CHAPTER 3

Marriage and Family

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SUBSTANTIVE CONCERNS

The family is one of the foundational social institutions in all societies, although the definition of *the family* varies from place to place and from time to time. The married couple generally forms the nucleus of the family. This chapter defines the family and locates this definition broadly in time and space. It examines marriage as a social institution and the role of marriage in the family. It assesses the ways that families have changed and examines contemporary variations in family forms and functions. Finally, it addresses some of the alternatives to the married couple family, including gay and lesbian couples and cohabiting couples.

THEORETICAL ISSUES

This section discusses key theoretical issues in studies of marriage and the family. It begins with problems that arise in attempting to define the family. It discusses the family mode of social organization, which is an important organizing concept. Next, it describes the social institution of marriage, its legal structure, and key features of the institution, including the benefits it confers, on average. Then, marriage is compared to cohabitation, in its characteristics, causes, and consequences. Finally, current issues surrounding gay and lesbian families are presented.

Defining the Family

Thornton and Fricke's (1989: 130) inclusive definition of the family provides a good starting point: The "family [is] a social network, not necessarily localized, that is based on culturally recognized biological and marital relationships." In most times and places, families were responsible for the production, distribution, and consumption of commodities, for reproduction and socialization of the next generation, and for coresidence and transmission of property. Families generally still are. Theoretically, however, the rise of alternative family structures, including gay and lesbian partnerships and cohabiting couples, sometimes including children, raises the question of whether a family must have a culturally recognized biological or marital relationship, which is unclear for such groups. In most current cultural schemas, a cohabiting couple living with their own child would constitute a family. But what of a woman, her child, and her cohabiting boyfriend? Does the family consist of the woman and the child, or does it include the boyfriend, who has no marital, legal, or biological relationship to either one? Since many stepfamilies are formed by cohabitation and then proceed to marriage, this is an important question for definitions of the family. The answer turns on the extent to which the cohabiting couple is culturally recognized as a family. Marriage would move this social group located at the outer boundaries of the family securely into a recognized stepfamily, with all the attendant rights and responsibilities, until and unless the marriage is dissolved. In such cases, social and legal issues arise about the continued rights and responsibilities of the former spouse and stepfather, who is not biologically related to the child, although the social, emotional, and financial ties between them may well be strong.

Family Mode of Social Organization

Under the family mode of social organization, kin groups tend to pool resources (including their labor), specialize in particular tasks, coordinate their activities, and connect to the larger community as a unit. This family mode of social organization is often associated with agricultural production, but it appears in a wide range of economic environments (Thornton and Fricke 1989).

The family mode of social organization has been altered with other, far-reaching social changes, including the rise of the market economy, vast increases in productivity with concomitant increases in real income (Fogel 2000), urbanization, changes in ideology toward greater individualization (Lesthaeghe 1983), and changes in the structure of education. All of these changes have shifted decision making and social control away from the family and toward the individual or other social institutions. As families have less control over the time and resources of children, they are less able to influence marriage choices—whether, when, and whom to wed. As more people support themselves through wage-based employment rather than through work on a family farm or small business, families have less stake in the property and family connections that a potential marriage partner brings, and accordingly, young adults acquire more autonomy in marriage choices (Caldwell, Reddy, and Caldwell 1983). Urbanization and electronic communication have made the family a less important source of companionship and entertainment now than when most people lived on farms or in villages (Burch and Matthews 1987).

In developed industrial societies such as the U.S., the family retains responsibility for reproduction, socialization, coresidence, and the transmission of property across generations. It is the main unit of consumption and often also produces considerable amounts of goods and services. Families provide care and support for both the young and the old. Although older adults receive financial transfers and access to medical care from the government in many societies, family members still provide most of their help and support (Logan and Spitze 1996), and children depend almost entirely on their families for financial, emotional, and instrumental support.

Marriage

Marriage is a legal contract between two individuals to form a sexual, productive, and reproductive union. Through the marriage, this union is recognized by family, society, religious institutions, and the legal system. Marriage defines the relationship of the two individuals to each other, to any children they might have, to their extended families, to shared property and assets, and to society generally. It also defines the relationship of others, including social institutions, toward the married couple.

The key features of marriage include a legally binding, long-term contract; sexual exclusivity; coresidence; shared resources; and joint production. Spouses acquire rights and responsibilities with marriage, enforceable through both the legal systems and through social expectations and social pressure.

LEGAL ASPECTS OF MARRIAGE. "Marriage" differs from other, less formal, relationships primarily in its legal status. Marriage is a legally binding contract. As such, the treatment of marriage in the law shapes the institution, and recent changes in family law appear to have made marriage less stable. Historically, in the U.S. and many other countries, both secular and religious law generally viewed marriage vows as binding and permanent. The marriage contract could only be broken if one spouse violated the most basic obligations to the other and could be judged "at fault" in the breakdown of the marriage (Regan 1996).

Beginning in the mid-1960s, however, states in the U.S. substantially liberalized and simplified their divorce laws. One of the key features of these changes was a shift from divorce based on fault or mutual consent to unilateral divorce, which required the willingness of only one spouse to end the marriage. Most states also adopted some form of "no-fault" divorce, which eliminated the need for one spouse to demonstrate a violation of the marriage contract by the other. The shift to unilateral or no-fault divorce laws was accompanied by a surge in divorce rates in the U.S. At least some of the increase in divorce rates appears to have resulted directly from the shift in the legal environment in which couples marry and decide to remain married or in which they divorce (Friedberg 1998). The link between divorce rates and laws that permit unilateral divorce has led several states to develop alternative, more binding, marriage contracts, such as *covenant marriage*.

KEY FEATURES OF THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE. Permanence, joint production, coresidence, and the social recognition of a sexual and childrearing union are, perhaps, the most important characteristics of the institution of marriage (Waite and Gallagher

2000). These features lead to some of the other defining characteristics of marriage. Because two adults make a legally binding promise to live and work together for their joint well-being and to do so, ideally, for the rest of their lives, they tend to *specialize*, dividing between them the labor required to maintain the family. This specialization allows married men and women to produce more than they would if they did not specialize. The coresidence and resource sharing of married couples lead to substantial economies of scale; at any standard of living it costs much less for people to live together than it would if they lived separately. These economies of scale and the specialization of spouses both tend to increase the economic well-being of family members living together.

The institution of marriage assumes the sharing of economic and social resources and *coinsurance*. Spouses act as a small insurance pool against life's uncertainties, reducing their need to protect themselves against unexpected events. Marriage also connects spouses and family members to a larger network of help, support, and obligation through their extended family, friends, and others. The insurance function of marriage increases the economic well-being of family members. The support function of marriage improves their emotional well-being.

The institution of marriage also builds on and fosters *trust*. Since spouses share social and economic resources, and expect to do so over the long term, both gain when the family unit gains. This reduces the need for family members to monitor the behavior of other members, increasing efficiency (Becker 1981).

THE BENEFITS OF MARRIAGE. As a result of the features just discussed, marriage changes the behavior of spouses and thereby their well-being. The specialization, economies of scale, and insurance functions of marriage all increase the economic well-being of family members, and the increase is typically quite substantial. Generally, married people produce more and accumulate more assets than unmarried people (Lupton and Smith 2003). Married people also tend to have better physical and emotional health than single people, at least in part because they are married (Mirowsky and Ross 1989; Waite and Gallagher 2000). The social support provided by a spouse, combined with the economic resources produced by the marriage, facilitate both the production and maintenance of health.

In most societies, marriage circumscribes a large majority of sexual relationships. Data from the U.S. show that almost all married men and women are sexually active and almost all have only one sex partner—their spouse. Unmarried men and women have much lower levels of sexual activity than the married, in part because a substantial minority have no sex partner at all. (Just under a quarter of unmarried men and a third of unmarried women who were not cohabiting at the time of the survey had no sex partner in the previous year.) Men and women who are cohabiting are at least as sexually active as those who are married but are less likely to be sexually exclusive (Laumann et al. 1994).

A key function of marriage is the bearing and raising of children. The institution of marriage directs the resources of the spouses and their extended families toward the couple's children, increasing child well-being.

Current theoretical issues surrounding marriage focus on the elasticity of the definition: Must marriage, by definition, include only adults of opposite sexes? Is it possible for two men to marry? Two women? An adult and a child? Two children? Clearly, in some societies, a husband may have more than one wife, although the reverse

is rarely true (Daly and Wilson 2000). And, theoretically, in countries such as Norway and Sweden in which the legal distinction between cohabiting and married couples has shrunken to the point of vanishing, have cohabiting couples become "married?" Is this just a return to the common-law marriages of the past, or is it something different?

Cohabitation

Many contemporary couples begin their life together not in a marriage but when they begin sharing a residence. In some countries, cohabitation is a socially recognized form of partnership that is quite stable and is a permanent alternative to marriage. In other countries, cohabitation appears to be more like a stage in the courtship process. In the United States, unmarried heterosexual cohabitation has become so common that the majority of marriages and remarriages are preceded by cohabitation, and most young adults cohabit at some point in their lives.

The similarity between cohabitation and marriage is apparent: they are both romantic coresidential unions. Many marriages, especially remarriages, begin as cohabitations. Cohabitation differs from marriage in requiring no formal, socially recognized, legally enforceable commitment for the long term. Couples begin a cohabitation when they begin to share a residence; most also share a sexual relationship. But they need share little else. Cohabiting couples are much less likely than married couples to commingle financial resources (Brines and Joyner 1999); less likely to be sexually exclusive (Treas and Giesen 2000); less likely to share leisure time and a social life (Clarkberg, Stolzenberg, and Waite 1995); less likely to have children (Bachrach 1987); and less likely to remain together (Smock 2000).

Cohabitation and marriage are different social institutions, according to some scholars. Nock (1995) has argued that cohabitation is much less *institutionalized* than marriage, at least in the United States and other countries in which it has become common relatively recently, because it is not covered by clear expectations or norms, and the legal rights and responsibilities of cohabiting partners have not been established. The requirements for establishing or ending a cohabiting union are minimal, with no legal or religious or community formalities involved. There is ambiguity about what it means to be a cohabiting partner, to the members of the couple themselves, their families and friends, their community, and to children belonging to one or both of them. The uncertainty about the nature of the relationship and its future seems to lead to lower levels of commitment, lower levels of relationship happiness (Brown and Booth 1996), and lower levels of emotional well-being, especially for cohabiting women with children (Brown 2000). Cohabiting couples with plans to marry show few of these poor outcomes (Brown and Booth 1996), especially if neither has been married before and neither brings children to the relationship, perhaps because these couples are clear about their future together (Brown 2000).

Some explanations for the dramatic increase in cohabitation in many societies over the last several decades focus on long-term social change, including rising individualism and secularism (Lesthaeghe 1983); economic change, especially women's increasing labor force participation; liberalization of attitudes toward gender roles (McLanahan and Casper 1995); and the sexual revolution (Bumpass 1990). Together, these changes have shifted attitudes and values away from responsibility to others and toward individual goal attainment, away from patriarchal authority toward egalitarianism, away

from stigmatization of sexual activity outside of marriage (at least if both parties were unmarried—attitudes toward extramarital sex have remained generally disapproving), and toward acceptance of sexual activity in other relationships, including cohabitation. Individuals may find cohabitation attractive because it allows them to lead a different sort of life than marriage, within an intimate union.

Cohabitation may act as an alternative to being single (Rindfuss and VandenHeuvel 1990), as a step in the courtship process, or as an alternative to marriage. Cohabitation plays a different role in peoples' lives, depending on economic and social circumstances, age of the cohabitors, or previous martial status. When couples select cohabitation at the beginning of their relationship and rarely make the transition from cohabitation to marriage, when cohabitions are about as stable as marriages, when cohabiting couples are socially recognized as a couple and treated as married, and when childbearing takes place in cohabiting relationships at about the same rate as in marriage, then we can argue that cohabitation is an alternative to marriage. This seems to be the case in the Nordic countries, where cohabitation has much the same legal and social status as marriage (Kiernan 2000b) and among Puerto Ricans in the United States (Landale and Fennelly 1992), although not all the above conditions apply. In the Nordic countries cohabiting relationships are less stable than marriages (Kiernan 1999), and among mainland Puerto Ricans, fathers in cohabiting couples with children are less likely to provide financial support to the family and are less involved in child care than fathers in married-parent families (Landale and Oropesa 2001).

The behavioral link between cohabitation, marriage, and childbearing can also tell us something about the nature and meaning of cohabitation. In the U.S., never-married cohabiting women show high levels of contraceptive usage and are much less likely than married women to expect a birth in the near future, whereas previously married cohabitors resemble married women in their contraceptive behavior and birth expectations (Bachrach 1987). This suggests that cohabitation may have a different meaning in the process of initial union formation than in the process of union re-formation.

The relationship between cohabitation, childbearing, and marriage also appears to differ by racial and ethnic group, at least in the contemporary U.S., which suggests that the meaning of cohabitation is not the same for these groups. Cohabitation increases the chances of conception more for white women than for black women. An unmarried conception increases the chances of marriage quite substantially for white women and modestly for black women (Brien, Lillard, and Waite 1999; Manning 1993). And a birth while single increases the chances of entering a cohabitation up to the date of the birth for white women and for the four years following the birth for black women (Brien, Lillard, and Waite 1999). A general consensus has emerged that cohabitation acts primarily as an alternative to marriage for black and mainland Puerto Rican women in the U.S. and as a step in the courtship process for non-Latino white women (see Smock 2000 for a summary of this literature.) It is important to keep in mind that these findings refer to specific cohorts of women, in a particular social and economic context, and there is no reason to think they apply in other times, cultures, or contexts.

Gay and Lesbian Families

Historically and traditionally, a *family* consisted of people related by blood or marriage in a culturally recognized social network of biological and marital relationships (Thorn-

ton and Fricke 1989). *Marriage* is a legal relationship between an adult man and an adult woman to form a new family. Gay and lesbian families, sometimes based on a socially recognized and/or legally recognized relationship, challenge these definitions. Attitudes toward sex between two adults of the same sex have become substantially more accepting in the U.S. over the past several decades (Smith 1994). Extension of the definition of *family* and *marriage* to same-sex couples has been hotly contested and fiercely debated. In the United States, many attempts to extend access to marriage and family rights to same-sex couples have been turned back by legislators or voters, with some notable exceptions. Several European countries have moved furthest on these issues. France now allows same-sex couples to register their partnerships, Denmark has extended child custody rights to same-sex couples, and the state supreme courts in Ontario, Canada, and Vermont have both ruled that same-sex couples are entitled to full and equal family rights. In 2003, the Massachusets Supreme Court ruled that the state constitution requires the state to give same-sex couples marriage rights equal to those of opposite-sex couples. And, perhaps most definitively, the Netherlands has granted same-sex couples full and equal rights to marriage (Stacey and Biblarz 2001).

METHODS AND MEASURES

Data

Data for the study of marriage and family come from a wide variety of sources—from surveys of the general population or special populations, to historical records, vital records, ethnographic research, and intensive interviews. Unfortunately, in the U.S. a number of key sources of data on marriage, divorce, and family have been discontinued, leaving at best a patchwork system of collecting information on these important dimensions of life. The U.S. Bureau of the Census collected a marital history supplement to the June Current Population Survey every five years in 1980, 1985, 1990, and 1995 but no longer does so. Until 1995, the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) Vital Statistics program compiled marriage and divorce registration data obtained from states into reports for the nation. Since 1995 only annual total counts of marriages and divorces have been produced by NCHS, with no information on the characteristics of those marrying or divorcing. The loss of these sources of data on marriage, divorce, and the family has limited research on these important topics in the United States, forcing scholars, policy makers, and journalists to rely on less-representative data or on data that are increasingly out of date.

SAMPLE SURVEYS. One common method for studying families involves collecting data through a *survey* of a sample of the population of interest. Survey methods allow a large number of people to provide information in response to standardized questions asked in a consistent way. Survey methods are particularly well-suited for tracking trends in behaviors such as unemployment and in attitudes such as consumer confidence (Bradburn and Sudman 1988).

Scholars, policy makers, and government statistical agencies frequently use survey methods for describing and studying marriage and the family. In the U.S. and other

countries, household surveys obtain information about current marital status, marital history, fertility, household composition, family-related attitudes and plans, and, more recently, cohabitational status and cohabitation history, sexual activity, sexual partnerships and sexual networking, and gay and lesbian relationships. Important federal government surveys on the family include marriage and fertility supplements to the Current Population Survey, the National Survey of Family Growth, the decennial Census of Population, and the Census Bureau's Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP). In Europe, a series of Eurobarometer Surveys carried out by numerous members of the European Community in various years provide comparative data on marriage, cohabitation, and other family behaviors (Kiernan 2000a).

VITAL REGISTRATION. Data on key family events, including marriage, divorce, and births, have been collected through the registration of these events with religious institutions or government agencies. Historical data on family status or family events often appear in parish registers, in tax rolls, census documents, or township records of property ownership. In the U.S., the registration of vital events has been the responsibility of state departments of health. The United States did not gather vital statistics on marriage until relatively late in its history, with information compiled from state marriage certificates beginning in 1920. Differences between states in the information collected make these data less than ideal for studying marriage, and since 1990, the National Center for Health Statistics has published no statistics on marriage except raw counts of the monthly number of marriages by state (Fitch and Ruggles 2000).

LIFE/NEIGHBORHOOD HISTORY CALENDAR. The Life History Calendar was developed to assist in the collection of retrospective accounts of life experiences. The LHC usually consists of a chart that combines the records of a number of event histories, for example, labor force participation, migration, education, marriage, cohabitation, and fertility. One format places calendar year in the columns of the chart and events in the rows. The cells might contain information on a specific transition, with a horizontal line indicating an ongoing state, such as an intact marriage, school enrollment, or employment. Use of a life history calendar improves respondent recall through a number of processes. First, the calendar instrument allows the respondent to see the sequence of events on paper and to place events along one dimension in relation to those along another. Respondents can use memorable events such as marriage or school graduation to fix the timing of other events or transitions. A respondent might use the date of marriage to recall changes in living arrangements or the date of graduation from school to recall the timing of changes in labor force participation. Second, the use of a calendar seems to improve the interviewers' ability to obtain complete and accurate data across domains by making gaps and inconsistencies readily apparent (Freedman et al. 1988).

The Neighborhood History Calendar extends the Life History Calendar to the local environment, allowing researchers to collect contextual event-history data. This method allows the direct collection of measures of the local context and changes in it, which permits researchers to distinguish among contexts that may have similar characteristics at one point but arrived at by different pathways. The resulting contextual event–history can be linked to individual life histories and the two can be analyzed together (Axinn, Barber, and Ghimire 1997).

VIGNETTES. The factorial survey approach, exemplified in *Of Human Bonding: Parent-Child Relations Across the Life Course* (Rossi and Rossi 1990), allows researchers to measure the normative structure underlying family relationships. The result is an empirical picture of of this normative structure, including the strength of felt obligation to kin of various levels of and types of relationship, the degree of consensus about these obligations, and the importance of the nature of the obligation. The method involves the creation of vignettes that describe a situation involving a specific type of kin, such as cousin, stepdaughter, or sibling. Each vignette differs along a number of dimensions, including kin relationship, gender and marital status, 1 of 11 "crisis" or "celebratory" events, and type of obligation. A computer randomly generated a set of 32 vignettes, each of which respondents rated on how strongly compelled they would feel to offer a given type of support. The greatest advantage of the factorial survey approach is its efficiency: the combination of respondents' ratings provides data on all unique vignettes and allows the researcher to quantify the relative strength of felt obligation to close and more distant relatives. Sometimes, however, certain dimensions cannot be integrated into the vignettes; the framework of Rossi and Rossi's factorial survey could not accommodate spouses, a centrally important kin category. The vignette technique captures reports of kinship ties in a hypothetical situation but offers no information on past or current behavior toward kin.

ETHNOGRAPHIC METHODS. Survey research, vital statistics, and historical data all paint a general picture of families and their members but do not uncover much detail about daily lives in families, decision making, and interactions between family members or the relationship between members. The complexity of families, their members, and their lives together is often studied using ethnographic methods, in which a research or team of researchers interviews family members using a general guide rather than structured questionnaires. Often these interviews are lengthy and repeated, covering multiple members of the family. Ethnographic methods allow scholars to place families in a cultural, social, economic, and community context; to uncover and incorporate complex or unusual family characteristics, experiences or situations; and to examine values, hidden assumptions, and values or behavior that might not be revealed in another context. Ethnographic methods allow research subjects to speak with their own voices and to tell their own stories. The volume of information about each family in ethnographic research generally restricts the researcher to a relatively small sample and does not support a great deal of generalization. Strengths of ethnographic methods include the richness of the information and the vividness of the picture of family life that can be obtained (Rubin 1994; Stacey 1990).

HISTORICAL METHODS. Historical studies of marriage rely on parish records, vital registration, tax records or, sometimes, literary documents. For the United States, data for the colonial period are not sufficient enough or reliable enough to allow researchers to calculate age at first marriage or proportions never marrying with any degree of confidence. Scattered data exist on marriage age from particular communities, mainly in New England, that allow the calculation of some key statistics (Wells 1992; Haines 1996).

Recent advances have made high-quality data for earlier periods available for the United States. The Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) consists of

individual-level national samples of census data from 1850 to 1990 (with the exception of 1890). These data allow researchers to examine the demographic characteristics of the American population in detail and with a variety of measures, greatly increasing our understanding of marriage behavior over the last 150 years (Fitch and Ruggles 2000).

Researchers using historical methods must rely on information collected and recorded long ago, often incompletely or for purposes other than recording population characteristics carefully and completely. For example, in 1850, 1860, and 1870 the census did not inquire about marital status. Using individual records from decennial censuses, Fitch and Ruggles (2000) used other information about the individual and household to create measures of family relationships using a probabilistic approach, although they could not identify all those who had been married but were not married at the time of the census. Emigh (1998) studied the relationship between household structure and sharecropping in 15th-century Tuscany using data from the *Catasto* of 1427—fiscal documents from 15th-century Tuscany used to assess taxes. Documentary evidence of this sort "makes sampling by households virtually impossible" and makes it difficult to gather variables for large numbers of cases (Emigh 1999). A small number of cases, in turn, makes generalization difficult. The data, with these limitations, provide a view into family and household not possible in any other way.

BIOMARKERS. As theoretical perspectives on human behavior expand to include evolutionary biology, biodemography, and biopsychology, it becomes important to measure biological characteristics of respondents in household surveys and other social science research. These biomarkers often include DNA sampling, obtained from cheek swabs, blood samples, and other sources, performance testing, such as lung capacity or handgrip strength, and environmental measures to characterize the local environments of subjects (Finch and Vaupel 2001). They may include measures of physiological functioning, such as blood pressure, endocrine or immune function, or physiological symptoms of disease such as blood sugar. The collection of these data serves at least three important purposes: (1) detection of common undiagnosed or subclinical diseases such as hypertension and diabetes that plausibly exert major influence on biophysiological aspects of function; (2) provision of objective direct and indirect measures of physiological function or conditions that can be compared to self-reports and that influence social behavior (e.g., height, weight, vision, hearing, sense of taste and smell, libido, depression, cognition); (3) determination of prevalence of diseases that may affect behavior. Biomarkers are essential in "explicating pathways and elaborating causal linkages between social environment and health" (Weinstein and Willis 2001). More specifically, DNA samples can help identify "demogenes," genes with noticeable effects at the population level, in addition to environmental factors that interact with particular genes to produce harmful traits or behaviors (Ewbank 2001).

Serious theoretical and practical concerns accompany research that involves biomarkers. Among the ethical issues of genetic research are privacy, psychological effects associated with providing genetic information to participants, and ownership of and access to genetic materials and information (Durfy 2001). Difficulties also arise in the collection, storage, and analyses of biological specimens: they can be expensive and logistically challenging, and they require training new and existing personnel (Wallace 2001). But the availability of biomarkers allows researchers to examine a wide range of relationships between biological and social characteristics (see chapter 21, "Biodemography," in this *Handbook* on more general issues of biodemography.)

Measures

RATES. Two basic measures of marriage and divorce are based on events occurring in a calendar year as captured by vital statistics. The marriage rate is measured as the number of marriages in a year per 1,000 population. The divorce rate is measured as the number of divorces in a year per 1,000 population. These rates present snapshots of marital events, which can be compared across years to see if the events of marriage and divorce are taking place at a faster or slower rate than in the past and compared across countries to answer the same questions. These crude rates are sensitive to differences in the characteristics of the populations being compared, which limits their utility.

SINGULATE MEAN AGE AT MARRIAGE. The *SMAM* is the mean age at first marriage for a cohort of women or men who marry by age 50, which can be computed from information on current marital status in a single census or survey. It requires only a census tabulation of marital status by age, making it the only measure of marriage age available in many historical populations. The *SMAM* calculated in this way assumes that marriage rates have been constant over time and that only negligible differences exist in mortality or migration rates by marital status. In situations in which these assumptions seem reasonable, the *SMAM* offers an acceptable summary measure of marriage age (Preston, Heuveline, and Guillot 2001). It is analogous in concept and methodology to the total fertility rate.

MARITAL HISTORY LIFE TABLES. Marriage and divorce can be studied using life table techniques (Preston, Heuveline, and Guillot 2001). If research questions are addressed to surviving members of a cohort, first marriage can be treated as a single-decrement process, with marriage the only mode of leaving the never-married state. Similar life tables can be created for all married members of a cohort, with marital disruption as the only mode of leaving the married state. If surviving members of a cohort faced different probabilities of marriage (or divorce) than those who died, these life-table estimates would not represent the experience of all members of a cohort that began life at age zero, or of all who survived to age 20, or of all whom ever married. For many purposes, the biases are small and unavoidable, since the only information available comes from retrospective reports from surviving members of the cohort (Preston, Heuveline, and Guillot, 2001).

PROBABILITY OF MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE. Annual rates tell us little about the chances that a person will marry eventually or the chances that a person who marries will divorce or separate. Estimates of lifetime chances, if estimated directly from the experiences of members of a birth cohort, require longitudinal data covering many years, which are rarely available and are out of date by the time they are available. For these reasons, estimates of the lifetime probability of marriage or divorce usually rely upon life-table methods and retrospective information on marital histories, often from a single survey. Martin and Bumpass (1989) used these methods to estimate the proportion of women in various marriage cohorts who will divorce or separate within 40 years of the marriage. They estimated period rates of disruption by using the most recent marriage cohort to complete a given year of duration since marriage as of the survey

date. This provided observations of the risk of marital disruption at each marital duration for each year between the wedding and the 40th anniversary, conditional on being married at the start of the specific duration. These duration-specific rates were then combined using life-table methods to give the cumulative proportion of marriages expected to remain intact to specific durations. Martin and Bumpass (1989) estimated these survival rates separately for first, second, and third marriages. Goldstein and Kenney (2001) used forecasting models developed by Coale and McNeil (1972) and by Hernes (1972) to estimate the proportion of birth cohorts of women who will eventually marry by education and race.

EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

The next section of this chapter paints an empirical picture of marriage and the family using current research findings. First, changes in the structure of the family are summarized. Then, this section reviews changes in age at marriage, proportions married, and cohabitation from an international perspective. Next, patterns of union formation, marital disruption, and union dissolution are described. Finally, this section discusses alternative family forms.

Structure of the Family

In the U.S. and many industrialized societies, the structure of the family looks quite different than it did a half a century ago. In fact, fewer people live in *families* as traditionally defined and more live in nonfamily households. The rise in nonfamily living can be traced to earlier nest-leaving by young adults (Goldscheider, Thornton, and Young-DeMarco 1993), to delayed marriage and to nonmarriage, to continued high rates of marital disruption with lower rates of remarriage (Cherlin 1992), and to increases in independent living at older ages (Michael, Fuchs, and Scott 1980). In 1998, 15% of all people lived in nonfamily households, 10% alone (U. S. Bureau of the Census 1999: Table 16), compared to 6% in nonfamily households in 1950 (U.S Bureau of the Census 1955).

Marriage

AGE AT MARRIAGE. Age at marriage generally declined in the first half of this century, but then rose dramatically. Both men and women in the United States and many European countries are now marrying later than at any other time in past decades (Fitch and Ruggles 2000; Kiernan 2000b). Between 1970 and 2000 the median age of first marriage for women increased by almost five years, from 20.8 to 25.1, and for men the median age increased by almost four years, from 23.2 to 26.8 (Fields and Casper 2001). In this same time period, the proportion of women who had never been married increased from 36% to 73% among those 20 to 24 years old and from 6% to 22% among those 30 to 34 years old. Similar increases occurred for men (Fields and Casper 2001).

For African Americans, the delay in first marriage has been especially striking. The median age at first marriage increased to 28.6 for African-American men, and 27.3

for African-American women (Fitch and Ruggles 2000). This represents a six-year delay for African-American men and a seven-year delay for African-American women since the 1960s. And, in 2000 among those 30 to 34 years old, 44% of African-American women and 46% of African-American men had never married (Fields and Casper 2001).

Similar changes in marriage patterns have taken place in most European countries; recent cohorts are marrying at older ages and over a wider range of ages than in the past. In addition, European countries differ substantially in marriage ages. The Nordic countries of Sweden, Denmark, and Iceland show the highest average ages at marriage for women (around age 29) and the Eastern European countries of Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland, the lowest (around age 22). Since societies with a relatively high age at marriage also tend to be those in which many people never marry, this diversity suggests that marriage is a more salient component of the family in some European countries than others (Kiernan 2000b).

Marriage typically takes place at substantially younger ages in Africa, Asia, and Latin America than in North America and Europe. The average mean age at marriage among countries in the developed regions is almost 28 for men and 25 for women, compared to 25 for men and 21 for women in the less developed regions of the world. Young average ages at marriage are common in some parts of Africa, in countries like Uganda, Chad, and Burkina Faso; in some parts of Asia, in countries such as India, Nepal, and Indonesia; in the Middle East; and in Eastern Europe. Within regions of the world, women and men in developed countries tend to marry at older ages than those living in less developed countries. For example, in Southeast Asia women's age at first marriage is about 27 in Singapore and about 22 in Indonesia. Men tend to marry at older ages than women, but the gap in average age at marriage varies quite substantially both within and between regions. The gap tends to be the largest where women marry relatively early (United Nations 2000).

PROPORTION MARRIED. Age at marriage has risen substantially, divorce rates are high and stable, and rates of remarriage have fallen, so a larger proportion of adults are unmarried now than in the past. In 1970, unmarried people in the U.S. made up 28% of the adult population. In 2000, 46% of all adults were unmarried. In fact, the shift away from marriage has been so dramatic for blacks that in 2000, only 39% of black men and 31% of black women were married, compared to 59% of white men and 56% of white women (Fields and Casper 2001: Table A1).

Countries in Europe also show a great deal of variation in the proportion of women in marital unions. Marriage is most common in Greece and Portugal, where over 60% of women ages 25 to 29 are married, and least common in the Nordic countries, Italy, and Spain, where a third or fewer are married (Kiernan 2000b).

In spite of increases in the age at first marriage in some countries, the vast majority of adults marry at some time in their lives, with the proportion ever married by age 50 reaching more than 95% of both men and women. Relatively high proportions of men and women have not married by their late 40s in the Nordic countries, where cohabitation is common, and in Caribbean countries such as Jamaica and Barbados, countries characterized by a long history of visiting relationships. In Sweden, for example, 76% of men and 84% of women in their late 40s had ever married, whereas in Jamaica, 52% of men and 54% of women had never married by these ages (United Nations 2000).

Cohabitation

Increasingly, couples form intimate unions by *cohabiting,* with marriage following at some later point unless the relationship dissolves. Since cohabitations tend to be relatively short-lived in the U.S., the proportion currently cohabiting is only about 10% among women ages 20 to 29, compared to 27% to 53% currently married. At older and younger ages, fewer than 1 woman in 10 is currently cohabiting. However, in the U.S. cohabitation has become an increasingly common step in the courtship process; only 7% of the women born in the late 1940s cohabited before age 25 compared to 55% among those born in the late 1960s (Raley 2000). The percentage of marriages preceded by cohabitation increased from about 10% for those marrying between 1965 and 1974 to more than 50% of those marrying between 1990 and 1994 (Bumpass and Lu 2000). Cohabitation is especially common for those whose first marriage dissolved (Brien, Lillard, and Waite 1999).

Although a number of European countries have experienced similar increases in cohabitation, some have experienced much more and some much less. Cohabitation is strikingly common in the Nordic countries of Denmark, Sweden, and Finland. France also shows fairly high levels, with about 30% of the women ages 25 to 29 in cohabiting unions. A group of countries including the Netherlands, Belgium, Great Britain, Germany, and Austria shows moderate levels of cohabitation—from 8% to 16% of women 25 to 29 are in this type of union. In the southern European countries and in Ireland cohabitation is rare, with less than 3% cohabiting among women 25 to 29 (Kiernan 2000b).

In the United States, cohabiting relationships are typically short-lived, with most either transformed into marriages or dissolved within a few years. The most recent estimates for the United States suggest that about 55% of cohabiting couples marry and 40% end their relationship within five years of moving in together. Only about one-sixth of cohabitations last *as cohabitations* for at least three years and only 1 in 10 last for five years or more (Bumpass and Lu 2000). Similar patterns appear for cohabiting relationships in Canada (Wu and Balakrishnan 1995), although in the Nordic countries, cohabitation seems to function more as an alternative to marriage than a substitute for it, so that both the proportion of women currently cohabiting and the length of cohabitations are relatively high (Kiernan 2000b).

It is important to assess the stability of relationships regardless of their form, so cohabitations that make the transition to marriage and then disrupt should be included in measures of union disruption. In the U.S., the probability that a first cohabitation dissolves within three years is 39%, and within five years is 49%. Differentials in the chances that a first cohabitation will dissolve mirror the chances of disruption of a first marriage: black women face higher risks of disruption than white or Hispanic women; women who were younger than 25 at the start of the cohabitation are more likely to disrupt than older women. And recent evidence suggests that women who have ever been forced to have intercourse at some time before the cohabitation are more likely to dissolve their relationship than other women, as are women who have ever had Generalized Anxiety Disorder (Bramlett and Mosher 2002).

The rise of cohabitation has meant, among other changes, that more children are spending time in a cohabiting union, either because their parents cohabit or, more commonly, because their mother lives with a man who is not their biological father.

The most recent estimates for the United States suggest that about 40% of children born to unmarried mothers are born into cohabiting unions, including over half of white and Hispanic births to unmarried mothers and a quarter of black births to unmarried mothers (Bumpass and Lu 2000). For children born into cohabiting unions, Bumpass and Lu (2000) have estimated that about a quarter of their childhood years will be spent in a cohabiting union, about one-half in a married-couple family, and about one quarter with a single mother.

Couples who cohabit and then marry show higher chances of marital disruption than couples who marry without living together first, even in countries like Sweden, where cohabitation is socially and legally supported (Bennett, Blanc, and Bloom 1988). Explanations suggested include the relatively "poor marital quality" of those who cohabit, including personality problems, alcohol or drug abuse, financial irresponsibility, or unstable employment patterns, all of which tend to increase the chances of divorce (Booth and Johnson 1988). Cohabitation appears to select individuals who are relatively approving of divorce as a solution to marital problems (Axinn and Thornton 1992) and those who are not committed to the institution of marriage (Bennett, Blanc, and Bloom 1988). And the experience of cohabiting may cause changes in individual's attitudes and values toward individualism (Waite, Goldscheider, and Witsberger 1986), toward more acceptance of divorce (Axinn and Thornton 1992), thereby increasing chances of marital disruption.

Union Formation

In the United States and similar countries, many couples begin their intimate life together by cohabiting rather than by marrying, so that the form of the union has changed more than its existence. But even when we consider both marriage and cohabitation, young adults are less likely to have formed a union now than in the past. Among young women born in the early 1950s, about one-quarter had not formed a union by age 25, compared to one-third of those born in the late 1960s (Raley 2000).

In many European countries, women typically are in either cohabitational or marital unions by their mid-to-late 20s. However, over 60% of Italian women and 50% of Spanish women are single—neither cohabiting nor married at these ages, compared to around one in three Portuguese and Greek women. In the Nordic countries and France, about one-third of women ages 25 to 29 are cohabiting, one-third are married, and one-third are single. Marriage is much more common than cohabitation in all other European countries (Kiernan 2000b).

Those who choose to cohabit as a first union, some research suggests, seek an alternative to marriage not only because it is a tentative, nonlegal form of a coresidential union but, more broadly, because it accommodates a very different style of life. For couples who eventually marry, cohabitation allows them to delay rather than avoid the assumption of marital roles and to gather information about the quality of the match. Men who prefer to avoid the breadwinner role are more likely to choose cohabitation for a first union, as are women who value money and career success for themselves (Clarkberg, Stolzenberg, and Waite 1995).

Economic considerations are important for formation and stability of intimate unions and for transitions between them. Both men and women who enter cohabitations

tend to have more unstable job histories than those who marry, but cohabiting women earn more than either single or married women, suggesting that cohabitation is both similar to and different from marriage in key ways (Clarkberg 1999). And the chances that a cohabiting couple makes the transition to marriage increases with the *man's* but not the woman's earnings and education, whereas the chances of separation are lower for men who are employed full-time compared to those employed part-time or not at all (Smock and Manning 1997).

Marital Disruption and Union Dissolution

A substantial proportion of all marriages end in divorce or separation due to marital discord. The divorce rate, which reflects the number of divorces in a year relative to the number of married people, rose continuously for more than a century in the U.S. and many similar industrialized countries, then leveled off at a fairly high level in about 1980 (Goldstein 1999). In the U.S., the best estimates suggest that around one-half of all marriages will end in separation or divorce rather than in the death of one of the partners (Martin and Bumpass 1989). Recent data for the U.S. show that after five years, 20% of all first marriages have disrupted through separation or divorce. By 10 years after the wedding, 32% of white women's first marriages, 34% of Hispanic women's first marriages, and 47% of black women's first marriages have dissolved. Asian women show the lowest levels of marital disruption; after 10 years only 20% have divorced or separated. The marriages most likely to end include those with no children, with children from a previous union, or with older children (Waite and Lillard 1991), marriages begun at a young age, and marriages between partners with relatively low levels of education (Martin and Bumpass 1989). Black women are more likely to experience the disruption of their first marriage and any subsequent remarriage than are white or Hispanic women. Those raised by one parent or by others during childhood are more likely to divorce later, as are women who had a child prior to marriage. Women whose religion is not important to them are more likely to divorce than women for whom religion is somewhat or very important (Bramlett and Mosher 2002). Couples who share the same religion at marriage show a substantially lower likelihood of disruption than couples with different religious faiths. The destabilizing effects of religious intermarriage decrease with the increasing similarity of the beliefs and practices of the two religions and with the mutual tolerance embodied in their doctrines (Lehrer and Chiswick 1993).

Although high divorce rates make marriages seem unstable, other types of unions are much more likely to dissolve. Cohabitational unions have high chances of disruption, with one-quarter ending in separation within three to four years compared to only 5% of marriages, according to one study (Wu and Balakrishnan 1995). In the U.S., the probability that a first premarital cohabitation will break up is higher for black than for white or Hispanic women and is higher among younger than older women. Cohabiting women are more likely to experience the end of their relationship the more economically disadvantaged the community in which they live, the higher the level of male unemployment, the higher the rates of poverty, and the higher the level of receipt of welfare (Bramlett and Mosher 2002). Many cohabitations become marriages, but these show a lower stability than marriages not preceded by cohabitation (Lillard, Brien, and Waite 1995).

Alternative Family Structures

The married, two-parent family has been the most common family form in the U.S. and other industrialized countries for some centuries. But even at the height of the married-couple family era, many people lived in other types, most often due to the death of one member of the couple before all the children were grown (Watkins, Menken, and Bongaarts 1987). When death ended many marriages relatively early in life, remarriage and stepfamilies were common, as were single-parent families caused by widowhood. High rates of divorce combined with relatively low rates of remarriage, especially for women with children, have been shown to lead to sizable proportions of families with a divorced single mother. The rise of cohabitation and nonmarital childbearing has meant that unmarried-couple families and never-married mother families are now common alternative family forms.

In the U.S., families consisting of a married couple with children fell from 87% in 1970 to 69% in 2000. The percent of single-mother families rose from 12% to 26%, and that of single-father families rose from 1% to 5%.

One alternative family form consists of two adults of the same sex, sometimes raising children. About 2.4% of men and 1.3% of women in the U.S. identify themselves as homosexual or bisexual and have same-gender partners (Laumann et al. 1994). Although information on the number and characteristics of gay and lesbian couples has not generally been available, in the U.S., one estimate suggests that in 1990 fewer than 1% of adult men lived with a male partner and about the same percentage of adult women lived with a lesbian partner (Black et al. 2000). These estimates are based on responses to the "unmarried partner" question in the U.S. census and are thus thought to be conservative estimates of the numbers of same-sex cohabitors. This is the case because some of those living in gay and lesbian couples do not identify as such in survey and other data. Legal and social recognition of these unions as "marriages" is generally not available in the United States.

Gay and lesbian families may, of course, include children, either born to one member of the couple or adopted by the couple. Black and his colleagues (2000) constructed estimates of the presence of children in families headed by gay and lesbian couples, using data from several sources. They estimated that 22% of partnered lesbians and 5% of partnered gays currently have children present in the home, about three-quarters of whom are under age 18. Some gays and lesbians are single parents and some are in heterosexual marriages. Including these families in the estimates suggests that over 14% of gays and over 28% of lesbians have children in the household. Black and associates (2000) have estimated that about 25% of gay men and 40% of lesbian women are married or previously were married.

Sex

In spite of the sexual revolution, marriage circumscribes most sexual relationships. Almost all married men and women are sexually active, and almost all have only one sex partner—their spouse. Unmarried men and women have much lower levels of sexual activity than the married, and frequently have no sex partner at all. Cohabiting couples are at least as sexually active as married couples, but are much less likely to be sexually exclusive (Laumann et al. 1994). Thus, the married couple remains the locus of most sexual activity.

RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Rapid changes in family processes in many postindustrial societies such as the U.S. mean that researchers studying cohabitation, marriage, or even the family are aiming at a moving target. Defining each of these is both crucial and difficult. Must families be related by blood or marriage? If so, does a cohabiting couple constitute a family? Clearly not, under the current definition, because they share neither a blood nor legal tie. What if they have a child? Blood ties exist between the mother and the child and between the father and the child, so each of these constitutes a family. It becomes difficult to argue that this triad consists of two separate families and much easier to argue that they form a single family, although the adults do not share a blood or legal tie.

What about a cohabiting couple with a child belonging only to the woman? The mother and child constitute a family, but does it include the man who lives with them but shares no blood or legal ties to either? It is difficult to say. The man has no legal responsibilities to either the woman or her child and no legal rights as a husband or father. But the three may share powerful social, financial, and emotional bonds.

A central question becomes, What *is* cohabitation? Nock (1995) has argued that cohabitation is incompletely institutionalized, leaving partners, their families, and others unsure about the nature of the relationship. Brown and Booth (1996) and Brown (2000) have suggested that cohabitation may be *several* institutions, with distinct characteristics. One consists of couples who are engaged, have no children and no previous marriages. These couples appear to be similar to married couples in their behavior and relationship outcomes. Another type of cohabitation includes couples with no plans to marry, with children—generally from a previous relationship, and at least one divorced partner. These couples seem to differ in important ways from more committed cohabitors and from married couples. So, scholars must ask, and continue asking, What kind of a relationship is this? What are the rules under which the partners are operating? How does the relationship affect choices made by the members and by others? How does the existence of the relationship and its form affect the well-being of the individuals involved?

Family scholars face as many questions about marriage. What are the irreducible characteristics of "marriage"? In the United States, same-sex couples are forbidden to "marry," although in a few places they may register a "domestic partnership." Opponents of granting same-sex couples access to "marriage" argue that, by definition, marriage must involve a man and a woman (Wardle 2001). Supporters argue that if marriage provides a wide variety of important benefits to participants, it is discriminatory to deny these to same-sex couples. Does a registered domestic partnership provide same-sex couples with the same benefits as marriage provides heterosexual couples? What *is* marriage?

Perhaps the most perplexing issue facing family researchers in the U.S. revolves around the rapid and dramatic divergence of family patterns and processes between whites and blacks. In about 1950, the proportions of black and white adults who were married was quite similar. Black men and women show little evidence of the substantial decline in age at marriage that characterized the Baby Boom of the 1950s and early 1960s for whites in the U.S. and a much more rapid rise in age at marriage since that time (Fitch and Ruggles 2000). Currently, almost twice as many black men as white men are not married (Waite 1995), with a similar differential for women. Goldstein and Kenney (2001) have found a dramatic decline in the proportion of black women

predicted to ever marry, especially among those who are not college graduates, whereas marriage remains virtually universal among whites. The proportion of births to unmarried women is three times as high for blacks as for whites (Martin et al. 2002). Although numerous hypotheses for this divergence have been put forward, none explains more than a small portion of the racial gap in family patterns.

The forms and patterns of family life have shifted, quite noticeably in some countries and among some groups. But *Homo sapiens* developed as a species in conjunction with the development of the family. Our future and the future of the family are inextricably intertwined and always will be.

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