This paper provides an analysis of research designed to explore college students’ attitudes related to marriage. Seventy-seven students participated in this research. Findings from this study support previous research showing that college students considered marriage desirable and important. Outcomes from this investigation also align with the findings of previous research (Campbell and Wright, 2010; Servaty and Weber, 2011) that showed young adults continue to view marriage as a committed, monogamous, and lifelong relationship. These findings add to the limited knowledge base on emerging adults’ attitudes towards marriage. Applications for family and consumer sciences educators are included.

Introduction
Perspectives and practices related to marriage in the United States (U.S.) have their roots in the philosophies and practices of those who founded the nation we know today (Cott, 2000). Coontz (2006) discussed the changes in and romanticizing of marriage within our culture over time. A few previous studies (Campbell & Wright, 2010; Hppelin, 2016; Martin, 1984; Servaty & Weber, 2011) investigated college students’ attitudes toward marriage. This paper highlights an investigation that builds on prior research as it gauges family and consumer sciences (FCS) college students’ in Kentucky on their attitudes related to marriage.

FCS educators have the responsibility to study and understand how the definition of marriage is evolving and how families are changing over time as a part of the broader profession’s body of knowledge (Nickols, Ralston, et al., 2009). This research article has implications for FCS educators to use within courses to meet student learning outcomes related to National Standards for FCS Education (National Association of State Administrators of FCS, 2018), in particular two areas of study, Family (Area of Study 6.0), and Interpersonal Relationships (Area of Study 13.0).

Review of Literature
Martin and Martin (1984) investigated attitudes of U.S. college students regarding cohabitation, marriage and divorce, and marital and extramarital sexual relations. In their review of the literature, they discussed how marriage and family life have changed considerably since the industrial revolution. Much has changed since the
Cherlin (2004) suggested that a nationwide trend of “marital deinstitutionalization” existed. He noted that individuals within the U.S. viewed marriage as more of a lifestyle choice, rather than a milestone to adulthood at that time. Hippen (2016) argued that attitudes towards marriage have changed due to the addition of the life stage of emerging adulthood, a stage that “falls between adolescence and young adulthood and ranges from the late teens to the mid- to late- twenties” (p. 1).

The purpose of this study was to understand how the current generation of college students’ views are changing, or not changing, considering the recent groundbreaking court cases over marriage (see Obergefell v. Hodges, 2015, for example). Demographic trends also demonstrate a decline in marriage rates and changes in family forms (Miller, 2020). Society’s views of marriage seem to be changing: Are the views of today’s college students also changing?

By investigating college students’ opinions on an issue such as marriage, future trends within the family and society might be predicted. Trends among college students now can be compared to past trends, and this can indicate future trends. Since college students will soon be among the parents, teachers, and leaders of our country, it is important to investigate their perspectives. Hippen (2016) claimed, “research on marital and long-term relationship attitude change during emerging adulthood is absent in the existing literature” (p. 21). Therefore, this research has added to the limited knowledge base on emerging adults’ attitudes towards marriage.

The foundation for this study lies in a previous study by Servaty and Weber (2011), who researched the influence of gender on Midwestern college students’ attitudes toward marriage. This study includes college students from the Central and Appalachian regions of Kentucky. This research was guided by the following question: How do college students from Central Kentucky and the Appalachian region view marriage?

**Methods**

**Participants**

Participants consisted of 77 undergraduate college students from Eastern Kentucky University. Eastern Kentucky University is a regional, coeducational, public institution of higher education offering general and liberal arts programs, pre-professional and professional training in education and various other fields at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, and multiple doctoral degrees. Located in Central Kentucky, Richmond, Madison County, the university serves more than 16,000 students with 22 counties in the traditional Appalachian service region of Kentucky.

**Research Design**

The researchers used a descriptive research design to obtain the current status of young adults’ views on marriage. Data were collected via online self-administered questionnaires, which is an efficient way to gather data directly from students enrolled in higher education institutions.

**Data Collection Instrument and Procedure**

A survey developed by Servaty and Weber (2011) was used in this study. An online version of the survey was sent out to a random sample of 500 college students using a list of email addresses provided by the university. A cover letter was included explaining the research and the voluntary nature of the participation. An explanation was
also provided to the students, discussing the option to opt-out of taking the survey at any
time. Participants were provided with a link to continue, which took them to the online
survey. No personal identifiable information was collected, only general demographic
characteristics. However, skipping the demographic questions did not preclude the
participant from continuing to take the survey. Participants were also provided with the
option to not answer any question if they were uncomfortable. The survey included
opinion statements such as “one of my goals is to be married” and “cohabitation is more
popular than marriage.” Participants selected a response on a six-point Likert scale that
best reflected their opinion, which ranged from the choices of “strongly agree” to
“strongly disagree,” including options of “neither agree nor disagree” and “choose not to
answer.”

**Data Analysis**

Survey results were downloaded into an Excel file. There were no missing
responses for the marriage attitude statements. The responses (“Strongly Disagree,”
“Disagree,” “Neither Agree nor Disagree,” “Agree,” and “Strongly Agree”) were coded
with the numbers one through five, and univariate descriptive summaries were produced
using the statistical software package Minitab.

**Results**

Table 1 provides a summary of the students’ responses to the statements about
marriage. Counts and percentages are given for the five possible responses for each
statement.

**Discussion**

This study expanded the original Servaty and Weber (2011) survey of
undergraduate students at a Midwestern university regarding attitudes toward marriage.
The research was guided by the following question: How do college students from
Central Kentucky and the Appalachian region view marriage?

This study confirms the findings of Campbell and Wright (2010) and Servaty
and Weber (2011) that young adults continue to support the definition of marriage as
monogamous and lifelong, with a strong belief in having a committed partner and
disapproving of infidelity. Comparing the findings of this study to the findings of Servaty
and Weber (2011), most participants in both studies either agreed or strongly agreed with
the following statements:

- One of my goals is to be married
- Cohabitation is more popular than marriage
- The principal purpose of marriage is love
- Marriage should last forever
- Infidelity in a marriage is unacceptable
- Marriage is a monogamous partnership
- Personal fulfillment is a purpose of marriage

Additionally, the results of this study aligned with Servaty and Weber’s (2011)
findings that young adults do not agree that marriage is old fashioned, thus, making the
case that marriage is a viable social institution that is not becoming obsolete.
Table 1
Summary of Responses to Statements about Marriage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One of my goals is to be married.</td>
<td>2 (2.60%)</td>
<td>4 (5.19%)</td>
<td>9 (11.69%)</td>
<td>23 (29.87%)</td>
<td>39 (50.65%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohabitation is more popular than marriage.</td>
<td>1 (1.30%)</td>
<td>15 (19.48%)</td>
<td>21 (27.27%)</td>
<td>30 (38.96%)</td>
<td>10 (12.99%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The principal purpose of marriage is love.</td>
<td>1 (1.30%)</td>
<td>3 (3.90%)</td>
<td>5 (6.49%)</td>
<td>27 (35.06%)</td>
<td>41 (53.25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A fundamental purpose of marriage is to have and raise children.</td>
<td>10 (12.99%)</td>
<td>22 (28.57%)</td>
<td>16 (20.78%)</td>
<td>21 (27.27%)</td>
<td>8 (10.39%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage should last forever.</td>
<td>0 (0.00%)</td>
<td>4 (5.19%)</td>
<td>16 (20.78%)</td>
<td>23 (29.87%)</td>
<td>34 (44.16%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infidelity in a marriage is unacceptable.</td>
<td>0 (0.00%)</td>
<td>1 (1.30%)</td>
<td>5 (6.49%)</td>
<td>16 (20.78%)</td>
<td>55 (71.43%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage is old-fashioned.</td>
<td>27 (35.06%)</td>
<td>27 (35.06%)</td>
<td>14 (18.18%)</td>
<td>6 (7.79%)</td>
<td>3 (3.90%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage is a monogamous partnership.</td>
<td>2 (2.60%)</td>
<td>4 (5.19%)</td>
<td>5 (6.49%)</td>
<td>12 (15.58%)</td>
<td>54 (70.13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal fulfillment is a purpose of marriage.</td>
<td>2 (2.60%)</td>
<td>20 (25.97%)</td>
<td>19 (24.68%)</td>
<td>28 (36.36%)</td>
<td>8 (10.39%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage is needed for a civil society.</td>
<td>10 (12.99%)</td>
<td>21 (27.27%)</td>
<td>28 (36.36%)</td>
<td>15 (19.48%)</td>
<td>3 (3.90%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This study did not support Campbell & Wright’s (2010) and Servaty and Weber’s (2011) finding that individuals believe one of marriage’s purposes is to have children. A majority of the participants in this study either strongly disagreed/disagreed or neither agreed/nor disagreed. According to Hamilton, Martin, Osterman, and Rossen (2019), the number of live births and birth rate has been declining for the past decade and more 39 percent of all children are born outside of marriage in 2018. According to this report, the lowest birth rate in 32 years was reported in 2018.
For the statement, “Marriage is needed for a civil society,” Servaty and Weber (2011) found most males either agreed or strongly agreed, while the majority of females were undecided. For this study, most of the participants were undecided. This research also had more participants who disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement than participants in Servaty and Weber’s (2011) study. Servaty and Weber (2011) speculated that students may have not previously considered a connection between marriage and a civil society. This may also be the case with the findings of this research.

It is important to note that although most participants in both studies indicated that they either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “Infidelity in a marriage is unacceptable,” there was an interesting discrepancy within the data for these two items. For Servaty and Weber (2011), 13.6% males stated they strongly disagreed with the statement, “Infidelity in a marriage is unacceptable,” while no females strongly disagreed. However, for this study no males and nor females strongly disagreed with the statement, “Infidelity in a marriage is unacceptable.” With respect to the statement, “Marriage is a monogamous partnership,” many more respondents in Servaty and Weber’s (2011) research were undecided than those in who participated in this study.

**Implications**

This research has several implications for FCS educators. This research contributes data related to recent college students’ attitudes regarding marriage, thus providing up-to-date research on human development issues. This article describes a basic research project that can be used by FCS educators to introduce students to research methodology. The table in the data section is user friendly, thus making reading and understanding the research findings less daunting for FCS students. FCS educators can replicate the research study within their own classes to demonstrate how to conduct research and analyze data. Then, students could be guided through a discussion of the findings from their class research as it relates to the student's personal perspective regarding marriage and the student's personal answers to the questions.

This article can provide a starting point for FCS students to obtain questioning and reasoning skills, thus assisting students in meeting the Reasoning for Action standard as set forth by the National Association of State Administrators of FCS (2018). FCS educators can provide students with the information from the research article and utilize several of the Process Questions (National Association of State Administrators of Family and Consumer Sciences, 2018) for two Areas of Study, Family (Area of Study 6.0) and Interpersonal Relationships (Area of Study 13.0) to engage in class discussions or personal reflections. For example, students can discuss the findings of the research and explore how these attitudes could impact seeking out a mate or relationships in general. FCS educators can facilitate a class discussion of the most recent findings in light of previous findings or ask the students to write a critical reflection comparing the findings of this research to previous research. FCS teachers can ask students to retrieve information from previous generations and evaluate it by comparing to the current research, then discuss how the previous research was relevant to previous generations and how the current research can be applied in students’ lives today and in the future.

**Limitations**


This study has several limitations. First, the participants of the study were limited to college students at one university. Therefore, the sample size was small, and the results cannot be generalized to the overall population of college students. Another limitation was that the measures of attitudes toward marriage were limited in scope, thus allowing only for a limited set of responses. This also contributed to the limited types of analyses that could be used to assess the participants’ attitudes. Also, the response rate was 15.4%, so there may be some bias in the results due to nonresponse.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

Future studies can expand the knowledge base by surveying young adults from other geographical regions. Additionally, the research can be duplicated with a younger cohort, such as teenagers. Understanding geographic and cultural variability in attitudes toward marriage is important for local policy advocacy and for designing appropriate family life education programs.

As previously mentioned, there may be a relationship between the answers where participants disagreed in this study with the statement, "A fundamental purpose of marriage is to have and raise children," and the decline in birth rates or the number of children being born outside of marriage. We recommend further examination of these relationships in future research. Additionally, although differences exist in findings related to responses to items such as “Infidelity in a marriage is unacceptable” and “Marriage is a monogamous partnership,” these might be attributed to the difference in time in the study, we recommend that other factors such as the value base of the community where the research is conducted be considered.

**Conclusion**

It has been suggested that marriage, as a social institution within the U.S., may be vanishing due to changes in generational attitudes (Cherelin, 2004). Research has shown attitudes toward marriage to be desirable and important within the emerging adult cohort (Servaty & Weber 2011; Hippin, 2016). This analysis of a small group of college students’ opinions reveals that college students in the Central Kentucky and Appalachian region primarily view marriage as a viable social institution. Despite having fewer participants in this research, when the percentages from the answers are compared to Servaty and Weber’s (2011) results, very few differences were found between undergraduate responses at a midwestern university and undergraduate responses from Central Kentucky and the Appalachian region.

**References**


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**Citation**