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These Hmong immigrants in St. Paul, Minnesota, are celebrating the Hmong New Year, which also serves as a courting ritual. As in Laos, teenagers line up—boys on one side, girls on the other—and play catch with desirable potential mates. Catching the ball begins conversation. Tossing the ball gives girls a chance to meet boys under conditions approved by their parents. In Minnesota, however, the traditional Laotian black cloth ball is often replaced with a fluorescent tennis ball (Hopfensperger 1990, p. 1B). Because virtually all participants are Hmong, the ritual helps to ensure racial/ethnic homogamy.

education levels seldom marry those who are poor or who have low educational achievement (Fu and Heaton 2008). We know relatively little about religious, racial, or socioeconomic homogamy in cohabiting relationships, but we would presume—given the filtering process of assortative mating—that cohabiting couples exhibit less homogamy than married couples. All in all, at least with regard to marriage, an individual is likely to choose someone who is similar in basic social characteristics. We'll look at a hypothetical case to see why this is so.

## Reasons for Homogamy

Andrea is attracted to Alex (and vice versa), who is a college student like herself. Andrea's parents are upper-middle class. They live in the expensive section of her hometown, have a housekeeper, and frequently have parties by their pool. Catholic, they go to Mass every Sunday. Alex's parents are working class. They are separated. His mother lives in an apartment and works as a checker in a supermarket. The family believes in "being good people," but do not belong to any organized religion.

How likely is it that Andrea and Alex will marry? If they do marry, what sources of conflict might occur? We can begin to answer these questions by exploring

four related elements that influence both initial attraction and long-term happiness. For one thing, people often find it easier to communicate and feel more at home with others from similar education, social class, and racial or ethnic backgrounds (Lewin 2005). Alex is likely to have attitudes, mannerisms, and vocabulary different from those of Andrea. Each may feel out of place in surroundings that the other considers natural. Two other factors—geographic availability and social pressure—are important reasons that many relationships are generally homogamous.

**Geographic Availability** Geographic availability (traditionally known in the marriage and family literature as *propinquity* or *proximity*) has historically been a reason that people meet others who are like themselves (Harmanci 2006; Travis 2006). For instance, as the size of various immigrant communities in the United States grows, the geographic availability of eligibles in the same ethnicity increases, resulting in ethnic homogamy (Gowan 2009; Qian and Lichter 2007). Geographic segregation, which can result from either discrimination or strong community ties, contributes to homogamous marriages (C. Gallagher 2006; Iceland and Nelson 2008; Lichter et al. 2007). Inter marriage patterns within the American Jewish community are an example. Only about 6 percent of Jews married non-Jews in the late 1950s. Now that the barriers that used to exclude Jews from certain residential areas and colleges are gone, about half marry gentiles (Sussman 2006).

Geographic availability also helps to account for educational and social class homogamy. Middle-class people tend to socialize together and send their children to the same schools; upper- and lower-class people do the same. Unless they had met in a large, public university or online, it is unlikely that Alex and Andrea would have become acquainted at all.

Today, first encounters may occur in cyberspace, and people meet others as far away as other continents. Websites such as InterRacialMatcher.com facilitate heterogamy. However, the Internet may actually encourage endogamy among religious or racial/ethnic groups, who can advertise online for homogamous dating partners (e.g., allhispanicdating.com; asianromance.com; black-singles.com; christian.com; jewishconnect.com; meet-muslimsingles.com; see also Desmond-Harris 2010). Illustrating these points, Russel K. Robinson, a black gay man writing in the *Fordham Law Review*, describes his experience as follows:

Although I lived on the wealthy, predominantly white west side of [Los Angeles], the Internet created opportunities for me to interact with men in [less wealthy areas of the city]—men I almost certainly would not meet randomly while going through my daily routine....Even as the Internet increases romantic opportunity, it also channels interactions....Like many dating websites, Match.com