

# MARRIAGES & FAMILIES

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New Problems, New Opportunities

SECOND EDITION



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Ernest Havemann ■ Marlene Lehtinen

**Second Edition**

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# **MARRIAGES AND FAMILIES**

**New Problems,  
New Opportunities**

**Ernest Havemann  
Marlene Lehtinen**

University of Utah



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# Preface

Instructors and textbook authors in the marriage and family course, whose task was never easy, now bear an unusually grievous burden. The last half of the 1980s brought another deluge of social developments, on top of those of previous years, that have profoundly affected American marriages and families. The floods of change are now so deep that we must reevaluate most of what we have learned and struggle to put it in perspective.

A book that simply lumps together a miscellany of information published in the '60s, '70s, and '80s has dubious value as a teaching tool in the '90s. Families of the '80s were different from those of the '70s, and those in turn from families of the '60s. Today's families live in a different society and have different problems and opportunities from those of the '80s.

Many scholarly findings of the past retain their value, and some are useful in showing how and why we got where we are; but some that seemed the ultimate wisdom a few years ago no longer apply in today's society. The book and the course, if they are to offer any real guidance to students, must painstakingly select from all the available information and explain what it means in today's world.

Perhaps the most dramatic change of re-

cent years has been the rapid sweep of the ever-shifting pendulum of sexual attitudes. Its move back from the extremes of the sexual revolution, which was just becoming discernible when the first edition of this book was published in 1986, is now clearly toward the conventional values of commitment and fidelity. The revolution is over, but it has left behind a new kind of permissiveness. The present situation calls for a reexamination of almost everything believed true about sexual attitudes before and during the various stages of the revolution.

For the first time, the mass move of wives into the job market has reached the point where a majority of mothers are ready for outside jobs before a new baby reaches its first birthday. Overwhelming majorities of young women, especially college women, plan to join the move toward combining family and career. Men, most of whom once hated the idea of a job-holding wife, have become increasingly reconciled. Indeed men in general have abandoned many "masculine" attitudes and become far more androgynous.

The '80s witnessed what Joseph Pleck has called a "value shift" toward "greater family involvement by husbands." In increasing numbers, husbands now devote considerably

more hours to housework and especially childcare. At the same time many working wives have lowered their standards of how much housecleaning is necessary. Their once-famous “overload” of job and household responsibilities has been substantially reduced and may be disappearing. Both sexes have gained some benefits—but they now find that the husband’s participation may introduce some thorny new problems (discussed in Chapter 4).

And so it has gone in recent decades: one vast new social development after another—producing, as social changes always have, corresponding changes in marriages and families. We who try to inform and help students must run fast to keep up.

We have plenty of solid information; a truly formidable amount of research has accumulated over the years. The mass of data on our bookshelves and in our own memory bank, however, can be a handicap. Which of all these studies really apply to today’s families? Which will be of value to students only if we interpret and explain them carefully? Which, though of interest to those of us thoroughly familiar with the subject, would only confuse and perhaps mislead students approaching the subject for the first time? Which have been rendered obsolete by the sweep of events?

We have to find the answers, and the search is not easy.

\* \* \*

Another difficulty is the sheer pluralism of marriages and families in today’s society. The most husband-dominated kinds of traditional marriages exist side by side with all-out egalitarian marriages. Attitudes toward sex roles range from extreme masculinity and femininity to total androgyny. Some people adhere to highly restrictive standards of sexual behavior; others have moved part or all the way to the opposite extreme. The pluralism is all-pervasive.

We can talk only about trends and ranges, not about any specifics true of all people and all families, and we must constantly remind ourselves that even an attitude held by only

one percent of married people guides the behavior of about a million people. Yet many students approach the course believing in universal truths. They have read newspaper and magazine articles offering advice for everyone, as if what is true of one marriage (or one divorce) is true of all of them. Parents and friends have offered them sure-fire rules about whom to marry and how to stay happily married.

Even social scientists have not been entirely guiltless. As Marvin Sussman pointed out, we have been quick to recognize and study the whole gamut of pluralism in religious and ethnic backgrounds—but slow to realize that there is likewise a vast diversity of male-female relationships and that the partners in all the varied relationships have “vastly different problems to solve and issues to face.” We must resist any temptation to forget that fact at times, and seek to disabuse our students of notions to the contrary.

\* \* \*

The burden of performing these onerous tasks, of course, falls chiefly on instructors, who must organize and present the course to fit the interests and needs of their own particular group of today’s many college students, who exhibit considerable pluralism of their own. Textbook authors can only try to help, largely by offering a large amount of solid information in a form readily available to students, thus saving classroom time.

We have chosen the information contained in the book to the best of our ability and have tried to interpret and explain it in a way that clearly tells students why and how it is important to their relationships. Most of the studies cited are recent, but we have not hesitated to include works of the past that illuminate the basic principles and underlying trends that students must know in order to understand today’s families and whatever happens in the future. (For example, the observations of William Ogburn in the ’30s, Burgess and Locke in the ’40s, Talcott Parsons in the ’50s, and Clifford Kirkpatrick in the ’60s.)

We tried to include all the information es-

essential to students without letting the book become too bulky, because we have found that if you try to teach an introductory class too much you are likely to teach very little. Students approaching a new subject can be puzzled and discouraged by a text that overwhelms them with more material than they find digestible.

Our criteria were importance and relevance. Therefore we have mentioned only briefly some topics discussed at length in other books—for example, homosexuality (because few homosexuals ever take the course) and STDs (which seem more suited to a class in hygiene or medicine). We have avoided dealing in detail with topics, however tempting, on which we believe our body of knowledge cannot really offer much useful comment. For example, the multitude of unique problems and crises that may arise in an individual relationship—alcoholism of a partner, a retarded or delinquent child, a parent

with Alzheimer's disease—can only be understood case by individual case. Generalities, made without regard to the people affected, are meaningless.

No textbook, of course, can meet the needs of all instructors and all classes, or perhaps even all the needs of any single instructor. Some will disagree with our selection of material, perhaps even with our entire pragmatic and generally optimistic approach. That is just another aspect of our nation's pluralism. Realistic textbook authors are just happy to believe they have in some way helped some instructors and some students with this vitally important but slippery course. We are happy to know that students who have used this book seem to have liked it, and that a gratifying number decided to keep it for future reference.

**Ernest Havemann**  
**Marlene Lehtinen**

# MARRIAGES AND FAMILIES

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CHAPTER \_\_\_\_\_

# 1

## How Marriages and Families Have Changed





What is marriage? Is it the happily-ever-after fulfillment of our romantic dreams? Or is it a risky gamble that will almost surely end in a bitter divorce?

As this book will show, modern marriage is neither of these things, although it has some possibilities for both. It cannot guarantee that we will live happily ever after, which is impossible, but it offers us more opportunities for a rich and rewarding human relationship than most men and women ever had in the past. It certainly need not end in divorce, but it does force us to face and solve numerous problems, many of them so new and revolutionary that we have few guidelines to lead us through the land mines.

In recent decades marriages and families have undergone vast and unprecedented changes, all taking place at breakneck speed. Relationships between the sexes have taken many new forms. So have attitudes toward the proper behavior of women and men, divorce, the size of the family, and numerous other family-related matters. At the same time, our entire society has also been transformed in ways that have had an impact on marriages and families—notably our shifting economy, the expansion of educational opportunities, and advances in medical science that have greatly lengthened the average lifetime.

Because of this mixture of opportunities and problems, many people today have mixed feelings of optimism and pessimism. Nearly 5 million women and men a year cast a strong vote of confidence by buying a license and taking the vows, but over 2 million

a year get divorced (National Center for Health Statistics, 1987a). Many young people take a dim view of marriage in general, and often their parents' marriage in particular, yet a large majority of them seem confident of their own success.

Today's pessimists, it should be pointed out, are by no means as new as the developments that have produced them. One scholar has traced harsh criticism of the family as far back as the ancient Greek philosopher Plato. Marriage and the family were also held in low esteem by the early Christians, in Medieval Europe, and in the early days of our own nation by such eminent social commentators as Thomas Paine (Pickett, 1975).

The optimists too have had plenty of forerunners throughout history, enough to make marriage "one of the oldest, most universal, and most distinctive of human institutions" (Fuchs, 1983). For an eloquent declaration by a modern-day optimist, see the *Opinions and Experiences* box.\*

To those of us contemplating or engaged in a marriage, the question is this: How can we best avoid the disaster predicted by the pessimists and fulfill our own optimistic hopes? Answering that question, by presenting the most pertinent and useful knowledge

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\**Opinions and Experiences* boxes will be found throughout the book. In some cases, as in this first one, they are the comments of social scientists on matters of special interest. In other cases they are reports of interviews the authors have conducted with people in all walks of life who have discussed their personal experiences.

# Opinions and Experiences

## HAPPY FAMILIES? "THERE ARE MILLIONS OF THEM"

*These are the observations of an optimist—David R. Mace, a sociologist who spent nearly a half century as a marriage counselor.*

Adapted from Mace, D. R. "What I Have Learned about Family Life." *The Family Coordinator*, 1974, 23, 189–95. Reprinted by permission of Dr. Mace.

It is not the failure of the family that we are witnessing—rather the failure of many families to make the kind of transition required by our expanding interpretation of the meaning of democracy.

Meanwhile many families are making the transition with spectacular success. They may be a minority, but there are millions of them—more than enough to fill us with confidence and hope. Unfortunately they are the silent, ignored, and overlooked minority. Newspaper reporters never interview them. Publications on the state of the American family hardly ever mention them. We seem instead to be fascinated by the extreme, the pathological, the bizarre, the far-out. Yet all the time, not far from our doorsteps, all these families are functioning magnificently and blazing the trail to health and happiness.

I myself have enjoyed close contacts with hundreds of these families. In them I have found husbands and wives enjoying warm, loving, highly creative relationships—and children, in a setting that gives them all the emotional security they need, developing into mature and responsible adults.

In these families no one's personal development is thwarted; they know that those who love them wish only to help them realize all their powers and capabilities. The members of these families suffer no identity crisis; they know who they are and are proud and glad to belong to each other. Their lives are filled with creative, meaningful activities that enrich them and all who know them.

that social scientists and other experts on family matters have acquired, is the purpose of this book.

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## MARRIAGE AND FAMILY; THE GREAT VARIETY

We can best begin by explaining why the words *marriages* and *families* are in the plural in the title of the book. The reason is that our society now has so many different kinds of marriages and families that the use of either word in the singular is suspect. If someone says, "I'll tell you what I think of marriage," you have to be skeptical of whatever follows. If you do not mind being impolite and want to steer the conversation along more useful lines, you might ask, "Whose marriage?"

Our nation has many kinds of marriages and families "existing side by side," and the

people in them have "different problems to solve and issues to face" (Sussman, 1971). Thus your own problems and issues, in everything from finding a mate to having children, may be totally different from those of the person sitting next to you in class, your friends and neighbors, and even your close relatives.

## All Kinds of People: Cultural Pluralism

This is a big nation. We have about 180 million adults, people 18 or older (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1988a). To a greater extent than any other nation, moreover, the United States is what sociologists call *pluralistic*, that is, composed of many different groups with their own cultural backgrounds and traditions. In religion we Americans are Buddhists, Catholics, Jews, Mohammedans, Mormons, Protestants, and Shintoists, not to



A happy and hopeful start for one of the 2.5 million American couples who embark on marriage each year.

mention agnostics and atheists. Racially we are black, brown, white, and yellow. In national background we trace our roots to all the countries of Europe, Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

This vast melting pot is further complicated by a wide range of social classes, as determined by such factors as education and income. The classes vary all the way from lower-lower (illiterate or semilliterate people living in poverty), through the large and famous middle class (high-school or college education, good income, and comfortable home), and on to the upper-upper (socially prominent people whose families have been wealthy for generations).

As will be seen in the following chapter, all of us are influenced in important ways by the

kinds of home, culture, and social class into which we were born (even if some of us, like many college students, are in the process of moving to a different class). Some of us go through life without ever questioning the attitudes instilled in our childhood. Even those who rebel never manage to shake off the past completely. In more ways than we ever realize, we are the product of our background, which forever influences everything from the foods we prefer to our religious beliefs and our political leanings.

Of particular importance to us here is that our background strongly influences our beliefs and feelings about how men should behave, how women should behave, what we seek in marriage, how wives and husbands should treat each other, and how children

should be brought up. The pluralism of our society is one of the chief factors in producing our many forms of marriages and families.

### All Kinds of People: Individual Differences

Besides having pluralistic backgrounds, we differ in other important ways. No two people are exactly alike. Evidence of a wide range of individual differences has piled up ever since Sir Francis Galton, around a hundred years ago, began measuring people's size, strength, hearing, color vision, and ability to judge weights. We now know that large individual differences exist in all kinds of human traits and personalities—in intelligence, emotional reactions, motives for achievement or dependence, sexual capacity and desire, even tendencies to be loners or to seek the company of others.

The differences result partly from heredity. You carry around in the cells of your body and brain your own individual combination of genes—molecules of powerful chemicals, inherited in random combination from all your ancestors, that direct your growth from a single fertilized egg cell into a living human baby. The genes give you your own individual body build, facial features, eye color, and brain power, as well as numerous built-in tendencies to behave in your own particular fashion.

The differences also stem from what you have experienced and learned—all the effects of your environment from birth onward, especially your relationships with other people. No two people have the same experiences. Thus even identical twins, although they possess exactly the same combination of genes, often have different attitudes toward life and behave in different ways. They may look so alike that we cannot tell them apart in photographs, but we can distinguish them quickly when we see them in action, for Twin A does not behave like Twin B.

### All Kinds of Marriages, Too

America's pluralism was not always evident in marriages and families. As recently as the 1950s, indeed, we clearly had what could correctly be called a "typical family." It was made up of a father whose earnings provided the financial support, a stay-at-home mother, and at least one and often two or three or more children living in the home.

Since then, however, marriages and families have undergone vast changes and acquired a new diversity. The "typical family," which made up 70 percent of all households in the '50s, has now dwindled to a mere 15 percent (Bureau of the Census, 1986).

About a quarter of today's households are not really families at all but just one person living alone (Bureau of the Census, 1987a). Many young adults, still unmarried or having been divorced, have established their own home. So have many widows and a smaller number of widowers. Besides these one-person households there are also more than 7 million single-parent families—headed by a divorced or never-married woman or sometimes a divorced man with children—and nearly 2.5 million households in which the man and woman are living together without being married (Bureau of the Census, 1987b). Many married couples have never had children, and in others the children have grown up and moved on. Even in families with children, including preschoolers, a majority of the mothers have jobs outside the home (O'Connell and Bloom, 1987).

Thus the once "typical" family of bread-winning husband, stay-at-home wife, and young children has been turned into a small minority by developments of the past three decades. We now live in "a more variegated society with many types of households, no one of which predominates" (Yankelovich, 1981).

The nearly 5 million women and men a year who set out on marriage can now choose from a wide array of possibilities—far more than were available to couples of the past. The choices provide them with many oppor-