, “He doesn’t do text messaging or email; he doesn’t even know how to turn on a computer. But he knows how to build a house, plant a garden, and fix a car . . . and he loves me and my children—trade-offs I’m willing to make.”

Some Choices Require Correction

Some of our choices, although they seem correct at the time that we make them, turn out to be disasters. Once we realize that a choice has negative consequences, it is important to stop defending it, make a new choice, and move forward. Otherwise, we remain consistently locked into continued negative outcomes for a “bad” choice. No matter how far you have gone down the wrong road, you can always turn back or go in a different direction.

Choices Include Selecting a Positive or a Negative View

In spite of an unfortunate event in your life, you can choose to see the bright side. Regardless of your circumstances, you can opt to view a situation in positive terms. A partner breaking up with you because they don’t love you anymore can be viewed as an opportunity to become involved in a new, mutual-love relationship. The discovery that your partner has been cheating on you can be viewed as an opportunity to open communication channels with your partner and to develop a stronger connection. Discovering that you have a sexually transmitted infection can be viewed as a challenge to face with your partner. It is not the event but your view of it that determines its effect on you.

Most Choices Are Revocable; Some Are Not

Most choices can be changed. For example, a person who has previously chosen to be sexually active with multiple partners can decide to be monogamous or to abstain from sexual relations in new relationships. People who have been unfaithful in the past can elect to be emotionally and sexually committed to a new partner. A person who chooses to live with a partner can choose to move out and find another place to live.

Other choices are less revocable. For example, a person who has an abortion cannot undo the abortion once it has occurred. Deciding to have a child is also difficult to “undo.” Choosing to have unprotected sex may result in prolonged coping with a sexually transmitted infection like herpes.

Choices About the Use of Technology

Since the use of technology may have positive or negative consequences, individuals must be deliberate in their choices to maximize desired outcomes. For example, those in a new relationship make the choice whether to continue texting their previous partner, spouses make the choice to send a text message thanking each other for a previous behavior or lash out at a perceived miscue, and parents decide how much screen time to allow their children. In one study, spouses viewed interactive technology, such as cell phones, the internet, and social networking sites, as both facilitating distraction as well as providing a mechanism for connection (Vaterlaus & Tulane, 2019). Individuals on the job market also make choices to “clean up their social media” by removing embarrassing photos or posts. Individuals must also make choices around cell phone or game addiction or both, stalking, and ghosting.



Cell phones provide a means to connect with a partner, but they also create distractions in relationships.

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Choices Are Influenced by the Stage in the Family Life Cycle

The choices a person makes tend to be individualistic or familistic, depending on the stage of the family life cycle—formally, a series of stages individuals progress through, such as married couple, child-bearing, and rearing preschoolers. The concept, though, doesn't apply to everyone since some never marry, don't have children, and so forth.

However, individualism characterizes the thinking and choices of young, single people. These individuals are concerned primarily with their own needs. If they marry and have children, familistic values ensue as the needs of a spouse and children begin to influence behavioral choices. For example, evidence of familistic values and choices is reflected in the fact that spouses with children are less likely to divorce than spouses without children.

Influence of Social and Cultural Forces on Choices

In the World Happiness Report (Helliwell et al., 2022), researchers investigated the level of happiness among people in 146 countries. Countries with the highest levels of happiness included Finland, Denmark, Iceland, Switzerland, and the Netherlands (the United States ranked 16th). One of the variables researchers used to measure happiness levels across countries is “freedom to make life choices,” which researchers assessed by asking survey respondents, “Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with your freedom to choose what you do with your life?”

No matter how free we feel we are to make choices, our choices are influenced by various social and cultural forces. When we are aware of how social and cultural forces influence our lives and choices, we are cultivating our **sociological imagination**.

Consider how social and cultural forces influence the choice of whether to marry someone from a different racial or ethnic background. The percentage of married U.S. adults in an interracial or interethnic marriage increased from 3% in 1967 to 11% in 2019, when one in five (19%) of new marriages involved an intermarried couple (Parker & Barroso, 2021). Choosing a spouse from a different racial background has become more common due to changes in society. Interracial marriage was illegal in at least 15 states until 1967, when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that such laws were unconstitutional. Change in public attitudes also affected people's choice to be in an interracial marriage, as attitudes have become more accepting. And choosing a mate from a different ethnic or racial background has also become more likely because of demographic changes in the population, particularly the growth of the U.S. Asian and Hispanic populations.

Our relationships and life satisfaction are also influenced by socioeconomic factors. A review of 47 studies in 22 countries revealed that individuals who reported more constrained socioeconomic conditions, primarily along the lines of income, education, and occupation, also reported poorer indicators of overall functioning (health, happiness, sexuality; Higgins et al., 2022). The partners we choose are themselves social influences that affect subsequent choices we make. In this chapter's Focus on Research feature, we look at examples of how romantic partners can be a positive or a negative influence in the lives of undergraduates. Next, we briefly describe ways in which globalization, social structure, culture, and media affect our choices.

FOCUS ON RESEARCH

BONNIE & CLYDE: ROMANTIC PARTNER INFLUENCE AS POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE?

"They're young . . . they're in love . . . and they kill people" was the advertisement for the classic film *Bonnie & Clyde*. Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow (notorious bank robbers of the 1930s) encouraged criminal behavior in each other, resulting in their violent deaths in 1934. In contrast to Bonnie and Clyde, celebrity couples Blake Lively and Ryan Reynolds, Emily Blunt and John Krasinski, and Sophie Turner and Joe Jonas have all reported that their partners have brought out the best in them. The research described here assessed undergraduates' perception of how their current or most recent romantic partner was a positive and/or negative influence in their lives.

Sample and Survey

A 31-item internet survey was completed by 464 undergraduate female, male, and nonbinary students. Most participants identified as white (70%) and heterosexual (85%).

Findings

Almost two thirds of the respondents reported that their current or most recent romantic partner had been a positive influence on them (66%), while 16% reported a negative influence. One in five (19%) of respondents reported that their romantic relationships disrupted familial relationships, in that respondents felt "less close" to their parents (19%). Romantic relationships of the respondents also interfered with peer relationships, as one third of respondents (35%) reported spending less time with their friends.

When asked about the balance of the positive and negative influences from their romantic relationships, both men (67%) and women (65%) agreed that it was more positive than negative. There were no significant differences by sex, race, or sexual orientation.

Answers to Open-Ended Questions

Undergraduates provided more detail about partner influence by answering open-ended questions:

1. "What did your partner do that influenced you positively"? Many respondents provided examples of their partner encouraging or supporting them in areas such as following their dreams, helping them work toward their goals, overcoming their insecurities, and affirming their identity. Examples included these:

—She's been my main support through figuring out that I'm nonbinary. I would never have come out to my previous partners like that. She doesn't care if I'm her girlfriend, boyfriend, or other; she just wants me to be happy.

—I was diagnosed with genital herpes 2 months before I met my boyfriend. When I told him, he said that he understood and that my condition didn't change his feelings for me. He's very understanding of my situation. Whenever I do have an outbreak, it really bothers me to the point that I get emotionally upset. He calms me down and reassures me that it's OK and that he doesn't mind.

2. “What did your romantic partner do that influenced you negatively?” The most common theme was that their partner had been emotionally damaging to them by engaging in sexual infidelity or lying, which made them mistrustful of themselves and others. An example follows:

He made me question my own sanity, made me feel like my emotions and feelings weren't important, made me feel like I was overreacting for getting upset that he was with someone else, and so on. He led me on for 6 months by telling me he never wanted anyone but me. I later found out he was having sex with random girls behind my back the whole time.

Another negative theme was that their partner was too selfish, narcissistic, or controlling. An example follows:

He would get mad at me for wanting to spend time with my family and/or friends instead of him and then would blow me off last minute to go somewhere else after already committing to plans with me.

3. “How did your partner influence you to change your sexual values, ideas, or behaviors?” The most common response was that their partner made them more sexually active, open, and/or confident. Here is an example:

[My partner] made me more open to trying new things since I have never felt this comfortable with a partner sexually until now.

Some respondents described not only how their partner affected them, but how they affected their partner. Indeed, each partner in a relationship affects the other.

I think what most influenced me about my boyfriend was him telling me how much I changed him. He told me he didn't have much to look forward to before me, but that I helped him strive to be better, take care of himself more, and even be more confident. He always tells me how smart I am, and it made me feel a lot more confident in my abilities. When he told me how much I changed his life, I felt completely fulfilled for the first time in my life because I've always wanted to make an unforgettable impact on someone else's life.

Source: Abridged from Hilliard, T. E., Perkins, E. B., Dyer, C. T., & Knox, D. (2021). *Bonnie and Clyde: Partner influence as positive/negative?* [Poster]. Southern Sociological Society Annual Meeting.

Globalization

As illustrated by COVID-19, which originated in China and spread across the globe, what happens in one country affects other countries. Globalization—the social, educational, economic, and political interconnectedness of societies around the world—affects relationships and families. As international travel increased for recreation, education (such as study-abroad programs), and for work in a global economy, more people chose to marry across international borders, forming cross-national couples and families.

Unfavorable social, economic, and political conditions in some countries compel some residents to emigrate to other countries, sometimes making the choice to leave family members behind (e.g., Ukrainian women and children evacuating to escape the 2022 war, while their male relatives were required to remain). In 2019, 17.8 million U.S. children had at least one foreign-born parent, including parents who were naturalized citizens, lawfully present immigrants, or undocumented immigrants (American Immigration Council, 2021). Many U.S. children who have an undocumented parent experience separation from their parent due to detainment or deportation or live under the constant threat that family separation could occur.

Social Structure

The social structure of a society includes institutions, social groups, statuses, and roles. Social **institutions** are enduring patterns of social relationships that perform important functions for society. Social institutions include family, religion, government, education, and the economy.

The institutions of the society in which we live affect our choices. In the family institution, living together and raising children without being married has become more common, making it more likely that people consider this choice for their own lives. Religion may affect choices about sexual behavior, marriage, abortion, gender expression, and mate selection, as people tend to choose partners with compatible religious views. Access to higher education affects mate selection, as college-educated people tend to select and marry one another. What happens in the economy affects couples and families in profound ways, as income and job security affect choices regarding mate selection, living together, marriage, divorce, and choices regarding having and parenting children. Government creates laws that affect our choices: Who can we marry? At what age can we marry? Can we access birth control and legal abortion? Government also creates tax policies, minimum wage policies, and public welfare policies that affect choices we make concerning marriage and divorce, housing, health care, and child care.

Institutions are made up of **social groups** (two or more individuals who interact, share some characteristics, and have a sense of unity), such as families, couples, friendship groups, roommates, coworkers, and classmates. Social groups may be categorized as primary or secondary. **Primary groups**, which tend to involve small numbers of individuals, are characterized by interaction that is intimate and informal. Marriages, families, and close friendships are primary groups. In contrast to primary groups, **secondary groups**, which may be small or large, are characterized by interaction that is impersonal and formal. Your classmates, teachers, and coworkers are examples of individuals in your secondary groups. Unlike your parents, siblings, partner, and friends, members of your secondary groups do not have an enduring emotional connection with you and are more transient.

Social groups have various influences on your choices, such as who to date, whether or when to become sexually active, whether to come out as LGBTQ+, whether to use a dating app, whether to drink alcohol and use drugs, and so on. Sometimes the influence is direct, such as when a parent tells us we are not allowed to date a particular person, when a friend advises us to break up with an abusive partner, or when a partner persuades us to go to a party instead of study for an exam. Other times, members of social groups to which we belong influence us indirectly—by setting an example in their own behavior.

One's family of origin, which includes one's parents and siblings, is a major influence on relationship choices. For example, young adults tend to seek romantic partners who mirror the behaviors they observed in the role models of their parents (Jamison & Lo, 2021). Strong parental support is also associated with positive romantic relationships among emerging adults (Shen, 2020). Adolescents whose parents divorce also report a temporary increase in delinquent behavior, which can include choosing to be sexually active at a young age (Boccio & Beaver, 2019). Another study of adolescents ages 18 and 19 found that higher quality of family of origin and more time spent with biological parents were associated with a lower likelihood of pornography use, vaginal sex, and oral sex (Astle et al., 2020).

One's siblings are also influential in one's attitude toward marriage (Cassinat & Jensen, 2020), as well as one's relationship and sexual choices. One study found that sisters influence each other by giving each other messages about dating and sexuality (Killoren et al., 2019). For example, a 19-year-old told her younger sister about the importance of similar values in a partner:

Find someone who's like you. I think it comes down to your values being the same. If we didn't agree about religious or political things . . . I couldn't do that. (quoted in Killoren et al., 2019)

Social structure also includes **statuses**—the positions we occupy in social groups—and **roles**—the expectations of behavior associated with roles. Sometimes the difficulty we have in making choices is related to **role conflict**—conflict that results from the different role expectations associated with our different statuses. For example, the status of college students is associated with the role expectation to study for exams. But college students who also have the status of an employee are also expected to work extra shifts when asked by their employer. The conflict in choosing between studying for an exam and working an extra shift is due to the different role expectations for students versus employees. Similarly, employees who are also parents experience role conflict when they are expected to show up for work but are also needed to care for a sick child.

Culture

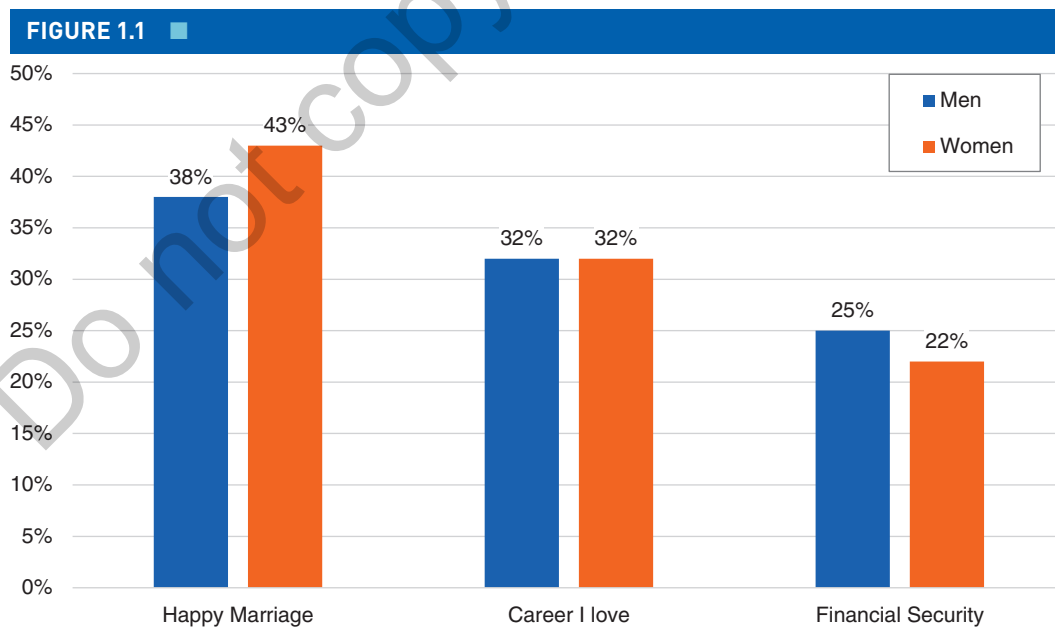
While social structure refers to the parts of society, culture refers to the meanings and ways of life in a society. Elements of culture include norms, beliefs, and values.

Norms are socially defined rules that guide our behavior and our expectations of the behavior of others. Sometimes norms are not clear, which makes choosing a course of action difficult. Consider a first date: Should one person pay for the date? Or should the dating partners split the cost of the date? In prior generations, heterosexual dating partners had clear norms dictating that the man should pay for the date. But today? The norms are not clear, although in one survey of 552 heterosexual college students, men almost always paid the whole bill on a first date and more often paid for subsequent dates. Both women and men in the survey expected men to pay more for first and subsequent dates (Hao-Wu & Albritton, 2021).

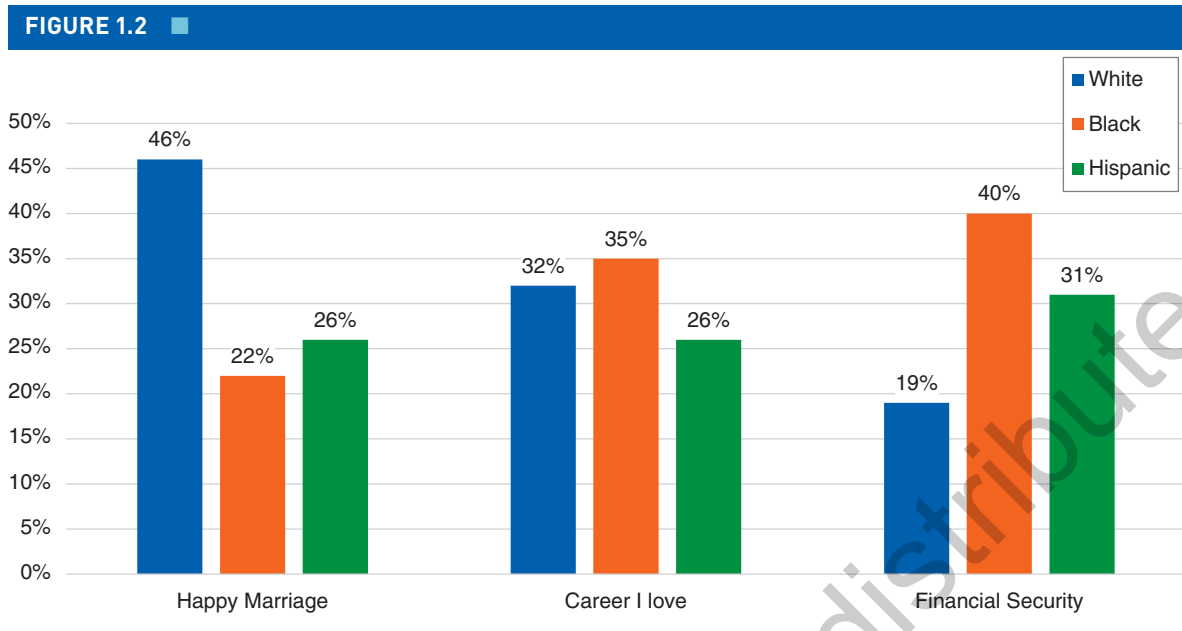
Beliefs are definitions and explanations about what is true. The beliefs of an individual or couple influence the choices they make. Couples who believe that marriage counseling can be helpful are more likely to seek counseling than couples who believe that marriage counseling is a waste of time and money. Parents who believe that spanking is necessary for disciplining children are likely to spank their children, whereas parents who believe that spanking is a harmful act of violence are not likely to spank their children.

Choices we make in relationships and in life are also guided by our **values**—standards regarding what is good and bad, right and wrong, desirable and undesirable. In a survey of almost 15,000 undergraduates, more students selected “Having a happy marriage” as a top value compared to “Having a career I love” and “Having financial security” (see Figure 1.1; Hall & Knox, 2022). The value for marriage is reflected in national data from Match.com (2021), showing that 77% percent of men and 75% of women reported that they were looking for a partner who wanted marriage. As shown in Figures 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3, the top values chosen by undergraduates vary by gender, race and ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

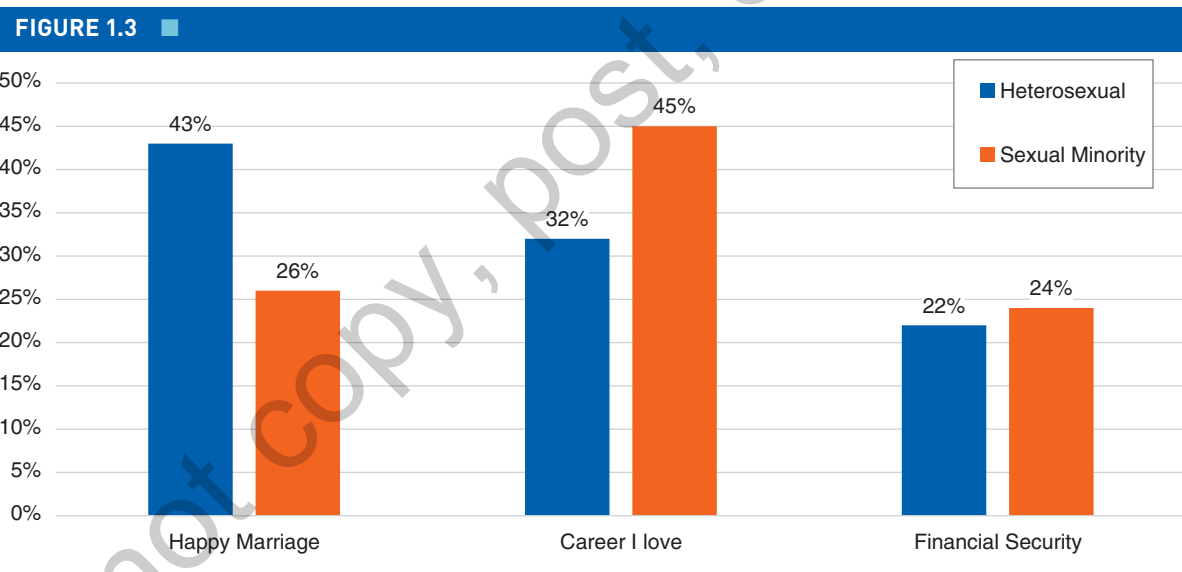
In making choices, it is useful to ask ourselves if our choices are consistent with our values. If we value our partner, do we choose to prioritize spending time together? If we value kindness and honesty, are we kind and honest with our family members? If we value gender equality, are we encouraging our children to develop in ways that are not constrained by stereotypical gender norms?



Source: Hall, S., & Knox, D. (2022). Relationship and sexual values and behaviors of 14, 976 undergraduates. Department of Early Childhood, Youth, and Family Studies, Teachers College, Ball State University and Department of Sociology, East Carolina University. Unpublished data collected for this text.



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The value of **individualism** prioritizes the individual's interests over the family's interests (**familism**). Suppose a woman was offered the job of her dreams, but taking the job required moving her partner and children to another state, disrupting the schooling and friendships of her children and requiring her partner to leave their job and friends. Should the woman choose what is good for her career (individualism) or what is good for her family (familism)? The distinction between individual and familism is not always clear. If the wife forfeits her dream job for the benefit of her partner and children, she may be unhappy and resentful, which would negatively affect the family. Meeting one's individual needs along with the needs of the family is a complex and delicate balance.



Ukrainian President Zelensky's choice to stay in Ukraine to help his country fight against the Russian invasion rather than evacuate for his own safety reflects the value of collectivism.

Alexey Furman/Getty Images

The value of **collectivism** emphasizes doing what is best for the larger community, state, or even world, not necessarily what is best for oneself or family. During the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, the United States offered to evacuate Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky from the capital city of Kyiv. Zelensky declined, saying, "The fight is here; I need ammunition, not a ride" (quoted in Braithwaite, 2022). Rather than protect his own safety and the safety of his family, President Zelensky chose to stay in Ukraine to help his country—a choice that reflects the value of collectivism.

THEORIES OF MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY

Although we emphasize choices in relationships as a framework for viewing marriage and the family, other theoretical frameworks clarify relationship choices and dynamics. **Theoretical frameworks** are ideas that help explain a particular phenomenon and provide a point of view.

Social Exchange Framework

The **social exchange framework** views relationship choices as based on a cost-benefit analysis of pros and cons, or risks versus rewards (Blau, 1967; Homans, 1958). For example, in choosing whether to hook up with someone, college students may consider the rewards (having fun, fulfilling sexual desires, gaining a sense of status, and the potential to develop a relationship) versus the costs (potential regret, risk of acquiring or transmitting a sexually transmitted infection, and loss of respect; Anders et al., 2020).

We assess the pros and cons in many of the relationship and family decisions we face: Should we live with our partner? Do we break up with our partner? Come out to our family as gay or trans? Get married? Have children? Have an affair? Get divorced? Although our emotions also influence our choices, social exchange theory points to the role of making a rational assessment of pros versus cons in making relationship choices.

Family Life Course Development Framework

The **family life course development framework** is an approach to studying families that emphasizes patterns and processes of transition in the **family life cycle**—the stages that families and family members

go through across time. For example, a young unmarried couple may become cohabitants, then parents, grandparents, retirees, and widows. The family life course development framework examines both the typical and traditional stages through which most individuals pass, as well as the exceptions and variations in how families and family members change across time. For example, in the traditional family life course, a couple dates, then gets married, then has children. But increasingly, couples may live together before or instead of marrying or may live apart as a married couple (“living apart together” is discussed later in this text) and may choose to be child-free. Another example of variation in the typical family life cycle occurs when children die before their parents die; typically, parents die before their children die.

The family life course developmental framework emphasizes the various developmental tasks family members face across time, as they experience different roles and challenges in marriage, childbearing, rearing preschool- and school-age children, parenting teenagers, adjusting to children leaving home, recreating a life following divorce, and coping with the death of a family member. For example, one of the developmental tasks facing many new couples is to figure out how each partner can fit in with the other partner’s family of origin. A developmental task of couples whose children have grown up and moved away or couples who have retired is to reestablish their focus on each other rather than on their children or their job.

Structure-Function Framework

The **structure-function framework** views marriage and family as a social institution that contributes to the functioning of society. Just as the human body is made up of different systems and organs that work together for the good of the individual, society is made up of different institutions—family, religion, education, government, and economics—that work together for the good of society. Functionalists view the family as an institution with values, norms, and functions that provide stability for the larger society.

A major function of the marriage and family institution is that it replenishes society with socialized members. Because our society cannot continue to exist without new members, we must have some way of repopulating a society. However, just having new members is not enough. We need *socialized* members—those who can speak our language and who know the norms and roles of our society. Although other institutions such as education and religion also socialize children, parents play a crucial role in socializing children to be members of society.

Families also provide physical care and economic and material support for their members. The family unit is expected to provide food, shelter, and other necessities for its members. Modern marriages and families also function to promote, ideally, emotional support and fulfillment of couples and children. No other institution focuses so completely on meeting the emotional needs of its members as marriage and the family. Marriage and other committed adult relationships also provide a context for couples to share their lives and experiences, to help each other manage day-to-day responsibilities, to provide emotional support to each other, and to cope with stress and challenges. And families—in all their varieties—are the best context for children to develop and thrive. Millions of children worldwide whose parents are deceased, incarcerated, ill, or otherwise unable to care for them live in child residential group care facilities. But these children do better physically, cognitively, emotionally, and socially if they are reintegrated into a biological, adoptive, or foster family (Wilke & Howard, 2022).

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

GOVERNMENT-SANCTIONED FAMILY SEPARATION POLICIES

Despite the importance of family for children’s well-being, governments have the power to separate children from their families. That power has been used disproportionately against marginalized minority populations. In Australia between 1885 and 1969, between 50,000 and 100,000 “half-caste” Aboriginal children (with one white parent) were taken by force from their parents by the Australian

police to be raised in church missions where they were forced to abandon their Aboriginal culture and be converted to white Christian culture.

In the United States during the era of slavery, children were separated from their parents as family members were sold to different plantation owners. And beginning in the late 1800s, the U.S. government supported the practice of taking Native American children from their families to “civilize” them in white boarding schools or non-Indigenous families, where many died. This practice only formally ended with the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978.

More recently, under former President Donald Trump’s “zero-tolerance” immigration program, 3,913 children (including infants and toddlers) were separated from their parents in 2018 and 2019 after crossing the U.S. border without authorization. The children and parents were detained separately while the parents were awaiting a hearing on their status. Records were often not kept regarding which child belonged to which parents so that reconnecting children with their parents was difficult. As of 2022, only half had been reunited with their parents (Jervis, 2022).

Another function of marriage and family is to regulate the behavior of its members in ways that promote social stability. Spouses in many societies are expected to confine their sexual behavior to each other, which helps ensure that children are born to parents who are socially and legally bonded. Spouses in high-quality, durable marriages provide social control for each other that results in less criminal behavior. Parole boards often note that the best guarantee against recidivism is an unconvicted spouse who expects the partner to get a job and avoid criminal behavior.

In addition to viewing marriage and family as functional for society, the structure-function framework also highlights how changes in one institution affect other institutions. The family institution is affected by what happens in other institutions, such as education, religion, the economy, and government. When the Supreme Court ruled in 2015 that the Constitution guaranteed the right for same-sex couples to marry, this governmental ruling helped change the definition of family to include same-sex couples. When schools closed during the COVID-19 pandemic, this change in the education institution had enormous effects on families who struggled to monitor their children’s online learning at home. When the economy experiences a high rate of unemployment, families are more likely to experience domestic abuse and neglect.

Conflict Framework

The **conflict framework** focuses on how wealthy and powerful segments of society influence couples and families. Wealthy and powerful businesses and corporations spend massive amounts of money on lobbying and financial contributions to political candidates, who then enact laws and policies that serve the interests of business over families. Consider that, as of this writing (May 2022) the United States is the only developed country in the world that does not have guaranteed paid family leave, in large part because business interests have strongly opposed it. But as corporations struggle to find and retain workers, they are beginning to support efforts to pass paid family leave legislation, recognizing that paid family leave can help, rather than hurt, their bottom line. In the words of Anna Walker, vice president of public affairs at Levi Strauss & Co., “Paid leave policies make businesses stronger. . . . Establishing national paid family leave is a critical element of boosting our economy” (quoted in Evers-Hillstrom, 2022).

Many social issues that affect families involve conflict between competing powerful groups. The legalization versus banning of abortion involves conflict between women’s rights and health groups versus conservative religious groups; face mask mandates in schools during COVID-19 led to conflict between those who claimed parental rights to determine whether their children wore a mask and those who represented public health interests.

The conflict framework also focuses on power and conflict within families. Family members have different goals and values that create conflict. Adolescents want freedom, while parents want their children to get a good night’s sleep, stay out of trouble, and excel academically. From a conflict perspective, conflict is not necessarily good or bad, but rather it is a natural and normal part of relationships. It is necessary for the change and growth of individuals, couples, and families. (Communication

techniques for resolving conflict are discussed later in this text.) Power imbalances and excessive and unproductive conflict can lead to relationship unhappiness, estrangement, abuse, and divorce, also discussed in later sections of this text. The conflict framework is also concerned with how gender-based power imbalances affect couples and families—a concern that overlaps with the feminist framework, which we discuss next.

Feminist Framework

The **feminist framework**, which includes several perspectives, is critical of all forms of oppression, including sexism, genderism, racism, ageism, heterosexism, and classism. “A feminist perspective is ultimately about critiquing and understanding the uses and abuses of power and promoting ways of creating a more equitable society for all” (Allen, 2022).

Feminist approaches view traditional male domination within families, known as **patriarchy**, as oppressive to women. The patriarchal tradition of women taking their husband’s last name and children taking their father’s last name implies that wives and children are the property of men. Women’s oppression in the family is evidenced by their high rates of domestic and sexual violence, as well as their invisible and undervalued household labor and caregiving role in the family. A feminist perspective also challenges the idea that only persons with children constitute a family, instead, recognizing child-free families as well as the close relationships of single adults as family (Allen, 2022).

Symbolic Interaction Framework

The **symbolic interaction framework** focuses on how behavior, relationships, and self-concept are influenced by meanings, labels, and definitions that are learned through social interaction. Aspects of this framework that are particularly applicable to family relationships are the definition of the situation and the looking-glass self.

Definition of the Situation

How we define a situation is as important as the situation itself, as our definitions affect our choices, behavior, and relationships. Consider a relationship in which Partner A frequently expresses anger at Partner B. There are various ways that Partner B can define the situation, including: (a) “My partner is under too much stress at work, so I should not take it personally”; (b) “My partner is abusive, and I need to let them know their behavior is not acceptable and needs to change or I am ending the relationship”; and (c) “My partner’s anger is my fault; I deserve it.” This situation is complicated by the fact that each partner influences each other’s definition of the situation. How we

define situations is critical in many aspects of relational and family life: Do we define getting a divorce as “breaking up a family” or as escaping an intolerable situation? Do we define sexual infidelity as a “dealbreaker” that ends the relationship or as a learning experience from which the relationship can grow? Do we define our attraction to same-sex individuals as evidence that we are gay, bisexual, pansexual, or fluid?

One way to assess compatibility with a partner is to assess the degree to which you and your partner define situations in similar ways. If you define a messy apartment as acceptable but your partner defines it as disgusting, you may have conflict about housecleaning standards.



Would you define a messy bedroom as comfortable? As disgusting or unpleasant? Would your partner have the same definition of the situation?

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Looking-Glass Self

The “looking-glass self” refers to the image of ourselves that we develop because of how others see us. Each of us holds up “social mirrors” that reflect how we view each other. The ways others behave toward us and what they say to us convey how they view us, which affect how we view ourselves. This process of self-concept development is particularly potent in childhood and adolescence when we are forming our sense of self.

Falling in love often involves finding someone who holds up a very positive social mirror—one that reflects an image of ourselves that feels good to us. We are more likely to fall in love with someone whose view of us is that we are special, beautiful, kind, generous, gifted, creative, and strong. Indeed, love “dies” and relationships suffer when partners stop reflecting a positive image of each other and instead constantly criticize each other.

The “looking-glass self” has important implications for parenting, as what parents say to their children strongly affects their child’s self-concept. Hence, parents are advised to communicate positive messages to their children, such as “You are generous and thoughtful,” “You are smart and can figure this out,” and “I am proud of how you handled that situation.”

Family Systems Framework

The **family systems framework** views the family as a system that operates as a whole and is affected by the complex interactions between family members. As a system, each family develops unique norms and rules that can facilitate family functioning or that may produce conflict and estrangement. According to the family systems framework, family therapists address family problems not by looking at individual family members, but rather at how the family members interact and function. For example, if a child is engaging in problematic behaviors at school (e.g., being a bully), the family systems framework views the behavior as a reflection of what is going on in the family.

Each family establishes itself as a system with its own norms and rules about a variety of issues: rules about mealtime, cell phone use, house chores, noise levels, holidays, religious observances and practices, child discipline, dress, and acceptable or preferred language. Family systems are dynamic; they change over time as children age and leave home; as parents divorce, separate, and re-partner; as members change their sexual or gender identity; and as members become ill, injured, or die.

Family systems draw attention to the fact that what happens in the life of one member of a family affects the whole family. Consider the profound changes in the family system that occurs when a family member has a child. The family systems perspective reminds us that families are not simply a collection of individuals but a dynamic system of interwoven relationships.

Human Ecology Framework

The **human ecology framework**, also known as the ecological perspective, examines how the natural and human-created physical, social, and cultural environments affect our behavior and how individuals and families, in turn, influence these environments. This perspective draws attention to the ways in which families and their members are affected by the environment in which they live, including communities, geography, economic systems, schools, religious organizations, and health care systems. The human ecology framework also considers how the social context of race, ethnicity, social class, age, and sexual orientation affects families and individuals.

The COVID-19 pandemic was a global social context that had profound effects on individuals and families. One silver lining of the pandemic is that many U.S. married and cohabitating couples reported that the challenges of living through the COVID-19 pandemic increased the appreciation they had for their partner. While one in 10 U.S. partnered adults in a large survey said the pandemic caused them to question the strength of their relationship, four in 10 reported that it had deepened their relationship commitment (Karpowitz & People, 2021).

The human ecology framework recognizes that social, cultural, and environmental factors overlap and intersect. For example, the effects of COVID-19 on families varied according to other factors, including age, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation status, and race/ethnicity. Hispanic Americans, for example,

suffered high rates of COVID-19 infections due to the fact that they disproportionately worked in frontline service jobs that involved greater workplace exposure to the virus (Phuong Do & Frank, 2021). In one large survey, about one in five Hispanic respondents reported that they had lost a family member to COVID-19, compared to one in 10 non-Hispanic white respondents (Karpowitz & People, 2021).

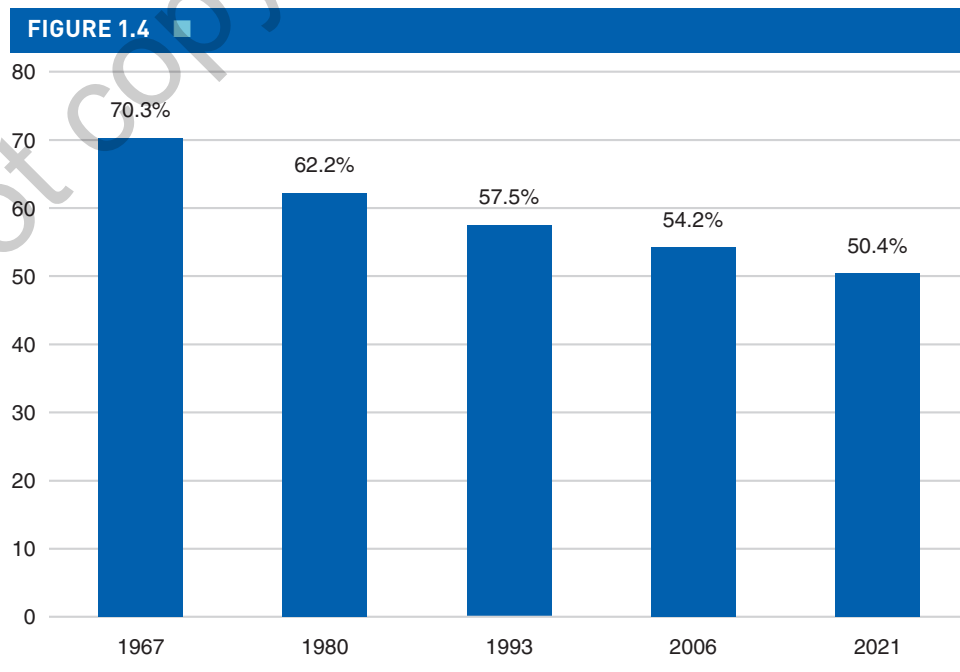
The effects of the pandemic were also more severe among LGBTQ+ individuals, especially youth, who, during lockdowns, were stuck in homes where they may not have been “out” or where they were mistreated by family members (Drabble & Eliason, 2021).

Couple and Family Technology Framework

The couple and family technology framework (CTF) focuses on how couples and families are influenced by communication and internet technology. Due to the proliferation of communication technology and the internet, couples and families today face many issues and options unknown to previous generations. Communication and internet technology can be problematic in relationships, such as when partners are in conflict over how much time one partner spends on social media, when partners disagree about giving each other their passwords or passcodes to email or cell phones, or about what constitutes online infidelity. Technology is also problematic when it is used in ways that are hurtful or frightening, such as cyberstalking, cyberbullying, or outing someone on social media. Putting parental limits on or monitoring of screen time, internet use, texting, and social media usage often leads to parent–child conflict. Internet and communication technology can also enhance couple and family life, in, for example, helping people find partners (through dating apps) and enabling nonresident grandparents to connect with their grandchildren via video technology such as FaceTime, Portal, and Echo Show.

MARRIAGE

Nearly every society throughout history has recognized some form of marriage—a socially approved sexual and economic union that entails rights and obligations between the married couple and any children they might have. Although most Americans marry during their lifetime (of adults over the age of 65 in 2021, 94% had married at least once; *Proquest, 2022*), the percentage of U.S. adults reporting that they were currently living with a spouse declined steadily, from 70% in 1967 to 50% in 2021 (see Figure 1.4). At the same time, the percentage of adults living with an unmarried partner or living alone has increased. Figure 1.4



Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 2021. Living arrangements of adults 18 and over, 1967 to present. Table AD-3: Historical living arrangements of adults.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

MARRIAGE IS NOT UNIVERSAL

The Na (also called the Mosuo) people of southwest China have no equivalent of marriage or even a word for it. “Among the Na, men and women are joined in a sexual and reproductive partnership in which the man secretly passes a night in his lover’s household, and returns to his own family [of origin] in the morning. As lovers, their relationship involves affection, respect, and intimacy but does not include notions of fidelity, permanence, or paternal responsibility for children. Both women and men have multiple partners, serially or simultaneously . . . there are no words for infidelity or promiscuity. The lineage is traced through women, and children by different fathers stay in their mother’s house for their entire lives. The Na male’s ‘visit,’ called a **walking marriage**, has been part of the Na culture for more than a thousand years” (Nanda, 2019, 2).

The increase in adults choosing to remain single or live with an unmarried partner suggests that attitudes toward marriage are changing. To assess your own views of marriage, complete the Self-Assessment: Attitudes Toward Marriage Scale.

SELF-ASSESSMENT

ATTITUDES TOWARD MARRIAGE SCALE

The purpose of this survey is to assess how you view marriage. Read each item carefully and consider what you believe. There are no right or wrong answers. After reading each statement, select the number that best reflects your level of agreement, using the following scale:

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Somewhat Disagree
4. Neutral
5. Somewhat Agree
6. Agree
7. Strongly Agree

- ___ 1. I am married or plan to get married.
- ___ 2. Being single and free is not as good as people think it is.
- ___ 3. Marriage is *not* another word for being trapped.
- ___ 4. Single people are more lonely than married people.
- ___ 5. Married people are happier than single people.
- ___ 6. Most of the married people I know are happy.
- ___ 7. Most of the single people I know think marriage is better than singlehood.
- ___ 8. Single people are not as happy as married people.
- ___ 9. It is better to be married than to be single.
- ___ 10. Spouses enjoy their lifestyle more than single people.
- ___ 11. Spouses have a more intimate relationship than singles do in their relationships.
- ___ 12. Spouses have a greater sense of joy than singles.
- ___ 13. Being married is a more satisfying lifestyle than being single.
- ___ 14. People who think that married people are happier than single people are correct.
- ___ 15. Single people struggle with avoiding loneliness.
- ___ 16. Married people are not as lonely as single people.
- ___ 17. A major advantage of being married is having companionship.
- ___ 18. Married people have better sex than singles.
- ___ 19. The idea that singlehood is a happier lifestyle than being married is nonsense.
- ___ 20. Singlehood as a lifestyle is overrated.

Scoring

After assigning a number from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree), add the numbers. The higher your score—140 is the highest possible score—the more positive your view of marriage. The lower your score—20 is the lowest possible score—the more negatively you view marriage. The midpoint is 60. Scores lower than 60 suggest more a negative view of marriage; scores higher than 60 suggest a more positive view of marriage.

Norms

The norming sample of this self-assessment was based on 53 undergraduate men and 155 undergraduate women. The average score of the males was 87, and the average score of the females was 92, suggesting a predominantly positive view of marriage, with women more positive than men.

Source: Attitudes Toward Marriage Scale was developed for this text. It is to be used for general assessment and is not designed to be a clinical diagnostic tool or as a research instrument.

Elements of Modern Marriage

Marriage varies across history and across cultures. Modern marriage in the United States has legal, emotional, sexual, child care, and public components.



Marriage is a legal relationship, not a casual agreement between two people.

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Legal Contract

Marriage in U.S. society is a legal contract into which two people of different or the same sex and legal age may enter, provided they are not already married to someone else. Individuals can marry at age 18 without parental consent in all states except for Nebraska, where the age is 19. Most states permit marriage of minors (ranging in age from 12 to 17) under exceptional circumstances,

including consent of a court clerk or judge, consent of the parents or legal guardians of the minor, if a minor is pregnant or has given birth to a child, or if the minor is emancipated (World Population Review, 2022).

The marriage license requires that a legally empowered representative of the state performs the ceremony, often with two witnesses present. Legal marital rights and responsibilities vary from state to state, although most states recognize that marriage allows couples to file joint federal and state tax returns; receive “marriage” or “family rate” on health or car insurance; inherit spouse’s property upon death; and receive spouse’s Social Security, pension, worker’s compensation, or disability benefits. In addition, marriage entitles spouses to a share of all marital property. In the event of divorce, unless the couple has a prenuptial agreement, the property acquired since the marriage began is usually divided equally regardless of the contribution of each partner.

Though the courts are reconsidering the definition of what constitutes a “family,” the law is currently designed to recognize spouses, not lovers or cohabitants. An exception is **common-law marriage**, recognized in some states, in which a couple lives together for a period and who presents themselves as married and enjoys some of the benefits of marriage. Persons in a common-law marriage who move to a non-common-law state may be recognized as being married in the state to which they move, but only if that state recognizes common-law marriages of other states.

Emotional Connection

Love is an important motive for getting married in the United States. But this view is not shared throughout the world. Individuals in other cultures (about 40% of the world population), such as India, do not require feelings of love to marry—love is expected to follow, not precede, marriage. In these countries, parental approval and similarity of religion, culture, education, and family background are considered more important criteria for marriage than love.

Sexual Monogamy

Marital partners generally expect sexual monogamy, though some (5% to 20%) couples negotiate other arrangements involving consensual nonmonogamy. For example, in 2021 Will Smith revealed that he and his wife Jada Pinkett Smith had a nonmonogamous marriage. While many couples that experience nonconsensual nonmonogamy—also referred to as infidelity—tolerate it or find a way to work through it, for other spouses, infidelity is a “dealbreaker.” Over two thirds (69%) of almost 15,000 undergraduates agreed with the statement, “I would divorce a spouse who had an affair” (Hall & Knox, 2022).

Legal Responsibility for Children

Although individuals marry for love and companionship, one of the most important reasons for the existence of marriage from the viewpoint of society is to legally bind a couple for the nurturance and support of any children they may have or adopt. In our society, child-rearing is the primary responsibility of the family, not the state.

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

Public Announcement

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

Types of Marriage

There are different types of marriage. Monogamy is the legal form in the United States. With high marriage, divorce, and remarriage rates, some scholars perceive our system as serial monogamy. Although we think of marriage in the United States as involving two individuals, other societies view marriage differently. **Polygamy** is a generic term for marriage involving more than two spouses. There are three forms of polygamy: polygyny, polyandry, and pantagamy. **Polygyny** involves one husband and two or more wives and is practiced illegally in the United States by some religious fundamentalist groups. **Polyandry**, a form of marriage that involves one wife and two or more husbands, occurs in certain communities in Nepal, Tibet, India, and Sri Lanka. **Pantagamy**, or group marriage, has been practiced in some communes.



Some polygynous “marriages” still exist. The first wife is the “legal” wife; subsequent wives have no U.S. legal status as a wife.

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Polygamy is much less common than monogamy; 75% of the world’s population lives in countries where polygamy is illegal (Carroll, 2021). Polygamy is against the law in America and Canada—individuals who have multiple legal spouses can be prosecuted. Polygamists often evade the law by having only one legal spouse, the rest being “social” spouses. However, Utah passed a Bigamy Bill (March 2020) that decriminalized the offense, making it a misdemeanor rather than a felony. In 2020, Somerville, Massachusetts, passed an ordinance allowing groups of three or more people who “consider themselves a family” to be recognized as domestic partners. About 60,000 people in the United States practice polygamy (Solomon, 2021).

Marriage—Then and Now

In her landmark book, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*, Stephanie Coontz (2016) explained the myths about marriages and families that disappear under factual scrutiny. For example, there is the idea that family was the primary value—the most important focus of life—during colonial times. But that was never the case, as early Americans believed individuals had responsibilities first to the larger community.

Another myth about marriage in American history is the idea of the male breadwinner—that husbands traditionally provided for their wives and children. Men and women and their children all worked to provide for the family. Husbands, wives, and children worked on farms, ran shops and bakeries, made goods, and provided services.

Marriage has changed considerably over the last few generations. Modern marriages include same-sex marriages and more egalitarian dual-earner marriages, child-free marriages, and remarriages. While some people view the changes in marriage as indicative of the decline of marriage as an institution, another view suggests that marriage is just as important in the lives of most adults as it has ever been. Marriage has not declined, it has simply changed (Cherlin, 2020). Although the number of individuals who choose singlehood or cohabitation has increased, and people are delaying marriage and getting married at older ages than in the past, marriage remains the lifestyle choice for most adults. And that choice can have good outcomes: When the continuously married are compared to the never married, divorced, and remarried, there are generally more positive outcomes (Hsu & Barrett, 2020).

FAMILY POLICY

COUPLE PREPARATION AND RELATIONSHIP EDUCATION

Couple preparation and relationship education programs—also known as marriage preparation, marriage education, and family life education, are programs that teach concepts and skills that promote healthy, stable, safe, and satisfying relationships and help couples and parents manage the stresses and challenges of family life. Relationship education programs vary but typically include communication skills, conflict resolution skills, and parenting skills. Relationship education programs are expanding to include new topics, such as how to have a healthy relationship breakup and how to navigate/survive long-distance relationships (Markman et al., 2022).

Outcome data on the Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education programs have shown increases in relationship quality and skills but not relationship stability (Hawkins, 2022). Other researchers have found greater commitment and stability and improved conflict management (Huz et al., 2020; McGill et al., 2021) and that the improved relationship qualities maintained over time (Young et al., 2021).

Face-to-face relationship education programs are not affordable, accessible, and available to everyone everywhere. Less than 30% of newlywed couples report having had any form of premarital education (Clyde & Hawkins, 2020). Inclusion of gender and sexual minority content in relationship education programs is lacking (Barden et al., 2021). However, relationship education geared toward nonheterosexual couples is on the rise (Hatch et al., 2021). Online relationship education programs, which are effective in enhancing a couple's relationship satisfaction and improving mental health, may help make relationship education programs more accessible (Spencer & Anderson, 2021).

Only 2,000 public schools nationwide offer a marriage preparation course. In Florida (an exception), all public high school seniors are required to take a marriage and relationship skills course. Ten states—Florida, Oklahoma, Maryland, Minnesota, Tennessee, Georgia, South Carolina, Texas, West Virginia, and Utah—promote marriage education among their residents by, for example, offering a discount on the marriage license. Researchers have found that this results in about 15,000 fewer divorces annually (Clyde & Hawkins, 2019).

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

The federal government has provided support for the Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education program (Hawkins, 2022). The philosophy behind these marriage preparation programs is that building a fence at the top of a cliff is preferable to putting an ambulance at the bottom. When people select a mate wisely and have the skills to manage conflict, communicate, and stay married, there is greater economic stability for the family and less drain on social services to support single parents and the needs of their children.

FAMILY

The 1979 classic hit disco song “We Are Family” by the music group Sister Sledge invokes a generalized feeling of solidarity—of family. The song became an anthem for women, providing a message of unity. “We are family” is a sentiment that can apply not only to one’s kin, but to one’s dorm suitemates, sports teammates, friendship groups, coworkers . . . and more.

The family, found in some form in all societies, is regarded as the basic social institution of society because of its important functions of procreation and socialization. Next, we examine the concept of “family,” discussing how families are defined, their numerous types, and how marriages and families have changed in the past fifty years.

Definitions of Family

The answer to the question “Who is family?” is important because access to resources such as health care, Social Security, and retirement benefits is often tied to family status. The U.S. Census Bureau defines family as a group of two or more people related by blood, marriage, or adoption. This definition has been challenged because it does not include foster families or long-term couples who live together. Unless cohabitants are recognized by the state in which they reside as in a “domestic partnership,” cohabitants are typically not viewed as “family” and are not accorded health benefits, Social Security, or retirement benefits of the partner. Indeed, the “live-in partner” may not be allowed to see the beloved in the hospital, where policies may limit visitation to “family only.”

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

TRANSNATIONAL BALINESE FAMILIES

Dragojlovic (2016) interviewed 24 women from Europe, Australia, and the United States who had vacationed in Bali, fallen in love with a Balinese man, and had one or more children. Although there were variations in the various patterns of commitment and relationships, a common theme was that these women were “playing family” by living and rearing their children in their native land while maintaining a relationship with the father of the children who lived in Bali. Even though the father was often married and had other children with a Balinese woman, the woman would visit annually to maintain the relationship with the partner and father of the child. These nonconventional **transnational families** illustrate that families come in many forms.

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

Sociologically, a **family** is defined as a kinship system of relatives living together or recognized as a social unit, including adopted individuals. This definition includes different- or same-sex couples with or without children as well as single parents and multigenerational households. Kin includes siblings, cousins, aunts and uncles, grandparents and great-grandparents, and in-laws. Families also include stepfamilies.

Fictive kin, also called families of choice, refers to nonbiological and nonlegal relationships that are close, meaningful, and supportive. National data reveal that 87% of African Americans, Black Caribbeans, and non-Latino whites report having a fictive kin relationship with on average 7.5 people. Sometimes friends become fictive family. Have you ever had a friend who felt like a brother or sister to you? Or a friend of the family who felt like an uncle or aunt or grandparent? Persons in the military and their spouses who are separated from their parents and siblings often form close “family” relationships with other military individuals, couples, and families. Persons who have fictive kin relationships tend to have close relationships with family, friends, and church members (Taylor et al., 2021).

Pets

Many people have a psychological bond with and commitment to pets, primarily dogs and cats, but also birds, reptiles, rodents, horses, and other animals (Amiot et al., 2020). Pets are, indeed, often considered to be members of the family. Pets may have their own furniture, go on family vacations with their owners, and receive presents for their birthdays and holidays. For example, pet owners who celebrate Christmas may put up a stocking with their pet's name on it. Other owners buy "clothes" for their pet and leave money in their will for the pet's care. Some cohabitants get a puppy to symbolize their commitment to being a "family." In divorce, pets are, increasingly, treated like children: Custody is established based on the best interests of the pet, and parental responsibility to pay for upkeep and medical care is negotiated.



One's pets are often regarded as part of the family.
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Types of Families

There are various types of families.

Family of Origin

Also referred to as the **family of orientation** or **family of origin**, this is the family into which you were born or the family in which you were reared. It typically involves you, your parents, and your siblings. Siblings in one's family of origin can have a profound influence on one's attitudes, behavior, and happiness. The relationship with one's siblings, particularly the sister–sister relationship, represents the most enduring relationship in a person's lifetime. Sisters have the longest relationships since they typically know each other from birth or from a relatively young age, and they have a higher life expectancy than men.

Family of Procreation

The **family of procreation** represents the family that you will establish should you have children, regardless of whether you marry, cohabitate, or remain single. Across the life cycle, individuals typically move from their family of orientation to a family of procreation.

Nuclear, Binuclear, and Blended Families

The **nuclear family**, which can refer to either a family of origin or a family of procreation, consists of couples and their children, typically living in one household. Generally, one-parent households are not referred to as nuclear families. A **binuclear family** is a family in which the children live in two separate households. This family type is created when the parents of the children live separately (e.g., because of divorce), setting up two separate units, with the children remaining a part of each unit. Each of these units may also change again if the parents remarry and bring additional children into the respective units, forming a **blended family**.

Extended Family

The **extended family** includes not only the nuclear family or parts of it but other relatives such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. The extended family is particularly important for African American, Asian American, and Latino American families. Extended families frequently play an active role in parenting (Ansion & Merali, 2018). We earlier discussed fictive kin, which may also become part of one's extended family.

Traditional, Modern, and Postmodern Family

The **traditional family** is the different-sex two-parent nuclear family, with the husband as breadwinner and the wife as homemaker. The **modern family** refers to the dual-earner family, in which both spouses work outside the home. **Postmodern families** are families that are characterized by diversity and variation, including same-sex couples and their children, parents who are single by choice, and families that “live apart together” (discussed later in this text).

Differences Between Marriage and Family

Marriage can be thought of as a social relationship that sometimes leads to the establishment of a family. Indeed, every society or culture has mechanisms for guiding their youth into permanent emotional, legal, or social relationships that are designed to have and rear offspring. Although the concepts of marriage and the family are sometimes used synonymously, they are distinct. Sociologist Lee Axelson noted some of the differences between marriage and the family (Table 1.2).

TABLE 1.2 ■ Differences Between Marriage and the Family in the United States

MARRIAGE	FAMILY
Usually initiated by a formal ceremony	Formal ceremony not essential
Involves two people	Usually involves more than two people
Ages of the individuals tend to be similar	Individuals represent more than one generation
Individuals usually choose each other	Members are born or adopted into the family
Ends when spouse dies or is divorced	Continues beyond the life of the individual
Sex between spouses is expected and approved	Sex between near kin is neither expected nor approved
Requires a license	No license needed to become a parent
Procreation expected	Consequence of procreation
Spouses are focused on each other	Focus changes with addition of children
Spouses can voluntarily withdraw from marriage	Parents cannot divorce themselves from obligations to children
Money in unit is spent on the couple	Money is used for the needs of children
Recreation revolves around adults	Recreation revolves around children

Changes in Marriage and the Family in the Last 70 Years

Various researchers have noted the enormous changes that have occurred in marriage and the family. A basic change has been in the reasons for marriage. A primary purpose for marriage throughout history has been to acquire the advantages of having in-laws and to expand the family labor source (Coontz, 2016). The purpose of marriage today is to provide a context for emotional intimacy and companionship, self-discovery, self-esteem, and personal growth (Finkel, 2019). Other changes since the 1950s are identified in Table 1.3.

	1950	2025
Family relationship values	Strong values for marriage and the family. Individuals who wanted to remain single or child-free were considered deviant, even pathological. Husband and wife should not be separated by jobs or careers.	Individuals who remain single or child-free experience social understanding and sometimes encouragement. Single and child-free people are no longer considered deviant or pathological but are seen as self-actuating individuals with strong job or career commitments. Spouses can be separated for reasons of job or career and live in a commuter marriage. Married women in large numbers have left the role of full-time mother and housewife to join the labor market.
Gender roles	Rigid gender roles, with men dominant and earning income while wives stay home, taking care of children.	Egalitarian gender roles with both spouses earning income and involved in parenting children.
Sexual values	Marriage was regarded as the only appropriate lifestyle in middle-class America. Living together was unacceptable, and children born out of wedlock were stigmatized. Virginity was expected or exchanged for marital commitment.	Focus on safer sex has taken precedence over the marital context for sex. Virginity before marriage is rare. Cohabitation has become a stage in a couple's relationship that may or may not lead to marriage. Having children outside of marriage is acceptable. Hooking up is normative among singles.
Homogamous mating	Strong social pressure existed to date and marry within one's own racial, ethnic, religious, and social class group. Emotional and legal attachments were heavily influenced by approval of parents and kin.	Dating and mating reflect more freedom of the individual to select a partner outside his or her own racial, ethnic, religious, and social class group. Pairings are less often influenced by parental approval.
Cultural silence on intimate relationships	Intimate relationships were not an appropriate subject for discussion in the media.	Interviews on television and features in magazines reveal intimate details of the lives of individuals. Survey results in magazines are open about sexuality and relationships.
Divorce	Society strongly disapproved of divorce. Familistic values encouraged spouses to stay married for the children. Strong legal constraints kept couples together. Marriage was forever.	Divorce has replaced death as the end point of 40% to 50% of marriages. Less stigma is associated with divorce. Individualistic values lead spouses to seek personal happiness. No-fault divorce allows for easy severance. Increasing numbers of children are being reared in single-parent homes.

(Continued)

TABLE 1.3 ■ Changes in Marriages and Families—1950 and 2025 (Continued)

	1950	2025
Familism versus individualism	Families were focused on the needs of children. Middle-class mothers stayed home to ensure that the needs of their children were met. Adult concerns were less important.	Adult agenda of work and recreation has taken on increased importance, with less attention given to children. Children are being reared in day care centers due to dual-career parents. Some parents are helicopter parents.
LGBTQ+	LGBTQ+ identities and emotional and sexual relationships were culturally hidden phenomena. These relationships and identities were invisible and stigmatized.	LGBTQ+ individuals are more open about their identity and relationships. While threatened with being overturned, same-sex marriage is legal in every state in the United States.
Scientific scrutiny	Aside from the Kinsey Report, a study of sexuality, few studies were conducted on intimate relationships.	Much scientific research is conducted on marriage and intimate relationships.
Family housing	Spouses lived in the same house	Spouses may “live apart together” (LAT), which means that, although they are emotionally and economically connected, they—by choice—maintain two households.
Communication technology	Limited to the telephone, postal service, and telegrams	Smartphones, texting, sexting, Facebook, Instagram, and other social media permeate the lives of individuals, couples, and families.

TECHNOLOGY AND FAMILY SPOTLIGHT

ROBOTS AS FAMILY MEMBERS

Robots are machines that resemble a living creature in their ability to sense, think, and act. Robots have become embedded in our family life: They perform domestic tasks such as vacuuming; some families use them to tell their children bedtime stories; (Lin et al., 2021); companion robots have been used to reduce loneliness and prolong independent living (Lee et al., 2022; Press, 2021); and therapeutic robots can enhance activity and engagement and improve mood for older adults (Inoue et al., 2021). Robots are also used in the bedroom as solitary sex dolls or for couples who want a threesome (Middleweek, 2021).

Will robots be considered “family”? Some scholars have suggested that the American family has been transformed to include companion pets due to increasing child-free couples and the strong bond between people and pets. After all, most pet-owners regard their companion animals as children, siblings, or grandchildren, and treat them like legitimate family members (Chan, 2020; Krueger et al., 2021; Laurent-Simpson, 2021). If we can develop strong attachments with companion pets, can we form a strong bond with robots? Robots are being designed to look humanlike in appearance, be compassionate and highly interactive, be equipped with decision-making abilities, and may also be morally capable (Riva & Wiederhold, 2021; Zhu, 2021). What if future personal robots not only perform domestic tasks and share the same dwelling, but also educate our children, attend to our pets, take care of our aging parents, listen to us attentively with compassion, and serve an important function in intimate relations? Do robots represent an enhancement of and extension of family? Or do they threaten to replace humans with machines? The morality, ethics, and choices regarding robots in the family elicit new questions that future research may address.

THE PROCESS AND QUALITY OF RESEARCH



The latest research is presented at professional conferences (e. g. the National Council on Family Relations). The authors of this text go to professional meetings, find out about new research, and refer to it throughout the chapters.

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Biological anthropologist Helen Fisher was once asked if studying love had dulled her capacity to experience and enjoy love. She replied that while she knew all the ingredients in a chocolate cake it did not diminish her enjoyment of eating it. Indeed, conducting research in marriage and family does not detract from the magic of relationships. Critical thinking is important in understanding any phenomenon. As research methods are based on and encourage critical thinking, it is important to include a discussion of research methods in marriage and family textbooks (Hughes et al., 2018; Hughes et al, 2020).

Research is valuable since it helps to provide evidence for or against a hypothesis. For example, it is assumed that hookups do not become monogamous love relationships. But almost a fourth of couples who begin as a hookup end up in a long-term romantic relationship with their hookup partner (Erichsen & Dignam, 2016). Researchers follow a standard sequence when conducting a research project, and there are certain caveats to be aware of when reading any research finding.

Steps in the Research Process

Several steps are used in conducting research.

1. **Identify the topic or focus of research.** Select a subject about which you are passionate and give your project a title in the form of a question—“Do People Who Use Social Media Have Happier Relationships Than Those Who Do Not?”
2. **Review the literature.** Go online to the various scholarly databases your college or university subscribes to and read research that has already been published on your topic—in this case, social media use. Not only will this prevent you from “reinventing the wheel”—you might find that a research study has already been conducted on exactly what you want to study—but it will also give you ideas for study.

3. **Develop hypotheses.** A **hypothesis** is a suggested explanation for a phenomenon. For example, you might hypothesize that high social media use is associated with lower relationship satisfaction because the individuals who are in satisfying relationships spend more time in face-to-face interactions in their relationships, and thus spend less time on social media. In this hypothesis, relationship satisfaction predicts social media use, rather than the other way around (social media use predicts relationship satisfaction).
4. **Decide on type of study and method of data collection.** The type of study may be **cross-sectional**, which means studying the sample or population at one time—in this case, finding out from persons about their current use of social media—or **longitudinal**, which means studying the same group of individuals across time—for example, collecting data for each of four years of college. The method of data collection varies: It could involve using archives of secondary sources such as journals, surveys, interviews with one or both partners, or a case study that focuses on one couple. Your research methodology may be quantitative, which relies on surveys or archival material for data collection, or qualitative, where interviews and focus groups are conducted.
5. **Get IRB approval.** To ensure the protection of people who agree to participate in your research, researchers must obtain IRB approval by submitting a summary of their proposed research to their institution's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB reviews the research plan to ensure that the project is consistent with research ethics and poses no undue harm to participants. In effect, the benefits of the intended research must outweigh any potential harm. Hamberger et al. (2020) assessed the outcomes of victims of previous intimate partner violence subjecting themselves to an 18-month program designed to assist in their coping with the negative memories. Data revealed that the survivors said that “it helped a lot to go over it”—the benefits outweighed the risks of producing emotional distress associated with reliving the trauma.
6. **Collect and analyze data.** Various statistical packages are available to analyze data to discover if the data support your hypotheses or not.
7. **Write up and publish results.** Presenting your findings at a professional conference or publishing them in a journal are important so that your study becomes part of the academic literature.

Quality Research

Popular magazines sometimes announce “New Research Study” on topics of interest to their readership—topics such as “hooking up,” “what women want,” “what men want,” “can nonmonogamy help my marriage?” and other relationship, marriage, and family questions. As you read such articles, as well as the research in texts such as this one, be alert to their potential flaws. Some of the issues to keep in mind when evaluating research are identified in Table 1.4.

TABLE 1.4 ■ Obstacles in Achieving Quality Research

WEAKNESS	CONSEQUENCES	EXAMPLE
Sample not random	Cannot generalize findings	Opinions of college students do not reflect opinions of other adults.
No control group	Inaccurate conclusions	Study on the effect of divorce on children needs control group of children whose parents are still together.
Age differences between groups of respondents	Inaccurate conclusions	Effect may be due to passage of time or to cohort differences.
Unclear terminology	Inability to measure what is not clearly defined	What is definition of cohabitation, marital happiness, sexual fulfillment, good communication, and quality time?

WEAKNESS	CONSEQUENCES	EXAMPLE
Researcher bias	Slanted conclusions	A researcher studying the value of a product should not be funded by the organization being studied (Ornstein & Thomas, 2018).
Time lag	Outdated conclusions	Often-quoted Kinsey sex research is over 70 years old.
Distortion	Invalid conclusions	Research subjects exaggerate, omit information, recall facts or events inaccurately, or do all these actions. Respondents may remember what they wish had happened.
Deception	Public misled	Researchers change research data to continue receiving economic support of sponsors.
Mischievous responders	Invalid data	Respondents mislead researcher by providing extreme or untruthful responses to be “funny” (Cimpian et al., 2018).

SUMMARY

What is the theme of this text?

A central theme of this text is to encourage you to be proactive—to make conscious, deliberate relationship choices to enhance your own well-being and the well-being of those in your intimate groups. Some of the important choices are whether to marry, whom to marry, when to marry, whether to have children, whether to remain emotionally and sexually faithful to one’s partner, and whether to use a condom. Important issues to keep in mind about a choices framework for viewing marriage and the family are that (1) not to decide is to decide, (2) action must follow a choice, (3) all choices involve trade-offs, (4) some choices require correcting, (5) choices include selecting a positive or negative view, (6) some choices are not revocable, (7) different generations choose differently, (8) technology influences choices, and (9) our choices are influenced by our stage in the family life cycle.

What are the theoretical frameworks for viewing marriage and the family?

Various theoretical frameworks were discussed. The most used are the family systems framework, the human ecology framework, the symbolic interaction framework, and the social exchange framework. The newest framework is the couple and family technology framework.

What is marriage?

Marriage is a system of binding adults together to have, care for, and socialize offspring if they choose to. The government regards marriage as a legal contract between a couple and the state in which they reside that regulates their economic and sexual relationship. Other elements of marriage involve emotion, fidelity, legal responsibility for children, and public announcements. Types of marriage include monogamy and polygamy.

What is family?

The U.S. Census Bureau defines family as a group of two or more people related by blood, marriage, or adoption. In recognition of the diversity of families, the definition of family is increasingly becoming two adult partners whose interdependent relationship is long-term and characterized by an emotional and financial commitment. The family of origin is the family into which you were born or the family in which you were reared. The family of procreation represents the family that you will begin should you marry and have children. Central concepts of the family are traditional, modern, and postmodern. Types of family include nuclear, binuclear, extended, and blended.

What are the steps in the research process, and what are obstacles to quality research?

Steps in the research process include identifying a topic, reviewing the literature, deciding on methods and data collection procedures, ensuring protection of subjects via getting IRB (Institutional Review Board) approval analyzing the data, and submitting the results to a journal for publication.

To ensure quality research, include a random sample where the respondents providing the data reflect those who were not in the sample; a control group where the group is not subjected to the experimental design for a basis of comparison; objectively defined terminology being used to study the phenomenon; researcher bias, which is present in all studies; time lag, which takes two years from study to print; and distortion or deception of data, which, although rare, some researchers do. Few studies avoid all research problems.

KEY TERMS

Beliefs (p. 11)	Nuclear family (p. 26)
Binuclear family (p. 26)	Pantagamy (p. 22)
Blended family (p. 26)	Patriarchy (p. 16)
Collectivism (p. 13)	Polyandry (p. 22)
Common-law marriage (p. 21)	Polygamy (p. 22)
Conflict framework (p. 15)	Polygyny (p. 22)
Cross-sectional (p. 30)	Postmodern family (p. 26)
Extended family (p. 26)	Primary groups (p. 10)
Familism (p. 12)	Role conflict (p. 10)
Family life course development framework (p. 13)	Roles (p. 10)
Family life cycle (p. 13)	Secondary groups (p. 10)
Family of orientation (p. 25)	Social exchange framework (p. 13)
Family of procreation (p. 25)	Social groups (p. 10)
Family systems framework (p. 17)	Sociological imagination (p. 7)
Family (p. 24)	Statuses (p. 10)
Feminist framework (p. 16)	Structure-function framework (p. 14)
Fictive kin (p. 24)	Symbolic interaction framework (p. 16)
Human ecology framework (p. 17)	Theoretical frameworks (p. 13)
Hypothesis (p. 30)	Traditional family (p. 26)
Individualism (p. 12)	Transnational families (p. 24)
Institutions (p. 9)	Values (p. 11)
Modern family (p. 26)	Walking marriage: (p. 19)
Norms (p. 11)	