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## Introduction to the Special Issue on Marriage in the 20th Century in Western Civilization: Trends, Research, Therapy, and Perspectives

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THE purpose of this Special Issue of *Family Process* is to focus on what happened to marriage in Western Civilization in the 20th century. This has been a time of immense transformation in virtually every aspect of human life in the West, including the human family. A core tenet of early family systems theory and family therapy concerned the centrality of the marital dyad to the health and well-being of the family and its members. During the 20th century this dyad was also transformed.

In the first article, I address the major marital changes or trends, focusing primarily on the fact that during the last half of the 20th century, for the first time in history, divorce replaced death as the endpoint of the majority of marriages. I explore the causes or correlates of this death-to-divorce transition, reflect on what it might mean about the human capacity and inclination to pair-bond permanently, offer a set of precepts for building a new paradigm of pair-bonding that better fits the relational realities of today, and explore the implications of these precepts for social policy, family law, marital research, and couple therapy.

In the 20th century, for the first time, marriage and intimate relations in general also became the objects of scientific study. In the second article, John Gottman and Clifford Notarius delineate the process whereby marriage progressively moved into the purview of science. They explore the application of various research strategies to marriage, including self-report, observational and, most recently, psychophysiological

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methodologies. They also review the major findings from these research strategies and provide recommendations for marital research in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Along with the dramatic increase in divorce and its new status as an object of scientific study, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, marriage also became, for the first time, an object of psychotherapeutic intervention. Alan Gurman and Peter Fraenkel describe and explain the process by which marriage and intimate relations increasingly moved into the consultation room. After exploring the early stages of "marriage counseling," they delineate the proliferation of couples therapies, as well as some of the major influences on the development of specific approaches and the field as a whole. They conclude with recommendations and predictions for the conduct of couples therapy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

It would be impossible to talk about what happened to marriage in the 20<sup>th</sup> century without addressing the rise of feminism and the fundamental changes in the biopsychosocial roles of women. As detailed in the first three articles, feminism has been one of the most influential factors in the redefinition of marriage and the increase in divorce, as well as the study and treatment of marriage in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In addition to commenting upon and extending the discussions of feminism in each of the three initial articles, Cheryl Rampage identifies different stages in the impact of feminist beliefs and values on marriage, research, and treatment, and argues for the more complete integration of these values and beliefs in the future.

Lastly, no discussion of what happened to marriage in the 20<sup>th</sup> century would be complete without addressing the dramatic changes in marriage that occurred within the African American community. In certain ways these changes mirrored what happened to European-American couples, but in important ways they differed. Extending the discussions on this subject in the first three articles, Elaine Pinderhughes focuses on the extraordinary decrease in the marriage rate among African Americans in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and some of the major factors associated with that change. She attends particularly to the impact of the legacy of slavery and pervasive racism on African American marriage and gender roles, as well as the influence of contemporary social and economic factors. She argues for more thorough integration of historical and contextual factors into the theory, research, and treatment of African American couples.

Although none of the articles in this Special Issue explicitly make this point, they collectively and implicitly challenge the idea articulated above that the marital dyad is the central and, to some extent, the most important dyad in the family. As these articles reflect, the place of marriage within today's single parent, bi-nuclear and remarried families has gotten more ambiguous and complex. These articles clarify and explain many of the changes in marriage, marital research, and couples therapy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the West, emphasizing the need for new theory, research, and practice to take a more complex, multifaceted and diverse perspective on marriage, divorce, and human pair-bonding in general into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

