



Eighth Edition



David H. Olson

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Marriages and Families

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and Strengths

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Dedication

This book about marriages and families is dedicated to our marriages and families.

Brief Contents

Preface xxi

PART I

The Social Context of Intimate Relationships 1

- Chapter 1** Perspectives on Intimate Relationships 1
Chapter 2 Cultural Diversity and Diversity in Family Structure: Family Strengths and Challenges 34
Chapter 3 Understanding Marriage and Family Dynamics 70

PART II

Dynamics of Intimate Relationships 107

- Chapter 4** Communication and Intimacy 107
Chapter 5 Conflict and Conflict Resolution 134
Chapter 6 Sexual Intimacy 159
Chapter 7 Gender Roles and Power in the Family 193
Chapter 8 Managing Economic Resources 220

PART III

Stages of Intimate Relationships 246

- Chapter 9** Friendship, Intimacy, and Singlehood 246
Chapter 10 Dating, Mate Selection, and Living Together 276
Chapter 11 Marriage: Building a Strong Foundation 303
Chapter 12 Parenthood: Joys and Challenges 329
Chapter 13 Midlife and Older Couples 373

PART IV

Challenges and Opportunities 404

- Chapter 14** Stress, Abuse, and Family Problems 404
Chapter 15 Divorce, Single-Parent Families, and Stepfamilies 458
Chapter 16 Strengthening Marriages and Families Worldwide 490

APPENDICES

- Appendix A** Couple and Family Scales A-1
Appendix B Family Science and Family Research Methods A-7
Glossary G-1
References R-1
Credits C-1
Name Index I-1
Subject Index I-9

Contents

Preface xxi

PART I

The Social Context of Intimate Relationships 1



1

Perspectives on Intimate Relationships I

Three Themes of Intimacy, Strengths, and Diversity 2

Defining Marriage and Family 3

What Is Marriage? 3

What Is a Family? 4

Trends in Marriage and the Family:

Change and Continuity 6

Trends in Marriage and Cohabitation 8

Trends in Divorce and Remarriage 9

Trends in Family Structure 11

Continuity in Marriage and the Family 14

Focus on Marital and Family Strengths 14

BOX 1.1 Putting It Together: *Learning to Focus on Strengths* 15

Advantages of Marriage 15

Impact of the Social Environment on Relationships 18

Stress, Change, and Materialism 19

Lack of Time for Oneself and Significant Others 20

Increasing Use of Child Care Outside the Family 21

Instability of Couple and Family Relationships 22

Violence, Criminal Victimization, and Fear 22

Use of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs 24

The Internet and Human Relationships 26

Changing Gender Roles and the Balance of Power 27

Urban Migration and Overcrowding 28

Financial Problems and the Global Economy 29

Changing the Social Environment 30

Positive Responses to the Social Environment 30

Summary 31

Key Terms 32

Activities 32

Suggested Readings 32

2

Cultural Diversity and Diversity in Family Structure: Family Strengths and Challenges 34



Diversity and Strengths in Family Structure and Cultural Context 35

Why Culture Matters 35

Intimacy and Diversity 36

Gay and Lesbian Couples and Families 36

Same-Sex Couple Relationships and Marriage 37

Gay and Lesbian Families 38

The Challenges of Gay and Lesbian Couples and Families 39

The Concepts of Race, Culture, and Ethnicity 41

BOX 2.1 Diversity in Families: *Race Has No Place* 42

U.S. Demographics and Future Trends 43

- The Hispanic Population 43
- The African American Population 44
- The Asian American Population 45
- The American Indian and Alaska Native Populations 45
- Immigration and Family Life 45
- What the Future Will Bring 46

Challenge to Researchers and Practitioners 47

- Research 47
- Practice 47

Cultural Competence 48

- Awareness 48
- Knowledge 48
- Skills 49

Kin Relationships Across Cultures 49

Family System and Sociocultural Characteristics 51

- Three Family System Characteristics 51
- Three Sociocultural Characteristics 52

Family Strengths and Challenges Across

Ethnic Groups 53

- Strengths of White Families 53

BOX 2.2 Self-Assessment: *Rate the Strengths in Your Family* 54

- Strengths of African American Families 55
- Strengths of Latino Families 56
- Strengths of Asian American Families 57
- Strengths of American Indian Families 59

BOX 2.3 At Issue: *Historical Trauma and American Indians* 61

BOX 2.4 Diversity in Families: *The Tables Are Turned: Going from the Majority to the Minority* 62

Cross-Cultural Family Studies 62

Challenges for Ethnic Families 63

- Assimilation, Acculturation, and Segregation 63
- The Advantages of Being in the Majority 64
- Marriage Outside the Group 65
- Relationships Between Men and Women 66
- Relationships Between Parents and Children 67

Summary 67

Key Terms 68

Activities 68

Suggested Readings 68



3

Understanding Marriage and Family Dynamics 70

The History of Family Science 71

- Family Science in the Early Years 72
- Family Science Today 73

Models of Couples and Families 74

- Family Systems Theory 74

BOX 3.1 Putting It Together: *Reorganization of the Family System After a Car Accident* 78

BOX 3.2 Diversity in Families: *Cultural Conflicts for a Female Chicana College Student* 79

- International Family Strengths Framework 81
- Family Development Framework 86
- Symbolic Interaction Framework 88
- Social Construction Framework 89
- Feminist Framework 90

Three Key Relationship Concepts 91

- Cohesion in Couples and Families 91

BOX 3.3 Putting It Together: *Theories and Research* 92

- Flexibility in Couples and Families 96
- Communication in Couples and Families 98

Couple and Family Map 98

- Balanced Versus Unbalanced Families 99
- Balanced Relationships Are More Healthy 99
- Value of Couple and Family Map 101

Dynamics Change in Relationships over Time 102

Summary 103

Key Terms 104

Activities 104

Suggested Readings 104



4

Communication and Intimacy 107

Couple Strengths and Issues in Communication 108

Perspectives on Communication 109

Gender Differences in Communication 109

BOX 4.1 Self-Assessment: *Your Gender Communication Quotient* 113

Communication Quotient 113

Cultural Differences in Communication 114

BOX 4.2 Putting It Together: *All Together at Family Mealtimes* 115

Using Communication to Develop Intimacy 116

Communication as a Cooperative Endeavor 117

Content and Relationship Messages 118

Nonverbal Communication 118

Mixed Messages and Double Binds 119

Metacommunication: Clarifying Your

Communication 120

Continuous Partial Attention 121

Using Communication to Maintain Intimacy 121

Speaking: The Art of Self-Disclosure 122

Listening: A Difficult Skill 125

Assertive, Passive, and Aggressive

Communication 127

BOX 4.3 Putting It Together: *Using Communication to Increase Intimacy* 128

Positive and Negative Communication Cycles 129

The Positive Influence of Assertiveness 129

The Negative Influence of Avoidance 130

Summary 131

Key Terms 132

Activities 132

Suggested Readings 132



5

Conflict and Conflict Resolution 134

Couple Strengths and Issues in Conflict Resolution 135

Conflict and Anger: An Overview 136

The Hierarchy of Conflict 136

Anger and Conflict Taboos 138

Myths, Theories, and Facts About Anger 140

BOX 5.1 Putting It Together: *Anger: Myths and Facts* 141

Intimacy and Conflict 141

Intimacy Breeds Conflict 141

Love and Anger in Balance 142

The Dance of Anger 143

BOX 5.2 At Issue: *Determining Styles of Conflict Resolution in Happy Versus Unhappy Couples* 146
Conflict and Supportiveness in Heterosexual, Gay, and Lesbian Couples 146

Approaches to Conflict Resolution 146

Fighting Fairly 147

Constructive and Destructive Approaches 151

Styles of Conflict Resolution 151

Resolving Conflict: Six Basic Steps 153

Summary 157

Key Terms 157

Activities 157

Suggested Readings 157



6

Sexual Intimacy 159

Intimacy, Strengths, and Diversity 160

Couple Strengths and Sexual Issues 160

Sex and Society: An Overview 161

Sexuality, Sex, and Gender 162

Historical Perspectives on Sex and Society 162

Gay and Lesbian Couples 163

Sexuality Across Cultures 165

HIV/AIDS—Three Decades Later 168

American Sexual Health and Behavior 169

National Survey of Sexual Health and Behavior 169

ABC News Survey 170

Sexuality in the Later Years 171

Gay-Male and Lesbian Sexual Behavior 172

Sexual Behavior Among Adolescents and Young Adults 173

Unintended Consequences: Teen Pregnancies and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) 174

Education for Sexuality 175

Sexuality Education and Parents 176

BOX 6.1 Putting It Together: *Father-Child*

Communication About Sex 178
Is Sex Education Effective? 179
Sexual Behavior, Alcohol, and College 179

Marital and Extramarital Sexual Behavior 181

Sex Within Marriage 181
Marital Styles and Sexual Behavior 183
Infidelity 183

Toward Sexual Health 185

BOX 6.2 Diversity in Families: *Extramarital Sex*

Around the World 186
Sexual Dysfunction 187
Sex Therapy 189

Summary 190

Key Terms 191

Activities 191

Suggested Readings 191



7

**Gender Roles and Power
in the Family** 193

Intimacy, Strengths, and Diversity 194

Gender Roles 194

Gender Norms and Family Life 196

Distribution of Family Work by Gender 198
Emotion Work in Marriage and Family 199
Maternal Gatekeeping 199
Gallup Survey of Male and Female Traits 200
Traditional Versus Contemporary Views of
Gender Roles 201

BOX 7.1 At Issue: *The Work–Family
Interface* 202

The Move Toward More Egalitarian Roles 203
An International Perspective 205

BOX 7.2 Diversity in Families: *Gender Roles in
Japan* 207

Gender Roles Across Ethnic Groups 207

Latino/a Culture 207
African American Culture 208
American Indian Culture 208
Asian American Culture 209
Gender Issues for Immigrant Couples 210

Theories About Gender Roles 210

Social Learning Theory 210
Cognitive Development Theory 211
Family Systems Theory 212
Feminist Framework 212

BOX 7.3 At Issue: *Gender Inequality as a Global
Problem* 213

Power in Families 214

Types of Power Patterns 215
Egalitarian Roles and Marital Satisfaction 216
Suggestions for Minimizing Power Issues 217

Summary 218

Key Terms 219

Activities 219

Suggested Readings 219

8

**Managing Economic
Resources** 220



Money and Happiness 221

Marriage and Money 224

BOX 8.1 At Issue: *The Effects of Debt on
Newlyweds* 226

Diversity and Financial Style 226

The Cost of Divorce 228

Why Do Finances Cause Problems? 229

BOX 8.2 Putting It Together: *Steps to Financial
Freedom* 230

Family Income and Expenses 231

Family Income 231
Annual Household Expenses 235
Family Net Worth 235

BOX 8.3 At Issue: *The Cost of Having and
Raising a Baby* 236

Does It Pay to Work Outside the Home? 236

Smart Money Management 237

Creating a Budget 237
Pooling Money: Pros and Cons 238

Credit: Uses and Abuses 239

Credit Cards—Dangerous Plastic 239

BOX 8.4 At Issue: *The Credit Card Trap and
How to Avoid It* 240

Advantages and Disadvantages of Credit 240
Purchasing a Home 240
Avoiding Debt and Bankruptcy 243
Financial Counseling 244

Summary 244

Key Terms 245

Activities 245

Suggested Readings 245



9

Friendship, Intimacy, and Singlehood 246

Friends Versus Lovers 247

- The Fabric of Friendship 247
- The Tapestry of Love 249
- The Love Triangle 249

BOX 9.1 Putting It Together: *Ten Traits of Love* 250

Jealousy: A Green-Eyed Monster or Real Love? 252

BOX 9.2 At Issue: *Love and Science* 253

Looking for Love on the Internet 254

Exploring Intimacy: From Experience to Relationship 255

- Paths to Intimacy Differ in Males and Females 255
- Intimacy and Communication 256
- Intimate Experiences Versus an Intimate Relationship 257
- The Paradox of Marriage and Intimacy 257

Developing Intimacy in Couple Relationships 258

- Communication Skills 258
- Couple Closeness 259
- Couple Flexibility 259
- Personality Compatibility 259
- Conflict Resolution 260

Intimacy Games 260

- Constructive Intimacy Games 262
- Destructive Intimacy Games 262
- Limiting Destructive Games 264

Attachment Theory and Intimacy 265

Being Single 267

BOX 9.3 Diversity in Families: *Definitions of Singlehood* 268

- A Historical Perspective on Being Single 269
- Being Single Today 270

Summary 273

Key Terms 274

Activities 274

Suggested Readings 274



10

Dating, Mate Selection, and Living Together 276

Courtship Patterns 277

- Parent-Arranged Marriages 277
- Dating: An American Creation 280
- Hooking Up: The Contemporary Trend 281
- Internet Dating and Matchmaking Services 285

BOX 10.1 Putting It Together: *Dating Do's and Don'ts* 286

Dating Among Older People 286

Choosing a Mate 288

- Physical Attractiveness 288
- Age and Finding a Mate 289
- Birth Order 290
- Similar Personalities or Different Personalities 290
- Interracial and Interfaith Marriages 290
- Finding a Good Mate 293

Patterns of Mate Selection 294

Conflict and Violence in Dating 295

Living Together 296

BOX 10.2 At Issue: *Dating Violence Warning Sign* 297

- Cohabitation's Dramatic Increase 297
- Reasons for Cohabiting 299

BOX 10.3 Putting It Together: *Ten Ideas to Consider Before Cohabiting* 300

Difficult Choices 300

Summary 301

Key Terms 301

Activities 301

Suggested Readings 301



11

Marriage: Building a Strong Foundation 303

Intimacy, Strengths, and Diversity 304

Perspectives on Marriage Today	304
The Benefits of Marriage	305
Marriage and Black Americans	306
When Marriages Do Not Work	306
The Decline in Marriage	307
Components of a Successful Marriage	308
Marriage Education	310
Premarital Education	311
What Constitutes an Effective Premarital Program?	312
BOX II.1 Putting It Together: <i>The PREPARE Program for Premarital Counseling</i>	313
BOX II.2 At Issue: <i>Predicting Marital Success</i>	314
Predicting a Successful Marriage	314
The Importance of Families of Origin in Marriage	315
Kathy's Family of Origin	315
Jim's Family of Origin	316
Goals for the Marriage	316
Newlywed Years	317
Keeping Marriages Strong	320
Five Types of Marriage	320
Changes in Marital Satisfaction over Time	322
Why Marriages Fall Apart	323
Keeping Your Marriage a Top Priority	323
The Role of Forgiveness in Marriage	324
The Role of Sacrifice in Marriage	325
Federal Healthy Marriage Initiative	325
Changes in Policy and State Laws to Strengthen Marriage	326
Summary	327
Key Terms	327
Activities	327
Suggested Readings	328

12

Parenthood: Joys and Challenges 329



Roots and Wings	330
Children and Happiness	330
Children and Individual Happiness	330
Children and Couple Happiness	331
Couple Strengths and Issues in Parenting	331
The Challenge of Parenthood	333
Myths and Realities of Parenthood	333
The Transition to Parenthood	335
Financial Issues and Children	337
Adoption	338

The Child-Free Alternative	339
Styles of Parenting	343
Democratic Style	344
Authoritarian Style	345
Permissive Style	345
Rejecting Style	345
Uninvolved Style	345
Democratic Parenting Works Best	346
Theories of Childrearing	347
Issues in Parenting	349
The Need for Positive Discipline Today	349
Corporal Punishment and Its Consequences	350
BOX 12.1 Putting it Together: <i>The Mother's Book by Mrs. Child</i>	353
Child Care	354
BOX 12.2 Diversity in Families: <i>Child Care for the Growing Hispanic Population</i>	355
Coparenting	357
BOX 12.3 At Issue: <i>Looking for a Very High Quality Child Care Program and Positive Caregiving</i>	358
Single Mothers	360
Gay and Lesbian Parenting	360
Fatherhood and Motherhood Today	361
When a Child Dies	365
Educational Programs and Resources for Parents	365
The Joy and Enduring Satisfaction of Parenthood	369
BOX 12.4 Putting It Together: <i>Owl Moon Walk</i>	370
Summary	370
Key Terms	371
Activities	371
Suggested Readings	371



13

Midlife and Older Couples 373

Intimacy, Strengths, and Diversity	374
Family Life in the Middle Years	375
Defining Middle Age	375
Middle Age: A Crisis or An Opportunity?	376
The Middle-Aged Person and the Working World	377
Sexuality in Middle Age	377
BOX 13.1 Diversity in Families: <i>Childlessness: The Invisible Group</i>	378
The Middle-Aged Marriage	380
Divorce During the Middle and Later Years	381
Empty Nest, Spacious Nest, or Cluttered Nest?	382
Caught in the Middle: The Sandwich Generation	383
Grandparenthood	383
Grandparents Raising Grandchildren	385

BOX 13.2 Diversity in Families: *Grandparents and Grandfamilies* 387

Family Life in the Later Years 388

Defining Old Age 389

Conventional Wisdom About Old Age 390

Retirement 393

BOX 13.3 At Issue: *Alzheimer's* 395

Long-Term Marriages 396

Losing a Spouse 397

Couple Relationships in the Later Years 398

BOX 13.4 At Issue: *I Am Aware That I Am No Longer Anyone's "Most Important Person": The Desolation of Grief* 399

Changes in Family Dynamics in the Later Years 400

Summary 401

Key Terms 402

Activities 402

Suggested Readings 402

PART IV

Challenges and Opportunities 404



14

Stress, Abuse, and Family Problems 404

Intimacy, Strengths, and Diversity 405

Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Couple and Family Stress 406

What We Know About Stress 406

Coping with Stress 407

Stress and Life Events 407

Top Five Stressors for Couples 409

BOX 14.1 At Issue: *Ambiguous Loss: When We Are Uncertain If a Person Is In or Out of Our Family* 410

Five Tips for Dealing with Stress in Your Relationship 412

The ABC-X Family Crisis Model 412

Life as a Roller Coaster 413

A Roller Coaster Course of Adjustment 414

Family Systems Changes Before and After the 9/11 Attacks 414

War and Its Effect on Families 416

Couples 417

BOX 14.2 At Issue: *The Impact of War on Families Left Behind* 418

Children 422

The Role of the Community in Supporting Military Families 422

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and War 423

Family Coping Strategies 424

Theoretical Perspectives 424

Coping with 9/11 425

BOX 14.3 Putting It Together: *Strategies for Managing Stress* 427

Domestic Violence 427

Incidence of Domestic Violence 428

Diversity and Domestic Violence 429

National Survey of Domestic Violence 430

Relationship of Physical Abuse and Psychological Abuse 431

Factors Contributing to Domestic Violence 432

Patterns of Domestic Violence 435

Treatment and Prevention of Domestic Violence 435

Domestic Violence and Children 437

Child Abuse and Neglect 437

Incidence of Child Abuse and Neglect 438

Psychological Aggression and Spanking 438

Alternatives to Spanking 440

The Long-Term Consequences of Child Abuse and Neglect 441

BOX 14.4 Putting It Together: *Surviving and Transcending a Traumatic Childhood: The Dark Thread* 442

Transcending Abuse 442

Families at Risk 443

Treatment and Prevention of Child Abuse 445

Sibling and Child-to-Parent Abuse 445

Sibling Abuse 445

BOX 14.5 Diversity in Families: *Family Violence from a Global Perspective: Strengths-Based Research and Case Studies* 446

Child-to-Parent Abuse 448

Alcohol Problems in Families 449

Alcohol and Family Violence 450

The Family's Reaction to Alcohol Abuse 450

Treatment and Prevention of Alcoholism 452

Acknowledging the Dangers of Legal Drugs 454

Summary 455

Key Terms 456

Activities 456

Suggested Readings 456



15

Divorce, Single-Parent Families, and Stepfamilies 458

Intimacy, Strengths, and Diversity 459

Divorce in Today's Society 460

Historical Trends 460

BOX 15.1 Diversity in Families: The Globalization of Divorce 462

Divorce Laws and Views on Divorce 462

BOX 15.2 At Issue: Dissolution of Interracial Marriages 465

Understanding Divorce 466

The Culture of Divorce 466

The Impact of Divorce on Adults 466

The Impact of Divorce on Children 468

Single-Parent Families 471

Fathers 473

Strengths of Single-Parent Families 475

Challenges of Being in Single-Parent Families 476

Benefits of Being in Single-Parent Families 478

What Resources do Single-Parent Families Rely On? 479

Stepfamilies 480

Differences Between Nuclear Families and Stepfamilies 481

Children in Stepfamilies 482

Couples in Stepfamilies 484

Stepfamilies in Diverse Populations 485

Boundary Ambiguity in Stepfamilies 486

Stepfamilies in Later Life 486

Building Stepfamily Strengths 487

Summary 488

Key Terms 489

Activities 489

Suggested Readings 489



16

Strengthening Marriages and Families Worldwide 490

Global Perspectives on Family, Community, and Cultural Strengths 491

Family Strengths 492

Community Strengths 492

Cultural Strengths 492

Two Visual Models Integrating Family, Community, and Cultural Strengths 493

BOX 16.1 Diversity in Families: The Perennial Philosophy 495

Premarital and Marriage Programs 496

Premarital Programs for Marriage 497

Couple Education Programs 498

Marital and Family Therapy 499

Common Problems in Couple Relationships 499

Problems Related to Closeness and Flexibility 500

Common Questions About Marital and Family Therapy 501

Family Therapy Case Study 503

BOX 16.2 Putting It Together: Building a Stronger Marriage 507

Strengthening Your Marriage and Family Relationships 507

Building a Stronger Marriage 507

BOX 16.3 Putting It Together: Building a Stronger Family 508

Building a Stronger Family 508

The Future of Your Family 509

Summary 510

Activities 511

Suggested Readings 512

Appendices

Appendix A

Couple and Family Scales A-1

Appendix B

Family Science and Family Research Methods A-7

Glossary G-1

References R-1

Credits C-1

Name Index I-1

Subject Index I-9

Boxed Features

-  **Box 1.1 Putting It Together:** *Learning to Focus on Strengths* 15
-  **Box 2.1 Diversity in Families:** *Race Has No Place* 42
-  **Box 2.2 Self-Assessment:** *Rate the Strengths in Your Family* 54
-  **Box 2.3 At Issue:** *Historical Trauma and American Indians* 61
-  **Box 2.4 Diversity in Families:** *The Tables Are Turned: Going from the Majority to the Minority* 62
-  **Box 3.1 Putting It Together:** *Reorganization of the Family System After a Car Accident* 78
-  **Box 3.2 Diversity in Families:** *Cultural Conflicts for a Female Chicana College Student* 79
-  **Box 3.3 Putting It Together:** *Theories and Research* 92
-  **Box 4.1 Self-Assessment:** *Your Gender Communication Quotient* 113
-  **Box 4.2 Putting It Together:** *All Together at Family Mealtimes* 115
-  **Box 4.3 Putting It Together:** *Using Communication to Increase Intimacy* 128
-  **Box 5.1 Putting It Together:** *Anger: Myths and Facts* 141
-  **Box 5.2 At Issue:** *Determining Styles of Conflict Resolution in Happy Versus Unhappy Couples* 146
-  **Box 6.1 Putting It Together:** *Father-Child Communication about Sex* 178
-  **Box 6.2 Diversity in Families:** *Extramarital Sex Around the World* 186
-  **Box 7.1 At Issue:** *The Work–Family Interface* 202
-  **Box 7.2 Diversity in Families:** *Gender Roles in Japan* 207
-  **Box 7.3 At Issue:** *Gender Inequality as a Global Problem* 213
-  **Box 8.1 At Issue:** *The Effects of Debt on Newlyweds* 226
-  **Box 8.2 Putting It Together:** *Steps to Financial Freedom* 230
-  **Box 8.3 At Issue:** *The Cost of Having and Raising a Baby* 236
-  **Box 8.4 At Issue:** *The Credit Card Trap and How to Avoid It* 240

-  **Box 9.1 Putting It Together:** *Ten Traits of Love* 250
-  **Box 9.2 At Issue:** *Love and Science* 253
-  **Box 9.3 Diversity in Families:** *Definitions of Singlehood* 268
-  **Box 10.1 Putting It Together:** *Dating Do's and Don'ts* 286
-  **Box 10.2 At Issue:** *Dating Violence Warning Signs* 297
-  **Box 10.3 Putting It Together:** *Ten Ideas to Consider Before Cohabiting* 300
-  **Box 11.1 Putting It Together:** *The PREPARE Program for Premarital Counseling* 313
-  **Box 11.2 At Issue:** *Predicting Marital Success* 314
-  **Box 12.1 Putting It Together:** *The Mother's Book by Mrs. Child* 353
-  **Box 12.2 Diversity in Families:** *Child Care for the Growing Hispanic Population* 355
-  **Box 12.3 At Issue:** *Looking for a Very High Quality Child Care Program and Positive Caregiving* 358
-  **Box 12.4 Putting It Together:** *Owl Moon Walk* 370
-  **Box 13.1 Diversity in Families:** *Childlessness: The Invisible Group* 378
-  **Box 13.2 Diversity in Families:** *Grandparents and Grandfamilies* 387
-  **Box 13.3 At Issue:** *Alzheimer's* 395
-  **Box 13.4 At Issue:** *I Am Aware That I Am No Longer Anyone's "Most Important Person": The Desolation of Grief* 399
-  **Box 14.1 At Issue:** *Ambiguous Loss: When We Are Uncertain If a Person Is In or Out of Our Family* 410
-  **Box 14.2 At Issue:** *The Impact of War on Families Left Behind* 418
-  **Box 14.3 Putting It Together:** *Strategies for Managing Stress* 427
-  **Box 14.4 Putting It Together:** *Surviving and Transcending a Traumatic Childhood: The Dark Thread* 442
-  **Box 14.5 Diversity in Families:** *Family Violence from a Global Perspective: Strengths-Based Research and Case Studies* 446
-  **Box 15.1 Diversity in Families:** *The Globalization of Divorce* 462
-  **Box 15.2 At Issue:** *Dissolution of Interracial Marriages* 465
-  **Box 16.1 Diversity in Families:** *The Perennial Philosophy* 495
-  **Box 16.2 Putting It Together:** *Building a Stronger Marriage* 507
-  **Box 16.3 Putting It Together:** *Building a Stronger Family* 508

About the Authors

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Olson has written or edited more than 20 books, including *Couple Checkup*; *Remarriage Checkup*; *Empowering Couples*; *Building Relationships*; *Families: What Makes Them Work*; *Circumplex Model*; *Power in Families*; *Treating Relationships*; and 10 volumes of the *Inventory of Marriage and Family Literature*. He has published more than 100 articles with the theme of bridging family research, theory, and practice.

Olson and his colleagues at the University of Minnesota are well known for having developed the Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems and a variety of couple and family assessment tools, including PREPARE, ENRICH, FACES, PAIR, and AWARE.



John DeFrain, Ph.D.

John DeFrain is a professor emeritus of family studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. His professional focus through a long career has been the development of couple and family strengths nationally and internationally.

DeFrain's research on family strengths and challenges from a global perspective has been recognized around the world. He holds an Honorary Appointment as Conjoint Professor of Family Studies at the University of Newcastle, Callaghan, New South Wales, Australia; serves as a research scientist in the Center for Family Studies, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, People's Republic of China; received an Onassis Foundation Fellowship to work at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece; was a Fulbright Scholar at the University of the South Pacific in Suva, Fiji; regularly attends the World Public Forum *Dialogue of Civilizations* conferences in Rhodes, Greece; consults with the Department of Family Development of the federal government of Mexico; and works with the MISS Foundation based in Phoenix, Arizona, part of an international network helping to develop programs for families whose child has died.

DeFrain is a co-founder of the Global Consortium for Education in Family Studies, developing an international family studies graduate program for students around the world. The Global Consortium links universities in America, Australia,



China, Greece, India, and Korea, making it possible for students to learn about how to strengthen families from teachers in many countries.

DeFrain's research has been published in 160 professional articles in books, journals, and Extension publications; and he has co-authored and co-edited 35 books, including: *Coping with Sudden Infant Death*; *Secrets of Strong Families*; *Stillborn: The Invisible Death*; *On Our Own: A Single Parent's Survival Guide*; *Parents in Contemporary America*; *Sudden Infant Death: Enduring the Loss*; *Building Relationships*; and *We Cry Out: Living with Developmental Disabilities*. His most recent books are: *Surviving and Transcending a Traumatic Childhood: The Dark Thread*; *Family Treasures: Creating Strong Families*; *Strong Families Around the World: Strengths-Based Research and Perspectives*; *The Strengths and Challenges of New Immigrant Families: Implications for Research, Education, Policy, and Service*; *Getting Connected, Staying Connected: Loving Each Other Day by Day*; and *Family Violence from a Global Perspective: Strengths-Based Perspectives*.

Linda Skogrand, Ph.D.



Linda Skogrand is a professor and family life extension specialist at Utah State University in Logan, Utah. She began her professional career as a social worker in the inner city of St. Louis, Missouri, and throughout her career has enjoyed a balance between academic institutions and social service organizations. Her current position as an Extension specialist allows her to take knowledge and research findings and make them available to people in communities in Utah and throughout the nation. She is a member of the working group for the National Extension Relationship and Marriage Education Network (NERMEN), which provides relationship education materials nationally for Extension educators and others who provide relationship and marriage education.

Skogrand's social service experiences include providing HIV/AIDS education programs for street kids, people in prison, and gang members, and overseeing the design of an AIDS house for the Latino population. She also taught family courses at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota, for 17 years and was adjunct faculty at the University of Minnesota.

She has authored numerous journal articles focusing on topics such as transcending a traumatic childhood, diversity, strong Latino marriages, strong Navajo marriages, strong African American marriages, relationship and marriage education for low-income and diverse populations, and benefits of stepfamily education for Latino and low-income audiences.

Skogrand is nationally known for her work with diversity—hearing the voices that are not typically heard in family research. With that focus in mind, she has conducted research with Latino couples and Navajo couples and created curricula for these populations based upon this research. These curricula include *Strong Latino Couple Relationships* for the Latino population and *Strong Marriages for Navajo Couples* for the Navajo people so members of these populations can strengthen their couple relationships in ways that are consistent with their cultural values. Currently, she is collaborating with the 4-H director in Alaska in conducting research in order to ultimately bring 4-H to youth in remote Native villages in culturally appropriate ways.

Preface

Our colleague and friend, the late Dr. David R. Mace, once said, “Nothing in the world could make human life happier than to greatly increase the number of happy couples and strong families.” Throughout eight editions, our goal in writing *Marriages and Families: Intimacy, Diversity, and Strengths* has been to provide students with information about marriage and family relationships that will help them move toward Mace’s goal.

We have tried to make the concepts and ideas presented in this book useful and meaningful so students will be able to apply them to their own lives. We hope to help students integrate intellectual ideas and personal experiences, thereby enriching both. Although the text deals with some complex ideas and materials, it is written in a style that is accessible to students new to the field of family studies and to those wishing to learn more about intimate relationships.

Intimacy, Strengths, and Diversity

Three distinctive themes have guided our efforts in writing this book, and they are woven throughout the text. The first is *intimacy*, and our focus is on how to develop and maintain close relationships. Most people seek connectedness and want to be involved in intimate relationships, the most intimate being marriage and family. This book is full of ideas, principles, and suggestions for building and keeping intimate relationships in your life. As a result, this is a book that you will want to keep and refer to throughout your life.

The second key theme is *marital and family strengths*. The family strengths perspective is based on the premise that if you approach relationships from a “problem-oriented” perspective, you will find problems. If you look for strengths, you will find strengths. Growing numbers of family educators and family therapists are using this approach today, helping families recognize their own strengths and use them as a foundation for positive growth. In Chapter 1, we identify a number of strengths that have been found to be present in healthy marriages and families all over the world. Throughout the book, we show how these strengths help families provide healthy and nurturing settings that promote the growth and well-being of individual family members, better enabling them to face the challenges and solve the problems they encounter.

Although the theme of marital and family strengths is integrated throughout the book, three chapters focus especially on this theme: Chapter 2 highlights the couple and family strengths of diverse ethnic and cultural groups, as well as gay and lesbian couples and families; Chapter 14 examines how families can use their strengths to manage stress, abuse, and other family issues; and Chapter 16 looks at how families, communities, and cultures can work together to build a healthier world in the future.

The third key theme is *diversity*, and, wherever possible, we consider how concepts, research, and theories about the family apply to couples and families of diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. We also focus on the diversity in structure that characterizes families today, looking at the many different forms that *family* can take. Diversity in sexual orientation—gay and lesbian relationships and families in our society—is another type of diversity we explore. The theme of diversity is introduced in Chapter 1, discussed in detail in Chapter 2, and integrated into discussions throughout the book. One of the four categories of the boxes throughout the text is dedicated to exploring diversity in families.

Family Systems and Family Strengths

We present innumerable theories of family in this book, but we focus especially on family systems theory. Recognizing that the family unit is a system of interdependent parts, we look at how families maintain themselves, yet change; how family members can be separate, yet connected; and how communication facilitates the processes of change and growth. We focus on communication and conflict resolution skills as essential tools for creating healthy intimate relationships. We also look at how families can learn to function well within the larger systems of community and society.

The family strengths perspective was developed by Nick Stinnett, John DeFrain, and many of their colleagues across the country and around the world. We use this perspective throughout the text as a model for understanding and evaluating families. With it, we identify and focus on six key qualities of healthy families: commitment, appreciation and affection, positive communication, enjoyable time together, spiritual well-being, and the ability to cope with stress and crisis. The research driving this model has involved thousands of family members in the United States and other countries around the world.

In Chapter 3, we introduce the Couple and Family Map, an assessment tool that was developed by David Olson and his colleagues. The Couple and Family Map is based on concepts from family systems theory, and it focuses on the three dimensions of cohesion, flexibility, and communication. It has been used in hundreds of studies to help researchers understand and evaluate families. Throughout the text, we cite studies that have used the map as a theoretical base. An ongoing family case study, described in the Instructor's Manual, can be used to show students how the Couple and Family Map is applied. Appendix A contains the instructions and materials to apply the map to couple and family relationships.

Updates in the Eighth Edition

Like a healthy couple and family, a good textbook needs to identify major issues and change over time. We have tried to describe the current issues in marriage and families today and identify changes in these relationships.

The field of relationships, especially marriages and families, is increasingly changing and becoming more diverse and complex. Marriage is being preceded and/or replaced by cohabitation, and two-parent families are becoming less common. Same-sex couples are increasing, as are single parents and people who are choosing not to marry. We will now highlight some of the changes we have made in each of the 16 chapters.

Overall, it is important for the reader to know that as we work on a new edition of the textbook, we check every citation to be sure that it is the most up-to-date source available. In addition, worldwide databases are tapped, organizations that collect the most recent data about marriages and family are searched, and the most reliable research and commentary are chosen to help keep the book current. This process takes 18 months.

Part I: The Social Context of Intimate Relationships

In **Chapter 1, Perspectives on Intimate Relationships**, we have completely updated national statistics on marriage and divorce in America. We have added some new definitions of *family* for the reader, and discussed the controversy between the so-called *exclusionists* and *inclusionists*. The latest developments in the struggle over same-sex marriage in the United States are discussed, followed by new statistics on cohabitation and remarriage. We present several propositions on how to look at couples and families from a strengths-based perspective, and go on to discuss why, from a statistical perspective, marital relationships look stronger than cohabiting relationships. New statistics are featured that show Americans are generally pessimistic about the prospects for the country's economy and for international peace in the near future, but the vast majority are optimistic about how they and their family will do in the coming year.

A number of major challenges Americans face in the broader social environment are described. This section includes the latest statistics on who's minding the kids, looking at the percentages of young children in the care of their parents, other relatives, child care centers, or nonrelatives in home-based arrangements. Violence and domestic abuse in this country are reviewed using very recent research. The latest data on the problems caused in families by tobacco use and excessive alcohol use are reviewed. New research is presented on how family socialization has dropped dramatically in recent years, attributed to increased Internet use. And finally, we look at the increase in single-parent families, the decrease in the number of children, and the decrease in the percentage of women who are stay-at-home moms. For the new Eighth Edition, Chapter 1 has been extensively revised and strengthened.

In **Chapter 2, Cultural Diversity and Diversity in Family Structure: Family Strengths and Challenges**, we have added a discussion about *why culture matters* and we conclude that everything that happens in couple and family relationships happens within a cultural context. This chapter, therefore, is very important in understanding how couples and families function based upon their own cultural values and experiences. Updated information about the ethnic population distribution in the United States is included. Additionally, new information about the increase of gay and lesbian couples and families is provided, and the newest research in this area included.

Chapter 3, Understanding Marriage and Family Dynamics, features a section on the *Family Strengths Perspective*, and we clarify the subsection on *Spiritual Well-Being and Shared Values* by explaining the distinction between spiritual beliefs and religious beliefs. In the subsection on the *Family Development Framework* we discuss the controversy surrounding the exact number of stages involved in the family life cycle, numbering 4 stages to 24 stages, depending on the theoretical model.

Part II: Dynamics of Intimate Relationships

In **Chapter 4, Communication and Intimacy**, the Gender Communication Quotient has been revised and updated, and seven new *Suggested Readings* have been added at the end of the chapter.

In **Chapter 5, Conflict and Conflict Resolution**, new research is featured on the relationship between how well an individual controls anger and the person's health. Also, the terms *fight*, *fighting*, and *fair fighting* are discussed, drawing attention to the notion that verbal disagreements are serious business and should be treated with caution and good sense.

Chapter 6, Sexual Intimacy, includes a new study about differences and similarities between men's and women's sexual behaviors. In addition, new research about same-sex and opposite sexual behaviors has been included. Findings about the long-term impact of teen pregnancy have also been added to this chapter.

Chapter 7, Gender Roles and Power in the Family, provides the most up-to-date information about gender roles, including information about why women still do most of the work in the home. The latest findings indicate that *attitudes* about such work seem to be different for men and women. This may explain why women do more housework—they enjoy it and have a positive attitude about it. New research about gender roles internationally is also provided.

Chapter 8, Managing Economic Resources, includes new research about the impact of the recession on poverty rates, credit card use, and bankruptcy. How the low interest rates affect the cost of buying a home is also discussed, as well as how financial issues affect couple and family relationships.

Part III: Stages of Intimate Relationships

Chapter 9, Friendship, Intimacy, and Singlehood, provides a new discussion with new citations about the unique friendship patterns of new immigrants and other cultural groups. A new phenomenon in our country is that there are an increasing number of women of child-bearing age who are choosing to have children and who are not getting married. These women are either choosing not to marry or are not finding the right person to marry. The implications for children and families are provided in this chapter. The chapter also discusses new research about the feelings and perceptions of single women in today's society.

Online dating has become increasingly pervasive in today's society. In **Chapter 10, Dating, Mate Selection, and Living Together**, we talk about what we are learning through research about this experience. Also, as our population is aging, dating in the older years is becoming increasingly prevalent. This results in new challenges for this segment of the population and we provide new information about how individuals and couples are addressing these challenges. A new section about theories of mate selection has been added. Research about those from diverse populations is added in multiple places throughout the chapter.

In **Chapter 11, Marriage: Building a Strong Foundation**, the latest marriage statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau are reported; new facts about marriage are presented from the Pew Research Center analyses of government data; and five new *Suggested Readings* are added.

Although children can often bring challenges to married life, **Chapter 12, Parenthood: Joys and Challenges**, draws on a recent study that shows couples with certain characteristics actually have improved couple relationships after they have children. This is groundbreaking research. This chapter also contains new information about the benefits of family education classes addressing the transition to parenthood. There is also new research about the use of punishment and its impact on children from differing cultures in this chapter.

In **Chapter 13, Midlife and Older Couples**, a new section on *Divorce During the Middle and Later Years* has been added, along with a new box on *Grandparents and Grandfamilies*. Also, new research is included on life satisfaction across the lifespan; the economic well-being of older families; the health of older Americans; loneliness and the elderly; and the myth that most older adults end up in nursing homes. There is also a new section on *Losing a Spouse*; and nine new *Suggested Readings*.

Part IV: Challenges and Opportunities

In **Chapter 14, Stress, Abuse, and Family Problems**, new thinking has been added on cross-cultural perspectives of couple and family stress. The *Stress Across the Family Life Cycle* section has been revised and updated with new research. A section on the classic ABC-X Family Crisis Model has been included. The latest research has been added about family members left behind when a person is deployed to a war zone. Up-to-date statistics on domestic violence are now included. The relationship between physical abuse and psychological abuse has been clarified. New sections have been added on alternatives to spanking and the long-term consequences of child abuse and neglect. New material on sibling abuse and child-to-parent abuse has been added. A section is now included on family violence from a global perspective, based upon a new study. The latest statistics on alcohol abuse and families are provided, plus up-to-date information on treatment and prevention of alcohol problems. The discussion on the importance of acknowledging the dangers inherent in the misuse of legal drugs has been strengthened. The list of *Suggested Readings* is filled with current resources, showing how much new research and thinking has appeared in the past few years.

Chapter 15, Divorce, Single-Parent Families, and Stepfamilies, includes 25 new citations, since this is an area of increasing change in our society. There is new information on the effects of divorce, how people manage step-family relationships, and how individuals and couples function in same-sex relationships. Much of this new information focuses on the impact on children as family structure changes. Because single-parent families have become so prevalent, a significant section has been added about what we know about this family structure, including a component about the strengths of single-parent families.

Chapter 16, Strengthening Marriages and Families Worldwide, has many new resources related to couple education programs. A new section entitled *Common Questions on Marital and Family Therapy* has been included. The section on *Strengthening Your Marriage and Family Relationships* has been revised. The *Suggested Readings* section has been revised and updated.

Appendices

Appendix A, Couple and Family Scales, based on research over the past 30 years that continues today, remains helpful to students who want to learn how to describe and assess couples and families from a family systems perspective. Having students use these scales to evaluate their own family or another family is a very useful and insight-producing assignment. See the *Activities* section at the end of Chapter 3 for more details on the assignment.

Appendix B, Family Science and Family Research Methods, has been reviewed and all the references have been updated to include the most recent citations.

How We Do Our Job

The field of family studies or family science continues to grow dramatically. Thanks to advances in computer technology and search engines scouring massive databases, we have been able to update this text to include the most current statistics and cutting-edge research studies. More than 350 new sources are cited in this volume, carefully gleaned from computer-driven searches, searching the top journals in the field of marriage and family, and keeping our eyes open literally every day of our lives for interesting new material for this textbook.

The tools listed below have proven to be especially useful as we do our job:

- *Google Scholar* is a Web search engine owned by Google Inc., and is a widely used search engine on scholarly work on the Internet. Google receives several hundred million queries each day through its various services. We have found Google Scholar especially useful when trying to track down the source of different ideas, quotations, or data that we have run across.
- *U.S. government Web sites* of the federal government provide a wealth of information about families that proves useful for textbook writers. Some of our favorite Web sites include Administration on Aging; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; *CIA World Factbook*; Library of Congress; National Center for Health Statistics; National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence; National Institutes of Health; U.S. Bureau of the Census; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center; U.S. Office of Justice; Statistical Abstracts of the United States.
- *Professional organizations and other useful Web sites* include the Alan Guttmacher Institute; Alliance for Children and Families; American Academy of Pediatrics; American Association for Marital and Family Therapy; American Psychological Association; Child Trends; Compassionate Friends; Mayo Clinic; M.I.S.S. Foundation; National Healthy Marriage Resource Center; National Council on Family Relations; National Marriage Project; Pew Research Center; Planned Parenthood.
- *The media* provide some of our favorite sources, including *The New York Times*, *The Economist*, *The Nation*, *AARP Magazine*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *The New Republic*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Business Week*, *Money Magazine*, *NPR*, and *PBS*.

Finally, but probably most importantly, to update this and every edition of *Marriages and Families: Intimacy, Diversity, and Strengths*, we literally go through

every issue of the following 12 professional journals, searching for solid and interesting new research and thinking: *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *Family Relations*, *Marriage and Family Review*, *Journal of Family Issues*, *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, *National Council on Family Relations Report*, *Journal of Family Communication*, *Child Development*, *Journal of Family Psychology*, *Family Process*, *Families in Society*, and the *Journal of Family and Economic Issues*.

Online Resources

The Eighth Edition of *Marriages and Families: Intimacy, Diversity, and Strengths* is accompanied by a number of supplementary learning and teaching available on the Online Learning Center Web site at www.mhhe.com/olson8e.

For the Student

AWARE Online. AWARE is a computerized assessment that contains 15 categories that match the chapters in the book. After completing the AWARE Online assessment, the student receives a 19-page *AWARE Personal Report* that identifies relationship areas and issues that are strengths for the student and problematic issues that need to be considered. AWARE helps personalize the course by showing students how their current relationship attitudes compare with professionals in the field. It also stimulates students' interest and involvement in the class by highlighting current relationship issues. To learn more about AWARE, go to the Online Learning Center Web site at www.mhhe.com/olson8e.

Additional Student Resources. The Online Learning Center Web site that accompanies this text offers a variety of resources for the student. Students will find interactive multiple choice and true/false chapter quizzes, and an annotated list of other online resources. Please visit the text OLC site at www.mhhe.com/olson8e.

For the Instructor

The password-protected instructor side of the Online Learning Center Web site includes AWARE Online, the Instructor's Manual, Test Bank, internet exercises and PowerPoint® lecture slides. Go to www.mhhe.com/olson8e.

Instructor's Manual. For each chapter of the text, the Instructor's Manual provides a chapter outline, learning objectives, a chapter summary, a list of key terms, lecture notes, suggested activities, and suggested readings. The Instructor's Manual also can be downloaded from the Instructor's Online Learning Center.

AWARE Online. AWARE is an acronym for **A**wareness of **A**ttitudes and **R**elationship Expectations. AWARE contains 15 categories that match the chapters in the textbook. After the students have completed the AWARE Online assessment, the instructor can view online and print a 20-page *AWARE Instructor Summary*. The summary provides an overview of the background areas, along with the strengths

and issues for the class on 15 categories and the Couple and Family Map. There are several advantages for using AWARE with a class.

- First, the instructor can quickly and efficiently learn about the relevant relationship attitudes of the students in the class.
- Second, by knowing the strengths and growth areas for the class, the instructor can tailor the class to better serve the needs of that class.
- Third, AWARE provides background information about the students that an instructor could not easily ask in a class.
- Fourth, the instructor can provide the class with summary feedback about their relationship attitudes for each chapter in the book.
- Fifth, AWARE personalizes the class for the students and stimulates their interest and involvement in the class.
- Last, AWARE helps engage the students in the class and facilitates greater class interaction. For more information about AWARE, go to www.mhhe.com/olson8e.

Test Bank. The Test Bank offers multiple-choice, true/false, short-answer, and essay questions for each chapter in the text. The Test Bank can be downloaded as a Word file from the Online Learning Center Web site at www.mhhe.com/olson8e. A Computerized Test Bank is also available on the Web site.

PowerPoint® Slides. A collection of tables and figures from the text, augmented by additional graphics, allows instructors to add visual content to their lectures. The PowerPoint® slides are also available on the Web site.

Additional Online Resources. The Instructor's side of the OLC offers access to the student chapter quizzes, an annotated list of other online resources and Internet exercises. The Instructor's Manual, PowerPoint® slides, and more can be accessed on this Web site at www.mhhe.com/olson8e.

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PART ONE

The Social Context of Intimate Relationships

1 *P*erspectives on Intimate Relationships



**Three Themes of Intimacy,
Strengths, and Diversity**

Defining Marriage and Family

**Trends in Marriage and
the Family: Change and
Continuity**

**Focus on Marital and
Family Strengths**

Advantages of Marriage

**Impact of the Social
Environment on Relationships**

**Changing the Social
Environment**

**Positive Responses to the
Social Environment**

Summary

Key Terms

Activities

Suggested Readings

Three Themes of Intimacy, Strengths, and Diversity

Most people need *intimate relationships* with other people. Intimacy is sharing intellectually, physically, and/or emotionally with another person. In this text we will focus on intimacy in marriage and family relationships and on how they are maintained and how they become broken.

Intimacy usually occurs when individuals disclose information about themselves, allowing themselves to become vulnerable, and involves trusting that the other person will not use that information to cause harm. Sharing information that involves intimacy usually results in receiving support from that person or persons.

Intimacy will be discussed throughout this book in terms of dating and courtship, sexual relationships, communication, dealing with conflict, and other aspects of marriage and couple relationships. Intimacy may look different at different times in the life cycle. In addition to having intimacy in couple relationships, intimacy occurs in parent–child relationships, relationships with extended family, and relationships with others who take the place of family. Most intimate relationships go through periods when that closeness is threatened or destroyed. Our goal is to provide you with ideas and exercises to help you improve your ability to develop and maintain intimate relationships throughout life.

Identifying and focusing on *strengths* and building on those strengths are essential for developing and maintaining successful marriage relationships. The focus of this textbook on couple and family strengths provides evidence from the United States and many other countries around the world on how families succeed in the face of life's inherent difficulties (DeFrain & Asay, 2007). By concentrating only on a family's problems and a family's failings, we ignore the fact that it takes a positive approach in life to succeed. The family strengths perspective is a worldview or orientation toward life and families that is positive and optimistic, grounded in research conducted among thousands of couples and families globally. It does not ignore family problems but restores them to their proper place in life: as vehicles for testing our capacities as families and reaffirming our vital human connections with each other. Not all families are strong, of course, but all families have strengths, and these strengths can be a foundation for continued growth. When one only looks for problems in marriages and families, that is all that one will find. By looking for a relationship's strengths, we create a more balanced and realistic picture of the couple and family situation. Finally, looking for what makes families strong helps us discover knowledge that is useful in helping other families. The strong families identified by researchers around the world become the experts for teaching other families how to create a happy and resilient family environment.

Focusing and building on strengths in relationships will be evident throughout this book in relation to couples, marriage relationships, single-parent families, gay and lesbian relationships and families, parenting practices, relationships in diverse cultures, and life in the middle and later years.

There is more *diversity* in family and couple relationships than ever before. There are a variety of family structures that are described in this book, including married couples, cohabiting couples, gay and lesbian couples, single-parent families, stepfamilies, and grandparents raising grandchildren. There is also greater cultural and ethnic diversity in the United States than ever before, with minority cultural groups becoming a greater proportion of the total population. These cultural groups bring a wide array of values, beliefs, and practices to our understanding of

how marriages and families work. It is increasingly challenging to understand the diversity of couple and family relationships that exist today and will continue to increase in the future.

The three themes of intimacy, strengths, and diversity are critical in understanding couple and family relationships today. These themes and the research and literature surrounding these themes are essential for developing healthy and happy relationships. Knowledge about the latest research in each of these areas will help you develop healthy relationships and better understand and appreciate those around you.

Defining Marriage and Family

Not as many people today live in the so-called traditional family, with a dad at work and a mom at home with the kids—only about 20% of all families in the United States match this model (Tavernise, 2011, May 26). In addition to the diverse types of family structure, families may vary in cultural or ethnic background, income, size, and longevity. There are many possible family structures rather than one “right” way for a family to be organized.

What Is Marriage?

Marriage is by nature a multifaceted institution. We define **marriage** as *the emotional and legal commitment of two people to share emotional and physical intimacy, various tasks, and economic resources.*

The following nine characteristics of marriage were identified by the late Carlfred Broderick (1992, 1993). A former president of the National Council on Family Relations, Broderick found these characteristics to be common across income levels, educational levels, and ethnic and cultural groups in the United States:

- *Marriage is a demographic event.* Each marriage creates a social unit in society.
- *Marriage is the joining of two families and social networks.* When individuals marry, they marry not only each other but their partner’s family and friends. Their social network may comprise friends of both partners, but only those friends liked by both partners tend to remain friends of the couple.
- *Marriage is a legal contract between the couple and the state.* Each state specifies the rights and responsibilities of the partners.
- *Marriage is an economic union.* A married couple usually becomes a single financial unit for most purposes. As a group, married couples are probably society’s most important financial decision makers—buying, selling, borrowing, and sharing resources as one.
- *Marriage is the most common living arrangement for adults.* Few people choose to live alone. Marriage is also the most popular living arrangement for adults.
- *Marriage is the context of most human sexual activity.* Most married couples rate sexual activity positively, especially in the early years.
- *Marriage is a reproductive unit.* Most married couples become parents and see parenting as an important goal and a valued purpose in their lives.
- *Marriage is a unit that socializes children* (although children can also be raised by single parents, extended families, grandparents, and other caregivers).
- *Marriage is an opportunity to develop an intimate, sharing relationship.* Although many marriages fail, many others provide a supportive context in which people develop and maintain intimacy.

Same-sex marriage. Historically speaking, the first laws in modern times recognizing same-sex marriage took effect during the first decade of the 21st century. As this textbook goes to press in the summer of 2013, 13 countries on five continents allow same-sex couples to marry (Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, South Africa, Sweden). Several sub-national jurisdictions (parts of Mexico and the United States) also allow same-sex marriage. Freedom to marry legislation has also passed in Uruguay, France, and New Zealand, and when these laws take effect in these three countries, same-sex couples will have the freedom to marry, regionally or nationwide, in 17 countries around the world. Bills to legally recognize same-sex marriage have also been proposed, are pending, or have been passed in at least one legislative body in Andorra, England and Wales, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, Nepal, Scotland, and Taiwan, as well as parts of Australia, Mexico, and the U.S. (Freedom to Marry, 2013a).

On June 26th, 2013 the U.S. Supreme Court in *Windsor v. United States* struck down Section 3 of the so-called Defense of Marriage Act, a 1996 law passed by Congress and signed by President Bill Clinton that denied legally married same-sex couples over 1,100 protections and responsibilities of marriage. By striking down Section 3 of DOMA, the court affirmed equal legal respect and treatment for all married couples, straight or gay (Freedom to Marry, 2013b).

Gay rights advocates hailed the decision as a major step in the struggle for equal protection under the law, while opponents decried the decision. Both sides saw that the struggle would now continue in the U.S., state by state. As this textbook goes to press, 13 states representing about 30% of the U.S. population grant the freedom to marry for same-sex couples (California, Connecticut, Delaware, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Washington, plus Washington, D.C.) In 2012 New Jersey passed a freedom to marry bill, and there is work underway to override the governor's veto. New Mexico explicitly recognizes out-of-state marriages of same-sex couples, though the state does not grant gays the freedom to marry. Six other states offer broad protections for gays, short of marriage: Colorado, Hawaii, Illinois, and New Jersey allow civil union, while Oregon and Nevada offer domestic partnership (Freedom to Marry, 2013b).

What Is a Family?

Family can be defined in many ways. One dictionary offers the following definitions (*American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 2012):

1. A fundamental social group in society typically consisting of one or two parents and their children.
2. The children of one of these groups.
3. A group of persons related by descent or marriage.
4. People in the same line of descent; lineage.

There are innumerable other definitions of family, and following is a collection that represents a diversity of perspectives:

- A family consists of two or more people (one of whom is the householder) related by birth, marriage, or adoption residing in the same housing unit (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011, Sept. 13).
- The term *family* is an inclusive term for people who “care, support and protect each other” (Australian Government, 2008).
- A family is defined as two or more persons who share resources, share responsibility for decisions, share values and goals, and have a commitment



Strong families are good for raising healthy and happy children. Extended families are a great source of support in raising children.

to one another over time (American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences, 2004).

- The family is the most important unit of society and functions to fulfill its members' needs for both survival and well-being. "Families" come in many forms. A well-functioning family enhances its individual members' ability to function both within the family and in the larger community; such a family provides emotional, physical, and economic mutual aid to its members. Ideally, family is characterized by intimacy, intensity, continuity, and commitment among its members throughout the life cycle (Family Service Association, 2012).
- The definition of a family "should not rest on fictitious legal distinctions or genetic history" but instead should be based on the functional and psychological qualities of the relationship: the "exclusivity and longevity" of the relationship; the "level of emotional and financial commitment"; the "reliance placed upon one another for daily family services"; and how the couple (members) "conducted their everyday lives and held themselves out to society" (New York State Administrative Regulations, 1995).

- Definitions of the family vary along a continuum with biological conceptions on one end of the continuum and social conceptions on the other (Holtzman, 2005). Having a child through birth would be on the biological end, and adopting a child would be on the social end of the continuum. Both are legitimate definitions of family.
- Voluntary family or voluntary kin. People who care for us, support us, and feel like family to us, but are not related by blood or law (Braithwaite, 2008).
- Call it a clan, call it a network, call it a tribe, call it a family. Whatever you call it, whoever you are, you need one (Howard, 2002).

How Americans define *family* is clearly evolving. A research team at Indiana University led by sociologist Brian Powell surveyed more than 2,300 people between 2003 and 2010 (Berman, 2010, Sept. 15).

The Indiana research team identified three clusters of Americans, when it comes to defining family: *exclusionists* who hold onto a more narrow definition of family; *moderates* who are willing to count same-sex couples as family if children are involved; and *inclusionists* who have a very broad definition of family. In 2010, the researchers found that almost everyone—99.8%—agreed that a husband, wife, and kids count as a family. Ninety-two percent said that a husband and wife without the kids made a family.

The researchers also found that 83% of Americans say unmarried couples with children are a family. Only 39.6% said that an unmarried man and woman living together were a family, but adding kids jumped the number up to 83%. Thirty-three percent said a gay male couple was a family. Sixty-four percent said they became a family when they added children. This number rose from 54% to 64% between 2003 and 2010.

Sixty percent of Americans in 2010 said that if you considered yourself to be a family, then you were one.

We personally believe that any definition of family should be broad enough to encompass a range of family structures, dynamics, and functions. Our definition of family is *two or more people who are committed to each other and who share intimacy, resources, decision-making responsibilities, and values*. This definition is inclusive and allows for diversity in family structure, family values, and ethnic and cultural groups. At a Wimbledon tennis match, sisters Venus and Serena Williams were going to play each other and a sports writer asked, “Will this match hurt your relationship with your family?” The immediate answer was: “Tennis is just a game. Families are forever.”

Trends in Marriage and the Family: Change and Continuity

What are marriage and the family like today? Current trends include fewer marriages, later age of marriage, fewer children, continued flattening of divorce rates, more single-parent families and stepfamilies, a greater need for day care, more child abuse, more spouse abuse, and less connection to kin networks (National Marriage Project, 2012).

Statistics on divorce, domestic violence, and alcohol and other drug abuse, as well as stories of families in crisis, paint a rather negative picture of marriage and family



Strong families enjoy leisure activities together.

life today. These snapshots of troubled families may be newsworthy, but the situations they describe are not new. For decades, many respected social scientists have predicted that the institutions of marriage and the family would not survive. For example, in 1927, psychologist John B. Watson predicted, “In 50 years, unless there is some change, the tribal custom of marriage will no longer exist.” He believed marriage would disappear because family standards had broken down. In 1937, Pitirim Sorokin, a respected Harvard sociologist, wrote, “The family as a sacred union of husband and wife, of parents and children, will continue to disintegrate.” Ten years later, Carl Zimmerman, also a Harvard sociologist, noted, “There is little left now, within the family itself or the moral code, to hold the family together” (Bernard, 1970, p. 42).

Although some professionals emphasize the decline of marriage and the family, others see them as being in a state of transition. As Ernest Burgess and his colleagues stated in 1954, “Certainly marriage and the family in the U.S. are in the process of rapid change. But is it change for the worse? Perhaps it may be for the better” (Bernard, 1970, p. 43). In a similar vein, David and Vera Mace, pioneers in the marriage and family enrichment movement in Great Britain and the United States, argued that “marriage has not failed—it is simply in transition” (Mace & Mace, 1980, p. 260). Skolnick and Skolnick (1977), in their classic study *Family in Transition*, clearly illustrated the dramatic changes in family life over the centuries. In fact, one of the salient characteristics of the family is its ability to adapt to changing times and new challenges.

Today, pessimists and optimists disagree about how to interpret these trends and what to do about them. The pessimists see recent changes as an indication that marriage and family are in serious trouble and are declining in their significance to society. They believe that we need to return to a more traditional value system to curtail these negative trends. The optimists, on the other hand, see recent changes as a reflection of the flexibility of marriage and family and the ability of these institutions to adapt to the increasing stresses of modern life. They believe marriage and the family will survive and thrive.

In fact, marriage and the family have survived over time despite all the predictions of their imminent collapse. Moreover, marriage remains the most popular voluntary institution in our society, with about 85% of the population marrying at least once (Popenoe & Whitehead, 2004).

Trends in Marriage and Cohabitation

There are several important trends in the United States that will be briefly described in this section: a decline in the percentage of those who are married, an increase in the number of those delaying marriage until they are older, an increase in the number of the never married, and an increase in the number of couples who choose to cohabit before—or instead of—marrying.

Marriage. Although marriage remains popular in the United States, it is not as popular as it once was. The percentage of people over the age of 18 who are married has steadily declined. In 1970, 68% of adults were married; in 1980, 66%; in 1990, 62%; and about 60% in 2000 (see Figure 1.1). In 2006, homes headed by married couples dipped to 49.7% (Roberts, 2006). This is the first time that married-couple households dipped below 50%, thus making married couples a minority in the United States. There are two reasons for this change: Many couples are choosing to stay single longer or are choosing to cohabit. There are also increased numbers of elderly people who have lost their spouse, which is adding to the number of single-family households. In addition, there are increasing numbers of same-sex couples who are not typically counted as being married.

More individuals are delaying marriage until their late 20s. Today, the median age for first marriage is 28.7 years for men and 26.5 years for women, the oldest in U.S. history. Age at marriage has been on the increase for more than 4 decades. In 1960, the median age for a first marriage was 22.8 years for men and 20.3 years for women (National Marriage Project, 2012; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Cohabitation. The number of unmarried couples who are living together in the United States has increased dramatically over the past five decades. Most

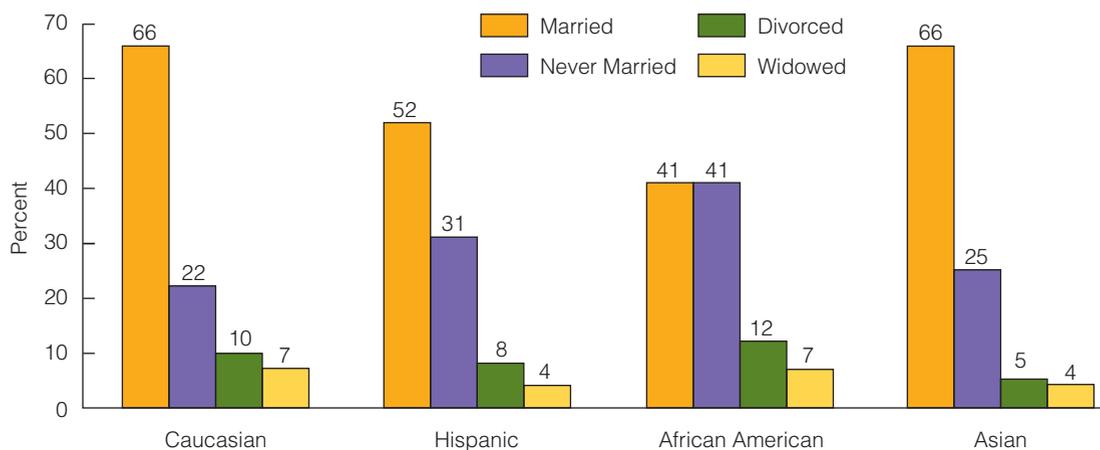


FIGURE 1.1

Marital Status of U.S. Population

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005e, table 54.

younger Americans are spending some time living together outside of marriage, and cohabitation commonly precedes marriage. Between 1960 and 2011 the total number of cohabitating couples increased 17-fold. Unmarried cohabitation, defined as the status of couples who are sexual partners, not married to each other, and sharing a household, is particularly common among young people (National Marriage Project, 2012). An estimated 60% to 75% of first marriages are preceded by cohabitation, and up to 80% to 85% of remarriages (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003b).

Trends in Divorce and Remarriage

Although marriage is still popular, it is not necessarily lasting, with new estimates indicating that the lifetime probability of divorce or separation now falls between 40 and 50 percent (National Marriage Project, 2012, p. 67). However, the majority of those getting divorced will remarry.

Divorce. The majority of people who divorce eventually remarry. However, the increases in divorce rates in the United States and decline in remarriage rates have led to a steep increase in the percentage of adults in this country who are currently divorced. This percentage was only 1.8% for males and



Cohabitation was once rare, but today a majority of young men and women of marriageable age live together without being married for some time, and about 40% of all children before reaching age 16 will spend some time in a cohabiting family.