

Frank D. Cox • Kevin Demmitt

Human Intimacy

11e

MARRIAGE, THE FAMILY, AND ITS MEANING



11th edition

Human Intimacy

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11th edition

HUMAN INTIMACY

Marriage, the Family, and Its Meaning

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BRIEF CONTENTS

Preface xv

- 1** Human Intimacy in the Brave New World of Family Diversity 1
 - 2** Human Intimacy, Relationships, Marriage, and the Family 27
 - 3** American Ways of Love 57
 - 4** Gender Convergence and Role Equity 85
 - 5** Communications in Intimate Relationships 109
 - 6** Dating, Single Life, and Mate Selection 141
 - 7** Marriage, Intimacy, Expectations, and the Fully Functioning Person 175
 - 8** Human Sexuality 209
 - 9** Family Planning, Pregnancy, and Birth 239
 - 10** The Challenge of Parenthood 277
 - 11** Family Life Stages: Middle Age to Surviving Spouse 319
 - 12** The Importance of Making Sound Economic Decisions 347
 - 13** The Dual-Earner Family: The Real American Revolution 383
 - 14** Family Crises 413
 - 15** The Dissolution of Marriage 449
 - 16** Remarriage: A Growing Way of American Life 481
 - 17** Actively Seeking Marital Growth and Fulfillment 507
- Appendix A** Sexually Transmitted Diseases 527
- Appendix B** Contraceptive Methods 537
- Glossary 545
- References 549
- Author Index 583
- Subject Index 595

CONTENTS

1 Human Intimacy in the Brave New World of Family Diversity 1

- Building Successful Relationships 2
- Qualities of Strong and Resilient Families: An Overview 5
- Can We Study Intimacy? 9
 - Optimism versus Pessimism 10
- Making Decisions That Lead to a Fulfilling Life 11
 - Logic and Emotion in Decision Making 12
 - Decision-Making Steps 13
 - The Gift of Choosing 16
- Theoretical Approaches to Family Study 16
- Methods of Study 19
 - The Experiment 19
 - The Survey 20
 - The Clinical Method 21
- HIGHLIGHT:** Sherlock Holmes, Dr. Watson, and Delinquency Data 22
 - Natural or Field Observation 22
 - Group versus Individual Data 23
- Strengthening the Family 23

2 Human Intimacy, Relationships, Marriage, and the Family 27

- Family: The Basic Unit of Human Organization 28
 - Family Functions 30
- The American Family: Many Structures and Much Change 32
- FAMILIES AROUND THE WORLD:** China: Families and Government Policy 36

Change within Continuity and Uniqueness within Commonality 38

- HIGHLIGHT:** The Family Riddle 39
- HIGHLIGHT:** Tricky Statistics: Cohabitation and Rejection of Marriage 40
- Family: A Buffer against Mental and Physical Illnesses 41
 - The Need for Intimacy 42
- HIGHLIGHT:** Why Do We Avoid Intimacy? 43
- The Family as Interpreter of Society 45
- Unique Characteristics of the American Family 46
- HIGHLIGHT:** What the Research Says 47
- Family: The Consuming Unit of the American Economy 47
- American Families: A Great Diversity of Types 48
 - African American Families 51
 - Hispanic Families 51
 - Asian American Families 52
 - The American Indian and Alaska Native Population 53
- DEBATE THE ISSUES:** Should Our Society Recognize Gay Marriages? 56

3 American Ways of Love 57

- The American Myth: Romantic Love Should Always Lead to Marriage 59
- Defining Love 60
- HIGHLIGHT:** Love Is ... 61
 - Theories of Love 62
 - Romantic Love 65
 - Infatuation 67
 - Loving and Liking 67

The Double Cross **68**
Love Is What You Make It **69**

WHAT RESEARCH TELLS US: Love and
Friendship **70**

Love in Strong Families: Appreciation and
Respect **72**

HIGHLIGHT: Gender Differences in Love **73**
Learning to Love **74**

Actions and Attitudes **74**

Developmental Stages in Learning to Love **75**

Love over Time: From Passionate to
Companionate Love **77**

HIGHLIGHT: Love and the Loss of One's Self-
Identity **79**

Love's Oft-Found Companion: Jealousy **79**

DEBATE THE ISSUES: Are Love and Marriage Good
for You? **83**

4

Gender Convergence and Role Equity **85**

Male = Masculine and Female = Feminine:
Not Necessarily So **86**

Norms and Roles **87**

How Sex and Gender Identity Develop **88**

Biological Contributions **88**

Environmental Contributions **89**

HIGHLIGHT: The Xanith of Oman **90**

Gender Differences **90**

Role Equity **91**

WHAT RESEARCH TELLS US: Stereotypical Sex-
Role Differences Compared with Research
Findings **92**

Traditional Gender Roles **94**

Changing Male and Female Roles **95**

Women and the Law **96**

HIGHLIGHT: "Firsts" for Women in the Past Three
Decades **97**

FAMILIES AROUND THE WORLD: The Dani of Irian Jaya
(Indonesian New Guinea) **98**

Gender-Role Stereotypes **100**

The Movement toward Gender Equality **102**

HIGHLIGHT: Men as the Oppressed Sex **103**

DEBATE THE ISSUES: Can We Create Gender-Neutral
Children? **107**

5

Communications in Intimate Relationships **109**

Good Communication: A Basic Strength of
Successful Families **111**

Communication Failure: An Indicator of
Relationship Problems **114**

Aversive Communication **114**

Communication Can Be Used for Good
and Bad Purposes **115**

The Foundation Blocks
of Successful Communication **116**

Commitment **116**

Growth Orientation **116**

Noncoercive Atmosphere **117**

Developing a Smooth Flow
of Communication **118**

Communication Skills **119**

Identifying Problem Ownership **119**

Self-Assertion **120**

MAKING DECISIONS: You-, I-, and We-
Statements **122**

Empathic Listening **123**

Negotiating **126**

Problem Solving **127**

Men and Women: Do They Speak the Same
Language? **128**

HIGHLIGHT: How Men and Women Can
Communicate Better in Intimate
Relationships **130**

Communication and Family Conflict **130**

Anger **133**

Over What Topics Do Couples Conflict? **133**

Personal Relationships in the
Information Age **134**

Social Networking Sites **135**

DEBATE THE ISSUES: Is Honesty Always the Best
Policy? **138**

6

Dating, Single Life, and Mate Selection 141

Premarital American Dating 142

Why Do We Date? 143

Premarital Dating Patterns 144

College Dating: Hanging Out, Hooking Up, Joined at the Hip 145

Dating and Extended Singleness 147

WHAT RESEARCH TELLS US: Women and Singleness 148

WHAT RESEARCH TELLS US: Singles in America 149

Changing Sexual Mores 149

Deciding for Yourself 152

Freedom of Choice and Sexual Health 153

Possible Problems Associated with Premarital Sexual Relations 153

HIGHLIGHT: Dawn and Nonmarital Pregnancy 154

MAKING DECISIONS: Is My Sexual Behavior Healthy? 155

Date Rape and Courtship Violence 156

Cohabitation: Unmarried-Couple Households 158

The Nature of Cohabiting Relationships 159

Is the Woman Exploited in Cohabitation? 159

The Relationship between Cohabitation and Marriage 160

WHAT RESEARCH TELLS US: Children and Cohabitation 163

Breaking Up 163

Living Together and the Law 164

Finding the One and Only:

Mate Selection 164

Background Factors 166

Interactional Processes 166

From First Impressions to Engagement 168

Engagement 170

Types of Engagements 170

Functions of Engagement 171

DEBATE THE ISSUES: Does Sex Education Prevent Pregnancy or Encourage Promiscuity? 173

7

Marriage, Intimacy, Expectations, and the Fully Functioning Person 175

Marriage Matters 176

The Transition from Single to Married Life 177

Marriage: A Myriad of Interactions 179

Fulfilling Needs in Marriage 181

FAMILIES AROUND THE WORLD: Marriage in Japan 182

HIGHLIGHT: Religion and Marriage 184

Defining Marital Success 184

Strong Relationships and Families 185

HIGHLIGHT: A Hectic Schedule 186

Marital Expectations 188

HIGHLIGHT: Carol: The Perpetual Seeker 189

The Honeymoon Is Over: Too High Expectations 189

Romantic Love or Marriage? 190

Differing Expectations 191

Eighty Percent I Love You; Twenty Percent I Dislike You 192

The Expectation of Commitment: A Characteristic of Strong and Successful Families 192

HIGHLIGHT: Carl and Allison: The Perfect Couple 193

The Expectation of Primariness: Extramarital Relations 195

The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy 197

MAKING DECISIONS: Online Infidelity—Is it Really Cheating? 198

The Self-Actualized Person in the Fully Functioning Family 199

Characteristics of Mental Health 199

Self-Actualization 200

Living in the Now 201

The Goals of Intimacy 201

You and the State: Legal Aspects of Marriage **203**
HIGHLIGHT: Navajo Marital Expectations **205**
 Writing Your Own Marriage Contract and Prenuptial Agreement **205**
MAKING DECISIONS: The Couple's Inventory **206**
DEBATE THE ISSUES: Is Marriage a Dying Institution? **208**

8 Human Sexuality **209**

MAKING DECISIONS: Sex Knowledge Inventory **211**
 The Uniqueness of Human Sexuality **212**
HIGHLIGHT: The Sambians of Papua **213**
 Changing Sexual Mores **214**
 Modifying Sexual Behavior **215**
HIGHLIGHT: "What Role Should Sex Play in My Life?" Beth-Ann Asks **216**
 Differences between Male and Female Sexuality **217**
HIGHLIGHT: A Precoital Contract **218**
 Physiology of the Sexual Response **220**
 Female Sexual Response **220**
HIGHLIGHT: Female Genital Mutilation **221**
MAKING DECISIONS: What Are Your Biggest Problems and Complaints about Sex? **222**
HIGHLIGHT: Describing Orgasm **223**
 Male Sexual Response **223**
 Variations in Sexual Response **224**
 Some Myths Unmasked **224**
 Does Sexual Addiction Exist? **225**
 Marital Sex: Can I Keep the Excitement Alive? **226**
HIGHLIGHT: One Husband's Sexual Life **227**
HIGHLIGHT: Sex and Physical Disability **228**
 Sex and the Aging Process **229**
 Menopause **230**
 Sex and Drugs **232**

Sexually Transmitted Diseases **233**
DEBATE THE ISSUES: Pornography **237**

9 Family Planning, Pregnancy, and Birth **239**

Children by Choice **240**
 Are We Ready for Children? **241**
 Children Having Children **242**
 Family Planning Decisions **245**
 Deciding on a Contraceptive **246**
 Abortion **247**
WHAT RESEARCH TELLS US: Who Has Abortions? **248**
 Infertility **251**
 Prerequisites of Fertility **251**
 Causes of Infertility **252**
MAKING DECISIONS: How Old Is Too Old? **253**
 Methods of Treatment: Designing Babies **253**
HIGHLIGHT: The Ultimate Breakthrough **259**
HIGHLIGHT: Who, in Fact, Are the Parents of Jaycee? **260**
 Pregnancy **261**
 Pregnancy Tests **261**
HIGHLIGHT: Am I Really Pregnant? **262**
 Environmental Causes of Congenital Problems **265**
 Controlling Birth Defects **267**
 Birth **268**
HIGHLIGHT: Infant Mortality Rates **269**
 Cesarean Birth **269**
 Birth Pain **270**
 Natural Childbirth **270**
 Rooming-In **271**
 Alternative Birth Centers **272**
 Home Births **272**
 Postpartum Emotional Changes **273**
DEBATE THE ISSUES: To Clone or Not to Clone **275**

10 The Challenge of Parenthood 277

What Effects Do Children Have on a Marriage? 279

HIGHLIGHT: The Highs and Lows of Parenthood 283

Traditionalization of the Marital Relationship 284

Parental Effectiveness 284

HIGHLIGHT: Diversity in Child-Rearing Values and Practices 287

The Father's Role in Parenting 289

Television, Video Games, and the Internet as Surrogate Parents 292

Child Rearing, Discipline, and Control 296

Spanking 297

MAKING DECISIONS: Using Discipline and Punishment Effectively 298

The Growing Child in the Family 299

Infancy: The First Year 300

The Toddler: 2 to 3 Years of Age 302

Early Childhood: 4 to 5 Years of Age 302

School Age: 6 to 11 Years of Age 303

Puberty-Adolescence: 12 to 18 Years of Age 303

HIGHLIGHT: Cell Phones—Don't Call Me, I'll Call You 304

HIGHLIGHT: Adolescent Hormones and Brain Functioning 304

HIGHLIGHT: Oh No, John Is Back Home Again 306

The Young Adult: 19 to 30 Years of Age 306

WHAT RESEARCH TELLS US: Young Adults Living with Parents 307

Broader Parenting 307

Parents without Pregnancy: Adoption 308

The Single-Parent Family 311

HIGHLIGHT: Father Absence in African American Homes 312

DEBATE THE ISSUES: Should Parents Stay Home to Rear Their Children? 316

11 Family Life Stages: Middle Age to Surviving Spouse 319

WHAT RESEARCH TELLS US: Increasing Life Expectancy 321

Dealing with Change: Another Characteristic of the Strong, Healthy Family 321

The Graying of America 322

Middle Age: The Empty Nest 323

HIGHLIGHT: How a Highly Trained Engineer Became a Bicycle-Repair Man 324

The Sandwich Generation: Caught in the Middle 325

Retirement 329

Widowhood as the Last Stage of Marriage 333

HIGHLIGHT: Doctor's Wife 335

The Adjustment Process and Remarriage 335

HIGHLIGHT: Remarriage after the Loss of a Spouse 337

The Grandparenting Role 337

HIGHLIGHT: Death of a Young Wife: A Young Father Alone 338

HIGHLIGHT: Becoming Parents Again after Your Children Are Raised 341

Older but Coming on Strong 342

DEBATE THE ISSUES: Should Physicians Help Terminally Ill Patients Commit Suicide? 344

12 The Importance of Making Sound Economic Decisions 347

WHAT RESEARCH TELLS US: GNI per Capita in Various Countries 350

WHAT RESEARCH TELLS US: Median Income of Households and Families 350

Slowly Drowning in a Sea of Debt 352

WHAT RESEARCH TELLS US: Is College Worth It? 353

WHAT RESEARCH TELLS US: How Much Do Americans Owe? 354

MAKING DECISIONS: Compare Your Attitudes about Money **355**

Making Good Credit, Borrowing, and Installment-Buying Decisions **355**

Discount Interest: Consumer Purchases **356**

Simple Interest: Home Loans **357**

Financial Problems and Marital Strain **358**

The Seductive Society: Credit and Advertising **359**

Effective Money Management **360**

To Pool or Not to Pool Family Money? **361**

Allocation of Funds: Who Makes the Spending Decisions? **362**

Budgeting: Enlightened Control of Spending **362**

MAKING DECISIONS: How to Budget Your Income **363**

Saving through Wise Spending **364**

MAKING DECISIONS: Budget Worksheet **365**

The Economy and Black, Hispanic, Asian American, and Single-Parent Families **367**

Inflation and Recession **368**

Inflation **368**

FAMILIES AROUND THE WORLD: Mexico: The Middle-Class Family **370**

Periods of Reduced Inflation and Mild Recession **372**

Deciding What Insurance Is Needed **373**

Medical Insurance **373**

Automobile Insurance **373**

Home Owner's Insurance **373**

Life Insurance **374**

Deciding to Buy a Home **374**

The Decision to Invest **376**

HIGHLIGHT: You Can Still Make a Million Dollars **378**

DEBATE THE ISSUES: Credit: Is Credit The Way to Economic Freedom? **381**

13 The Dual-Earner Family: The Real American Revolution **383**

Women and the Economy **384**

WHAT RESEARCH TELLS US: Women in the Workforce **385**

Job Opportunities for Women **386**

Pay Differentials between Men and Women **388**

Making the Decision to Become a Two-Earner Family **391**

The Employed Wife's Economic Contribution to the Family **392**

Community Service and the Employed Wife **394**

Household Activities and Supermothers **394**

Deciding in Favor of Part-Time Work **397**

Child Care and Parental Leave **398**

Stay-at-Home Moms **400**

Employers, Pregnant Employees, and Employed Mothers **401**

Home-Based Work **403**

Marital Satisfaction in the Two-Earner Family **404**

Work and Family: Sources of Conflict **405**

Jobs, Occupations, and Careers **408**

Dual-Career Families **408**

Commuter Marriage and/or the Weekend Family **408**

DEBATE THE ISSUES: Is Sexual Harassment in the Workplace Pervasive? **411**

14 Family Crises **413**

Coping with Crises **414**

HIGHLIGHT: Types of Stressor Events **415**

Stress: Healthy and Unhealthy **415**

Crisis Management **419**

HIGHLIGHT: Agencies That Can Help with Various Crises **420**

Defense Mechanisms **420**

Death in the Family **422**

Natural Causes **422**

Ambiguous Loss **422**

Suicide and Homicide **423**

Firearm Mortality **426**

Grief and Bereavement **426**

Accidents, Injuries, and
Catastrophic Illness **428**

MAKING DECISIONS: The Case of the Weinstein
Family **429**

Family Violence **430**

Violence between Partners **430**

Child Abuse **431**

Sibling Abuse **433**

Peer Abuse **433**

HIGHLIGHT: Repressed Memories of
Incest **434**

Parental Abuse by Children **435**

Factors Associated with Family
Violence **435**

Poverty and Unemployment **436**

Children and Poverty **438**

The Military Family in the Time of War **439**

Drug and Alcohol Abuse **441**

Drugs and Drug Abuse **441**

Alcohol **442**

DEBATE THE ISSUES: Should Drugs Be
Legalized? **447**

15 The Dissolution of Marriage **449**

Let No One Put Asunder **450**

WHAT RESEARCH TELLS US: Divorce Facts **451**

Reasons for America's
High Divorce Rate **452**

Emotional Divorce and the Emotions of
Divorce **454**

HIGHLIGHT: Not One Divorce but Six **456**

HIGHLIGHT: Divorce: Constant Self-
Questioning **457**

Divorce but Not the End
of the Relationship **458**

MAKING DECISIONS: What Changes Must Be Made
with Divorce? **459**

Problems of the Newly Divorced **459**

Economic Consequences **460**

Children and Divorce **463**

Types of Child Custody **465**

WHAT RESEARCH TELLS US: The Children of
Divorce **466**

Learning to Coparent **468**

HIGHLIGHT: Divorce and Dad **469**

Divorce: The Legalities **469**

Some Cautions about No-Fault Divorce **472**

Divorce Counseling and Mediation **473**

Reducing Divorce Rates **474**

Divorce May Not Be the Answer **475**

DEBATE THE ISSUES: Should Couples Stay Together
for the Sake of the Children? **480**

16 Remarriage: A Growing Way of American Life **481**

Returning to Single Life **484**

Cohabitation as a Courtship Step to
Remarriage **486**

Remarriage: Will I Make
the Same Mistakes Again? **486**

HIGHLIGHT: Bob, Carol, Ted, and Alice **488**

Family Law and Stepfamilies **490**

Child-Support Obligations **491**

Custody and Visitation of Stepchildren **491**

His, Hers, and Ours: The Stepfamily **492**

HIGHLIGHT: How to Ruin a Remarriage **495**

HIGHLIGHT: The Ten Commandments of
Stepparenting **496**

Weekend Visits of the Noncustodial Child **496**

Dealing with Sexuality in the Stepfamily **498**

HIGHLIGHT: How Much Closer Can We Get? **499**

The New Extended Family **499**

Building Stepfamily Strengths **500**

The Prenuptial Agreement **501**

Mediation to Settle Conflicts
and Other Prevention Programs **501**

DEBATE THE ISSUES: Fatherless America: Can
a Stepfather Take the Place of a Biological
Father? **504**

17

Actively Seeking Marital Growth and Fulfillment 507

“And They Lived Happily Ever After” 509

HIGHLIGHT: Economic Success, Marital Failure 511

HIGHLIGHT: Self-Improvement, Marital Failure 512

Marriage Improvement Programs 513

Guidelines for Choosing Marriage Improvement Programs 515

HIGHLIGHT: A Family Life Enrichment Weekend 517

An Ounce of Prevention Is Worth a Pound of Cure: Marriage Enrichment 518

HIGHLIGHT: Marriage Encounter 520

Marriage with Purpose: Effective Management 521

In the Future, the Family Will Remain and Diversify 523

APPENDIX A Sexually Transmitted Diseases 527

APPENDIX B Contraceptive Methods 537

Glossary 545

References 549

Author Index 583

Subject Index 595

PREFACE

Marriage and family seem, on the surface, to be simple age-old concepts. Yet, arguments rage over how to define family:

- Are an unmarried single mother and her child a family?
- Should two men or two women be able to marry and create a family?
- Can a number of people in an intimate commune setting be defined as a family?
- Using an anonymous sperm donor, an egg donor, and a surrogate mother to carry the fertilized egg to birth creates a family, but to whom does the child really belong?

Everyone seems to support “family values,” but there is little agreement on what, when, how, and to whom such support should be given. Most Americans believe in family values but are quick to criticize others whom they feel do not share their own particular definition of family.

As readers of past editions of *Human Intimacy* know, your authors focus on principles that lead to successful intimate relationships, regardless of what your definition of a family may be. *Human Intimacy* presents an optimistic view of the American family, concentrating on those strengths that research has found in all successful intimate relationships.

Even when the family is afloat in stormy seas and seems to be foundering, marriage and family remain the basic building blocks of a strong society. Almost all of us grow up in families, and 90 percent of us will be a marriage partner at some time in our lives. Although some people worry that the percentage of Americans marrying is dropping (and it is), if we add cohabitation figures to marriage figures we find that intimate relationships are still sought by the vast majority of Americans. Why? Because it is within the intimate love relationship we call family that individuals most often find a sense of sharing, a sense of well-being, a sense of security, a sense of fulfillment, and, perhaps above all, a meaning to one’s life.

It is important to stress those characteristics of intimate relationships that help reinforce the strength and resiliency of the marital relationship and the family. Families tend to get into trouble because members are unwilling to make the effort to nourish and enrich their family relationships. By emphasizing ways by which relationships can be improved, *Human Intimacy* encourages readers to make the effort to build strong, satisfying intimate relationships.

It is the author’s hope that *Human Intimacy* will contribute to the reader’s ability to make intelligent, satisfying choices about intimate relationships. Individuals who can make such choices in their lives are most apt to feel fulfilled. And fulfilled people have the best chance of making their intimate relationships, their family relationships, exciting and growth producing. Fulfilled people are also more likely to contribute to society at large, thus making the general community a better place in which to live.

New to This Edition

The marriage and family field is complex and ever changing. Relationships do not occur in a vacuum; they are embedded in a context of laws, economics, values, norms, race, and myriad other cultural and social factors. Thus, it is important to keep up with changes in all these areas and their connections to marriage and family relationships. This Eleventh Edition includes new, updated material on some of the most relevant marriage and family related issues and events.

- Chapter 1 (Human Intimacy in the Brave New World of Family Diversity) includes new data for marriage rates and birth rates by race. Feminism is added as a perspective in the section on conflict theory.
- Chapter 2 (Human Intimacy, Relationships, Marriage, and the Family) adds recent data on the characteristics of single families, cohabitation rates, social and demographic characteristics of families by race, and same-sex marriage laws.
- Chapter 3 (American Ways of Love) includes new references on the benefits of marriage, as well as new research on arranged marriages.
- Chapter 4 (Gender Convergence and Role Equity) includes new research on the pressure men feel as they balance economic expectations with parenting responsibilities and how parents influence gender role expectations for their children.
- Chapter 5 (Communications in Intimate Relationships) adds research on how people can learn new communication skills and how people expect a conversation to end influences communication patterns. The demand–withdraw pattern is added as a common communication problem. Also, a new section on how social media influence communication is included in this chapter.
- Chapter 6 (Dating, Single Life, and Mate Selection) includes new research on adolescent romance, hanging out, and hooking up. New research on the changing relationship between education and age at marriage is presented. Also, recent declines in adolescent sexual activity are discussed. New data is included on cohabitation rates, interracial marriages, and teenage pregnancy.
- Chapter 7 (Marriage, Intimacy, Expectations, and the Fully Functioning Person) includes a new *Highlight* on religion and marriage, updated research on extra-marital affairs, the benefits of family meal time, and a new *Making Decisions* discussion of online infidelity.
- Chapter 8 (Human Sexuality) updates research on teen sexuality, teen birth rates, abortion, sexually transmitted diseases, and pornography.
- Chapter 9 (Family Planning, Pregnancy, and Birth) includes an expanded discussion of voluntary childlessness. New information on trends related to artificial insemination and sperm donors has been added. And the data on global fertility rates, teen fertility rates, multiple births, and abortion rates is updated.
- Chapter 10 (The Challenge of Parenthood) includes new discussions on raising children with special needs, the cumulative effects of family instability on children, patterns of involvement for nonresident fathers, and sex in the media. New and updated *Highlights* are included for the topics of children with cell phones and African American fathers. Also, there is new data on children living in single-parent households, fathers' involvement in child care, adult children living at home, spanking, the time children spend with media, and international adoptions.
- Chapter 11 (Family Life Stages: Middle Age to Surviving Spouse) expands the discussion of caring for aging parents to include the effect of women's employment on caregiving, and reasons why people feel inclined to assist their parents. Research on the discrepancy between daily life expectations and reality for older

Americans has been added. More recent data on life expectancy rates, household characteristics, living arrangements, and economic conditions for seniors is included. And the section on the multifaceted role of grandparenting is expanded.

- Chapter 12 (The Importance of Making Sound Economic Decisions) includes new information on the Great Recession, financial struggles, and marital conflict, and updated data on the global economy, median income and poverty rates, labor market trends, consumer buying patterns, inflation statistics, and the decline of home values. There is also a new discussion of student loan debt and the economic value of a college degree.
- Chapter 13 (The Dual-Earner Family: The Real American Revolution) has updates on economic and education trends for women, the gender income gap, family-friendly employers, employment patterns for men and women, stay-at-home moms and stay-at-home dads, child-care arrangements, flexible work schedules, and trends in sexual harassment cases.
- Chapter 14 (Family Crises) includes the most recent data available on the cost of health care and the Affordable Care Act. There are expanded discussions of intimate partner violence and child abuse, and new sections on cyberbullying and the effect of poverty on children's behavior. Data on suicide rates, firearm deaths, demographic characteristics of those without health insurance, child abuse rates, drug and alcohol use by age, and poverty rates by race, sex, and education have all been updated.
- Chapter 15 (The Dissolution of Marriage) has the latest divorce statistics and research on the causes and consequences of divorce. New information on how child custody arrangements are determined has been added. There also is a discussion of new initiatives to strengthen marriages and reduce the divorce rate.
- Chapter 16 (Remarriage: A Growing Way of American Life) includes new research on the relationship patterns with stepparents and stepchildren and an expanded discussion of how children affect remarriages.
- Chapter 17 (Actively Seeking Marital Growth and Fulfillment) includes an update on the implementation and effectiveness of marriage initiatives across the country.

Distinctive Features of *Human Intimacy*

Human Intimacy has several features designed to aid your reading and challenge you.

- Each chapter starts with an outline that gives you an overview of the material to follow. This is followed by a series of thought-provoking questions for you to ponder as you read the chapter.
- Highlight boxes supply interesting detail and add variety to the reading, much as an aside adds variety to a lecture. What Research Tells Us is one type of highlight that serves as a reminder of the quantity of scientific research underpinning our knowledge about intimate relationships, marriage, and the family.
- Debate the Issues, featured at the end of each chapter, present both sides of controversial topics. Taking a definitive stand on both sides of an issue helps make discussions both lively and thought provoking.
- Families around the World help readers better understand the diversity of family life.
- What Do You Think? are critical thinking questions that appear throughout the text to precipitate thought and discussion.

- Making Decisions boxes are short exercises designed to help you gain insight into such topics as your attitudes toward love, marriage, the handling of finances, and so on.
- Key terms are set in boldface and defined in the margin at the point of use as well as in the glossary at the back of the book.
- A short summary concludes each chapter.
- Each chapter now includes web addresses for internet sites that provide additional information to the topics covered.
- Updated appendices investigating sexually transmitted diseases and contraception are included at the end of the book.
- The discussion of HIV/AIDS is in Appendix A, along with a discussion of other sexually transmitted diseases. By placing it in an appendix, the instructor may bring in a discussion of HIV/AIDS at any time he or she chooses rather than having to discuss it when it appears in the chapter on sexuality.
- More emphasis was placed on weaving the positive characteristics of successful families throughout the book.

Supplements

Human Intimacy: Marriage, the Family, and Its Meaning, Eleventh Edition is accompanied by a wide array of supplements prepared to create the best learning environment inside as well as outside the classroom for both the instructor and the student. All the continuing supplements for *Human Intimacy: Marriage, the Family, and Its Meaning*, Eleventh Edition, have been thoroughly revised and updated, and several are new to this edition. We invite you to take full advantage of the teaching and learning tools available to you.

Supplements for the Instructor

eBank Instructor's Manual with Test Bank Written by Kevin Demmitt of Clayton State University, this supplement contains resources designed to streamline and maximize the effectiveness of your course preparation, including learning objectives, chapter lecture outlines, key terms and concepts, and class projects. The Instructor's Manual with Test Bank also includes 75–100 multiple-choice and 25 true-false questions for each chapter, all with answers and page references. There are also 10–15 short answer questions and 5–10 essay questions for each chapter.

ExamView® Create, deliver, and customize tests and study guides (both print and online) in minutes with this easy-to-use assessment and tutorial system. ExamView offers both a Quick Test Wizard and an Online Test Wizard that guide you step by step through the process of creating tests, while its “what you see is what you get” interface allows you to see the test you are creating on the screen exactly as it will print or display online. You can build tests of up to 250 questions using up to 12 question types. Using ExamView's complete word processing capabilities, you can enter an unlimited number of new questions or edit existing questions.

Supplements for the Student

Marriage and Family: Using Microcase® ExplorIt®, Third Edition Written by Kevin Demmitt of Clayton State University, this is a software-based workbook that provides an exciting way to get students to view marriage and family from the sociological

perspective. With this workbook and the accompanying ExplorIt software and data sets, your students will use national and cross-national surveys to examine and actively learn marriage and family topics. This inexpensive workbook will add an exciting dimension to your marriage and family course.

Internet-Based Supplements

CourseMate for Human Intimacy: Marriage, the Family, and Its Meaning Cengage Learning's Sociology CourseMate brings course concepts to life with interactive learning, study, and exam preparation tools that support the printed textbook. Access an integrated eBook, learning tools including glossaries, flashcards, quizzes, videos, and more in your Sociology CourseMate. Go to CengageBrain.com to register or purchase access.

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We also thank all the wonderful students who have passed through our classes. They have made us think and grow and have let us know that the American family is alive and well.

Although *Human Intimacy* has our names on it, the actual production of the book rests with Mark Kerr, our editor; and Liana Sarkisian, the development editor who helped guide the development of this revision. Once in production, the project was skillfully guided by Michelle Clark.

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11th edition

Human Intimacy



CHAPTER

1

Human Intimacy in the Brave New World of **FAMILY DIVERSITY**



CHAPTER OUTLINE

- Building Successful Relationships
- Qualities of Strong and Resilient Families: An Overview
- Can We Study Intimacy?
- Making Decisions That Lead to a Fulfilling Life
- Theoretical Approaches to Family Study
- Methods of Study
- Strengthening the Family

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QUESTIONS

TO REFLECT UPON AS YOU READ THIS CHAPTER

- Can you list several characteristics of a successful marriage and family?
- What are your own personal ideals about marriage and family?
- How do logic and emotion relate when making successful decisions?
- Can you suggest some things that we can do to strengthen the family?

Could *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* or *Leave It to Beaver* middle-class, American family of the 1950s possibly have predicted the current changes in reproduction? In that decade, the petri dish-cultured, artificially inseminated, gene-altered, implanted egg; the surrogate mother-carried child; and, perhaps, the soon-to-be cloned child were considered to be only science fiction possibilities.

Could that ideal, middle-class American family of the 1950s possibly have envisioned and accepted the diversity of families in the twenty-first century—families comprising a stepparent or a parent that is single, single adoptive, foster, or gay/lesbian; families that are African American, American Indian, Asian American, Hispanic, or of mixed ethnicity or nationality; or any mix of the above?

The popular buzzword in today's sociological and psychological study of the American family is the term *diversity*. It is clear that the American family is, indeed, diverse. Even experts in the field of family study can no longer agree on a definition of *family*. Yet, the idea of diversity (meaning differences) can be (and often is) taken to the politically correct extreme, which implies that any relationship and every behavior is acceptable, that there are no standards, and that there can be no criticism or judgment. Too often, emphasis on diversity exaggerates differences.

Successful human relationships are built on similarities and on overcoming, rather than emphasizing, differences. To lay differences aside, to minimize them, is a major step in resolving conflict. Of course, there are differences in any relationship, but discovering and emphasizing similarities leads to compromise and acceptance of differences.

In the broader sense, no society can remain vital or even survive without a reasonable base of shared values. Emphasizing similarities, rather than differences, within the general society helps to create a foundation of shared values among the populace. Shared values form the glue that holds a family, and perhaps more important, a society, together.

Amazing changes are undoubtedly taking place in both reproduction technology and family functioning within the American population (Demo et al. 2000; Marks 2000; Smock and Greenland 2010; Stacey 2000). How, then, do Americans create intimate, long-term relationships and families within this new, seemingly ever-changing context? Can a child born via the new technologies into a family made up of diverse individuals learn to create long-lasting intimacy? We believe that he/she can, and that is the point of this marriage and family textbook.

Building Successful Relationships

Given one wish in life, most people would wish to be loved, to have the capacity to reveal themselves entirely to another human being and to be embraced, caressed, by that acceptance. People who have successfully built an intimate relationship know its power and comfort. But they also know that taking the emotional risks that allow intimacy to happen isn't easy. Built upon the sharing of feelings, intimacy requires consummate trust. (Avery 1989, 27)

Intimate relationships—what an exciting and important field of study! By *intimate*, we mean experiencing intense intellectual, emotional, and (when appropriate) physical

intimate

Experiencing intense intellectual, emotional, and, when appropriate, physical communion with another human being

communion with another human being. Communicating and caring. Boyfriend/girlfriend. Husband/wife. Parent/child. Grandparent/grandchild. Family/friends. These are the relationships that give meaning to life, the relationships that give us a sense of identity, of well-being, of security, of being needed. These are the relationships that ward off loneliness and insecurity, the relationships that allow us to love and be loved. Perhaps, without intimacy, the human part of *human being* would disappear and we'd all simply *be*; we'd become automatons similar to our home computers—capable of solving problems and delivering information, but lacking in those markedly human qualities of loving, caring, and compassion. In a phrase, we'd lack the characteristics that allow human beings to become intimate. Without intimacy there is emotional isolation, and emotional isolation increases the risk of physical and emotional disorders (P. Brown 1995, 135; Hawkey and Cacioppo 2010; Ladbroke 2000; Wamboldt and Reiss 1989). Social ties of all kinds, but especially those of an intimate nature, tend to support both physical and mental health (Bramlett and Mosher 2002).

The study of intimate relationships is both essential and exciting because we live in a society where intimate relationships are important to social and emotional survival. Modern society is fast-changing. Think of the speed of technological advancement to which we all must adjust. Compare the freedom today to build an intimate love relationship with the rigidity demanded of such relationships during Victorian times. As personal freedom increases, the building of personal relationships becomes more salient. Without rigid rules of the past governing relationships, the intimate relationships an individual builds become the glue to hold marriages and families together (Jamieson 1998, 1999, 218–219). On the other hand, intimate, long-lasting relationships are more difficult to build without the rigid rules of the past. However, most Americans continue to find intimacy and satisfaction within a creative and changing family, and most still spend the bulk of their lives within marriage and family relationships. Therefore, we need to expend more energy on making marriages and families viable and fulfilling, rather than simply criticizing the institution of marriage.

Yet, disparaging marriage and advocating alternatives to current practices is easy and popular. Such criticisms tend to imply that marriage is a rigid relationship that has passed relatively unchanged into our modern culture. In reality, marriage and the family have undergone dramatic change and they continue to change as they adapt to today's world.

Changes in the family because of modernization have led some critics of marriage to long for the good old days. This suggests that there was some lost, golden age of the family such as in TV's *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* of the 1950s where children, parents, and communities lived free of the problems and conflicts of modern life. Studies of family history, however, have failed to uncover any such golden age. Jerome and Arlene Skolnick (1986, 17; 1991; 2000) point out that those condemning modernization may have forgotten the problems of the past. Although our current problems inside and outside the family are genuine, we should remember that many of these issues derive from the very benefits of modernization, benefits too easily taken for granted or forgotten in the fashionable denunciation of modern times. In the past, there was no problem of the aged because most people died before they got old. Adolescence wasn't a difficult stage of the life cycle because it didn't exist; children worked and education was a privilege of the rich. Modernization certainly brings problems, yet how many of us would trade the troubles of our era for the ills of earlier times? Edward Kain (1990) suggests that the dismay at the current state of the family and the desire to return to the good old days has created the myth of family decline. The family of the past also had plenty of problems, though often different from those of the modern family.

Rather than dwelling on the problems facing families, let us examine some possible agendas for strengthening marriages and families. For many years, researchers

have often defined healthy marriages as ones that have relatively low levels of conflict. The focus has been on the lack of negatives rather than on the presence of positives. But in the same way that being physically fit is more than just being illness-free, a healthy relationship is more than just conflict free. That is why a growing number of researchers are focusing on the positive characteristics of healthy marriages (Fincham and Beach 2010).

Examining the strengths exhibited by successful intimate relationships, particularly within families, may help us achieve higher standards for future generations. What would intimate relationships be like if we could make them the best possible? Even if we succeed in solving the major problems that will surely arise in any intimate relationship, can we build enduring relationships that are better than just satisfactory? Can people create intimate relationships that are secure and comfortable, yet growing and exciting at the same time? Will today's young families be able to rear children who care about themselves and the communities of which they are a part—children who will grow into adults who are capable of being intimate, caring, responsible, and loving human beings?

Having a vision of what we want for ourselves, our relationships, our families, our children, our society, and our world-to-be is of the utmost importance to human beings. The ability to visualize the ideal enables human beings to change. Without a vision of what could be, there would be little if any change. If all our behaviors were inborn, biologically determined, and preordained, then nothing could change and no vision of the ideal would be necessary to survive. To be creative in life is to see what is, visualize what could be, think of the ideal, and then work in-between to move from what is to what could be. But why discuss an ideal? Won't we all fall short of the ideal? Yes, of course we will. But ideals can be goals, and goals give us something at which to aim. They give us direction in life. They motivate us.

We will begin our study of intimate relationships by examining the ideal qualities of strong families because it is within families that all of us learn the most (positive and/or negative) about intimate relationships. After all, our **family of origin**, the family in which we were born and grew up, is the first seat of all of our learning, and human relationships are the essence of the family. All that we experience in this context influences our **family of procreation**, the family we create following marriage. Throughout this book, we will often return to this theme: How can we build into our intimate relationships those characteristics that lead to strong individuals and successful friendships, marriages, and families? You may wonder why we began by mentioning *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* and *Leave It to Beaver*. How old-fashioned! How out of touch! As already pointed out, historical families had problems and were often far from perfect. However, they did portray certain ideals that can be helpful toward the creation of successful relationships and the successful rearing of children in today's diverse society.

Data supporting the importance of the two-parent family in the rearing of children are plentiful. When compared to children raised by single parents and stepparents, children reared by their own parents are more likely to finish school, have higher grades, and attend and graduate from college. They are more likely to be employed and less likely to become single parents. In addition, they score higher on measures of competence, conduct, psychological adjustment, and long-term health (Parke 2003; Bramlett and Mosher 2002).

Let us be clear that these statistics are group averages. Parenting by individuals other than the biological parents can certainly produce children who achieve as well as those reared by biological parents, though such success is less common. Remember, group statistics indicate what a group will do on the average; they do not predict what any one individual or family will do or become.

Any type of family can be successful if it understands the characteristics that make intimate relationships grow and flourish. Good decision making can build intimate relationships that are enduring and successful. Such relationships do not appear by

family of origin

The family into which we were born and grew up

family of procreation

The family we create after marriage

magic. As we go through life, constant decisions must be made about trivial, daily problems; important decisions, such as about the direction our lives will take, must also be made. The better and more efficient we become at making decisions, generally the smoother our lives will flow. A flourishing, intimate relationship is built upon a foundation of ongoing, successful choices. No relationship is stagnant. Regardless of how fulfilling and happy a relationship is, decisions must be constantly made to keep it that way and to continually improve it.

Putting families first is a call that is being heard more and more throughout the United States. *Family values* is now a favored topic in government. More than 40 states have launched programs to strengthen marriage relationships just since the late 1990s (Dion 2005). Family support systems have become available to people in all segments of society rather than just to the poor, as was the case in the past. An increasing number of programs (both public and private) offer families the social supports that were once provided by a network of stable, extended families within the community. But despite society's growing interest in building family strengths and regardless of the number of family supports provided, the major responsibility for the creation of strong, stable, satisfying intimate relationships remains with the individual. Knowing the ideal characteristics of the successful family and making decisions that move our intimate relationships toward these ideals are the responsibilities of each person.

Most people believe that durability signals a successful marriage. This alone may or may not be true. There are unhappy, conflict-ridden marriages that last a lifetime. Couples in such marriages simply may not consider divorce or separation, whatever their reasons might be.

A successful marriage approximates the marital and family ideals held by each partner. It usually yields satisfaction and happiness for the couple. The relationship fulfills their psychological, material, social, and sexual needs. Each individual entering marriage has some ideal expectation of what the relationship will be.

Qualities of Strong and Resilient Families: An Overview

As researchers who study strong, healthy marriages and successful families point out, volumes have been written on what is wrong with the family, but little has been written about what is right in the successful family. We don't learn how to do anything by looking only at how it shouldn't be done. We learn most effectively by examining how to do something correctly and by studying a positive model. By discovering the strengths of enduring, intimate relationships, we might improve our ability to build successful marriages and create fulfilling family lives.

The basic thrust of this book is to create and develop a vision of the strong family and to weave this image throughout the book. Secondly, we focus on how to make decisions that lead to strong, intimate relationships. Of course, we also spend time discussing family problems. But by formulating an ideal vision of what a family can be, we take the first and perhaps most important step toward resolving problems that will arise throughout our lives. This ideal will help us to understand how decisions can be made that improve our relationships.

The real question is, "*How can we make all types of intimate relationships more successful, more enduring, and more fulfilling?*"

Vera and David Mace (1983, 1985) coined the term *family wellness* to describe the strong family that functions successfully. The Maces maintain that the quality of life in our communities is, in part, determined by the quality of relationships in the families that make up the communities. Healthy families produce healthy individuals,

who then help to maintain healthy community environments (Stinnett 2000; Stokols 1992). The quality of life in families is, in turn, strongly affected by the quality of relationships between the couples who founded those families.

We take the view that family wellness, in its full and true meaning, grows out of marriage wellness. A family begins when a marriage begins. We do not mean that a one-parent family cannot be a well family. It can. But since four out of five one-parent families are really in transition between marriages it is the marriage relationship that is still the foundation stone [to family success]. So the key to nearly everything else is to enable marriages to be what they are capable of being and what the people involved want them to be. (Mace and Mace 1985, 9)

Concentrating on individual and family strengths helps to counteract the prevailing social view that is absorbed with the negative—problems and failures (Seligman 1998; Volz 2000). The idea that nothing good can come from any failure or undesirable event and that the victim is helpless in the face of adversity is self-defeating.

Science has managed to ignore the fact that undesirable events often produce extraordinary strength, growth, and creativity. Many social scientists have come to view courage, perseverance and good cheer as illusory, defensive, and inauthentic while weaknesses such as depression, greed and lust are genuine. (Seligman 1998, 11)

Such views tend to lead to the idea of victimization—the placing of blame, rightly or wrongly, on outside forces—which, in turn, leads to defeatism, inactivity, surrender, and the idea that severe trauma can't be undone.

On the other hand, strong families are optimistic and take the initiative to fight their problems, feeling they can solve them and control their lives. They are on the offensive. They do not simply react; they make things happen. Families can do a great deal to make life more enjoyable, and strong families exercise that ability.

For our discussion, we assume that basic needs such as nutrition are met, leaving family members some energy to invest in improving their lives. Obviously, in many parts of the world, discussion of family strengths and an optimistic view of life is meaningless until basic survival needs are met.

What are the relationship qualities that lead to family strength and wellness? Numerous researchers have sought answers to this question, and there has been considerable agreement among their findings (Alford-Cooper 1998; Gottman 1994; Mackey and O'Brien 1995; Robinson and Blanton 1993; Stinnett 1997, 2000; Stinnett and DeFrain 1985; Stinnett and James 2000). The research suggests the following eight major qualities shared by all strong, healthy families (each is discussed more thoroughly in later chapters):

1. *Commitment.* The major quality of strong families is a high degree of commitment. The family members are deeply committed to promoting each other's happiness and welfare. They are also very committed to the family group and invest much of their time and energy in the family. The individual family member is integrated into a relationship of mutual affection and respect. By belonging and being committed to something greater than oneself, there is less chance that individualism will turn into egocentrism. Commitment to the relationship involves wanting to stay married, feeling morally obligated to stay married, and feeling constrained to stay married (meaning that there are barriers to leaving a relationship) (Huston 2001; M. P. Johnson 1991, 1999; Wilcox and Nock 2006).

2. *Appreciation.* This quality seems to permeate the strong family. The family members appreciate each other and make each other feel good about themselves. All of us like to be with people who make us feel good. Yet, many families fall into interactional patterns in which they make each other feel bad. In strong families, members find good qualities in each other and can express appreciation for them. This appreciation increases a person's good behavior by rewarding it, thus making it more common, which, in turn, leads to greater appreciation from others.
3. *Good communication patterns.* Members of strong families spend time talking to each other. Sometimes families are so fragmented and busy and spend so little time together that they communicate with each other only through rumor. By this we mean that families may communicate indirectly through hearsay, assumption, guesswork, and innuendo rather than directly through good communication techniques (see Chapter 5).

Strong families also listen well. By being good listeners, the family members say to each other, "You respect me enough to listen to what I have to say. I'm interested enough to listen, too."

Families that communicate well also fight fairly. They get angry at each other, but they get conflict out into the open and can discuss the problem. They share their feelings about alternative ways of dealing with problems and can select solutions that are best for everybody.

Both appreciation and good communication require family members to be empathic and trustworthy. **Empathy** may be defined as the ability to understand what the other is thinking, put oneself in the other's place, and intellectually understand another's condition without vicariously experiencing their emotions (Long et al. 1999, 235).

empathy

The ability to understand what the other is thinking, put oneself in the other's place, and intellectually understand the other's condition without vicariously experiencing the other's emotions

Trust is important to all successful relationships. It is essential for open communication, mutual understanding, and problem solving (F. Walsh 1998, 52). Whether it is trust between a buyer and seller, business partners, family members, or an individual and his/her government, when trust declines or is lost, the relationship is usually lost. Loss of trust leads to discomfort, skepticism, disbelief, and failure to participate. For example, many political scientists feel that Americans' low voter turnout results from distrust of the government.

4. *Desire to spend time together.* Strong families do a lot of things together. This is not a false or smothering togetherness; they genuinely enjoy being together. Another important point is that these families actively structure their lifestyles so that they can spend time together. This togetherness extends to all areas of their lives, including meals, recreation, and chores. They spend much of their time together in active interaction rather than in passive activities such as watching television. Family rituals and routines are part of the strong family's activity (Gregg et al. 1999).

Rituals and routines maintain a sense of continuity over time, linking past, present, and future through shared traditions and expectations. Routines of daily life, such as family dinner or bedtime stories, provide regular contact and order in what is increasingly a fragmented, hectic schedule for most families. (Hochschild 1997)

5. *A strong value system.* The underlying factor that adds strength to a family is a strongly held and mutually shared value system. Such a value system allows individuals to have a wider vision of life than personal success alone and enables them to reach beyond themselves. Families that share a strong value system experience *spiritual wellness*. This is a unifying force, a caring center within each person that promotes sharing, love, and compassion for others. Some will disagree,

WHAT

DO YOU THINK?

1. How many of these characteristics do you find in your family of origin?
2. Which characteristics are most important to you? Why?
3. Do you have family traditions that you'd like to carry on in your own family? What are they? Why are they important to you? How do traditions help support the characteristics of successful families?
4. How would you establish those characteristics that are important to you in your own family or future family?

resilience

The capacity to rebound from adversity strengthened and more resourceful

but Stinnett and DeFrain (1985) found this quality was most often expressed as a high degree of religious orientation. This finding agrees with research from the past 40 years, which shows a positive correlation among religion, marriage happiness, and successful family relationships (Lehrer 2000; Robinson and Blanton 1993, 38; Wilcox 2004; Wolfinger and Wilcox 2008). In addition, the higher the importance attached to religion, the lower the likelihood of marital disruption (Bramlett and Mosher 2002; Mahoney et al, 2001). Spirituality gives us a sense of community and support. It also “sanctifies” marriage, or sets it apart as a unique relationship to which one is called to support with high levels of commitment and personal investment (Hernandez et al, 2011). Organized religion may be advantageous to family life by (1) enhancing the family support network, (2) sponsoring family activities and recreation, (3) indoctrinating supportive family teachings and values, (4) providing family social and welfare services, and (5) encouraging families to seek divine assistance with personal and family problems (Abbott et al. 1990, 443).

These researchers also point out, however, that rigid religious doctrines that promote only traditional sex roles or negative approaches to family planning, for example, might be detrimental to family life.

Of course, organized religion has no monopoly on spirituality. Strong values can be demonstrated in many ways such as through community involvement, education, and work.

6. *Ability to deal with crises and stress in a positive manner.* Strong families have the ability to deal with crises and problems in a positive way. Such families can bounce back from adversity. They may not enjoy crises, but they can handle them constructively. Even in the darkest situations they manage to find some positive element, no matter how small, and focus on it. In a particular crisis, they may rely to a greater extent on each other and the trust they have developed in each other. Confronted by a crisis, they unite to deal with it instead of being fragmented by it. They cope with the problem and support each other.
7. *Resilience.* **Resilience** can be defined as the capacity to rebound from adversity, having become strengthened and more resourceful. It is an active process of endurance, self-righting, and growth in response to challenge and crisis. It involves more than merely surviving, getting through, or escaping a harrowing ordeal. The quality of resilience enables people to heal from painful wounds, take charge of their lives, and go on to live fully and love well (F. Walsh 1998, 4). Fortunately, research has shown that resilience can be learned by most anyone (Kersting 2003), especially children. Children seem to have an amazing capacity to withstand and recover from adversity (Masten and Berkmaier 2001). Resilience leads to a feeling of competence.
8. *Self-efficacy.* Perceived self-efficacy is a person's beliefs about his/her capacity to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect his/her life. More simply, ask, “What are my beliefs about how competent I am in general?” and “How competent am I, related to a given task?” Self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves, and behave. A strong sense of self-efficacy enhances human accomplishment and personal well-being. People with high self-assurance in their capabilities approach difficult tasks as challenges to be mastered rather than threats to be avoided. Such people approach threatening situations with assurance that they can exercise control over them. Such an efficacious outlook produces personal accomplishments, reduces stress, and lowers vulnerability to depression (Bandura 1997, 2000, 2001). “People who regard themselves as highly efficacious act, think, and feel differently from those who perceive themselves as inefficacious. They produce their own future, rather than simply foretell it” (Bandura 2004).

Regardless of the type of family, the strong presence of these eight characteristics creates a positive environment, one that is pleasant to live in because family members treat one another in beneficial ways. Members of strong families can count on each other for support and love. They feel good about themselves, both as individuals and as members of a family unit or team. They have a sense of *we*, yet this sense of belonging does not overpower their individuality. The family supports and respects individuality. Perhaps strong families can best be defined as those that create homes we enter for comfort, development, and regeneration and from which we go forth renewed and charged with power for positive living (Stinnett and DeFrain 1985, 8). Within a healthy family, individuals learn how to be intimate with family members. This sets the stage for successful, intimate relationships in the future.

Families founded on the principles of equality, the inviolability of the rights and responsibilities of the individual, mutual respect, love, and tolerance are the cradle of democracy. Such families are the foundation for the well-being of individuals, societies, and nations (Sokalski 1994, 8). This important idea led the United Nations to proclaim 1994 and every 10 years thereafter as the International Year of the Family.

Can We Study Intimacy?

Can we study intimacy? We can if we study relationships that can be, and often are, intimate. We usually find intimacy within marriage and the family. Although intimacy can exist between any two people, it is within the family that most of us learn to be intimate, caring, and loving people—or not. Thus, to study the family is also to study intimacy.

The study of the family deals with many topics, as the table of contents of this book reveals. It is clear that such a study cuts across numerous disciplines: psychology, sociology, anthropology, economics, and so on (Figure 1-1). To identify the study of marriage

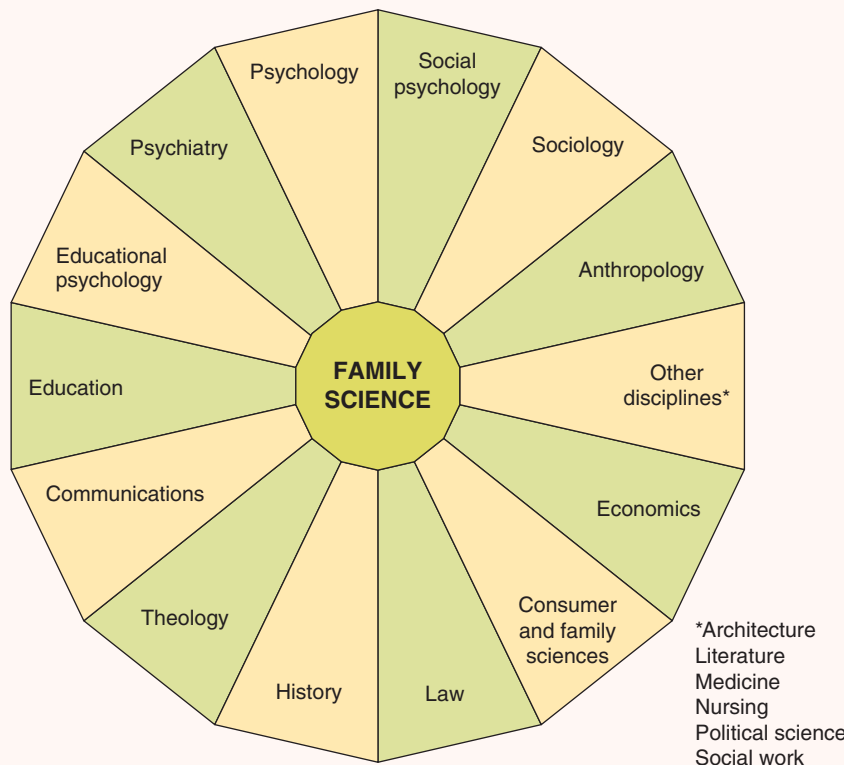


Figure 1-1 Family Science