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What Is a Marriage?

The Rise of More Diverse Unions

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Introduction

For better or for worse, the last two decades have seen rapid changes in the family system, with the family structure diversifying and people increasingly opting out of or delaying marriage. Questions have arisen about the future of marriage and whether the unfolding trends represent the deterioration or evolution of marriage. The United States is experiencing a precipitous decline in marriage (also see Chapters 4 and 13 in this volume), with rates in recent years lower than at any other point in history. According to census data, in 2021, about half of Americans were married (51%), compared with 72% in 1960. When people do marry, they are much older, with the median age of first marriage in the United States rising by eight years since 1960 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). Notably, these trends are not unique to the United States and appear in many parts of the world.

Despite fewer marriages, people continue to have a vast array of relationships (see Chapter 17 in this volume). The number of adults cohabitating with a non-spousal partner, remarrying, or having a kid solo (e.g., single parenthood) has increased substantially (Ortiz-Ospina & Roser, 2020). More people are choosing to cohabitate before marriage or instead of marriage (see Chapter 3 in this volume). While cohabitation once served as a stepping stone to marriage (Guzzo 2014), it now exceeds marriage rates (Horowitz et al., 2019). Indeed, cohabitation among non-married romantic partners is becoming the normative relationship experience among young adults, and fewer cohabiting unions are transitioning into marriages (Guzzo, 2014).

Another illustrative example is that, historically, marriage was a precursor to a couple's decision to procreate. Many people waited until marriage to have

children or were married due to pregnancy. However, it has become increasingly common for people to have and raise children outside of marriage, either as single parents or by co-raising children with cohabitating, unmarried partners (Hayford et al., 2014). These examples suggest that marriage rates are decreasing and that pivotal relational and familial decisions are no longer tied to marriage.

What Do Marriages Look Like Today?

The outward appearance of marriage has changed to better reflect the composition of society, with notable increases in interracial, inter-religious, and same-sex marriages (Rosenfeld & Kim, 2005). The 1960s saw a rapid rise in interracial marriages, partially as a reflection of the growing diversity of the United States population. Between 1980 and 2015, the rates of interracial marriages nearly tripled (Livingston & Brown, 2017). In addition to crossing lines of race, marriage is now legal for many same-sex couples in various jurisdictions, including the United States, since 2015. Unsurprisingly, nations with legal same-sex marriage have seen drastic increases in the number of same-sex couples getting married. Despite increased diversification of the family system (Rosenfeld & Kim, 2005), prejudices remain toward any relationship that does not fit the standard "norm" of heterosexual, intraracial marriage. Indeed, some forms of nontraditional relationships, such as consensually non-monogamous (CNM) relationships, are still under great scrutiny and denied access to the privilege of having their relationships recognized. In this chapter, we will discuss the impact of the diversification of the family structure on the current state of marriage and the specific forms of prejudice encountered by those in interracial, LGBTQ+, and CNM relationships.

Interracial Marriages

An increase in interracial relationships has occurred within the context of various social and political factors that have reduced the barriers to marrying across racial lines (see Chapter 8 in this volume). In the United States, the percentage of interracial or interethnic married-couple households increased from 7.4% in 2000 to 10.2% in 2016 (Rico et al., 2018), and 17% of all new

marriages in 2015 were between people of different racial backgrounds (Livingston & Brown, 2017). Direct comparisons across countries can be challenging, as the definition of interracial relationships tends to vary. For example, scholars often rely on census surveys not designed to measure interracial relationships to generate population estimates.

Drawing specific attention to sexual relationships between members of different races dates back to 1864 when an anonymous author first coined the term "miscegenation." The term combined the Latin roots for "mix" (*miscere*) and "race" (*genus*) to provide a seemingly more scientific term for the more colloquial phrasing of "race-mixing" (Sussman, 2019). Although the term became commonly used in formal and informal settings, such as the anti-miscegenation laws, the original pamphlet argued that such relationships should be encouraged and viewed as capable of producing racially superior offspring. While abolitionists initially praised the pamphlet, those who favored continuing slavery in the United States condemned the publication. The result was a series of publications arguing against miscegenation. Indeed, the original pamphlet was an anti-abolitionist hoax aimed at making the abolitionist agenda appear more radical (e.g., suggesting that abolitionists supported *forced* marriage between races). The pamphlet left a lasting mark on views toward interracial marriage in the United States and directly contributed to the generation of laws that would prohibit "miscegenation" (Sussman, 2019). Formal and informal barriers to interracial marriage were blatant throughout much of the 20th century across North America and beyond (e.g., "immorality laws" in South Africa). Many American states had anti-miscegenation laws forbidding cohabitation, marriage, or sexual relations between racial groups. Such laws remained in place until the 1967 United States Supreme Court Ruling in *Loving v. Virginia*, which deemed such laws a violation of the 14th Amendment (Bryant & Duncan, 2019).

Families were frequent sources of disapproval for interracial couples. In 1939, Velma Demerson's father had her arrested for the crime of being "incorrigible." Such a charge fell under the Canadian Female Refuges Act of 1897, which allowed the incarceration and detention of women who failed to follow the societal status quo. For Velma, her crime was being an unwed, pregnant, White woman living with the soon-to-be father of her child, a Chinese man (Demerson, 2004). The consequences for Velma were vast; she was incarcerated for 10 months and subjected to abusive medical treatments and solitary confinement. The Canadian government stripped Velma of

her Canadian citizenship under the 1946 Citizenship Act, which dictated that women who married men of foreign citizenship were assumed to have relinquished being Canadian. Consequently, Velma was stateless until 2004, when her citizenship was finally reinstated (Fleet, 2011).

Much has changed over the past century in North America, including attitudes concerning interracial marriages. According to Bibby (2007), "most social scientists maintain that there is probably no better index of racial and cultural integration than intermarriage" (p. 1), leading many sociologists to note the importance of tracking changes in the prevalence of interracial relationships because this metric can provide insight into broader societal trends of racial integration, assimilation, and prejudices (Hou et al., 2015). Indeed, attitudes have also improved with the increased prevalence of interracial relationships. In Canada, the approval of interracial relationships has risen from approximately 55% in the mid-1970s to 92% in the early 2000s (Bibby, 2007). Positive attitudes vary, by time and place, and remain lower in the United States, where a 2007 U.S. Gallop Poll identified that while 77% of Americans approved of marriages between Black and White individuals, nearly a quarter (23%) withheld such approval (17% disapproving and 6% reporting no opinion; Carroll, 2007).

Despite increased engagement in and acceptance of interracial relationships, specific challenges remain. For example, people in interracial relationships often report reduced social support, more significant stigma from friends and family (Rosenthal & Starks, 2015), and feeling that others more closely scrutinize their relationship (Wieling, 2003). People in interracial relationships often report a lack of support from parents, which, in turn, can be a source of conflict within the relationship (Bell & Hastings, 2015). Any relationship met with greater disapproval from parents and friends can subsequently experience reduced relationship well-being, which can have detrimental effects on the mental and physical well-being of those in the relationship (Blair & Holmberg, 2008; Blair et al., 2018). Furthermore, society grants less approval to interracial relationships, thereby generating stigma associated with the *nature* of the relationship rather than its unique qualities. Experiencing this stigma is, in turn, associated with reduced mental well-being (Rosenthal et al., 2019) and can be associated with lower levels of relationship investment (Lehmiller & Agnew, 2006).

Relationship stigma has many consequences. Interracial couples can feel undue pressure to make their relationship appear as a "model" relationship, fearing that onlookers will judge all interracial relationships negatively

if their relationship fails. Additionally, some interracial couples experience "visual dislocation," in which others do not automatically see them as being in a relationship together (Steinbugler, 2005). Potentially in response to visual dislocation, those in interracial relationships engage in more actions that indicate that they are together in a romantic relationship. Such behaviors, such as holding hands, are associated with better mental health, relationship satisfaction, and closeness (Mederos, 2015).

Same-Sex Marriage

Social and legal arguments supporting same-sex marriage have focused on declaring that they are *no different* from traditional, heterosexual marriages. There are meaningful differences between same- and mixed-sex marriages, but the focus on achieving "marriage equality" led to near-willful blindness to differences. To understand the emphasis on arguing for "sameness," we must provide a brief history of how society has treated same-sex relationships over time.

For much of the 20th century, *homosexuality* was a criminal form of sexual deviance (see Chapter 11 in this volume). Over time, viewing homosexuality as a *chosen* criminal activity gave way to seeing it as an *affliction* or mental illness. While today it is considered prejudiced to think of homosexuality (or sexual diversity as we might say today) as a mental illness, the transition from chosen crime to mental affliction represented a positive step. Individuals with a "mental illness" could potentially "recover" with treatment; if not, it seemed cruel to criminally punish them for something that was "no fault of their own." Consequently, throughout the 1900s, the medical professions subjected gay men and lesbians to ineffective treatments that we would now consider torture, ranging from extreme aversion therapy to lobotomies and chemical castration. The legal prohibitions against homosexuality often remained, making it challenging for gay men and lesbians to conceive of fighting for marriage rights when they lacked fundamental rights of freedom and self-determination.

Dr. Evelyn Hooker's work in the late 1960s was instrumental in defining same-sex attraction as a natural variation in human sexuality (Hooker, 1993). The American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from the Diagnostic and Statistics Manual of Mental Illnesses (DSM) in 1973. The famous Stonewall Riots of 1969 and the decriminalization of homosexuality

(e.g., Canada: 1969, California: 1976) contributed to gay men's sexual liberation in the 1970s, sparking motivation to fight for equal marriage rights. In 1970, a county clerk denied Richard Baker and James McConnell a marriage license (Ekholm, 2015). Their challenge of the ruling failed, rendering marriage rights a matter to be handled by individual states rather than U.S. federal law for decades to come.

Much of this momentum for relationship recognition was lost when the HIV/AIDS epidemic struck the community. The government left the community alone to handle the fatal fallout of the epidemic, which cost the lives of more than 330,000 gay and bisexual men in the United States alone (Linley et al., 2019). The lack of legal recognition for same-sex relationships throughout the 1980s and 90s resulted in institutions denying gay men the right to visit their dying partners, participate in their partner's treatment decisions, or even maintain ownership of their property after a partner's death. Although some places, like San Francisco, made exceptions, the United States did not grant legal hospital visitation rights to same-sex couples until 2010 (Shapiro, 2010).

The HIV/AIDs epidemic placed the marriage equality movement on the back burner for decades in many jurisdictions worldwide. The Canadian Supreme Court heard the first legal case for marriage in Canada in 1995. The court denied access to legal marriage for Jim Egan and his partner of 47 years, Jack Nesbit, but the ruling resulted in the inclusion of sexual orientation as a protected category within Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The same court redefined "spouse" to include same-sex partners in 1998, followed by a case in 2003 that required the federal government to legalize same-sex marriage, which was completed by 2005. Canada was the third country to legalize same-sex marriage, following the Netherlands in 2001 and Belgium in 2003. The United States lagged many years behind as individual states fought to extend or restrict the definition of marriage, but eventually, the U.S. Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage in 2015. It is within this context that research on same-sex relationships emerged.

Lawrence Kurdek provided one of the earliest attempts to systematically study same-sex relationships through longitudinal research comparing the relationships of gay men and lesbians with mixed-sex heterosexual dating and married couples. By comparing Rusbult et al.'s (1998) investment model of relationship commitment across same-sex and mixed-sex couples, Kurdek (2007) found that same-sex couples often had similar conceptions and levels of commitment as their mixed-sex counterparts. Kurdek argued

that inconsistent commitment findings concerning same-sex relationships could likely be attributed to the lack of legal recognition available to same-sex couples (Kurdek, 2006) and to a reduced number of barriers to leaving a same-sex relationship (Kurdek, 1998).

Over a decade later, Rosenfeld (2014) found that relationship dissolution rates between same-sex and mixed-sex couples in committed "marriage or marriage-like" relationships were similar. Thus, researchers prioritized providing evidence that same-sex relationships were "similar" to heterosexual marriages to "warrant" the extension of equal marriage rights. Lawyers often referred to such research in their legal arguments for marriage equality (e.g., Lau & Strohm, 2011) and the American Psychological Association relied heavily upon Kurdek's research in preparing their amicus briefs supporting same-sex marriage (Pollitt et al., 2023). Differences that did emerge were often linked to stigma and discrimination, including the lack of access to legal spousal recognition.

The minority stress model (Meyer, 2003) became a focal theoretical framework to explain the differences between mixed- and same-sex relationships. The model helps explain LGBTQ+ health disparities, arguing that the additional day-to-day stressors associated with managing one's minority (and stigmatized) identity can take a cumulative toll on an individual's well-being. The model can also shed light on "couple-level" stressors that affect the relationship (LeBlanc et al., 2015). For example, two gay men walking down the street may not draw any negative attention from strangers until the specific moment when onlookers come to perceive the two men as being in a same-sex relationship, potentially due to sharing affection, such as holding hands. The relationship becomes the target of stigma and the tool through which the men's sexual identities become known (Blair et al., 2022).

Through the lens of the minority stress model, it becomes salient how a stigmatized identity or relationship type can contribute to reduced relationship well-being and, in turn, health and well-being consequences. Couples who perceive less social support for their relationships from their friends and family report lower relationship well-being and, in turn, reduced mental and physical health (Blair et al., 2018). While this is true for *all* relationship types, individuals in same-sex relationships consistently perceive lower levels of support for their relationships than those in mixed-sex relationships (Holmberg & Blair, 2016). The slow rollout of legal same-sex marriage in the Western world has provided opportunities for comparing relational outcomes between those with and without access to marriage. In 2011,

Badgett and Herman concluded that individuals in same-sex relationships with access to legal relationship recognition had lower levels of relationship dissolution, potentially due to a greater ability to garner support for their relationship from outsiders. Relatedly, Ogolsky et al. (2019) reported a decrease in psychological distress and an increase in general life satisfaction among LGBTQ+ people following the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling on marriage equality in 2015.

These findings are not limited to the United States; the legalization of same-sex marriage is associated with positive well-being outcomes for sexual minorities worldwide (e.g., Boertien & Vignoli, 2019). Indeed, the focus on marriage equality as a *primary* goal of LGBTQ+ community activism has lessened attention to advancing the rights of gender minorities and LGBTQ+ individuals who experience other sources of marginalization, such as racism, ableism, or femmephobia (see Chapter 11, this volume). Consequently, researchers and LGBTQ+ communities have questioned whether the general approach of basing the argument for marriage equality on "similarity" may have unjustly held monogamous heterosexual marriage up as a "gold standard" to which all other relationships must be measured. By focusing on the similarities between same-sex relationships and married heterosexual couples, scholars have given less attention to the areas in which same-sex relationships may be unique or face challenges unrelated to discrimination and stigma.

More recent research has begun to examine the strengths associated with same-sex relationships, such as how their freedom from sexual scripts provides greater sexual flexibility (Blair et al., 2015) or how the removal of gendered power structures results in more equal divisions of labor (van der Vleuten et al., 2021). Same-sex couples tend to maintain a sense of humor during conflicts, which is associated with relationship well-being and stability (Gottman et al., 2003). While these are positive differences, deficits also emerge. In fighting for one's legal rights, it can be difficult to shed light on perceived negative experiences for fear that outsiders will use such experiences against the community. With a more solid footing in the world of equal rights, research on negative differences between same-sex and mixed-sex relationships is now emerging. For example, some forms of intimate partner violence may be more prevalent within same-sex relationships (e.g., Messinger, 2011). Moving through the world with a marginalized identity and the associated lack of social safety (Diamond & Alley, 2022) likely contributes to such discrepancies.

Nonetheless, relationship scholars need to be open to studying the "skeletons in the closet" so that the field can better identify the needs of same-sex couples and develop tailored interventions. Love is love, but conflict is also conflict, and all relationship types can encounter difficulties. If there are meaningful differences in how those difficulties emerge or the processes best suited to ameliorating their effects, researchers must extend the use of research methods that are LGBTQ+ inclusive to all areas of relationship research.

CNM Relationships—What Is Next for Legal Recognition of Relationships?

Throughout the battle for legal recognition of same-sex relationships, one of the common reprieves from those opposed to "redefining" marriage was that the extension of relationship rights to same-sex couples was the beginning of a slippery slope that would eventually lead to the recognition of other "non-normative" relationships, including those between multiple consenting adults. When a journalist asked Stanley Kurtz, a senior fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, about his objection to the legalization of same-sex marriage, he replied that "the core issue here is not homosexuality; it is marriage. . . . Up to now, with all the changes in marriage, the one thing [we have] been sure of is that marriage means monogamy" (Kurtz, 2003, p. 9). When opponents challenged President Barack Obama on his support of legalizing same-sex marriage, he described thinking "about members of [his] own staff . . . in incredibly committed *monogamous* relationships, same-sex relationships" and about "those soldiers or airmen or Marines or sailors who are out there fighting on my behalf and yet feel constrained, . . . because they are not able to *commit themselves in a marriage*" (Earnest, 2012, emphasis added). In both cases, the argument for extending marriage rights to same-sex couples rested upon their participation in monogamous, committed relationships. Such sentiments also made clear that policymakers at the highest level viewed CNM as an unacceptable sexual deviancy that would deteriorate the validity of marriage. Consequently, advocacy for same-sex marriage walked a fine line of holding same-sex relationships up to a "heterosexual norm" to demonstrate sameness while simultaneously denying the legitimacy of what we now refer to as CNM relationships.

While monogamy remains the most common romantic relationship arrangement in North America and Europe, scholars have recently posited that the family system and the rules regarding romantic relationships are changing, with increased interest in, and awareness of, CNM relationships—relationships in which all partners give explicit consent to engage in romantic, intimate, and/or sexual relationships with multiple people. The desire to seek out and maintain relationships that deviate from the monogamous dyad reflects a cultural shift away from traditional Christian values and marital arrangements. Indeed, public interest in options beyond the monogamous dyad has increased dramatically (Moors, 2017). Such interest is reflected by heightened media attention, with shows like *You, Me, and Her* and *Shameless* including CNM storylines and providing exposure to relationship options beyond the monogamous dyad. Popular dating sites like OkCupid now allow users to identify as CNM, providing greater accessibility to finding others interested in non-monogamous relationship formations.

In the United States and Canada, approximately 4%–5% of individuals are currently in some form of CNM relationship, and 21.9% say that they have engaged in a CNM relationship at some point in their life (Haupert et al., 2017). According to a recent poll, about one-third (32%) of U.S. adults say their ideal relationship is non-monogamous to some degree, particularly among younger generations (Ballard, 2020). Although research on CNM is still relatively scarce, individuals in CNM relationships report high-quality relationships. That is, they tend to report high levels of relationship satisfaction, open communication, honesty, and trust coupled with low levels of jealousy, and they report highly satisfying sex lives with their partners (Balzarini et al., 2019b, 2021; Balzarini & Muise, 2020, for a review). Interestingly, the same qualities that characterize CNM relationships are analogous to those that characterize a secure attachment (Hazan & Shaver, 1987), the gold standard for relationships, according to adult attachment theory (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2009), representing the healthiest attachment style. However, across the research, stigma is one component of CNM relationships that sets them apart from monogamous unions (Moors et al., 2013).

Stigma toward CNM is robust, with 26%–43% of people in CNM relationships reporting experiences of stigma and discrimination (Fleckenstein et al., 2012). Such stigma is pervasive and extends beyond simply judging non-monogamists on their relationships. For example, in addition to viewing non-monogamists as less trustworthy, less passionate, and more distant from their partners, research participants also judge

non-monogamists to be less likely to pay their taxes on time, have good oral hygiene, or routinely walk their dogs (Conley et al., 2013). Thus, individuals in CNM relationships still face a great deal of stigma that influences how their relationships are perceived and how others judge them as individuals across multiple facets of life.

CNM relationships also lack legal rights and recognition. Historically, diverse relationship configurations and families (e.g., same-sex, interracial) have been criminalized and declared unfit to raise children. While many jurisdictions now protect the right to parenthood for same-sex or interracial couples, no protections specifically relate to a person's relationship orientation (e.g., monogamous vs. CNM) or status (e.g., single, one partner, multiple partners). As such, despite the frequent experiences of discrimination and stigma associated with their relationship type, individuals in CNM relationships have no legal protections or recourse when they experience discrimination. The lack of legal recognition alongside the lack of acceptance from friends and families results in many CNM individuals opting to keep their relationship structure secret or hiding aspects of their relationship from the public (e.g., passing as monogamous by hiding aspects of their relationships with others; Balzarini et al., 2017, 2019a).

The stigma that people in CNM relationships face can have detrimental effects on their health and well-being, as well as their relationships. Experiences of minority stress and stigma can be turned inward and subsequently internalized in the form of internalized negativity. Internalized CNM negativity includes fear of one's CNM identity becoming known publicly, discomfort with having a CNM lifestyle, and discomfort associating with other CNM individuals. Perhaps it is not surprising that CNM negativity is associated with diminished relationship functioning and a lower degree of relationship satisfaction (Moors et al., 2021). Furthermore, the internalized negativity and experiences of minority stress associated with a marginalized sexual identity are associated with adverse physical health implications and mental health concerns.

Research examining the effects of CNM suggests that CNM relationships are not harmful to the individuals who engage in them or to society, and yet, these relationships are not legally protected or afforded the same rights as others. Indeed, intermarriage, such as interracial marriage and same-sex marriage, was considered illegal in the United States and other countries, and there is now greater acceptance and rights for these relationships than ever before. As acceptance of CNM relationships grows, approaches to legalizing

and distributing rights based on relationship status may change to become more inclusive and adaptable to the realities of human relationships. Given research on the link between legal recognition and well-being for same-sex marriages, access to spousal rights, privileges, protections, and obligations would likely have a similar outcome for those in CNM relationships.

Conclusion

While marriage has not ended, it has starkly declined and has reached historically low rates in the United States and many other countries. Despite this, the institution of marriage has evolved to accommodate increased diversity and to maintain relevance in an ever-evolving family system. The diversification of marriage is apparent in the acceptance of and rise in interracial and same-sex marriages in the United States and many other countries (Rosenfeld & Kim, 2005). For those who have access, marriage continues to provide positive outcomes. One of the most robust findings in the literature is the role that our social relationships, including marriages, play in predicting our overall health and well-being (Umberson & Montez, 2010). Even recent research suggests that married people reap the rewards and benefits over and above individuals in unmarried relationships. For example, married people report greater trust and satisfaction with their partners than those who cohabitate (Horowitz et al., 2019).

Consequently, it is not surprising that policymakers have suggested that increasing the marriage rate could lead to greater societal well-being (e.g., Aber et al. 2015). However, the perks of marriage are not universal. Indeed, the positive links between marriage, health, and well-being are not equally distributed. People in poor-quality marriages often experience more health problems than single people or those who leave unhealthy relationships (Lawrence et al., 2018). The benefits of marriage also differ based on demographics, such that women often benefit less than men, and the effects of marriage are unequal across socioeconomic status and race (e.g., Drabble et al., 2021; Liu & Umberson, 2008). Indeed, the positive associations between marriage and well-being may reflect more the demographic composition of people who are more apt to get married. White, more educated, and financially well-off individuals are more likely to get married (e.g., Elliott et al., 2012), and thus these demographics may tip the balance in calculating the potential benefits of marriage itself.

If marriage does, indeed, provide benefits above and beyond other forms of relationship commitment (e.g., cohabitation), we must seek to understand the source of such benefits better. This chapter has focused on how marriage has changed and adapted over time, but it is also essential to consider the function of marriage in society and to understand what is unique to marriage that affords such perks. Is it that the *word* "marriage" and the title that accompanies it influence people's sense of commitment? Is it the legal rights and benefits that help secure these relationships? Could it be the resulting recognition and social support from peers and society? Alternatively, perhaps it is a combination of these things. We know that legitimizing a relationship is an important milestone and ritual event for many couples. Indeed, when individuals in stigmatized relationships (e.g., same-sex or CNM relationships) have commitment ceremonies or get married, this may positively influence the opinion of those who attend the ceremony (Liddle & Liddle, 2004). We also know that social support for relationships is an important predictor of relationship well-being and better health and well-being. The marriage ritual and legal recognition may help social network members "slot" a relationship into a well-understood script of commitment, thereby providing the schematic structure necessary for outsiders to understand and subsequently support a marginalized relationship (Pollitt et al., 2023).

As this chapter has discussed, the family system has diversified, and the institution of marriage has evolved to become more inclusive of the greater diversity in society and diverse relationships. Recent and historical changes to the institution of marriage demonstrate that social institutions can, and often do, change quite quickly. Indeed, the legalization of same-sex marriage, interracial marriage, and women's rights to end a marriage are developments of the last century. With the additional advancements in gender equality, fertility science, and drastic increases in life expectancy, it is unsurprising to see the fundamental structure of human relationships continue to change. CNM relationships are becoming more common but remain restricted in terms of access to the legal protections afforded by the institution of marriage. Although it seems unlikely that humans will forego the ritual and celebration associated with marriage any time soon, as we look ahead to the future, the boundaries around marriage are likely to continue shifting as humans continue to reconfigure and explore a multitude of relationship structures and experiences. With an eye to these future possibilities, researchers must continue to be novel in their approach to relationship science and seek to generate adaptive research methods that can accurately reflect and include

all the diversity that currently exists, as well as the diversity yet to come—did someone mention robots?

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