Chapter Twelve: Marriage and Family

Learning Objectives

- Explain the concept of marriage and family.
- Identify the common cultural themes that run through marriage. Discuss how marriage differs in traditional and industrialized societies.
- Summarize the three perspectives on marriage and family: functionalist perspective, conflict perspective, and symbolic interactionist perspective.
- Describe love, courtship, and the family cycle. List the two components of romantic love.
- Explore the diversity of families in the U.S.
- Analyze the trends in U.S. families.
- Understand the concepts of divorce and remarriage and their impact on U.S. society.
- Explore the dysfunctions of family life: spouse battering, child abuse, and incest.
- Identify the factors that make marriage successful.

Chapter Summary

The practices of marriage and family differ around the world. Although every human group organizes its members in families, how families are organized varies greatly from culture to culture. Broadly defined, a family consists of people who consider themselves related by blood, marriage, or adoption. A household, in contrast, consists of people who occupy the same housing unit.

Every human group establishes norms to govern who can marry whom. Although these norms vary from culture to culture, all societies use family and marriage to establish patterns of mate selection, descent, inheritance, and authority. Most societies demand endogamy, the practice of marrying someone within one’s own group. In contrast, norms of exogamy specify that people may marry outside their group. The best example of exogamy is the incest taboo, which prohibits sex and marriage among designated relatives.

Every society has a system of descent, the way people trace kinship over generations. A bilateral system of descent, means children are considered as related to both their mother’s side and the father’s side of the family. In a patrilineal system, descent is traced only on the father’s side; in a matrilineal system, descent is traced only on the mother’s side. In a society that practices these patterns of descent, the pattern of inheritance would be similar. A social system in which men dominate women-as-a-group is referred to as patriarchy. Although a matriarchy would be a society dominated by women, there is no historical record of a true matriarchy existing. Family patterns in America are becoming more egalitarian, or equal, although many of today’s customs still reflect a patriarchal origin.

According to the functionalist perspective, the family is universal because it serves six essential functions: economic production, socialization of children, care of the sick and aged, recreation, sexual control, and reproduction. Conflict theorists focus on the inequalities within the institution
of the family and marriage, particularly as they relate to the subservience of women. Symbolic interactionists examine how the contrasting experiences and perspectives of men and women are played out in marriage.

The major elements of the family life cycle are love and courtship, marriage, childbirth, child rearing, and family transitions. Romantic love, people being sexually attracted to one another and idealizing the other, plays a significant role in courtship in Western culture. In Western culture, love is mostly regarded as the basis for marriage. Sociologists use the term homogamy to refer to the tendency of people who have similar characteristics to marry one another. One of the more dramatic changes in U.S. marriage is the increase in marriages between African Americans and whites.

Over the years, Americans have moved to having fewer children and child care arrangements are similar between single and married mothers. However, when married women are at work, the children are more likely to be under the father’s care or in day care. This is different from single mothers who rely on grandparents and other relatives to care for the children. Working-class parents are more likely to set limits for their children then let them choose their own activities, while middle-class parents are more likely to push their children into activities that they think will develop their thinking and social skills. Family transitions later in life include children staying home longer and adults adjusting to widowhood.

Although there are some variations in family life among white, African American, Latino, Asian American, and Native American families, the primary distinctions in families result from cultural differences and social class.

The decline of the traditional family and the changing definitions of family are evident in the significant increase in one-parent, childless, blended, and gay and lesbian families. The percentage of U.S. children living with two parents has dropped from 85 percent in 1970 to 70 percent in 2010. Most childless married couples have made a choice to not have children. Referred to as DINKs (dual income, no kids), these couples prefer the personal comforts and convenience of not having children. Blended families—those that have members who were previously parts of other families—are also on the rise. Although gay marriages are not allowed in most of the United States, gay unions are becoming more public.

Several trends since the 1960s are very apparent in U.S. families. Significant changes in the characteristics of the family include postponement of first marriages and childbirth, the cultural acceptance and increase in cohabitation, and the rise in births to unwed mothers.

Divorce often has adverse effects on children that can carry over into adulthood. Children of divorced parents who are not made to choose sides, feel loved, live with a parent who is making a good adjustment, have consistent routines, and grow up in households with adequate finances to meet the family’s needs adjust best to the effects of divorce.
Men and women experience divorce differently. For men, divorce often results in weakened relationships with their children. For women, it typically means a decline in their standard of living.

Although the institutions of marriage and the family fulfill universal needs, some marriages and families are characterized by a “dark side” that includes spouse battering, child abuse, marital rape, and incest. On the brighter side, a survey showed that out of 351 couples who had been married fifteen years or longer, 300 considered themselves to be happily married. They thought of their spouse as their best friend, considered marriage a lifelong commitment, and believed marriage to be sacred. They strongly wanted their marriages to succeed and often laughed together.

Patterns of marriage and family life in the United States are undergoing a fundamental shift, with trends pointing to further increases in cohabitation, more births to single women, a higher age at first marriage, and an increased presence of married women in the workforce. We will continue to deal with the conflict between the bleak picture of marriage and family painted by the media and the rosy one painted by cultural myths. Sociologists can help correct the distortions through research.

Chapter Outline

I. Marriage and Family in Global Perspective
   A. The term “family” is difficult to define because there are many types.
      1. In some societies men have more than one wife (polygyny) or women have more than one husband (polyandry).
      2. A broad definition of family is consists of people who consider themselves related by blood, marriage, or adoption. A household, in contrast, consists of people who occupy the same housing unit.
      3. A family is classified as a nuclear family (husband, wife, and children) or an extended family (a nuclear family plus other relatives like grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins).
      4. The family of orientation is the family in which an individual grows up, while the family of procreation is the family formed when a couple has its first child.
      5. Marriage is a group’s approved mating arrangements, usually marked by a ritual to show the couple’s new public status.
   B. Common cultural themes run through marriage and family.
      1. Patterns of mate selection are established to govern whom one can and cannot marry. Endogamy is the practice of marrying within one’s own group, while exogamy is the practice of marrying outside of one’s own group. The best example of exogamy is the incest taboo, which prohibits sex and marriage among designated relatives.
      2. Three major patterns of descent (tracing kinship over generations) are (1) bilateral (descent traced on both the mother’s and the father’s side), (2) patrilineal
3. Mate selection and descent are regulated in all societies to provide an orderly way of passing property and other things to the next generation. In a bilateral system, property passes to males and females; in a patrilineal system, property passes only to males; in a matrilineal system, property passes only to females.

4. Patriarchy is a social system in which men dominate women, and it runs through all societies. No historical records exist of a true matriarchy, a system in which women-as-a-group dominate men-as-a-group. In an egalitarian social system, authority is more or less equally divided between men and women.

II. Marriage and Family in Theoretical Perspective

A. The functionalist perspective stresses how the family is related to other parts of society and how it contributes to the well-being of society.

1. The family is universal because it serves functions essential to the well-being of society: economic production, socialization of children, care of the sick and aged, recreation, sexual control, and reproduction.

2. The incest taboo (rules specifying which people are too closely related to have sex or marry) helps the family avoid role confusion and forces people to look outside the family for marriage partners, creating a network of support.

B. Central to the conflict perspective is the struggle over power: who has it and who resents not having it?

1. Throughout history, husbands have had more power and wives have resented it. In the U.S., wives have been gaining more power in marriage.

2. According to Figure 12.1, wives are currently making more decisions at home concerning the family’s finances, purchases, and activity planning than men. A total of 43 percent of wives make more decisions at home compared to 26 percent of husbands making the majority of the family decisions and 31 percent of families where the decisions are divided equally.

C. Using the symbolic interactionist perspective, we can explore the different meanings that gender, housework, and childcare have for men and women and how each sex experiences marriage differently.

1. Surprisingly, not only are husbands spending more time caring for children, but so are wives.

2. Parents are spending less time on social activities and organizations to allow more time to care for children.

According to Figure 12.2, men are spending more time on housework than in the past, but the combined time spent on housework by husbands and wives has dropped from 38.9 to 29.1 hours per week. This is most likely the result of technological advances allowing for less time to complete more of the time consuming household tasks than in the past.

III. The Family Life Cycle

A. Romantic love is the idea of people being sexually attracted to one another and idealizing the other.
1. It provides the ideological context in which Americans seek mates and form families.
2. Romantic love has two components: (1) emotional, a feeling of sexual attraction; and (2) cognitive, the label we attach to our feelings. If we attach this label, we describe ourselves as being “in love.”

B. The social channels of love and marriage in the United States include age, education, social class, and race-ethnicity.
1. Homogamy is the tendency of people with similar characteristics to marry one another, usually resulting from propinquity (spatial nearness).
2. Interracial marriage, which has increased sharply, is an exception to these social patterns. About 7 percent marry someone of another race, which totals about 4 million couples.
3. One of the most dramatic changes is marriages between African Americans and whites.

C. As more mothers today are employed outside the home, child care has become an issue.
1. In comparing married couples and single mothers, child care arrangements appear to be quite similar. The main difference is the role played by the child’s father while the mother is at work. When married women are at work, the child is more likely to be under the father’s care or in day care. For single mothers, grandparents and other relatives are more likely to fill in for the absent father.
2. About one of six or seven children is cared for in day care centers. Only a minority of U.S. day care centers offers high-quality care. The very low wages paid to day care workers seems to account for this. Two factors that seem to be associated with higher quality of care are (1) fewer children per staff worker and (2) staff training in early childhood development.
3. According to Melvin Kohn, parents socialize children into the norms of their respective work worlds. Working-class parents want their children to conform to societal expectations. Middle-class parents are more concerned that their children develop curiosity and self-expression.

D. Later stages of family life bring both pleasures and problems.
1. The empty nest is a married couple’s domestic situation after the last child has left home. The empty nest is not so empty anymore.
2. With prolonged education and a growing cost of establishing households, U.S. children are leaving home much later or are returning after having left.
3. A total of 18 percent of all 25- to 29-year-olds are living with their parents. These “adolescents” face issues with their parents between being independent and dependent.
4. Women are more likely than men to face the problem of adjusting to widowhood, for not only does the average woman live longer than a man, but she also marries a man older than herself.
5. The survivor is faced with identity issues of who he or she is.
6. The death of a spouse produces the “widowhood effect.” The impact of the death is so strong that surviving spouses tend to die earlier than expected.
IV. Diversity in U.S. Families

A. As with other groups, the family life of African Americans differs by social class.
   1. The upper class is concerned with maintaining family lineage and preserving their privilege and wealth; the middle-class focuses on achievement and respectability; poor African American families face the problems that poverty brings.
   2. Poor men are likely to have few job skills and to be unemployed. As such, it is difficult for them to fulfill the cultural roles of husband and father. Poor families tend to be headed by females and to have a high rate of birth to single mothers. Divorce and desertion are also more common among the poor.
   3. Compared to other groups, African American families are the least likely to be headed by married couples and the most likely to be headed by women. The women are also more likely to marry men who are less educated than themselves.

B. The effects of social class on families also apply to Latinos. In addition, families differ by country of origin.
   1. What really distinguishes Latino families is culture—especially the Spanish language, the Roman Catholic religion, and a strong family orientation, coupled with a disapproval of divorce.
   2. In all studies of Latino families, it has been shown that social class is more important in determining family life than is either being Latino or a family’s country of origin.

C. As with the other groups, family life for Asian American families reflects social class.
   1. Asian American children are more likely than children in any other racial-ethnic group to grow up with both parents. Because Asian Americans come from many different countries, family life varies considerably, reflecting these different cultures. The more recent the immigration, the closer the family life is to that of the country of origin.
   2. Bob Suzuki identified several distinctive characteristics of Asian American families. They tend to retain Confucian values that provide a distinct framework to family life: humanism, collectivity, self-discipline, hierarchy, respect for the elderly, moderation, and obligation.
   3. Asian Americans parents are more likely to use shame and guilt rather than physical punishment to control their children’s behavior.

D. For Native American families, the issue is whether to follow traditional values or to assimilate. The structure of Native American families is almost identical to that of Latinos; like others, these families differ by social class.
   1. Native American parents are permissive with their children and avoid physical punishment.
   2. Elders play a much more active role in their children’s families than they do in most U.S. families; they provide child care and teach and discipline children.

E. There has been an increase in one-parent families.
   1. This is due to the high divorce rate and the sharp increase in births to unmarried women.
2. The concern about one-parent families has more to with their poverty than that they are headed by a single parent. The reason for the poverty is that most are headed by women who earn less than men.

3. Children from one-parent families are more likely to have behavioral problems in school, to drop out of school, to get arrested, to have physical and emotional health problems and to get divorced.

F. Overall, about 20 percent of U.S. married couples never have children. Although somewhat influenced by racial-ethnic group, in general, the more education a woman has, the more likely she is to expect to bear no children.

1. Some couples are infertile, but most childless couples have made a choice not to have children. Some decide they want to be free to be able to change jobs or do spontaneous things.

2. These couples prefer the term childfree rather than childless.

G. A blended family is one whose members were once part of other families (two divorced persons marry, bringing children into a new family unit). Blended families are increasing in number and often experience complicated family relationships.

H. Many homosexual couples live in monogamous relationships that resemble heterosexual marriages in many respects.

1. Although some U.S. states allow same-sex marriages, 41 states have laws prohibiting these marriages.

2. Sociologists Philip Blumstein and Pepper Schwartz found that same-sex couples’ main struggles dealt with housework, money, careers, issues with relatives, and sexual adjustments, which are the same struggles heterosexual couples deal with. Relationship major difference is that only in the few states that allow same-sex marriages or civil unions do same-sex couples have to confront a legal system when they break-up.

3. Adoption by gay and lesbian couples is a controversial issue; a primary fear is that children raised by gay or lesbian parents will be more likely to become homosexuals. Studies have shown that children reared by gay and lesbian couples have about the same adjustment as those raised in heterosexual families and the children are not more likely to have a homosexual orientation.

4. A study by anthropologist Ellen Lewin showed that homosexual couples look to adopt children for the same reasons that heterosexual couples do: to establish a family, love children, provide a home for parentless children, and to give meaning to their lives.

V. Trends in U.S. Families

A. The average age of American brides is the oldest it has been since records first were kept.

1. As a result, the age at which U.S. women have their first child is also the highest in U.S. history.

2. While many young people postpone marriage, they have not postponed the age at which they set up housekeeping with someone of the opposite sex.

B. Cohabitation—adults living together in a sexual relationship without being married—is 12 times more common than it was in the 1970s.
1. Commitment is the essential difference between cohabitation and marriage: marriage assumes permanence; cohabiting assumes remaining together “as long as it works out.”

2. Couples who cohabit before marriage are more likely to divorce than couples who did not live together before marriage. Many who live together feel pressure to marry and end up marrying a partner that they may not have chosen. However, the latest research shows that of the recently married, the divorce rate of those who did and did not cohabit before marriage is about the same.

3. Sociologist Kammi Schmeer discovered that on average, the children of cohabiting parents aren’t as healthy as the children of married parents. One possibility suggests that this is because there is more conflict in cohabiting relationships.

VI. Divorce and Remarriage

A. There are problems when it comes to measuring the extent of divorce in U.S. society.

1. Although the divorce rate is reported at 50 percent, this statistic is misleading because with rare exceptions, those who divorce do not come from the group who married that year.

2. An alternative is to compare the number of divorces in a given year to the entire group of married couples. The divorce rate for any given year is less than 2 percent of all married couples.

3. A third way is to calculate the percentage of all adult Americans who are divorced. People’s race-ethnicity makes a difference in the likelihood of divorce.

4. Another question to ask is the percentage of people who have ever been divorced. The percentage increases with each age group and peaks when people reach their 50s. Overall, 43 to 46 percent of marriages end in divorce.

B. Divorce profoundly threatens a child’s world.

1. Compared with children whose parents are not divorced, children from divorced families are more likely to experience emotional problems, more likely to be juvenile delinquents, less likely to complete high school or graduate from college, and more likely to divorce.

2. There is a debate between two psychological studies conducted by Judith Wallerstein and Mavis Hetherington. Wallerstein claims that divorce scars children, making them depressed and leaving them with insecurities that follow them into childhood. Hetherington’s study found that 75 to 80 percent of children of divorce function as well as children who are reared by both of their parents.

3. Several factors help children adjust to divorce. Children adjust well if they experience little conflict, feel loved, live with the parent making a good adjustment, have consistent family routines, and live in a family that has adequate money for its needs. Children also adjust better if a second adult can be counted on for support.

4. Adult children who come from a divorced family have a chance of a successful marriage if they marry someone whose parents did not divorce. Those marriages where both husband and wife come from a divorced family are more likely to be marked by high distrust and conflict, leading to a higher chance of divorce.
C. Sociologists have found that the effects of divorce continue across generations. Sociologists found that the grandchildren of divorce have weaker ties to their parents, they don’t go as far in school, and they have more marital discord with their spouses.

D. Fathers who were married to the mothers of their children, are older, more educated, and have higher incomes are more likely to continue to have contact with their children following divorce.

E. Women are more likely than men to feel that divorce gives them a new chance at life. The spouse who initiates the divorce usually gets over it sooner and usually remarries sooner. Many divorced couples maintain contact with ex-spouses because of their children. Others experience lingering attachments, called continuities, in which the divorced couple interact on a social basis—go to a movie or dinner. Some even continue to make love after their divorce.

F. Most divorced people eventually remarry.
   1. Most divorced people remarry other divorced people. Men are more likely to remarry than women; those who are most likely to remarry are mothers with small children and women who have not graduated from high school.
   2. The divorce rate of remarried people without children is about the same as that of first marriages; remarriages in which children are present are more likely to end in divorce.

VII. Two Sides of Family Life
   A. Spousal battering, child abuse, marital rape, and incest represent the dark side of family life.
      1. Although wives are about as likely to attack their husbands as husbands are to attack their wives, it is generally the husband who lands the last and most damaging blow. Violence against women is related to the sexist structure of society and our socialization.
      2. Each year about 2 million U.S. children are reported to the authorities as victims of abuse or neglect; about 800,000 of these cases are substantiated.
      3. Incest is sexual relations between certain relatives, such as brothers and sisters or parents and children. It is most likely to occur in families that are socially isolated, and is more common than it previously was thought to be. The most common form of incest is sex between children, with three-fourths of the cases being initiated by a brother who is five years older than his sister.

   B. A study of couples who had been married fifteen years or longer reported these factors in making a relationship successful: thinking of their spouses as their best friend, liking their spouse as a person, having a commitment to the marriage and seeing it as sacred, agreeing with their spouse on aims and goals, believing that their spouse has grown more interesting, wanting the relationship to succeed, and laughing together.
      1. Sociologist Nicholas Stinnett found that the following characteristics make for happy families: spending a lot of time together, expressing appreciation, promoting one another’s welfare, talking and listening to one another, being religious and dealing with crises in a positive manner.
2. Sociologists have also found that marriages are happier when couples get along with their in-laws and when they do leisure activities that they both enjoy.

C. While the statistics are important in order to gain a deeper understanding of the state of marriages and families in U.S. society, it is also important to remember that these are describing an overall pattern and not an individual case.

1. Our own chances of having a successful marriage depend on our own situation, especially the way we, as individuals, approach marriage.

2. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, we create our own worlds; we interpret our experiences and act accordingly. If we think our marriage will fail, we increase the likelihood that it will. We tend to act according to our ideas, creating a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy.

VIII. The Future of Marriage and Family

A. In spite of problems, marriage will continue because it is functional. The vast proportion of Americans will continue find marriage vital to their welfare.

B. It is likely that cohabitation, births to single mothers, age at first marriage, and parenting by grandparents will increase. More married women will join the work force and continue to gain marital power.

C. We will continue to deal with the conflict between the bleak picture of marriage and family painted by the media and the rosy one painted by cultural myths. Sociologists can help correct the distortions through research.

KEY TERMS
After studying the chapter, review the definition for each of the following terms.

bilineal (system of descent): a system of reckoning descent that counts both the mother’s and the father’s side (p. 353)

blended family: a family whose members were once part of other families (p. 365)

cohabitation: adults living together in a sexual relationship without being married (p. 368)

egalitarian: authority more or less equally divided between people or groups (in marriage, for example, between husband and wife) (p. 353)

endogamy: the practice of marrying within one’s own group (p. 352)

exogamy: the practice of marrying outside one’s group (p. 352)

extended family: a nuclear family that includes other relatives such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins (p. 352)

family: two or more people who consider themselves related by blood, marriage, or adoption (p. 352)

family of orientation: the family in which a person grows up (p. 352)

family of procreation: the family formed when a couple’s first child is born (p. 352)

homogamy: the tendency of people with similar characteristics to marry one another (p. 357)
household: people who occupy the same housing unit (p. 352)
incest: sexual relations between certain relatives, such as brothers and sisters or parents and children (p. 376)
incest taboo: the rule that prohibits sex and marriage among designated relatives (p. 353)
mariage: a group’s approved mating arrangements, usually marked by a ritual of some sort (the wedding) to indicate the couple’s new public status (p. 352)
matriarchy: a society in which women-as-a-group dominate men-as-a-group (p. 353)
matrilineal (system of descent): a system of reckoning descent that counts only the mother’s side (p. 353)
nuclear family: a family consisting of a husband, wife, and child(ren) (p. 352)
patriarchy: a group in which men-as-a-group dominate women-as-a-group (p. 353)
patrilineal (system of descent): a system of reckoning descent that counts only the father’s side (p. 353)
polyandry: a form of marriage in which women have more than one husband (p. 352)
polygyny: a form of marriage in which men have more than one wife (p. 352)
romantic love: mutual sexual attraction and idealized feelings about one another (p. 357)
system of descent: how kinship is traced over the generations (p. 353)

KEY PEOPLE
Review the major theoretical contributions or findings of these people.

Paul Amato and Jacob Cheadle: These sociologists were the first to study the grandchildren of divorced parents. They found that the effects of divorce continue across generations. (pp. 365, 370, 374)

Philip Blumstein and Pepper Schwartz: These sociologists interviewed same sex couples and found that they face the same problems as heterosexual couples. (p. 366)

Urie Bronfenbrenner: This sociologist studied the impact of divorce on children and found that children adjust better if there is a second adult who can be counted on for support. (p. 373)

Andrew Cherlin: Cherlin notes that our society has not yet developed adequate norms for remarriage. (p. 374)

Donald Dutton and Arthur Aron: These researchers compared the sexual arousal levels of men who were in dangerous situations with men in safe situations. They found that the former were more sexually aroused than the latter. (p. 357)

Mavis Hetherington: A psychologist whose research shows that 75 to 80 percent of children of divorce function as well as children who are reared by both parents. (p. 373)
Melvin Kohn: Kohn found that the type of work that parents do has an impact on how they rear their children. (p. 360)

Jeanette and Robert Lauer: These sociologists interviewed 351 couples who had been married fifteen years or longer in order to find out what makes a marriage successful. (p. 376)

Diana Russell: Russell found that incest victims who experience the most difficulty are those who have been victimized the most often over longer periods of time and whose incest was “more intrusive.” (p. 376)

Kammi Schmeer: This sociologist compared the health of children of married and cohabiting parents and found that on average, the children of cohabiting parents aren’t as healthy as the children of married parents (p. 370)

Nicholas Stinnett: Stinnett studied 660 families from all regions of the United States and parts of South America in order to find out what are characteristics of happy families. (p. 376)

Murray Straus: This sociologist has studied domestic violence and found that, while husbands and wives are equally likely to attack one another, men inflict more damage on women than the reverse. (p. 375)

Bob Suzuki: This sociologist studied Chinese and Japanese American families and identified several distinctive characteristics of Asian American families. (p. 363)

Judith Wallerstein: A psychologist who claims that divorce has detrimental, long-term effects on children. (p. 373)

Discussion Topics to Encourage Student Participation

- Given the trends towards higher numbers of divorces and more children born out of wedlock since 1970, ask your students to think about and discuss the following: Should the legal system make it more difficult for married couples to obtain a divorce, and harder for people to cohabit outside of marriage, especially when children are involved? What can the United States government do to strengthen families and marriages in American society? How can the people change the culture to strengthen families and marriages?

- Have your students review *The Bright Side of Family Life: Successful Marriages* in their textbooks. After reviewing the research findings of Robert and Jeanette Lauer and of Nicholas Stinnett, have students discuss why love and money did not make the list, while being friends, keeping commitments, and religion all appeared in the research results. Based on these findings, have students discuss whether the idea of looking for a friend, rather than a lover, might be a better route to take when seeking intimacy and marriage.

- Despite the availability of legal abortion, morning-after pills, birth-control pills, condoms, and other birth control options, we still have a very high percentage of children born out-of-wedlock. Ask students to discuss how this can be the case. Then have them review the very low percentage of out-of-wedlock births you find among Asian Americans and the Suzuki findings on cultural values. Have students debate how cultural values affect out-of-wedlock
birth rates, and if whites and other minority groups could reduce their rates of out-of-wedlock births by adopting Chinese American and Japanese American cultural traits (e.g.; self-discipline, obligation, collectivity, and respect for family).

- Ask your students how long they think the “sexual high” experienced by some couples when they first meet or start going out can last. At what point in a relationship does the intense sexual chemistry that makes “love” the most exciting thing on earth begin to wear off? Most likely, you will get a range of answers from six months to two years. In light of this range, ask your students to consider and discuss the following: If two people who are “madly in love” with one another marry at the age of twenty-three and the sexual high ends two years later, what will they do for the next fifty years of their married life? In the absence of intense sexual attraction, what keeps most married couples together? And what does this say, if anything, about which factors are the most and least important for a successful long-term marriage?

Classroom Activities and Student Projects

- Break your students into small groups—some with all-male members, others with all-female members, and still others with both male and female members. Ask each group to draft a list of ten characteristics—from most important to least important—that describe the ideal marital partner. Afterwards, have each group present its list to the class and then have the class discuss the following points: Which groups had the easiest time agreeing on the components of the list: the all-male groups, all-female groups, or the mixed-sex groups? Which groups had the hardest time? Which similarities and differences can you identify in the characteristics and the rankings from group to group? Finally, which social factors and/or socializing influences might most account for these similarities and differences?

- Ask your students to imagine they are getting married next week. Then, as an in-class assignment, have them spend the next half hour writing a prenuptial agreement that details their expectations for the marriage and, more importantly, their partner’s obligations in the marriage related to the following: 1) financial matters, 2) housework, and 3) child-rearing responsibilities. Afterward, have four male volunteers and four female volunteers come up to the front of the room and briefly present what they wrote, while telling the rest of the class to look for and be prepared to discuss any significant differences between the prenuptial agreements written by the male students and those written by the female students.

Service Learning Projects and Field Trips

- Have students contact a day care center and ask if they can observe the center’s operation for a few hours to fulfill a class assignment. During the observation period, have the students take notes on the types of activities in which the children engage, the degree of supervision provided, and the children’s apparent responses to the activities. After the assignment is
completed, have the students compare notes to discuss which were the best activities and under what circumstances the best day care observed operates.

- Working with the local Salvation Army, area church, or similar organization, ask if your class can “adopt” a needy family to provide them a special Sunday experience. Working with the cooperating agency, prepare a list of items needed to prepare a good meal and include a small gift of some kind for all members of the family, including the mother and father. Students who wish to participate can choose from the list of items on the list. For larger, more expensive items, such as the main entrée (a ham, turkey, large chicken, or other appropriate entrée) several students can pool their resources. Then have the class write a letter to the family expressing their best wishes and the spirit in which the presentation of these gifts are given. Ask your students to comment on the difference between contributing money to community agencies that help the poor and actually purchasing and delivering the items. Which system is actually more efficient? What are some of the problems associated with trying to help needy families in the manner of this class project?

**Suggested Films**

  This is an account of how a family deals with the accidental death of a child.

  Follows four years in the lives of a diverse group of contemporary immigrants and refugees—from India, Mexico, Nigeria, the Dominican Republic and Palestine—as they journey to start new lives in America.