Chapter 5. Creating An Adult Lifestyle

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SUMMARY
Module 5.1. Singlehood

Creating an adult lifestyle that provides a measure of satisfaction and happiness can be difficult for many adults, and maybe even more so in today’s world in which there is more freedom to make choices that were not there for other generations. The difficulty is in making a choice without a good understanding of all that it entails and being surprised when it is not what was imagined. One’s life feels much different in the living of it, than it does in the imagining of it. On the other hand in the process of living a life, “choices” can be made without volition, in which a path is taken that leads in a direction not considered, but eventually becomes a lifestyle. Events in our lives can shape them in ways we do not anticipate, as we carry out our adult roles. Today, there is more diversity in how men and women live their lives than ever before; maybe even more so for women than for men. Men and women are moving in the direction of greater equality, but the movement has been slow, and the support of social institutions has not fully developed in keeping up with these changes, so the way forward is uncharted. One of the options for an adult lifestyle that has changed in recent years is singlehood.

Remaining Single

Currently more young adults are postponing marriage and remaining single in early adulthood than was true in the recent past. The median age at first marriage has been increasing from 20.3 years for women, and 22.8 years for men in 1950, to 25.9 years for women and 28.1 years for men in 2010 (Figure 5.1). Furthermore the rate of increase has been greater over the last two decades, and so far does not show signs of letting up. A large part of this change is due to the perceived need for a college education in preparing for a future occupation, extending the horizon for a future marriage by about four years.

Although, there might be a perception that parents are eager for their sons and daughters to wed and pressure them to marry earlier than they might chose, especially in the case of daughters, it is not accurate. When parents and their children were asked what was the right age to marry parents actually reported that they would like to see their children wait longer than they reported. College students put the right age for marriage at 25 years of age which the parents thought was too soon, primarily because of the need for more advanced education to equip their children for the future (Willoughby, Olson, Carroll, Nelson, & Miller, 2012). However, the mean age for the college students surveyed was 20 years and this could reflect that at age 20, they may perceive the future at age 25 to be very far off. It does seem to show a basic agreement between parents and children for a delay in when they will marry. Interestingly, the estimates of the right time to marry for both parents and children was below the ages men and women currently marry. Perhaps, as these students reach 25 there ideas of when to marry will change, and they will see more benefits in being single. Maybe after age 25 is when parents pressure their children to marry, we do not know. We may want to ask these same parents when their children reach age 25 and are unmarried, how they feel about their children delaying marriage.

The fact that couples are delaying marriage means that they will be older when they marry, and this can have a considerable impact on their union. Research shows that if one or both members of a couple are under 20 years of age, it is more likely that their marriage will end in divorce in the first few years than if they were over 20 (Schoen, 1975). The older ages at which the current cohort marries, could have a beneficial effect on the general quality of their marriages and decrease the current high rates of divorce.

Figure 5.1. Estimated median age at first marriage by sex: 1900 to 2010. U.S. Bureau of the Census.
We have been looking at this issue as delaying marriage, but perhaps we should consider that these young men and women are extending singlehood. Delaying marriage, has the effect of increasing the proportion of persons who are single at later ages when compared with persons from earlier cohorts. From 1970 to 2008, the percentage of single adults has more than doubled in almost all age categories from 25 to 44 (Table 5.1.1). The significance is that there are many more single young adults available with whom to interact with, and engage in pleasurable activities. For example, there are four times as many women, and three times as many men, who were single in 2010 as was the case in 1970 which in mind conjures up the idea—“Hey, let’s party.” Furthermore, the greater acceptance of premarital sex, the increased use of contraceptives and abortion to avoid unwanted pregnancies, and the increasing rates of cohabitation all have had an effect in decreasing the motivation of young adults to marry by making singlehood more palatable to their being able to form close relationships outside of marriage (Cherlin, 1990). Support for this argument comes from evidence of a change in attitude about singlehood toward viewing it as a lifestyle that can be associated with happiness. Both young adults and their parents are beginning to recognize the legitimacy of the single life-style, and do not view getting married as a prerequisite for being happy in one’s life (Thornton & Freedman, 1982). Although the pressure to marry may be reduced, the expectation to marry continues to function as a social norm, and those who remain unmarried are considered deviant. In line with this interpretation, a national survey of men and women 19 years and older found that persons became less happy with their status over time and showed declines in personal ratings of well-being if they remained single (Marks & Lambert, 1998). However, it should be noted that there is more than one interpretation of this finding, and that is that happy desirable people are more likely to attract people who want to marry them.

Reasons for remaining single differ depending on gender. Women who have never married have been studied more often than never-married men, perhaps because of a cultural prejudice that considers singlehood to be more of a problem when it occurs in women. Research contradicts this negative view. One investigator (Simon, 1987) studied a cohort of single women who reached adulthood during the period between the depression and the start of the second world war. Seventy-six percent of these women reported that they chose to remain single because it provided them greater freedom in their lives and allowed them to have a more satisfying career than what was afforded women who played the role of wife. Their belief, which was quite prevalent at the time, was that one must choose between a career and a family; a woman could not have both. They did not regret the choice they had made, and contrary to negative social stereotypes of single women, they lived active, satisfying and fulfilling lives. Obviously, this is not the situation that today’s women face, but the point that could be made was that this group of women were able to create a satisfying lifestyle for themselves that did not involve being married.

In general, never-married women are happier and psychologically healthier than never-married males (Newmann, 1986). They have a higher level of educational attainment than single men, and highly value their careers (Glick, 1984; Spreitzer & Riley, 1974). Differences between single men and women may be changing. A study of never-married women and men ranging in age from 35-64 found them to have quite similar characteristics, and there was no difference in their levels of education (Seccombe & Ishii-Kuntz, 1994). They also adopted similar patterns in their relationships with others. Both groups of men and women did not differ in the amount of time spent with friends and neighbors, which was considerably greater than married couples with whom they were compared. There was not a consistent pattern to describe single individuals, but they appear to be over-represented in the extremes of social interactions, being either isolated or interacting with others very frequently. The diverging patterns of single adults suggests that individuals accommodate to their lifestyles in quite different ways perhaps related to differences in their personalities, and that their ways of maintaining as satisfying life differ from those who marry.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>1970</th>
<th>2010</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Women:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 24 years</td>
<td>35.8</td>
<td>79.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 29 years</td>
<td>10.5</td>
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</tr>
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<td>5.4</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 to 44 years</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>13.8</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Men:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>20 to 24 years</td>
<td>54.7</td>
<td>88.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>25 to 29 years</td>
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<td>62.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>30 to 34 years</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>36.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>35 to 39 years</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 to 44 years</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>20.4</td>
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Chapter 5. To Love: The Development of Adult Intimacy

Module 5.1. Singlehood

Table 5.1.2. Percentages of first partnerships that were marriages. Source: Michael et al., 1994, p. 99.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1933-1942</td>
<td>84.5%</td>
<td>93.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1943-1952</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>75.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953-1962</td>
<td>46.6%</td>
<td>57.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963-1974</td>
<td>33.9%</td>
<td>35.3%</td>
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There have been relatively few studies investigating the single lifestyle or reasons for remaining single, so it is not clear if men and women make a deliberate decision to remain single, or if they slip into the lifestyle slowly over the years, and then accommodate themselves to that status. Past evidence suggests the longer one delays marriage, the more likely it is that they will remain single. Regardless of how one remains single or becomes single again after a divorce or death of a spouse, the percentage of single adults overall, has increased from 28 percent in 1970 to 40 percent of the population in 1996 (U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1996).

Cohabitation

Before 1960, most couples dated, fell in love and then engaged in minor sexual experimentation but few were as sexually active before marriage as today's cohabiting couples. Cohabitation has become an increasingly popular step before marriage during the 1960s and 1970s. In 1960, there were approximately 300,000 cohabiting couples, but by the end of the century the number grew to 7.6 million (Fields & Casper, 2001). The rapid growth created large cohort effects that can be seen in Table 5.1.2. Ninety-three percent of young women and 84% of young men born between 1933 and 1942, had never lived with another partner before marriage, but 30 years later, these figures dropped to 35% and 33% respectively for men and women born 1963 between 1974. Today, cohabitation has become so popular that it is displacing marriage as the first intimate partnership of young adults. In line with this conclusion is the finding that, although the age at which one marries has increased in recent decades, the age of the first union of a couple has remained fairly stable; it is just that younger cohorts are more likely to achieve it through cohabitation rather than through marriage (Michael et al., 1994).

Cohabitation has not been studied extensively in all age groups, and what information there is, focuses on young adults, although the number of cohabiting couples over age 55 have been growing as well. It is an arrangement that is quite varied in form. Cohabitation does not seem to be a life-long commitment, and fewer than half of male and female cohabiters expect that they will eventually marry their current partners (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983). On the other hand, more than 60% of couples who marry have previously cohabited (Stanley, Amato, Johnson, & Markman, 2006). About half of cohabitation relationships last two years and then they either end in marriage or break up. A few, approximately 10 percent, consider cohabitation a continuing long-term lifestyle and that the arrangement is unlikely to end in marriage (Stanley, Amato, Johnson, & Markman, 2006).

Although cohabitation entails no formal commitment between partners, as there is in marriage, cohabiting adults often slip into traditional marital roles, and comparisons with married couples show few differences in division of household activities, sexual satisfaction, and decision making (Bumpass & Sweet, 1989). On the other hand, there are differences in how financial matters and work roles are perceived. In general cohabiting couples believe that neither person is responsible for the financial welfare of the other, and work outside the home is expected of both men and women. There is a greater emphasis on equality and that each person pull his/her own weight. This is more difficult for women since they generally earn a smaller income than men and must contribute a greater proportion of their financial resources to achieve equality but this is rapidly changing (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983).

Cohabitation is usually a childless arrangement. Only about 10 percent of cohabiting couples have children living with them (Bumpass, Sweet, & Cherlin, 1991) and couples are reluctant to add children without being legally married. The presence of children appear to increase the length of time cohabiting couples stay together, an effect similar to what has been found in marriages (Wu, 1995), but it also introduces more stress in the relationship (Brown & Booth, 1996).

Cohabitation as a “Trial Marriage”

At first glance, cohabitation appears to be much like a trial marriage, and many believe it increases the chances of making a wiser and more informed choice of a marriage partner. Unfortunately the data do not bear this out. Young adults who have previously cohabited with their spouses before marrying are more likely to divorce than those who have not (DeMaris & MacDonald, 1993; DeMaris & Rao, 1992; Teachman &
Polonko, 1990), and couples who decide to cohabit after a divorce show greater relationship instability as well (Xu, Hudspeth, & Bartkowski, 2006). One group of investigators compared couples who cohabited before their engagement, with those who cohabited after their engagement, or after their marriage (Kline et al., 2004). The results showed that the first group had more negative interactions, lower relationship quality, and less of a commitment and confidence in the relationship than those who cohabited after their engagement or in marriage, results similar to an earlier study that also found a greater likelihood of divorce (Thomson & Colella, 1992). It might be counter-argued that couples who cohabit actually spend a longer time together, if time spent cohabiting is added to the time married and that this should be figured into measures of marital stability. However, even if the point at which two people begin to cohabit is taken into account, there still remains a greater likelihood that previous cohabiters are more likely to divorce than non-cohabiters (DeMaris, & Rao, 1992).

Reasons why cohabitation is more likely to lead to later divorce vary but it appears that couples who decide to cohabit may have different attitudes about relationships or else develop them during cohabitation. Women in particular have views of marriage that stressed individualism, that partners should be free to do as they please. These differences in values were greater the longer a couple had cohabited before marriage (DeMaris, & Rao, 1992). Generally investigators have concluded that cohabitation probably does not have a direct effect on future marital success but that it tends to draw people with more unconventional views and beliefs about relationships, which are related to their later marriages being unstable (Bennett, Blanc, & Bloom, 1988; Booth & Johnson, 1988; Thomson & Colella, 1992). Anthony Giddens (1992) has argued that the separation of sexuality from reproduction as a result of new contraceptive methods has lead to "pure relationships" in the modern era. Relationships are not supported or anchored by norms and traditions of society, but are maintained by the value of the relationship itself. However, these relationships are inherently unstable since they depend primarily on the good will of either partner and not on external institutions. A study of cohabiting couples in Canada by David Hall (1996) supports such a conclusion. Drawing on the work of Giddens, Hall compared marital and relationship attitudes of women who had cohabited before their first marriage with women who had not, and whether or not their attitudes were related to divorce. Hall replicated the finding that there was a greater risk of divorce among women who had previously cohabited. However, if he controlled for differences in attitudes about pure relationships among cohabiting women, premarital cohabitation no longer predicted divorce. In other words, whether one cohabits did not predict divorce, but the individual’s attitudes about relationships did. This makes sense. A cohabiting woman who enters a marriage with the belief that she has made a long-term commitment is more likely to have a stable marriage than a cohabiting woman who enters a marriage believing relationships are open-ended and subject to change. In addition, a person with more traditional attitudes about relationships is less likely to consider ending a marriage that is experiencing difficulties. It may also be the case that cohabiting, encourages couples to decide to marry, because the lifestyle creates an inertia toward marriage even though there are serious problems in the relationship. What some others have called “sliding” into a marriage rather than deciding on marrying (Stanley, Rhoades, & Markman, 2006).

However, persons who decide to marry before they cohabit have been found to possess more traditional views of the roles of men and women, have higher quality relationships with their partners, and act more similarly to their married counterparts (Brown & Booth, 1996). Kulu and Boyle (2010) tested the hypothesis that cohabiters and those who marry directly are self-selected populations, and that the pre-existing differences are responsible for subsequent breakups. They did this by first examining whether there was a difference between these two groups in marital dissolution and they found that there was. However, after they controlled for selection factors they observed that risk of separation was no longer greater in the cohabiting group but was actually lower than it was in those marrying directly. They argue that cohabitation may actually have beneficial effects as a "trial marriage." This study used retrospective data for the participants so it needs to be confirmed in a longitudinal setting.

Although differences in relationship attitudes and values of those who cohabit may explain why many later marriages fail, it could also be true that the experience of cohabiting perse may lead to the development of relationship attitudes and values that are harmful to relationships. Dush, Cohan, and Amato (2003) found that people who cohabited before marriage had poor marital relationship quality and greater relationship instability than those who did not. However, when selection factors were controlled cohabitation continued to show negative effects. They suggest the experience of cohabitation has a stronger effect than selection factors alone. When one enters a cohabiting relationship it may be viewed as temporary phase in a person's life rather
than as a legitimate alternative to marriage (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983). The couple fails to form a strong commitment with their partner, but instead adopts more of a wait and see attitude, and develops habitual ways of acting toward their partner which lead to later problems in a marriage. There is some evidence that the relationship between parents and their cohabiting children and their married children differs. In a study examining intergenerational support within families, children in cohabiting relationships were less likely than children who had married, to exchange support with their parents or to nominate them as who they would turn to in an emergency (Eggebeen, 2005). The author suggests that because parents view cohabitation as unstable relationship they are less likely to invest as much effort into supporting the relationship, and that they cohabiting children also see themselves as different from their married siblings. The lack of investment of the partners and parents in the union may spell its doom.

However, the increasing number of young adults who cohabit before they marry is showing no evidence of slowing down. As time goes on it is likely to take on more of the aspects of a marriage, and the expectations of people in cohabiting relationships and society at large will create new social norms and a more uniform understanding of what the relationship actually is and should become, and this may change the nature of cohabitation. The results of studies completed in the 21st century already show relationship between cohabitation and divorce has weakened (Reinhold, 2010). Researchers are becoming more aware of the variations in the forms of cohabitation and how it might affect relationship quality. For example, the 2006-2010 National Survey of Family Growth of over 20,000 men and women found that women who had cohabited with their first husband were less likely to have a marriage that lasted 20 years than those who did not but this had no effect on men who cohabited with their first wife (Copen, Campbell, Vespa, & Mosher, 2012). The difference appears to be related differences in the strong gendered norms that men and women possess when they enter these relationships (Huang, Smock, Manning, & Bergstrom-Lynch, 2011). It is also the case that the relationship between cohabitation and divorce changes if we consider couples who have only cohabited with their eventual marital partner, which suggests they may have been planning to marry before the arrangement. A meta-analysis of studies on cohabitation found that the correlation of cohabitation and divorce was not present in the above couples although it was still negative for the other couples (Jose, O'Leary, & Moyer, 2010). The experience of cohabitation for young adults may be moving in a more positive direction.
Module 5.2. Marriage

For some social commentators, marriage has become an anachronism that has outlived the usefulness it once had for its participants. They argue that marriage no longer meets the needs of modern couples and that the benefits a marriage provides can be attained through other relationship alternatives, such as cohabitation. Alvin Toffler (1970) argued that it is too much to expect that anyone can choose a person with whom they will be compatible over their entire adult life span and that maintaining a long-term marital commitment is improbable in a culture that does not value permanence in anything. Toffler believed that a serial marriage, with its pattern of marriage-divorce-remarriage, is best suited for our modern era. Despite the naysaying, the United States still has one of the highest rates of marriage in the world. The debate over whether marriage is in decline will continue, but what cannot be denied is that marital patterns are changing from what they were in the past. Current young adults take the decision to marry more seriously than previous generations who were more affected by “social clock” expectations of marriage and family in early adulthood. Up to the current time, ninety-five percent of males and females eventually married at some point in their lives and the vast majority did so in their early twenties. Part of the reason for these high rates of marriage may have been a generally negative impression of singlehood as a permanent lifestyle.

Love and Marriage: Changes in Marital Roles

The meaning of marriage has changed significantly during the 20th century moving from marriage as an institution based on the traditional roles in which there is a division of labor, for males as providers and females as caregivers, but in the context of companionate relationship of lover and friend (Cherlin, 2004). Although the emotional tenor of the relationship has changed it remains the only socially acceptable arrangement for sex and for raising children. The acceptance of the companionate style of marriage is evident in the answers given by college students to the following question: “If a boy (girl) had all the other qualities you desired, would you marry this person if you were not in love with him (her)?” This question was put to college students of three different cohorts and the results are very interesting (Simpson, Campbell, & Bersheid, 1986). Responses to this question by the oldest cohort was published in 1967, and they showed that males overwhelmingly reported they would not marry if they did not love the person. Females were not so sure; over two-thirds expressed that they were undecided. This same question was asked of more recent cohorts of college students in 1976 and again in 1984. In these later studies, both men and women voted with their hearts and said they would not marry someone if they were not in love with him/her. What is the reason for the change in the responses of women? The authors of the study suggest that societal changes which occurred after the first study led to greater social, economic, and legal independence of women, allowing them to be more romantically inclined in their decision as men seem to be. But this is not to say that love is the only consideration in a marriage. College students were also asked to express their agreement to a second question in 1976 and 1984: “If love has completely disappeared from a marriage, I think it is probably best for the couple to make a clean break and start new lives.” In this instance, men and women were less inclined to hold love as decisive in maintaining a marriage; 57 percent said they agreed with the statement in 1976, but this declined to 45 percent in 1984. Thus, love has become a very important ingredient for both men and women in entering a marriage, but they are other issues to be considered in maintaining a marriage.

Additional social changes occurring in the 1960s and beyond set in motion forces for further evolution in the meaning of marriage. Men and women began to marry later because of educational needs, women began to take advantage increasing work opportunities, and having a child out of wedlock was less stigmatized. Furthermore, people began to judge success of their marriages more in terms of their personal development and satisfaction and less on traditional roles. In the past, the husband in the marriage had greater authority and was given responsibility for decision making based largely on his role of provider for the family. Men were indulged because they worked hard for their families who depended on them for their welfare. The greater authority of males over females is now questioned, and the increasing number of women who work and receive respectable salaries has enhanced their power in their relationships. Andrew Cherlin (2004) calls this the individualized marriage in which a person seeks self-development and fulfillment and shows greater independence from their partner. These changes have led to what he calls a “deinstitutionalization of marriage” by which he means there has been a weakening the social norms that support and delineate spousal roles. This has led to a greater diversity in marital roles since there are fewer social norms to constrain the
development. Although this seems like a positive development at first blush it also means that there are fewer guidelines in the development of a marriage which can lead to more mistakes. Although men and women have become more equal in their marital roles, there still remains a residual cultural expectation that a marriage’s smooth functioning depends more on a woman’s efforts than on a man’s (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983). A Ann Lander’s response in her advice column is an example of that attitude (Box 5.1). Ask yourself how you would respond if the roles were reversed and it was Wilma being complained about by her husband.

**Box 5.1. Did Ann give good advice?**

A question suggested by this column is that Ann Landers may have been influenced by the attitude that women should make a greater effort to ensure their homes are welcoming places for their husbands, and that women who work are not good wives. In addition, Waldo is not responsible for the fact that he is acting in an inconsiderate manner toward his wife; its HER fault if he is. Would Ann Landers give the same advice if “Slow Burn” was the one who had a friend that monopolized her time? Read the column twice, once as it is and then substitute Wilma for Waldo and see if this helps to change your perspective on this problem.

**Dear Ann Landers:**

My husband, “Waldo,” gets a ride to work five days a week from a friend who lives in our neighborhood. The drive takes over an hour, and Waldo really does appreciate the ride. He has offered to pay his friend, but the guy refuses to accept any money. He does, however, allow Waldo to fill the tank occasionally.

Here’s the problem, Ann. Waldo and I see very little of each other because we both work long hours. This friend loves to gab. When he drives Waldo home, the two of them sit in front of our house for hours, talking and drinking beer. When I suggested he tell the guy he needs to go inside, Waldo became angry and said, “That’s why you don’t have any friends.”

Do you think it's me, Ann? Does Waldo owe this fellow hours of talk because he gives him a ride to work? I would appreciate your thoughts on this because I am doing a -- Slow Burn in Ohio.

**Dear Slow Burn:**

Would you prefer that Waldo sit in a tavern with his friend and drink beer? Face the facts, dear. Your husband enjoys the guy's company. He also enjoys the beer. P.S.: Maybe if you'd consider cutting back your hours at work a few days a week and "sweeten up," Waldo would come in the house sooner.


These social change in marriages can perhaps be best seen by comparing attitudes of different age cohorts. Carol Holahan (1984) used a time-lag design to compare attitudes of 70 year-old participants in Terman's study of the gifted when they were 30 with a younger cohort of 30 year-old participants who had similar characteristics. She found that persons in the more recent cohort at age 30, were more egalitarian in their role expectations for men and women than were participants in the Terman study when they were 30, but participants in the older cohort became more egalitarian over the 40 year interval, reflecting the changes that were occurring in society. Older women showed more change than men did. In fact the 70 year-old Terman women often responded to questions about marriage, family and work in a manner similar to contemporary 30 year-old women. Both men and women in the more recent cohort at age 30 show less marital satisfaction than Terman's older cohort did when they were 30. Although the women in the younger cohort had higher marital satisfaction they were more likely to have considered divorce than the older women. Men in both age cohorts did not differ from each other. It is difficult to determine what these results mean. Are marriages are less happy today than they were in the past, or has the increasing independence of women and the new roles and expectations of modern marriages created more friction. Regardless, these results suggest that today’s young adults function differently in their marriages than their parents or grandparents did (or do) and we should take this into account when making generalizations about the nature of marriage and how the perspective may change depending on the age of the respondent.

Other investigators have tried to assess if changes in marital roles have created more strain in a marriage. Stacy Rogers and Paul Amato (2000) used national survey data to determine whether there were changes in husbands and wives perception of marital quality in an age cohort married between 1964 and 1980, compared with persons in a more recent age cohort who were married between 1981 and 1997. Rogers and Amato found evidence that wives in the more recent cohort were more likely to work, to contribute a greater share of the household income and to have a greater influence in the marriage. Both husbands and wives of
the younger cohort reported less traditional gender-role attitudes and more housework was being done by husbands in comparison to husbands in the older cohort. However, there was a fly in the ointment. The younger cohort reported greater marital discord as measured by scales assessing severity of marital conflicts and marital problems, and divorce proneness. Did the shift away from gender traditional marriages create these problems? Rogers and Amato believe not. In fact, they found evidence that the contrary is true and that discord would have been greater had men not taken up a greater share of housework, and that unequal sharing of power was responsible for greater marital discord in both age cohorts. Instead, they believe increased demands of modern life, especially the conflict between work and family was the source of the problem. How is one to balance the demands of spouse, children, work and self in a day limited to 24 hours. It has become more difficult to balance family and work and society has not yet provided a ways to support these changes.

On a more positive side, young adults are more in agreement about marriage than in the past. When asked what they are looking in a wife or husband their responses were remarkable similar (See Table 5.2.1). The importance of family was pre-eminent for both sexes in their concern, as can been seen in the first three characteristics listed as very important. There are remnants of gender differences along traditional lines in the characteristics of education, income but they are not large, and it is interesting that both men and women now see being good at household chores as equally important (or should I say unimportant) characteristic in a partner. In all, the men and women show a remarkable similarity in what they believe is important in a prospective mate.

**What Makes a Good Wife and a Good Husband? Views from the Opposite Sex**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What young men say about a good wife</th>
<th>What young women say about a good husband</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good mother</td>
<td>Good father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93</td>
<td>91</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caring and compassionate</td>
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<td>88</td>
<td>89</td>
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<tr>
<td>Put her family before anything else</td>
<td>Put his family before anything else</td>
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<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good sexual partner</td>
<td>Good sexual partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well educated</td>
<td>Well educated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good at household chores</td>
<td>Provides a good Income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides a good Income</td>
<td>Good at household chores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Based on 136 men ages 18-29 and 140 women ages 18-29.

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Table 5.2.1. Source, (Wang & Taylor, 2011).

**Benefits of Marriage**

When two people marry they expect that the change will be mutually beneficial and that their lives will improve in significant ways. They may be right. A number of studies have linked being married with being happier and having greater physical and psychological health (Glenn, 1975). Rates of alcoholism, suicide, mortality and morbidity, schizophrenia, and other psychiatric problems are all higher in unmarried groups (Coombs, 1991). There are two competing hypotheses that can explain these results: The protection/support hypothesis proposes that marriage provides continuing companionship with a person who provides intimacy, emotional support and gratification, helping an individual to cope with the difficulties of daily living. On the other hand, the selection hypothesis postulates that the type of people who marry, are
more likely to already possess these positive characteristics that allow them to deal with stress more effectively. In this case, marriage does not provide any benefits, but it is more attractive to a healthier class of individuals. According to Robert Coombs (1991), the evidence more strongly supports the protection/support hypothesis. One of his arguments is that women, who are generally more supportive of their spouses, find marriage to be less an advantage in physical and emotional health than the men who are the objects of their support (Newman, 1986). In addition, although men receive a health benefit from a marriage regardless of its quality, women appear to be benefitted only when they are happily married (Carstensen, Graff, Levenson, & Gottman, 1996). Finally, the benefits of a union may not accrue to men who are cohabiting (Brown, Bulanda, & Lee, 2005). A study of middle-aged men and older found they reported more depressive symptoms than their married counterparts, whereas cohabiting and married women showed no differences.

One of the ways to rule out the selection hypothesis is to study marriages longitudinally and examine changes in mental and physical health that are related to changes in marital status. This strategy was used in the study of marital data from Lewis Terman’s study of the gifted (Tucker, Friedman, Wingard, & Schwartz, 1996). The findings of these investigators confirmed that people who are married, live longer than those who suffer separation or divorce in their lives, suggesting that once you leave a marriage its benefits no longer accrue. However, this does not rule out a possible selection factor in those who divorce or separate, furthermore, they found no differences in mortality in a group that had never-married. If marriage has a protective effect it would be expected that never-marrieds would have higher mortality rates, but they did not. Interestingly, men, and to a lesser extent women, who had experienced a marital breakup at some point, showed higher mortality risks regardless of their current marital status. This suggests that marital breakup is a very stressful event and can have a negative long-term impact on health even with remarriage. The investigators in this study suggest that while there may be a protective effect in marriage it is smaller than previously thought.

There is also some indication that the benefits of marriage may have decreased in recent years. Norval Glenn and Charles Weaver (1988) compared responses to annual national surveys conducted by the National Opinion Research Center from 1972 through 1986. One of the questions asked was: "Taken all together, how would you say things are these days--would you say that you are very happy, pretty happy or not too happy?" The authors found a significant decline in reported happiness for married women but a significant increase in happiness for never-married men over the time interval surveyed (Table 5.2.2). This last finding may indicate a more positive experience in being single in recent years. In their view, the differences between married and unmarried people have decreased, in part because socially approved alternatives to marriage are available that provide many of the same benefits. Although the benefits of marriage are real, they are not unlimited, and marriage can at times have negative effects as well. For example, a national survey of adults 19 years and older who were interviewed over a five year interval found lower ratings of personal growth and autonomy among those who married compared with those who remained single (Marks & Lambert, 1998).

### Changes in Marital Quality Over Time

When two people begin living as closely and intimately as they do when they marry, it requires a period of adjustment. Newlyweds are faced with unfamiliar situations and must make adjustments in their sex

### Table 5.2.2. Percentage of respondents ages 25-39 who said they were "Very Happy," by sex and marital status, 1972-1976 and 1982-1986. Adapted from Glenn & Weaver, 1988, p. 319.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Change</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1972-76</td>
<td>1982-86</td>
<td>1972-76</td>
<td>1982-86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never-married</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>+11.1</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>-3.7</td>
<td>42.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated or divorced</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>+3.1</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>-2.1</td>
<td>37.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Significant at the .05 level on a two-tailed test.
**Significant at the .01 level on a two-tailed test.
lies, in their roles as husbands or wives, in learning a new jobs, in sharing financial resources and household chores, and in learning to compromise, all of which can be quite challenging to say the least. But newlyweds, like dating couples, are likely to be much in love and are therefore apt to either ignore or fail to realize the extent of their partners' faults and failings. The changes in the lives of newlyweds help to explain why the positive feelings newlywed couples have for each other at the start of their marriage, begin to decline within the first year of living together. Both husbands and wives report feeling less satisfaction with their relationship, less love for their spouse, and in general, less satisfaction with married life after a year of marriage and wives' feelings decline more than their husbands’ (Huston, McHale, & Crouter, 1986). Lawrence Kurdek’s longitudinal study of marital satisfaction over the first 10 years of a marriage showed marital satisfaction declined fairly steeply in the first four years of a marriage, followed by a period of stabilization from years 4 to 8, which was then followed by second decline after the 8th year of marriage (Kurdek, 1998, 1999). There is evidence these declines in satisfaction can be traced to changes in the couples' interactions. The amount of time couples spend with each other generally remains fairly constant, but the type of activity shifts toward the mundane household tasks and away from the more pleasurable leisure activities. In the first year, the time spent together in leisure activity dropped by 20 percent. In addition, spouses reported the amount of time devoted to relationship building actions such as complimenting a partner, saying "I love you," making a partner laugh, and doing something nice for your partner, dropped by 40 percent. The early period in a marriage is a very busy time in the lives of newlyweds and makes demands on their time which may cause them to take each other for granted (Huston, McHale, & Crouter, 1986).

It is perhaps inevitable that marriages show a decline in satisfaction from the newlywed period since couple often start out extremely happy, but there are some consistencies in the way it occurs. In general, married men show greater satisfaction when assessing the quality of their marriages than do women, perhaps because they tend to be more idealistic about their marriages and may be more likely to deny marital difficulties (Weishaus & Field, 1988). Women are more realistic, and this may be why they express less satisfaction. Studies that have examined marital quality over the duration of married life have reported a U-shaped pattern (Figure 5.2.1) showing greater happiness early in the marriage, a decline in the middle part of the marriage when children are being reared and a recovering pattern of happiness later in the marriage when children leave and parenting roles decrease (Anderson, Russell, & Schumm, 1983; Burr, 1970; Rollins & Feldman, 1970; Rollins & Cannon, 1974; Thurnher, 1976).

Very few longitudinal studies have data bearing directly on this issue, but it was the most common pattern in Berkeley Older Generation Study (Weishaus & Field, 1988) which studied the surviving parents of the children in the Guidance Study and the Berkeley Growth Study mentioned in chapter one. Investigators in the Grant Study of Adult Development, a longitudinal study of promising young men attending Harvard between 1938 and 1942 (Vaillant & Vaillant, 1993), asked their subjects to evaluate marital satisfaction retrospectively and they also found a curvilinear relationship showing high satisfaction early in the marriage, dipping in the middle years, and recovering in the later years.

Judith Wallerstein (1994; 1996), in a pilot study of happily married couples, attempted to identify the psychological tasks that need to be accomplished in order for a marriage to remain happy and successful marriage (Table 5.2.3). Although further investigation is needed to verify the importance of these tasks, they provide a good description of some of the important issues in a marriage, and are given here because they describe important ways that couples need to work together to satisfy each others’ needs. Although some of Wallerstein's nine tasks of a marriage are more important at the
onset of a marriage, and others become more important at later stages. All of them serve important functions throughout a marriage. They are given here to show the variety of tasks entailed in a marriage that works.


| Task 1. | To separate emotionally from the family of one's childhood so as to invest fully in the marriage, and at the same time, to redefine the lines of connection with both families of origin... |
| Task 2. | Closely related to the initial task is the task of building togetherness based on mutual identification, shared intimacy, and an expanded conscience that includes both partners, while at the same time setting boundaries to protect each partner's autonomy. Continued tension between togetherness and separateness is at the heart of modern marriage. |
| Task 3. | To establish a rich and pleasurable sexual relationship and to protect it from the incursions of the workplace and of family obligations. |
| Task 4. | To integrate the daunting responsibilities of parenthood and to absorb the impact of the baby's dramatic entrance into the marriage while protecting the privacy and intimacy of the couple. |
| Task 5. | To confront and master the inevitable crises of life, and maintain the strength of marital bond in the face of adversity. |
| Task 6. | To create a safe zone within the marriage for the expression and resolution of differences, anger, and conflict. |
| Task 7. | To use laughter and humor to keep things in perspective and to avoid boredom and isolation. |
| Task 8. | To provide nurturance and comfort to each other, satisfying each partners' continuing needs for emotional dependency, encouragement and support. |
| Task 9. | The final task, which like the others runs throughout the marriage, is to keep alive the early romantic, idealized images of falling in love, while facing the sober realities of the changes wrought by time. |

### Predicting Marital Satisfaction by Marital Type

Empirical research on marriage has tried to identify marital types based on the characteristics of the married couples and correlating these types with measures of success. Describing marriages as basic types is difficult, but it is very useful in developing theories and stimulating further research into what makes marriages work.

The PREPARE/ENRICH Assessment Program attempts to type marriages based on the assessment of a couple’s relationship on a number of dimensions thought to be related to marital problems and conflicts. The dimensions assessed are: personality issues, manner of communication, conflict resolution, financial management, leisure activities, sexual relationship, children and parenting, family and friends, and religious orientation. Marital satisfaction and consideration of divorce were also assessed. Based on research of over 8,000 married couples who had been evaluated on a computerized assessment tool for married couples known as ENRICH, Yoav Lavee and David Olson (1993) generated seven different types of marriages of couples who had been married for 10 years, had 2-3 children, and 80 percent were in their first marriage. The couples had entered the program for either marital therapy or marital enrichment. The following descriptions of their seven types of marriages are given in increasing order of marital success.

**Type 1. Devitalized**, 40 percent. These couples were dissatisfied on every dimension of their marriage. They show the highest dissatisfaction of any type, and both husband and wife are the most likely to have considered divorce. They tend to be younger, have been married a shorter time, and have a lower income. More of them come from divorced homes, or have been previously divorced than couples from other marriage types.

**Type 2. Financially focused**, 11 percent. These couples are distinguished from devitalized marriages by their high agreement on a single relationship quality of financial strength, but they show dissatisfaction on
most of the other dimensions. Money and financial rewards appear to hold this couple together. There is a good deal of conflict in the relationship and they tend not to like each other's personality.

Type 3. **Conflicted**, 14 percent. Conflicted couples have more areas of satisfaction than the financially focused couples in external areas of their relationship, such as leisure, children and religion. Concentrating on these aspects of their relationship helps them avoid dealing with internal issues with which they show great dissatisfaction, such as the personality of their partners, communication, conflict resolution and sexuality.

Type 4. **Traditional**, 10 percent. Couples in types 4, 5 and 6, generally are moderately satisfied in most areas of their marriage. They usually have one problem area, and one or two areas of satisfaction. Traditional couples are not satisfied with their sexual relationship and communication, but show strength in satisfaction on religious issues and positive interactions with extended family and friends. The couple is not as critical of each other's personality as were the previous types. These couples tend to be older, and have been married longer.

Type 5. **Balanced**, 8 percent. Balanced couples show a quality relationship that is balanced in internal and external relationship issues. They communicate well with each other, and are satisfied with their ability to resolve conflicts. They show above average agreement on issues of leisure, child rearing, and sex, and place considerable value on the nuclear family. Financial management is the one area that they find to be a problem. They are moderately satisfied with most relationship areas, with particular strengths in communication and problem solving.

Type 6. **Harmonious**, 8 percent. They are highly satisfied with each other, their expression of mutual affection, and their sexual life. However, they appear self-centered. Children are viewed as a burden and they find the parenting role a source of distress.

Type 7. **Vitalized**, 9 percent.

They are highly satisfied with almost every dimension of their relationship. They are personally integrated, have strong internal resources, and agree in most external areas. These couples are older, and have been married longer than the other couples. They tend to be in their first marriages and come from families that were intact.

Couples in marriage types **Devitalized**, **Financially focused**, and **Conflicted** (1, 2 and 3), were more dissatisfied than couples in other marriage types, and were found to be considerably more likely to consider divorce (Table 5.5). Generally, women were less satisfied than were husbands in all seven marital types and were more likely to consider divorce. Depending on your views of marriage, you may be surprised at the sizeable percentage of marriages described as devitalized (1), and the rather low percentages of couples in the more satisfying **Harmonious** (6) or **Vitalized** (7) marriage types. It indicates that establishing and maintaining a marriage that is personally fulfilling and rewarding is difficult for most couples and achieved by only a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Type</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>X²</th>
<th>Rank Order</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marital Satisfaction (% Dissatisfied)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>39.7</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>394.0</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 6 5 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>57.6</td>
<td>45.8</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>284.1</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Think Divorce (% Yes)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>63.2</td>
<td>56.6</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>159.1</td>
<td>1 2 3 5 4 6 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>75.8</td>
<td>64.8</td>
<td>63.7</td>
<td>35.4</td>
<td>44.1</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>222.5</td>
<td>1 2 3 5 4 6 7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. p < .01 for all X² tests.*
minority. Even in the most successful type of marriage, labeled Vitalized, Lavee and Olson found that almost 1 out of every four wives considered divorce at some point in their marriage. It shows that even in well-adjusted marriages couples are not immune to problems, and that the presence of serious conflicts in a marriage do not necessarily indicate that it will fail.

An important question in the study of marriage is whether it is possible to predict happiness and stability in a marriage based on premarital characteristics of couples. Fowers, Montel and Olson (1996) identified the marital types of couples who were planning to be married employing a premarital version of the inventory used above by Lavee and Olson. The couples were followed for 2-3 years to determine whether they married, and if they did, whether their marriage were stable. Their findings appear in Table 5.6.

The results of this study are interesting for a number of reasons. First, some types of relationships are more predictable than others with regard to marital stability. Couples identified as Conflicted in Table 5.6 are likely to cancel their marriage plans or to be separated or divorced more than any of the other couples. These results strongly support the position that a couple’s premarital characteristics predict later marital stability, as well as the practice of premarital assessment and counseling for couples who are planning marriage to alert them to future problems in their relationship that can perhaps be ameliorated or so that the couple can be advised of the possible consequences if they were to marry. Second, premarital relationship types are also predictive of positive aspects of later marriages, such as marital satisfaction. A linear pattern of increasing percentages of couples who are satisfied moving up from Conflicted to Vitalized as predicted by marital type can be seen in Table 5.6. Finally, the particular pattern of characteristics making up relationship types is related to marital stability. For example, although more Harmonious couples have higher marital satisfaction than Traditional couples, their divorce rate is higher as well. The authors suggest that Traditional couples place greater importance on formal and traditional aspects of marriage, such as marital stability, influencing them to continue their marriage even though their satisfaction may not be high. On the other hand, Harmonious couples focus on interpersonal aspects of their relationship and are less tolerant of continuing an unsatisfying relationship.

A basic assumption behind research using marriage inventories in the above studies is that agreement on important personal and family issues and attitudes is very important in predicting marital stability. However, the work of John Gottman, to which we now turn, suggests it is not whether you disagree with your mate that makes you a candidate to dissolve your marriage but the manner in which you do it.

### Predicting Marital Success by Types of Marital Interaction

**John Gottman’s “Laboratory” approach**

In contrast to the Prepare/Enrich Assessment program, John Gottman and his associates have worked directly with couples in discerning the interactive processes inherent in marital relationships that lead to success or failure in a marriage. They have been innovative in their use of an elaborate lab used to simulate a "home-like” atmosphere of family, where they can observe couples interacting with each other. As part of their assessment couples are instructed to discuss three topics: events of the day, a pleasant topic, and a major area of disagreement in their marriage; this last discussion being particularly instructive in determining problematic and successful interactions. During this time the couple is videotaped and their interactions are coded on a number of dimensions, such as, their attempt to persuade their partner, negative (anger, disgust/contempt, sadness, fear, or whining) and positive affect (affection/caring, humor, interest/curiosity, or joy/enthusiasm). Each interaction is also coded in terms of whether has a positive or negative effect. In addition to videotaping

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Premarital Couple Type</th>
<th>Married Satisfied</th>
<th>Married Dissatisfied</th>
<th>Separated or divorced</th>
<th>Canceled marriage</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vitalized</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmonious</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflicted</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 5. To Love: The Development of Adult Intimacy

Module 5.1. Singlehood

the couples engaged in these interactions, Gottman also records their physiological responses in these interactions.

Gottman found that the couple’s interaction in discussing a problem in their marriage is especially predictive of trouble in a marriage. Women usually begin this conversation, and are generally more willing to push toward resolution of marital conflicts than are men. Men tend to respond to these discussions by reacting more emotionally based on physiological recordings, and attempt to end any conflict quickly (Levenson, Carstensen, & Gottman, 1994). Gottman believes that there is a biological difference between men and women which causes men to react more emotionally to conflict and to show a greater tendency to withdraw, whereas women’s greater tolerance for emotional arousal allows them to remain engaged when discussing important problems in their marriage (Levenson, Carstensen, & Gottman, 1994). This may be because by the time women reach adolescence they have spent considerably more time than men sharing their intimate feelings about relationships in their same-sex friendships, making them more able to begin such a conversation as Gottman has found, but also to withstand the discomfort that comes with it. However, the most important aspect of the discussion of problems between husbands and wives is the manner in which they are discussed and the outcome of these interactions which Gottman has found to be very predictive of whether a marriage will last.

Gottman's analysis of marital interactions allowed him to identify five marital types, to which were unhappy, unstable and prone to divorce and three others that were satisfied with their marriages and were stable (Gottman, 1993; 1994).

**Unstable marriages**

The two marital types identified as unstable and unhappy were called **hostile** and **hostile detached**. Gottman’s early research on marital interactions allowed him to identify 5 marital types that differ in the way they handle anger and conflict (Gottman, 1994). Couples who he labeled **validators** worked out their problems in a calm fashion to their mutual satisfaction. In conflicts, couples were able to communicate to each other that they considered their partner’s emotions valid even if they did not agree. On the other hand, couples labeled **volatile** frequently erupted in passionate disputes. In the third type of marriage, **conflict avoiding**, the partners rarely confronted each other about their differences. They avoided conflict and instead minimized their disputes rather than resolving them.

**Stable Marriages**

**Conflict Avoiding.** For these couples the desire to avoid conflict seem to be so great that the interviewers had a difficult time setting up the conflict discussions and showed very little emotional behavior. They were less inclined to work out their problems together, but felt it would be better if they worked out their problems separately or that in time the problems take care of themselves. They emphasized ways in which they agreed and expressed a desire to accept differences as not important and could be ignored. They rarely confronted each other about their differences. They seem to believe that once a spouse stated a position it should be accepted and end of discussion.

**Volatile.** Volatile couples contrasted sharply with conflict avoiding couples. They actively confronted one another and freely expressed their disagreement, and tried to persuade the other toward their point of view. They saw themselves as equals and believed it was important to be open about their feelings. Their marriages were passionate and exciting, and they show the highest level of negative interactions but also the highest level of positive interactions as well. These couples spend the most time trying to persuade the other of the rightness of their position. In their marriage individuality and separateness play a special role in something that they believe is positive in their marriage.

**Validating.** Validating couples seem to take a position in between the conflict avoiders and the volatile couples. They expressed emotion and conflicting positions during the discussion, in a calmer more easy going manner did then did the volatile couples, but were more direct than the conflict avoiding couples. They appear to validate and accept the other's position even though they may disagree with it.

Gottman’s three types of marriages are similar to those described by Fitzpatrick (1988) and their characteristics have recently been replicated by Kamp Dush and Taylor (2012), so there is some confirmation of their reality. If I had asked you to choose the marital type that you thought would achieve the greatest success in creating a marriage that continued over time I would expect that you would have chosen the validating couples because of their calm rational ways of approaching problems in their marriages. Gottman
(1993) believes this is the type of marriage held as an ideal in marital therapy. He makes the point that each of them has a particular flavor or tone, and as a result may not be appealing to everyone in terms of how each are experienced and have their own benefits and risks. Gottman (1993) speculates that volatile marriages appear to be quite passionate and romantic but because of their emphasis on independence it could degenerate into endless bickering. The validating marriage is much calmer and more companionate, but this could lead to treating your spouse as merely a good friend and losing the strong positive emotional feelings of being romantically involved. Finally, the emphasis on avoiding confrontation in an avoiding marriage could lead to an emotional distance that is unsatisfying and leading to feelings of loneliness.

What is especially interesting about these three types of marriages is that they appear to be equally stable and one is not more prone to divorce than the other. This is very interesting since there is a great deal of conflict expressed in the volatile marriages and very little in the conflict avoiding marriages. Gottman found that in unstable marriages such as the Hostile, and Hostile detached negative interactions led to their downfall, why was this not the case in Volatile marriages. Gottman discovered that when comparing negative and positive affect expressed in the stable marriages a balance seemed to be struck between positive and negative affect so that if negative affect occurred it would be compensated by interactions that were positive. What was really quite remarkable is that they seem to be a ratio that predicted stability in a marriage of 5/1. This meant that in volatile marriages in which there is more conflict there was also many more positive interactions in order to maintain the ratio, where is in conflict avoiding marriages there is little conflict and positive affect was also reduced. This contrasted greatly with the Hostile and Hostile Detached marriages where the ratio was less than 1/1. A ratio of 5 to 1, in positive interactions to negative interactions, was a key dynamic in stable marriages. If the ratio dropped as low as .8 to 1 the marriage was headed for divorce course court (Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998; Gottman & Levenson, 1992). This also tells us something about the powerful corrosive effect of negative affect in a marriage since the ratio has to be so high to counteract it.

**The Role of Anger in a Marriage**

Gottman has spent considerable research effort examining negative emotions in a marriage. Gottman (1991) finds not all expression of strong negative emotions is equally damaging to a marriage. Surprisingly, the emotion of anger by itself, which has often been assumed to be harmful in a relationship, does not appear to predict divorce. In fact, Gottman believes it can have a positive effect on a marriage if it leads to a better understanding of the other's position and needs, and can even help enkindle feelings of passion by preventing couples from taking each other for granted. Gottman found that reciprocating anger after receiving it from one's spouse is so common, that it was unlikely that it ever ceases to exist in a marriage (Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998). Most partners find it difficult to "turn the other cheek" when they feel they are unjustly criticized, and there is not much stopping negativity from expanding once it begins. However, angry confrontations per se are not indicators of a troubled marriage, but rather how the anger functions within the context of a particular marriage, and that analyzing when and how anger occurs allows him to be 90% accurate in predicting whether the couple will stay together for the next 3 to 5 years ("Making relationships work"). Although engaging in conflicts may create some dissatisfaction and negative feelings in the short run, it can bring a long-term gain in future satisfaction (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989). Other marital investigators have made similar comments. Markman (1992) found that a couple's success in resolving negative issues was a better predictor of marital success than is the frequency of shared positive emotional experiences. Thus the goal should not be to do away with anger in a marriage completely, which is probably impossible, but to use it effectively and to control its negative consequences. What appears to actually hurt a marriage is how much the displeasure and dislike each partner harbors for his/her spouse is expressed in negative emotions.

**Gottman's "Four Horsemen"**

In most marriages, negativity is often excused early in the marriage, but if left unchecked, it can have an increasingly corrosive effects on the feelings spouses have for each other. Continuing negativity leads to increasing dissatisfaction over the first year of a marriage, and it is a better predictor of the health of the relationship and of later marital problems, than is the expression of feelings of love (Huston, McHale, & Crouter, 1986). Gottman has identified four forms of negativity that are especially harmful in marriages. Since Gottman thought of them as signs of impending doom in a marriage he labeled them the “Four Horsemen” (Gottman, 1994). As each new horseman appears in a marriage, it creates the circumstances for the arrival of
the next more destructive type, and the marriage moves ever closer to disaster as the couple becomes more and more entrenched in their dysfunctional ways of interacting with one another.

**Criticism.** It is unlikely that couples can avoid criticizing each other completely, but it becomes harmful when criticism becomes a personal attack on one's character ("You are so selfish") rather than focusing on the behavior that is creating the problem ("Why can’t you spend more time with me?"). In the "kitchen sinking" kind of criticism, all the negative things you can imagine about your partner are brought up in a long series of complaints that exacerbate the conflict. A tell-tale sign of criticism is phrases such as "you never" or "you always." Gottman differentiates criticism from a legitimate complaint about your partner's behavior even though both are expressed with anger and disagreement. Complaints can be healthy for a marriage in the long run, especially if positive change occurs. Trouble arises when the complaints continue to be ignored.

**Contempt.** Criticism crosses over to contempt when the intent is to insult and to psychologically abuse your partner. This can be done through name-calling ("You are an idiot!"), hostile humor, mockery, or body language, such as a sneering smile, or a rolling of the eyes. Criticism changes your view of your partner. You no longer remember their positive qualities that made you fall in love with them, instead, you dwell on negative thoughts of your partner’s stupidity or incompetence.

**Defensiveness.** When couples become defensive they make matters worse. Neither is willing to take responsibility for problems in the marriage, and they both feel they are victimized by the other, and deny responsibility for their role in the problem, and instead make excuses for any complaint their partner has about their actions. If their partner complains, they immediately hurl back a complaint of their own. Couples can get bogged down in defensiveness, and begin to repeat themselves and their own position over and over again rather than trying to understand their partner's perspective.

**Stonewalling.** The final horseman is a serious step toward dissolution of the marriage. This is because a person stonewalling is withdrawing psychologically from the relationship making it more difficult to reach them, or to motivate them in bringing about positive changes in the marriage. Once stonewalling becomes habitual, their marital satisfaction plummets. Couples who become detached and withdrawn are living parallel lives, well on the road to divorce. Men are more likely to engage in stonewalling as a way to reduce the stress they feel, and women find it is especially upsetting to be on the receiving end.

**Controlling Conflicts**
In their study of 130 newlyweds over a 3 to 6 year period Gottman and his associates found ways to help avoid the negative effects of conflicts. They did not find that the expression of anger, or reciprocating a spouse's negative emotion was related to divorce; the expression of strong emotions is characteristic of all marriages even those that are happy. However, couples who eventually divorce are more likely to begin discussing their disagreements with what they labeled negative startup, usually by the wife, which escalates the conflict quickly from neutral affect to negative affect through criticizing and complaining. The husband responds by stonewalling the spouse's attempts to influence him and to withdraw. If a wife cannot re-engage her husband in the relationship, she withdraws as well, and the marriage is headed for separation and divorce (Gottman, 1998; 1991; 1994; Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998). Although the wife may make her contribution toward divorce by being negative at the startup, the husband exacerbates the problem by rejecting any of her attempts to influence him and by escalating conflict with higher intensity negative affects of his own, such as the "four horsemen" as well as a fifth that Gottman labels belligerence in which a spouse challenges the other spouse's power and authority. For example, a husband may say, "I am going out with the boys, and what are you going to do about it?" When this point is reached, the marriage is nearing its end. Couples in stable marriages react differently when discussing an area of disagreement. Women in these marriages tend to express complaints to their husbands in a "softened startup" or less negative manner, and as a result (or because) their husbands are more willing to accept their influence and try to decrease their wives' low intensity affect by responding positively, or suggesting a compromise.

Gottman (1994) suggests strategies to avoid the "four horsemen" in a marriage. The first is to try to remain calm when conflicts occur. If anger becomes too great you can become flooded with emotions and find it difficult to hear what your partner is saying and to understand their perspective. Secondly, learning to listen and to speak non-defensively counteracts the tendency to escalate the argument to damaging levels. Empathizing with your partner in an effort to understand his/her point of view does not mean you have to agree with him/her, but if you can manage to discuss the problem without feeling the need to defend yourself or to
act in a way that encourages retaliation from your partner, the conflict can be beneficial for your marriage. Gottman suggests a good method is to cultivate a positive mind set toward your partner and to remember to express the praise and admiration you usually feel toward him or her even when you may be angry. This is easier when a partner avoids focusing on the negative, so that the good qualities a spouse may have can be recognized. In addition, couples in stable marriages use more positive affect to help de-escalate conflict, such as expressing validation of their partner’s point of view, or expressing affection for them. Humor which can and does occur in the midst of disagreements has a soothing effect on both partners, but especially on the husband. Finally, Gottman recommends couples keep trying until they overlearn the skills in communicating without the negativity expressed by the horsemen. He believes that no matter the style of marriage a couple adopts, if the basic ingredients of love and respect are present, the marriage will remain stable.

Gottman finds that successful couples emphasize the positives in their marriage by engaging in acts that they believe will please their partners, such as complimenting them or agreeing with them when they raise good points in their discussion. “They try to say ‘yes’ as often as possible” (“Making relationships work”, p. 46). Gottman believes that men who are capable of being influenced by their wives experience much different marriages from men who find this difficult, but if they remain unwilling to share power with their wife they face a 81% chance their marriage will self-destruct (“Making relationships work,” 2007). In a related study, wives who reported that it was very easy to raise issues with their husbands (and that they usually changed) were much more likely to report being “extremely satisfied” in their marriages. More interestingly, the husbands of these wives also reported being “extremely satisfied.” Other studies have found that overall marital satisfaction is related to how well wives thought their husbands knew them and were aware of what emotions they were feeling (McQuillan & Ferree, 1998). These results indicate a couple's knowledge and responsiveness to each other, and, perhaps especially that of the husband, are very important factors in happy marriages.

What Do Successful Marriages Look Like?

The voluntary commitment of two individuals to each other in marriage can lead to one of the longest lasting human relationships and with greater numbers of individuals reaching age 65 and beyond, it is becoming quite common for couples to reach their 50th wedding anniversary, an achievement that was rare just a few decades ago. The ability of a couple to maintain a loving, vibrant and interesting relationship over a lifetime is obviously of interest to those studying adult development, but not all long lasting marriages are examples to be envied. Some couples continue to stay together even though their marriage gives them very little in the way of happiness or personal satisfaction.

The expectations of couples who enter marriage can often be unreasonably high since marriage is thought to be necessary for self-fulfillment and that one's marital partner is the key in accomplishing that successfully. Unfortunately, the effort involved in two people learning to live happily together, is often underestimated, especially if they suffer from what might be called "perfect mate's disease." People who suffer from this malady imagine that there is someone "out there" who is perfect for them in every way and who can make them infinitely happy, in a life filled with romantic bliss. Unfortunately, they married Sam or Harriet, who “intentionally” makes their life miserable every chance they get. They opine: "If only I would have chosen more wisely, life would be so much easier and I would be happier." It may be true that Sam or Harriet are difficult people to live with, but the expectation that married life is easy, if one chooses the right mate is unrealistic. A key ingredient in making a marriage work is the commitment a husband and wife make in their willingness to work through problems that come up. All marriages have difficulties, but those that last are helped in getting over the rough spots by their commitment to work together for “better or worse.”

However, it takes more than commitment to make a marriage happy and satisfying as Robert and Jeannette Lauer (1986a; 1986b) found in their study of successful marriages. They defined success as having been married for more than 15 years in forming a sample of 351 couples. The number of years these couples had been married ranged from 15 to 61, with a median of 25 years. Although in the vast majority of these marriages both partners reported they were happy (85 percent), in 9 percent of the marriages, one of the partners described their marriages as less than happy. In an additional 5 percent of the marriages, one of the partners said they were unhappy to some extent. In other words, not all "successful" or I should say, long-lasting marriages are necessarily happy. When asked why their marriages was successful, couples in the happy group chose: "My spouse is my best friend," and "I like my spouse as a person." These were the top two responses. The response was "marriage as a long-term commitment" was important but it was number three. It
appears that when people in happy marriages are asked why their marriages were successful their initial reasons are the positive aspects of their spouses which make them happy, and commitment is there but in the background. This was in marked contrast to the unhappy or mixed marriages who rated the long-term commitment response as number one reason for staying together. Although not more than 10 percent of partners in happy marriages mentioned children as a reason for staying together, 19 percent of those in mixed happiness marriages and 47 percent of those in unhappy marriages did. Commitment is important to both types of marriages in helping them stay together but it plays a different role in making them happy.

The happy couples also showed phenomenal agreement, in ranking reasons for staying together. Among happy couples, the same seven reasons were listed as important, but amazingly in the same order as well!

My spouse is my best friend
I like my spouse as a person
Marriage is a long-term commitment
Marriage is sacred
We agree on aims and goals
My spouse has grown more interesting
I want the relationship to succeed
(from "Marriages Made to Last," Lauer and Lauer 1986.)

Having such similar goals was likely not only to reduce conflict in their marriages but also to give them the feeling that they were pulling together to make their marriages successful. People in long-term marriages that are happy or distressed, each develop an abiding trust or distrust which has the effect of biasing how they perceive their mates and how they interpret their behavior for better or worse. Luchies et al. (2013) found that the greater trust in the romantic partner the more positively they remember their partner's transgressions in terms of their severity or consequences. This bias with specific to their partner and not a general tendency on their part to be more forgiving. It is likely that something similar works in the relationship of long-term partners and that years of positive marital interactions brings with them the greater likelihood that your spouse will be biased to perceive you in the best possible light, or the worst possible light if it goes the other.

**Looong Term Marriages**

The increasing average life expectancy over the last century has led to an increase in the average length of a marriage. Currently, one in five couples celebrate their fiftieth wedding anniversary (Dickson, 1997). There has been very little research on these long term relationships, but what there is, depicts a generally positive picture. The research is generally cross-sectional, and the historical differences in current older couples may not be duplicated in the marriages of future cohorts as they age. The privations of the Great Depression or World War II experienced by these older couples may have taught them to be more willing to be satisfied with the state of their marriages than what is expected today (Dickson, 1997). There is also a methodological problems that makes comparisons troublesome. Couples in long-term marriages appear to be more compatible and happier not because of lessons learned and applied in their marriages but because a selection factor was operating. Couples who stay together for fifty years may need to be happier by nature, to allow them to remain together, and measures of success in marriages of an older quite different cohort, may not be valid (Dickson, 1997). Fran Dickson identified four common characteristics among couples who had remained happily married for 50 or more years:

“The happy couples tended to:
(a) happily married later-life couples report that during their years together they have developed a mutual family vision, which usually takes the form of a plan or mutual desire that the couple develops on how they would like their life together to be;
(b) these couples report that they put their spouse before all other activities, people or things, making their spouse the most important person in their lives;
(c) they treat each other with respect, politeness, and kindness; finally,
(d) these couples have learned how to manage comfortable levels of intimacy and distance in their
One might think that a couple that has remained together for 50 years or more would be happily married by definition, but Dickson found that some of the couples, even people who managed to remain together for so long, were not happy. Why would they remain together in a relationship in which there was no love or satisfaction? Dickson found that unhappy couples also shared similar characteristics in their marriages but they were quite different from those who were happy:

“The dynamics are quite different for the unhappy later-life couples. These couples tend to have four common characteristics:

a) they report that while they were unhappy for many years in their marriage, divorce was not an option--it was common for women to report this more than the men;

b) many of these couples were highly religious and believed that you marry for life;

c) the women felt that they had financial security in their marriage and would not be able to obtain employment or financial security if they were divorced;

d) these couples also maintained high levels of emotional and physical distance, at least in the later years of their marriage. One characteristic of this distance is that these couples did not have high levels of conflict, even though they had high levels of unhappiness (Dickson, 1997, p. 262).”

In comparing the sets of characteristics for each group, one is struck by the timelessness of the characteristics for happy marriages and could describe happily married couples regardless of cohort membership or age of the marriage. The characteristics for the unhappy, long-term marriages are more time bound or cohort bound, and many of the reasons, such as religious beliefs against divorce, are no longer so prevalent. Divorce is definitely an option today, and women’s roles have changed so that women are no longer so financially dependent on their husbands. Perhaps these changes will make for fewer unhappy, long-term marriages in the future.
Chapter 5. To Love: The Development of Adult Intimacy

Module 5.3. Parenthood

In the last few decades there has been a shift in couples having fewer children at older ages than their parents and grandparents. Currently, fertility rates for women are much lower than they were during the late 1940s and 1950s. During those decades, the average woman had 3.7 children compared with an average of 2.0 in 1992 (Skolnick, 1997), which is about the current average. The decision of today's young couples to have fewer children at a later time in their marriages or no children, has encouraged a companionate style of marriage in which there is a greater focus on the relationship of the couple than was true for their parents or grandparents (Skolnick, 1997). In addition, more women are remaining childless. In 1976 10% of the women aged 40-44 were childless but this has increased to 18% in 2008 (Pew Research Center, June 25, 2010). The increase in childless women has been accompanied by a change in public attitudes. Fewer adults disagreed with the statement “that people without children ‘lead empty lives,’” 39% in 1988, than the 59% who were asked this question in 2002, and they see children as less central to a successful marriage (65% in 1990 versus 41% in 2007). Although educated women remain the group most likely to be childless, in recent years the percentage has decreased as women began to consider single parenting. Fewer women in this group have remained childless decreasing from 31% in 1994 to 24% in 2008. This likely reflects a positive change in attitude about the place of children in the lives of women who pursue professional careers, and more people seeing it as normal and appropriate, with or without a husband.

We know very little about the lives of people who choose to remain childless. One study, (McAllister & Clarke, 1998), does provide us with some information from interviews with 34 women and 11 of their partners, between the ages of 35 and 49, who made this choice. For most of these women, the decision was not made early as a conscious choice, but took place gradually as they formed their lifestyles and partnerships and determined that being childless was most likely their future course. They were not anti-child but considered the responsibilities and the changes in their lives that children would necessitate such as constraint on their lives and financial obligations was not something they wanted.

I find that students like to point to childless parents as examples of couples that are unhappy because they do not have children in giving their reasons for wanting to have children, but there is a flaw in thinking their thinking. Because couples who are childless and couples with children, are groups whose members are self-selected, each group has reasons, characteristics, predispositions etc that caused them to decide either to have children or to remain childless, and we can not determine if their happiness is determined by the presence or absence of children or one of other the self-selected characteristics on which they differ. Interestingly, childless couples are not anti-children and tend to have positive views of children. Their reasons for not having them are the specific experiences of parenting that they do not want to take on, the decline in marital relations, negative effects on careers and the lifestyles they wish to pursue and the added responsibilities that come with children (McAllister & Clarke, 1998).

Making a Decision on Whether to Become a Parent

Most parents see their children as very positive influences in their lives (White, Booth, & Edwards, 1986). The Carolyn and Phillip Cowan, a husband and wife team who have studied the effects of children on marital relationships write:

As they gave birth, each parent began to report astonishment at the intensity of feelings--about the baby and about what was happening to their relationship as a couple. Many parents reported that the powerful feelings they were experiencing about their baby were unlike any other emotions they had felt... Virtually all of the parents described this new, intense relationship as one of the most exciting, fulfilling, and complex they had experienced, but they were exhausted from the ongoing state of excitement, fatigue, and disequilibration of struggling to master the requirements of new parenthood while attempting to carry on with their pre-baby roles and responsibilities (Cowan & Cowan, 1997, pp. 24-25).

Most people’s views on parenthood are that we love children and that they make us happy. This belief is so strong and supported by our biology and our culture that we resist efforts to change this perception, and we may even become upset when we read contrary evidence. Even researchers are not immune to this effect.
and feel a need to write a defense of parenthood when they believe it is attacked (see Nelson, Kushlev, English, Dunn, & Lyubomirsky, 2012). One of those who has criticized the overly positive view of parenthood, is the psychologist Daniel Gilbert (Gilbert, 2006a; Gilbert, 2006b), who maintains that the belief that parenthood is wonderful is supported for a variety of reasons, other than the actual experience of parenting. First, parents have expended so much effort and expense for their children that they rationalize these costs by believing they are repaid by the joys children bring them; secondly, their memories give them faulty comfort by focusing on the positive experiences with their children, by emphasizing “peak” experiences with them e.g., child’s first step, first time they cuddled, first time they said “I wub u,”; finally, our focus on children leaves little room for other experiences that might bring us happiness. Child give us the most joy because so much of our time and effort revolves around them.

One way to diffuse this issue is to realize that our views on parenthood are really divided into two parts: our feelings which make up the intuitive global view of parenthood, what we just considered, and our feelings about the specific activities involved in parenting that we assume give rise to a positive global view of children. Most of us think that they two must be strongly correlated but it turns out that they are not. One can love children in a general abstract sense, and not appreciate good parenting practices because in the concrete, they demand self control, persistence, unwavering positive regard for the child, and they can be uninteresting and boring for adults. It is not logically inconsistent to have different attitudes about these two domains. Daniel Kahneman, one of the few psychologists to win a Nobel Prize, has been interested in assessing the activities that people declare makes them happy. In our case, if we say that being a parent is wonderful and rewarding do we find that the actual experiences of “taking care of one’s children” makes us feel very happy and fulfilled.

Kahneman and his colleagues (Kahneman, Krueger, Schkade, Schwarz, & Stone, 20040, examined mothers’ assessment of their childcare experiences using the Day Reconstruction Method (DRM). In their study, 909 women were asked to reconstruct their memory of their previous day, by giving the sequence of events that occurred, the times they began and ended, and the particular affect they were feeling during that experience. The results were both interesting and surprising. When mothers are asked to give a global estimate of how they feel when they interact with children compared with other activities, it often tops the list of enjoyable activities, however, when Kahneman used the DRM to get the mothers’ ratings of specific episodes when they were "taking care of one's children," it ranked 12th on the list, just below "preparing food," "on the phone," and "napping" but above "working," "housework," and "commuting." To many this was a stunning finding and one that was hard to accept for many people, maybe for some of the reasons given by Daniel Gilbert. Why should they be rated so low. Well if you are honest, it is probably is true. If you do not have children of your own what was your experience the last time you babysat. There is a reason why they paid you. Your global estimate of how much you love to interact with children is often based on an ideal concept, whereas Kahneman was assessing an actual experience. Think of it this way; you might consider a college education makes your life more fulfilling and interesting (global estimate), but you may not feel particularly fulfilled or interested when studying for exams (specific experiences).

The idealization of parenthood was the focus of a study completed by Richard Eibach and Steven Mock (Eibach & Mock, 2011). They designed a scale to measure parenthood idealization by asking parents how much they agreed with 8 statements such as: "Parents experience a lot more happiness and satisfaction in their lives compared to people who have never had children," and "Nonparents are more likely to be depressed than parents." They reasoned that if the ideal, parents possessed about parenthood were threatened by receiving negative information about how children affect a parent’s life, they would experience cognitive dissonance, the feeling that occurs when you entertain contrary beliefs, and that they would respond by endorsing the ideal more strongly. To test whether this occurs, they had one group of parents who received information about the financial costs of raising children, and a second group that received this same negative information, but also positive information about the benefits of having children. They hypothesized that the first group would experience cognitive dissonance since it threatened their beliefs about parenthood, but not the second group since they received positive information which compensated for the negative information. Both groups were than given the Parenthood Idealization Scale. The results confirmed their prediction. Parents who were only given the cost of children idealized parenthood more strongly, presumably to bolster positive beliefs about parenthood, but the other group given both negative and positive data about children did not. In a second part of this study, parents were given only information about costs of children which challenged their beliefs, reported greater enjoyment of the time they spend with their children and that they intended to spend more
leisure time with them in the future. This would be expected if their ideal was threatened.

Because I am a developmental psychologist I am bothered by these results but not for the reasons you might think. In my experience I find a great many undergraduates are subject to idealization of parenthood, and believe that it would be great to have a child as though parenting will always be positive, and without thinking about the parenting activities that are necessary for good childcare, which they may not enjoy or even dislike. Doing these things well is necessary to really make parenthood joyful, Perhaps your being aware of how idealization of parenting works will change that.

**Children’s Effects on Marital Quality**

The entry of children into a marriage brings about changes that are often unanticipated by the new parents. Everyone knows that children need a great deal of care, new parents may not realize how much or that it must be provided around the clock. Children create unforeseen repercussions on their lifestyles, since time is finite, and the time caring for children must be taken from somewhere else. Unfortunately, it may be taken from the time previously spent caring for the relationship, such as the conversations couples have catching up on each other's days, or the romantic nights out for dinner. In addition conflicts can develop between spouses because the increased time spent caring for a child may require a renegotiation over the division of labor that had been established in the household during the childless years, which now must be changed. Furthermore, financial expenses for childcare increase concerns over money while decreasing the money available for activities and objects that were sources of mutual pleasure (Belsky, Lang & Huston, 1986; McHale & Huston, 1985). Relationships with the couple’s parents can change. Grandparents are usually helpful and supportive, but they can appear to be critical to new parents who are doing their best to cope with a flurry of new roles and tasks, and can resurrect long buried feelings over conflicts with one's own parents, creating emotional confusion and awkwardness for the new parent. Further adjustments are needed if the mother has been working outside the home and decides to quit her job in order to care for her child full-time. This means separating her from important sources of support, friendship, and social stimulation that could be helpful in dealing with the stress of raising a child. Because so many of the biological and social changes affect women more directly than men they are more likely to find parenthood more stressful (Glenn, 1990).

Because there are so many changes that occur with the arrival of a child, investigators were interested in how it affected the couple's relationship. The first study to examine this issue found that 83 percent of 46 middle-class couples reported they suffered an "extensive" or "severe" crisis in adjusting to the birth of their first child (LeMasters, 1957). Although recent studies have not found that children create the severe crises of this early study, there is persistent evidence that the arrival of children often has a negative effect on the perceived quality of marriages. Numerous studies over several decades, that used both cross-sectional and longitudinal designs, have found fairly substantial decreases in marital quality between preparental and postparental families (Glenn, 1990). A criticism of these studies had been that since children usually come later in the marriage, their arrival is confounded with the decline in marital quality that occurs with the passage of time (McHale & Huston, 1985; White & Booth, 1985). However, in longitudinal studies that have controlled for length of marriage by comparing childless couples and couples with children, there is still a decline in marital quality that is directly related to the arrival of children (Belsky & Kelly, 1994; Cowan & Cowan, 1992).

Carolyn and Philip Cowan have been trailblazers in studying the effects of children on a couple's relationship. They became interested in the topic after experiencing a period of marital strain in their own marriage after they became parents. In their Becoming a Family Project (Cowan & Cowan, 1992, 1997), the Cowans followed 72 expectant couples longitudinally from the seventh month of pregnancy until the child reached approximately 6 years of age. In addition to couples who were parents, they also included 24 couples that had not decided to have children as a control group. The couples were visited regularly and given in-depth interviews and questionnaires. One-third of the expectant couples were randomly chosen to participate in a couples group for six months during the transition to parenthood to see if this intervention would ameliorate some of the problems associated with having children.

The Cowans’ own work and their examination of data from subsequent studies, such as Jay Belsky's investigation of couples in Pennsylvania called the Penn State Child and Family Development Project (Belsky, 1994), led them to conclude that at least 50 percent of partners who become parents experience stressful changes in the marital relationship that may be related to an increase in the divorce rate of 15-20 percent that is observed during the early years of parenting (Cowan & Cowan, 1997; Cowan & Cowan, 1992). How much
parenthood had affected these marriages was related to how the couples had decided to have children. About 50 percent of the couples had planned the pregnancy together and welcomed the event. Another 15 percent of the couples said the pregnancy was unplanned or accidental, but they willingly accepted it. A third group of 17 percent were ambivalent about the pregnancy all the way through to delivery, and a final fourth group, containing 17 percent of the couples, disagreed with each other over whether they should have a child. One member was enthusiastic or determined that it should happen while the other was feeling they were not ready, but was trying to maintain the relationship. Of the nine couples in this last category, seven of them were instances of the husband not wanting the pregnancy. Of the four groups, two of them responded quite differently in their transition to parenthood. Planners did quite well in making a satisfactory adjustment to being parents, but those couples who had disagreed over the pregnancy plummeted in marital satisfaction 18 months after the birth. By the time the child was 5 years-old, all seven of the couples in which the husband had not wanted the pregnancy were separated or divorced.

Having children, of course, requires much more work and effort on the part of parents that can be stressful, but much of the stress for many new parents is not anticipating how much children can upset daily routines. Belsky and Kelly write:

Some recent figures explain why the reality of a baby's impact is so much greater than the expectation. Typically nonbaby tasks, such as dishwashing, increases from once or twice a day to four times, laundry from one load a week to four or five, shopping from one expedition per week to three, meal preparation from twice a day to four times, and household cleaning from once a week to usually once a day. Nursing chores add further to the workload. On average a baby needs to be diapered six or seven times and bathed two or three times per day, soothed two or three times per night and often as many as five times per day. His helplessness also transforms once-simple tasks into complex, time-consuming ones. 'These days,' said one new father, not bothering to hide his exasperation, 'going out for ice cream is like planning a moon shot. First I have to check Alex to see if he's wet. Then I have to wrestle him into his clothes, then into the stroller. Next I have to pack an extra diaper in case he wets himself and a bottle in case he starts acting up (Belsky & Kelly, 1994, p 33).

Parents’ Changing Perceptions of Themselves
As a way of measuring some of the internal psychological changes in young couples, Carolyn and Philip Cowan asked couples to describe themselves by completing a "pie" exercise. The "pie" was a five inch circle that represented each of them individually, and they were instructed to divide it into pieces according to how much it represented important aspects of themselves, such as "lover," "parent," "son/daughter," and so on. This exercise was completed before and after the birth of the child to assess changes that occurred with becoming a parent. In contrast to childless couples, who showed remarkable stability in their self concept as measured by the "pie" exercise, couples who had become parents described significant and often unexpected shifts in how they perceived themselves. Both husbands and wives showed an increase in viewing themselves as parents, but the increase was twice as large for wives as it was for husbands. On the other hand, the parts that described them as lovers or partners, decreased in size, but more so for women than for men. Couples reported that intimate conversations and love making declined because of the demands for childcare, or because of changes in how they felt about themselves after becoming parents. Intimacies in a marriage often help to bind two people together and make it easier to traverse the rough spots. When these activities decline, it may be more difficult to attribute the best motivations to your partner. The greater priority women place on the welfare of the child can also create misunderstanding or resentment in husbands. A husband interviewed by Jay Belsky is a good example:

...Last Sunday, while Ellen and I were lying in bed, I reached over and touched her. She'd been half asleep, but as soon as I put my hand on her breast, she bolted upright, pulled a sheet over her and said, 'Don't. Not now. That's for Jonathon.' Believe me, if I ever had any doubts about her priorities, that incident cleared them up in a hurry. (Belsky & Kelly, 1994, p. 40-41.)

Add this to the importance the new mother now gives to spending time with in-laws and other female friends who provide her with help in nurturing skills, and the new father may feel further alienated and that he is on the outside looking in.
Division of Labor in a Marriage

Housework and Child Care

Because the birth of a child increases the workload in the household you might expect that it leads to a more egalitarian arrangement of household chores. That does not happen, instead, the division of household and family tasks becomes even more traditional; husbands begin to work longer hours, and mothers increase their share of the household work. In one study, the wives' already healthy proportion of housework shifted from 67 percent to 79 percent (McHale & Huston, 1985). Childcare is much the same. Cowan and Cowan (1997) found women reported putting in five times the hours in child care related tasks as men. This is not what the wife expected would be the case before the child was born, and the greater the discrepancy between what she expected before she gave birth and the reality afterwards, the more unhappy she is likely to be, and the size of the disparity was directly related to the decline in their marital satisfaction (Cowan & Cowan, 1997). Fights increasingly reflected the issue of who does what, and it became the greatest source of conflict in the marriage (Belsky & Kelly, 1994; Cowan and Cowan, 1992).

Men may not be aware they are not pulling their fair share of housework because they evaluate their efforts by comparing themselves with their fathers, who were likely to have been less involved in both child care and housework. These mental comparisons are made by others as well, and at times lead to men being given more credit for what they accomplish than they deserve. A husband who occasionally makes a meal and changes a diaper may be complimented for being a very involved father, but nothing like this happens to a woman who does the other three-fourths of the work. These sentiments are expressed in the comments of a young couple that participated in the Jay Belsky's Pennsylvania Child and Family Development Project.

Husband (with some self-congratulation): “My dad is always telling me and my brother he never changed a diaper in his life. I change them all the time, and I think I'm a better parent and a better husband for it.”

Wife (after husband left the room): “David knows his father never helped his mother, and since he gives me a little help, he thinks he's Mother Theresa. The truth is, I do about eighty percent of everything. You know what really burns me up though? The way David acts when his parents visit. Usually he does a little more then, and of course they think he's wonderful. 'Wow,' his dad keeps saying, 'I never did any of that stuff.' Ohhh, when I hear that, I'd like to take the pair of them... (Belsky & Kelly, 1994, p. 34.)

The pattern of housework and childcare is also very different. Women take on the unrelenting, repetitive chores that need to be completed daily, such as cooking, cleaning, and laundry, whereas men do the infrequent, irregular tasks such as household repairs and yard work. This allows men to have a break and to do most of their chores on weekends, while women do them each day (Thompson & Walker, 1989). Not surprisingly, the housework that women find most pleasant, such as cooking and child care, is often the work men are most willing to share. Mothers typically bathe, feed, and dress the child, whereas fathers tend to spend more time playing with them. Husbands are more likely to care for children during evening hours while wives are cleaning up after dinner, but as soon as the clean up has been completed, women regain the responsibility for child care. The style of parenting also differs between men and women. When men care for their children they are less intimately involved with them than their wives. Women monitor their children more closely, and spend more time in the physical care of the child and are more likely to sacrifice their free time in order to provide the continuous coverage that children often require (Thompson & Walker, 1989).

In some ways, men's engagement in housework is more in the nature of "helping out" rather than in taking full responsibility for the tasks that need to be done. Menus need planning, groceries need to be purchased, dishes need to be washed, schedules need to be coordinated, doctors appointments need to be made, laundry needs to be done, the list is never ending. These chores, usually done by women, are for the most part in the background and are a less obvious part of her work load, and they are noticed only when they are not done.

Why Gender Inequities Persist

Why do they put up with such a lopsided arrangement in sharing household and child care tasks? One explanation is that housework has a different meaning for women than for men. Cultural expectations for men and women play a role in the division of labor. Although women do not enjoy the endless menial labor of
housework, they may take satisfaction in knowing they are doing these things for people they love, and the essential role they play for their families. Under these circumstances they are more likely to perceive the unequal distribution of work as fair (Hawkins, Marshall, Allen, 1998). The role of caregiver is encouraged for a woman and they are more likely to experience a greater psychological reward in caring for their family, especially if their husbands appreciate the work they do for them. In fact some women prefer the arrangement. They think males as deficient in household abilities and pride themselves in being superior in this vein. Sarah Allen and Alan Hawkins (1999), labeled these women in their study as gatekeepers because they identified strongly with the mothering role, viewed male and female roles as differentiated, and had high standards for how housework needed to be done, but low expectations of their husbands. Gatekeepers worked five more hours per week in the home than did other women who were more collaborative with their husbands, and the discrepancy in the number of hours they worked in the home as compared with their husband was largest (eight hours more). I suspect that some men are willing to play the role of “incompetent helper” to the “boss of the house,” if it relieves them of responsibilities for the household chores. However, it is also the case that there are psychological benefits for fathers who follow cultural expectations. Schindler (2010) found that fathers who were more involved in parenting and provided greater financial contributions for their family, the male provider role, realized an improvement in self-efficacy, self-esteem and a drop in psychological distress over a five year span.

Despite cultural expectations, the majority of men and women believe husbands and wives should share the housework, and an even greater percentage (80 percent) think child care should be shared equally. Not all couples are satisfied with a gendered division of labor and most wives benefit psychologically and the quality of their marriages is more positive, if husbands share more of the burden of household labor (Thompson & Walker, 1989). Research on young couples between the ages of 25 and 30 with one child, suggests that wives are more satisfied with the division of labor if husbands show their concern by working together with wives to complete tasks and have a good relationship with their children, and the couple has higher marital satisfaction even if the division is not equal (Galovan, Holmes, Schramm, & Lee, 2013). There appears that there is much to be gained for young men in playing productive fatherhood roles.

The extent to which inequalities in sharing housework are disruptive to marital quality depends on the degree to which it is perceived as “unfair.” Wives who are egalitarian in their beliefs about marriages are more likely to perceive inequality as an inequity, and the quality of their marital relationship is more likely to suffer, whereas a traditional women, in a home with a traditional division of labor does not (Greenstein, 1996). Conversely, men who have traditional sex-role attitudes but have to share the housework with their wives show greater marital dissatisfaction (MacDermid, Huston, & McHale, 1990; McHale & Crouter, 1992). Luckily, the marital dissatisfaction in men with incongruent sex-role attitudes and behavior decreased over time. However, marital dissatisfaction for the incongruent women who were non-traditional did not (McHale & Crouter, 1992). It may be that men who share housework with their wives, even though they at first may not want to, begin to realize that it is only fair that they do so, or perhaps, their wives are more likely reward them for their efforts. Advice to males about household chores was best expressed by a priest who officiated at a wedding of one of my students, who gave this advice during his homily, “No husband was ever assaulted or murdered by his wife while doing the dishes.” There also may be a problem if the change in division of labor is introduced as a change in the marriages. Marital quality decreased for women who adopted less traditional gender role attitudes over an 8 year interval in their marriage, but increased for men who adopted less traditional gender role attitudes (Amato & Booth, 1995).

The division of labor in marriages that our culture has socialized in men and women is changing slowly, and will continue as we move toward marriages of greater equality, but it might not necessarily mean that men have to make up the difference in workload. Ferree (1991) has pointed out that women's high standards for housework are associated with lower participation from husbands and more hours of work for herself. She suggests that women should reduce the extent to which they care about such standards, as an important practical step toward greater domestic equality. It may be difficult for some women to make such a change, since cleanliness in a home is a reflection of a woman’s competence, but not a man’s, and she may be more invested in maintaining high standards (Allen & Hawkins, 1999). However, changes such as these may be already occurring. Men’s increase in hours of housework showed the greatest increase in the 70s and 80s and has since remained fairly stable whereas women’s hours continue to decline (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robinson, 2000). It may be that men’s changing lifestyles of remaining single for longer periods necessitated their doing more housework in order to take of themselves and that women’s increasing activity in the work
force has necessitated that she decrease her standards. This has served to move in the direction of more fair
distribution of hours of housework, but there is still a long way to go.

**Making a Good Adjustment to Parenthood**

Generally the couples who made the best adjustment to parenthood were those who were doing well in
their relationship before becoming pregnant. Jay Belsky's investigation of Pennsylvania couples who became
parents replicated many of the findings of the Cowans, but there were other new findings as well (Belsky,
1994). Belsky observed that about half of his sample showed a decline in marital quality, but approximately
30 percent showed no change and another 19 percent showed a positive change over time (Belsky & Rovine,
1990). Husbands and wives who experienced a decline in their marital relationship were younger, less well
educated, married for a shorter period of time, and earned less income. The time around the birth is especially
important in how well couples adjust to being a parent, and it is related to the manner in which husbands and
wives respond to each other during this time. John Gottman and his associates (1998; Shapiro, Gottman, &
Carrière, 2000) also found that although wives tend to show steeper declines in marital satisfaction when they
became mothers, and not all women were affected. Thirty-three percent remained stable or even increased
in satisfaction compared to 67 percent showing declines. In this case, husbands played a pivotal role in
maintaining marital satisfaction after the birth of their first child. These husbands spontaneously expressed
their fondness and admiration for their wives, and used the inclusive "we" or "us" when referencing themselves
indicating their togetherness. They also showed an extensive knowledge of the details of their spouse's
everyday lives; all characteristic of a very strong, stable, and loving relationship.

Because so many couples have very little knowledge or personal experience in how a child affects a
marriage, they are taken by surprise by the extent of the changes that occur, and the more negative experiences,
such as the decline in marital satisfaction, are unanticipated. Jay Belsky and Emily Pensky (1988) have
suggested that educating prospective parents on the effects children have on a marriage would be beneficial in
their adjustment to parenthood. Childbirth classes may be an ideal place to start, since they reach large
numbers of parents who will soon experience this transition. Allowing couples to talk in small groups about
their expectations of how their marriage will change may help them learn more about what each other is
thinking and feeling, as well sharing their concerns with others who are facing the same prospect, could serve
as beneficial anticipatory socialization in more realistic expectations about marriage and having children.

**Timing of Parenthood and Child Rearing**

Parents who have trouble adjusting to parenthood are often young, and it might be asked whether
delaying parenthood would help them to be better parents. In the early years of a marriage, a young couple is
embarking on new careers, creating a home, trying to make ends meet, and coming to know each other in the
deeply personal way that couples do. Perhaps if couples delayed parenting until a time when they were secure
in their marriages and careers, they might be more free to give themselves to the task of raising children.

One method of studying this hypothesis is to compare new parents of different ages. A cross-sectional
study of mothers ranging in age from 16 to 38 found that positive parental behaviors increased linearly with
age or the parent (Ragozin, Basham, Crnic, Greenberg & Robinson, 1982). Older mothers reported greater
satisfaction with parenting and a greater time commitment to the maternal role, and they were observed to
engage in more optimal parenting behaviors and showed more positive affect for their children. These
beneficial effects for older mothers were interpreted as not due to a decrease in stress factors alone, but also to
a greater emotional maturity and less egocentrism on the part of the mother. Of particular interest were the
parenting behaviors of women who were older when they gave birth to their first child, compared with mothers
who gave birth to additional children at this age. These mothers showed more positive affect and more optimal
parenting behaviors with their children when compared with older mothers who had previously given birth to
other children. It may be that these two groups of older mothers are moving in different directions in pursuing
satisfying life roles. The authors suggest that those that have already birthed and raised other children may be
more interested in extra-familial roles and are ready to "get on with her life" and do other things, but that the
older first time mother has already had those extra-familial experiences and now wants to fully commit herself
to the parenting role.

Other research shows delayed parenting also affects fathers. In a comparison of early and late
parenting (based on mother's age: 21 years versus 30 years), late parenting fathers shared more of the child
care and housework with their wives than did younger fathers, and they expressed fewer worries over financial
matters (Daniels & Weingarten, 1982). The authors suggest that the older fathers have established their careers and have accumulated sufficient resources to allow them the flexibility to concentrate on family roles. Similarly, a study comparing early (age 23), on-time (age 28) and late (age 34) fathers found that older fathers were more likely to be classified as being more involved with their children and having positive feelings about being a father, in contrast to some of younger fathers who felt more uninvolved and expressed more negative affect about being a father (Cooney, Pedersen, Indelicato & Palkovitz, 1993).

Timing of parenthood seems to be particularly important in the division of labor. Scott Coltrane and Masako Ishii-Kuntz (1992) found that husbands who had their first child after age 28 had less traditional views of gender and family, which influenced them to share more of the housework than dual-career couples who had their first child early in their marriages. The authors speculate that men and women who delay parenthood have a longer history in negotiating more equal arrangements in household tasks, and have observed a greater diversity of patterns in the division of labor in other households, in contrast to early birth couples who are more likely to use traditional models of domestic labor they have observed, such as their parents. In addition, wives who are older when they have children have established independent work-related identities and are not so closely tied to traditional roles of being a wife and mother.

Marital Quality and Parenting

So far we have been discussing the effects of children on a marriage as though the effects go only in one direction but this is not the case; the effects go in both directions. A couple in a high quality marriage are likely to parent better and to encourage greater developmental progress, and positive adjustment in their children (Cowan, Cowan, Schulz, & Hemming, 1989). A partial explanation for the relationship is that the couples see both parenting and marital satisfaction as integral components of a good marriage, so that success in one family role encourages efforts in the other (Rogers & White, 1998). For example, mothers in close marriages are warmer and more sensitive with their infants, and fathers in these marriages hold more positive views toward infants and toward their parental role (Cox, Owen, Lewis & Henderson, 1989). Unfortunately, poor marital quality has the opposite effect. Men who feel they are ignored by their wives may become insensitive and attempt to impose themselves on their children. Likewise, mothers who are unhappy in their marriages may inappropriately seek the closeness lacking in their marriage in the relationships with their children (Belsky & Kelly, 1994).

However, studies show husbands and wives also react differently to their children in response to marital conflict. A father's relationship with his children appears more closely tied to his relationship with his spouse than is the case for a mother (Belsky, Youngblade, Rovine, & Volling, 1991; Furstenberg & Harris, 1992; Rogers & White, 1998). Husbands in unhappy marriages and who withdraw emotionally from their wives, also distance themselves from their children (Dickstein & Parke, 1988). In Jay Belsky's Pennsylvania Child and Family Development Project, families were followed from pregnancy through the child's third birthday (Belsky, Youngblade, Rovine, & Volling, 1991). Men, whose love for their wives declined, and who doubted the stability and wisdom of their marriage, interacted with their children in a more negative and intrusive fashion. Men whose marriages did not show negative changes over the three years were more likely to express positive affect toward their children and to interact in a sensitive, supportive manner. Divorce has also been found to further erode the affection between fathers and their children, but does not affect the mother’s relationship with her children (Amato & Booth, 1996).

There are reasons why fathers' parenting might be more closely associated with marital quality. The responsibilities of the social role of father and their relationship with their children is less scripted and less distinctive for men than is the social role of mother for women. This may influence men to meld their role of father with their role as husband and to treat their wives and children as single units. Thus, if things are going well or going poorly with their spouses, it is reflected similarly in the relationship with their children. Women, on the other hand, differentiate their roles as mothers from their roles as wives, causing them to consider their responses to their husbands and children separately. Supporting evidence for this is that women in failing marriages may try to compensate for the poor parenting behavior of their husbands by making special efforts with their children to ameliorate the effects (Belsky, Youngblade, Rovine, & Volling, 1991; Brody, Pellegrini & Sigel, 1986). The dark side of the closer mother/child relationship is that they may form an alliance against the father due to their mutual difficulty with the father, but this spells further disaster for the marriage (Belsky, Youngblade, Rovine, & Volling, 1991).
Module 5.4. Divorce and Remarriage

Factors Related to Divorce

Demographic Variables

For many couples, the ending of a marriage gives rise to great unhappiness and disruption in their lives and in the lives of any children they may have. If this could be avoided either by changing the dynamics of the marriage or counseling couples in what they might look for in a prospective spouse or what they might avoid, it could be very beneficial. Thus, it is a worthwhile goal to determine whether there are characteristics that are correlated with marital unhappiness and divorce.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Relation to divorce</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Second Marriages</td>
<td>Divorce rates higher in second marriages but it is unclear whether it is because of the characteristics of people whose first marriages fail, or because the dynamics of later marriages are different primarily because of stepchildren.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Divorce</td>
<td>Children whose parents have divorced are more likely to divorce.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Couples who marry at young ages are more likely to divorce in the first five years of the marriage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Duration</td>
<td>Divorce is less likely when partners are older or have been in a long lasting marriage. It is difficult to determine whether this is due to the age of the couple, the length of the marriage, or due to selective attrition through divorce.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohabitation</td>
<td>Premarital cohabitation is associated with divorce. Most commonly thought to be a function of different values toward marriage of the participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Premarital Childbearing</td>
<td>Having a child before marriage is associated with increased risk of divorce, but becoming pregnant before marriage is not. The effect is stronger for white than black Americans, and stronger in the early years of marriage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>Childlessness is associated with higher divorce rates. Birth of the first child drastically reduces chance of divorce in the following year, but does not prevent it entirely. Parents of sons are less likely to divorce than parents of daughters. Usually interpreted as the result of greater family involvement of the father.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>Income and socioeconomic status are negatively related to divorce.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Blacks are more likely to divorce than whites.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The rate of divorce in the United States is one of the highest in the world, and the experience of going through a divorce has become increasingly common. The number of divorced people has increased from 4.3 million in 1970 to 18.3 million in 1996, representing a percentage increase from 3 to 10 percent of the population 18 years and older (U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1996). The frequency of divorce varies depending on age cohort. The likelihood of divorce by the tenth anniversary of a marriage for cohorts born between 1933 and 1942 was about 1 in 5. It increased to one in three for the cohort born between 1943 and 1952, and to 38 percent for the cohort born between 1953 and 1962 (Michael, et al., 1994). It is estimated that 50 percent of first marriages will end in separation or divorce (Martin & Bumpass, 1990) but this figure should not be interpreted as meaning 50% of people in marriages get divorced, since some of these are people in their 2nd or greater marriages. Part of the reason for the increasing numbers of people who divorce in recent times is a shift
in societal attitudes. As recently as the early 1960s, the stigma of divorce was so great, that Nelson Rockfeller, a popular, prominent, Republican at that time but also a divorced person, could not be considered as a serious candidate for president of the United States. In the years predating 1970, couples in some states often had to prove serious marital problems existed, such as infidelity or physical abuse of a spouse before a divorce could be granted. Today things are drastically different with the rise of no-fault divorce laws which have made it easier for a couple to divorce, so much so that reasons such as “incompatibility” or “lack of self-fulfillment” are valid (Martin & Bumpass, 1990). In fact, some couples recognize the greater possibility of divorce before they marry by signing prenuptial agreements that specify the conditions under which they will part.

Besides the changes in divorce laws divorce may have also increased because the expectations for marriage have become greater. Young adults today enter marriage expecting a more fulfilling, loving, satisfying relationship than their parents did. For them, marriage has become less of a social institution for procreation and economic security, and more of a voluntary arrangement for their personal happiness, increasing the likelihood a couple will consider dissolving their marriage when problems arise. Finally, changing gender roles for women and increasing financial independence and security, have made it easier for women to leave unhappy marriages. However, There is good news on the divorce front which counteracts these influences toward divorce. Because Americans are marrying at later ages and to a lesser extent their increasing education seem to be related to greater marital stability in more marriages since the late 1990s (Heaton, 2002).

The majority of divorces occur early in a marriage when partners are still quite young, between ages 25 and 35 (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983), but there has been a sharp increase in older age groups (Lloyd & Zick, 1986; Uhlenberg, Cooney, & Boyd, 1990). Between 1990 and 2010 the rate of divorce for those over 50 have doubled. In 2010, about 1 in four divorces involved person 50 or older (Brown & Lin, 2012). Other demographic characteristics related to the likelihood of divorce are listed in Table 5.7.

The Importance of Early Intervention in Saving Troubled Relationships

The finding that interaction patterns that predict divorce occur early in relationships argues strongly for early intervention in trouble relationships. It also seems to be the case that one of the partners may have an idea that their marriages is not right for them much earlier than we might expect. Lavner, Karney, and Bradbury (2012) found that some women had intuitions about future problems before they married or shortly afterwards. Six months into their marriage, these investigators asked husbands and wives in separate interviews a single yes–no question: “Were you ever uncertain or hesitant about getting married?” Because they were part of a larger study on marriage they were followed for the next four years during which the success of their marriage could be monitored. Doubts about their marriage were fairly common for most couples. In two thirds of the marriages at least one member expressed doubts. However, the results showed that women with doubts about their marriage, but not men, were 2 ½ times more likely to divorce than women who did not have doubts. Because the study was done retrospectively there could be something that happened in their marriage in the first six months that led them to believe they had premarital doubts. Future investigations will have to control for this by asking the question before couples marry. It is not known why men’s doubts were not predictive but we do know that women pay more attention to the condition of a relationship.

The initial stages of a marriage are considered to be the most important because marital relationship styles tend to be set early and then to continue relatively unchanged. If something is not done at this point it becomes harder to remedy later on. Gottman believes that couples tend to go through a series of stages in moving toward dissolving their marriages. First, the couple may see their expectations for their relationship to be in opposition, but they are not especially angry with each other. If conflict continues, it is followed by a second stage of entrenchment by each partner of their respective positions. In the third stage, change becomes more difficult because each partner has settled into their coping strategies and has become fearful that accepting the other's influence at that point will significantly change their lives. During the fourth stage, the vilification of their partner, begins, followed by the fifth stage of emotional disengagement from the relationship (Gottman, 1998). Obviously, if marital therapy is to succeed, it is best begun in the early stages of conflict when there are fewer obstacles to overcome, and some would argue, it needs to happen before any problems are evident, such as in weekend marital “renewals.”

Howard Markman and his associates (Markman, Floyd, Stanley, & Storaasli, 1988) investigated whether intervention early in a couple's troubled relationship before marriage, would help to maintain the
couple's current high levels of functioning while they were being taught skills that would help them avoid more serious problems in the future. They reasoned that the levels of conflict would be low and the couples would still be strongly motivated and willing to make changes. To test their hypothesis, Markman and associates followed 42 couples over a period of 3 years who were planning to marry. Half the group was randomly selected for participation in a premarital intervention program that stressed communication skill training, problem-solving, clarification of marital expectations, and sensual/sexual education for relationship enhancement. After three years, the intervention group showed higher relationship and sexual satisfaction, and fewer marital problems. More couples in the control group ended their relationship.

Distressed marriages due to problems outside or within the marriage predicts a later divorce but interestingly, non-distressed couples who are initially quite satisfied with their marriage also end up in divorce courts (Lavner & Bradbury, 2012). Amato and Hohmann-Marriott (2007) conjectured that these couples had lower levels of relationship commitment, making it easier for them to leave the marriage. However other research with non-distressed couples suggests that negative patterns of relationship exchanges that may not be given prominent attention at first, has a debilitating effect on the marriage over time. This seemed to be true for couples observed discussing a problem in their marriage who showed anger and contempt and were more likely to blame and be disagreeable with their spouses (Lavner & Bradbury, 2012). Markman, Rhoades, Stanley, Ragan, and Whitton (2010) found that self-reported negative communication before marriage was associated with a later divorce and that distressed couples greater declines in positive communication with their spouses and less of a decline in negative communication. Nondistressed couples maintain high levels of positive communication.

Again it seems to be the case, that the effects of negative exchanges on a marriage appear to be stronger predictor of divorce than the remediating effects of positive exchanges. Although positive exchanges may increase marital satisfaction the effects of negative interactions can overwhelm them and predict which couple will divorce whereas positive interactions do not. (Markman, Rhoades, Stanley, Ragan, & Whitton, 2010). There's a good deal of support and psychological literature for the stronger effects of negative information and experiences and it may be due to an inherited disposition to treat these effects is more predictive of later survival problems. This is perhaps the reason why Gottman's ratio of positive to negative exchanges in avoiding a divorce is so high at 5 to 1. One negative exchange necessitates five positive exchanges to remediate the damage done.

The Decision to Divorce

The decision to divorce is unlikely to be mutually arrived at by both parties. In most cases one partner has a much stronger desire to terminate the marriage than the other (Hill, Rubin, & Peplau, 1976; Kelly 1982). Women are more likely to initiate the decision to divorce, perhaps reflecting the greater care and attention women give to their relationships. Research shows (Crane, Soderquist, & Gardner, 1995) that women are more likely than men to discuss divorce and separation with their spouses as well as others outside of their marriage, and to make and to carry out plans of how the divorce would proceed. The decision is not made lightly, but forms slowly over a fairly lengthy period of unhappiness as the person begins to realize the relationship is costing a lot more than the benefits they receive from it (Kelly, 1982).

The reasons couples give for their decision to divorce differ depending on the marriage. One study, (Hawkins, Willoughby, & Doherty, 2012), surveyed approximately 60% of divorcing parents in a metropolitan area of Minnesota during a nine-month period in 2008. Of the 886 participants 45% were male and 55% were female. Almost twice as many females (66%) as males (33%) indicated they initiated the divorce. The average length of their marriages was 6.6 years. To assess reasons for the divorce participants were given a list of 20 possible causes for the divorce and asked to check those which were important for their divorce. In table 5.8 the top two reasons given indicate that couples who divorce most frequently lose interest or change their feelings toward their spouse perhaps because of the effects of conflicts in their marriage. It would seem that this would indicate there is hope for these couples especially since about 25% of individuals and 10% of couples feel their marriage can be saved when going through a divorce (Hawkins et al., 2012). However, it is very difficult re-establish the love and affection one had for their spouse early in the marriage after it has been withdrawn, as well as the fact that it is usually the person who did not initiate the divorce proceeding that has a greater interest in reconciliation (Hawkins et al., 2012).
Although in recent years, divorce has become easier to attain, it still takes a heavy toll on the well-being of both parties. The person initiating the divorce process is often beset with conflicting and contradictory emotions of failure, blame, self-recrimination, anger, sadness, apprehension, relief, and guilt. The strong feelings for one’s spouse may have become negative rather than positive, but the experiences and memories a couple has shared are not easily forgotten, even after long periods of separation. Going through the experience of a divorce is difficult, but the stress and unhappiness of living with a mate from whom they are alienated is greater than the pain associated with actual parting, and this in itself can provide some relief (Hopper, 1993). There is evidence that a woman's health may be more affected by the condition of her marriage than is the case for a man. Gottman and his associates found that women in a marriage in danger of dissolution were more autonamically aroused than men during conversations in which they tried to resolve a marital conflict. Furthermore, when they were interviewed as part of a follow-up four years later, women reported increased health problems (Gottman & Levenson, 1992). A similar interpretation was entertained in a study of middle-aged and older women in long-term unsatisfying marriages who reported more severe physical, psychological and functional health problems compared to women in more satisfying unions (Levenson, Carstensen & Gottman, 1993). The greater effect a troubled marriage has on women’s health may be an indication that more women are aware of the problems in their marriage, and expend greater efforts in attempting to remedy the situation than do men. Men in a troubled marriage are more likely to withdraw from the conflict and this may serve to protect their health by removing them from sources of stress, although their withdrawal creates greater burdens for their wives in the relationship.

### Table 5.8. Percentage of Sample Indicating Factor Was an Important Reason in Their Divorce, by Gender (Adapted from Hawkins, Willoughby, & Doherty, 2012, p. 456).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason For Divorce</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Growing apart*</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not able to talk together</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How my spouse handles money</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infidelity 37%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal problems of my spouse</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not getting enough attention</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My spouse’s personal habits</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual problems</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differences in tastes and preferences</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol or drug problems**</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How we divided household responsibilities**</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflicts over raising our own children</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-law problems</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My spouse’s leisure activities**</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How we divided child care responsibilities**</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical violence**</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My spouse’s friends</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My spouse worked too many hours**</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious differences</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*N = 886.*
Difference Significant: *p < .05; **p < .01.*
If the stress is great for the partner who initiates a divorce, it is even greater for the partner who is informed that their partner wants a divorce. Joan Kelly in writing on divorce describes it as follows:

It appears to be, for most men and women, an extraordinarily stressful experience to be told that one is no longer loved or wanted. Most often feelings of humiliation and utter powerlessness overwhelmed the rejected spouse as he or she recognized a helpless inability to make the departing spouse stay married. A common response to this pain and shattered self-esteem was immense anger, depression, and a surprising degree of regressive behavior. Spouses who initiated the divorce often did so with sadness, guilt, apprehension, relief, and sometimes anger, but a clear differentiating feature was their sense of control and the absence of profound feelings of humiliation and rejection. Further they had rehearsed and mentally prepared for their separated status. While they sometimes divorced with diminished self-esteem characteristic of partners of a failed marriage, their self-esteem at separation was on the upswing, in stark contrast to those feeling shattered by abandonment (Kelly, 1982, p. 737).

How divorce will affect the children in a marriage is often the most important part of the equation when a spouse asks whether or not they should divorce. The answer to this question is not easy and has to be approached on an individual basis. Much of the answer depends on the extent of the conflict in a home and the debilitating effects it can have on the child’s development. There is evidence that children show higher levels of well-being as young adults if their parents choose to divorce rather than to tough it out in a marriage that was not working. However, there is some evidence that children in low-conflict families were better off if their parents stayed together (Amato, Loomis, & Booth, 1996). A book on divorce by Mavis Hetherington and John Kelly (2002) presents a complex picture showing how the aftermath of divorce is related to the hostility of the original marriage, the gender of children affected, the age at the time of divorce and other factors. Even so, the authors come down on the more optimistic side of this issue and suggest many parents and children even thrive under the changed circumstances. Obviously, a decision like this is difficult indeed and the well-being of the individual parents must also be balanced with those of children.

The Aftermath of Divorce

The first two years after a divorce are the most difficult for both parents and children as they experience social and psychological stresses from changes in their roles and in their day to day living and a decline in family functioning. As a result, both husbands and wives experience a decline in physical and mental health, and show more symptoms of depression, anxiety, substance abuse and an increase in mortality (Amato, 2010). Interestingly, the association between divorce and a decline in health and an increase in mortality is stronger for men than women (Amato, 2010). Perhaps the beneficial effect of marriage for men is lost after a divorce.

Many divorced people feel that they are treated differently after the separation from their spouses by society, and their new social lives as singles are more restricted than they were when they were married. Women report a greater sexualization of the attitudes toward them by others, and believe their friends seem jealous or suspicious of them when they are around their husbands. Mutual friends of the divorced couple often find it difficult to adjust to the changed circumstances and to maintain their relationships with both parties. For these reasons, as well as changes in the divorced persons themselves, there appears to be a distancing from friends after the separation, leading to deep feelings of loneliness for 40-50 percent of divorced men and women in the first six months after divorce (Kelly, 1982). However, by the third year after a divorce, the majority of parents and children show marked improvement (Chase-Lansdale, & Hetherington, 1990).

By and large, things change more for women after a divorce than they do for men, especially if she retains custody of the children. If she holds a job she will ask for additional hours or, if she did not work before, it is likely that she will now seek employment. The added financial burden, as well as the burden of running a household alone, can lead to role strain, making it difficult to maintain a regular schedule or to provide the care and attention for children that was present before the breakup of the marriage. Fathers who receive custody of children have similar stresses, but they typically receive more sympathetic help from friends.
and family or hire people to help them (Kelly, 1982). At first, noncustodial fathers see their children regularly, but over time the amount of contact decreases dramatically. In one study of the effects of divorce, only 17 percent of children between the ages of 11-16 saw their father once a week, and sadly, about one-third of the children reported having not seen their father for five years (Chase-Lansdale & Hetherington, 1990). Because of changes in divorce law, women are more likely to experience a greater drop in income after divorce than do men. Even in cases where courts award payments to the wife, only 40 percent of wives receive full payments, and 32 percent receive nothing at all (Chase-Lansdale & Hetherington, 1990). Men’s incomes are more likely to remain the same or show a temporary decline. These changes in income can make the contrast of pre and post divorce lifestyles of women appear quite dramatic.

Given the widespread changes and adjustments entailed in separation and divorce, it should not be surprising that divorce can lead to strong emotional, psychological and physical reactions. Even in cases where the marriage had greatly deteriorated prior to the divorce, the final separation is extremely stressful for both men and women, even for the spouse who had initiated the divorce. Deep emotions arise, such as anger, regret, guilt, depression, loneliness, and to the surprise of many; feelings of continuing attachment. Attachment is felt most strongly by women who did not want the divorce, but over the years it fades as they begin to make a healthy adjustment. The actual termination of the marriage may affect men more strongly than women since they are more likely to wish that their marriages had not ended, and are twice as likely to say they still love their spouses. Men are also more likely than women to be admitted for psychiatric care after a divorce. The end of the marriage, however, does not mean the end of conflict with the former spouse. In fact, for the majority of couples, conflict often escalates over matters of child rearing, parental visitation, and finances (Chase-Lansdale & Hetherington, 1990).

Although divorce is more likely to occur at earlier ages, when it happens during middle-age, it can be more difficult for the individual to adapt. Judith Wallerstein (1986) found that among the 60 families she followed after their divorce, those women who were over 40 but under 55 were more likely to continue to have difficulties adjusting to the social, financial and personal losses suffered in their divorce than women at other ages. The children of middle-aged divorced couples, although they are older, and many are young adults, often feel angry with their fathers and protective of their mothers (Cooney, Smyer, Hagestad, & Klock, 1986). This may lead some middle-aged divorcees to rely more heavily on their children for comfort and support than they should.

Despite all the stress and pain of the separation, the majority of both men and women eventually report their divorce was positive, and that they now lead a happier, healthier life (Kelly, 1982). Factors related to a healthy adjustment after a divorce are strong inner psychological resources, social support from friends and family, and improvement in social status. But whether a person enters a stable, successful remarriage can also be very important factor (Chase-Lansdale & Hetherington, 1990).

Remarriage

Although women are usually the spouse that initiates a divorce, men are more likely to remarry more quickly. For most men and women the period of being single after divorce is relatively brief, and most remarry within three years (Furstenberg, 1982). Eventually, this percentage rises to 83 percent of divorced men and 75 percent of divorced women (Cherlin, 1981). Because couples are older and more mature when they remarry, their second marriage may be better than their first. The divorce rate for remarriages is 37 percent within 10 years, which at first looks worse than the 30 percent figure for first marriages (Bumpass, Sweet & Martin, 1990), but on the other hand, since all of the first marriages of divorced persons failed, it suggests progress has been made. Since 1980, the period between divorce and remarriage has been increasing, leading to the prediction that fewer of the current divorced men and women will remarry than has been the case in the past (Chase-Lansdale & Hetherington, 1990). Why this is happening is unclear.

The probability of a woman remarrying is related to whether she is childless. Based on data for white females, a woman under 30 without children is more likely to marry than if she has children, but childlessness is unrelated to remarriage for women in their early 30s. At later ages the relation changes, so that a woman over 35 and childless is less likely to remarry (Chase-Lansdale & Hetherington, 1990). One explanation for these changes is that for young women, having children may put them at a disadvantage in finding a mate since the prospective husband may not want to take on the additional responsibilities of child care, but this changes for women and men in their early 30s. Later, women in their middle 30s who are childless may be more independent and career oriented and are less willing to trade the freedom of their current lifestyle that they
have become accustomed to for the greater constraints a marriage would bring them.

Remarriage after divorce in middle age is statistically less likely for women since men tend to marry younger women and their mortality rate is higher, leaving fewer eligible men available as competition with increasing age. But, there may also be psychological reasons as well that discourage middle-aged women from pursuing re-marriage. The emphasis on physical appearance for women may cause her to have low self-esteem and to be less confident in social situations. In addition, she may not have dated for 20 to 30 years, and she may be wary of the changed social and sexual mores for singles. All of these things can make the prospect of finding a suitable mate appear to be a quite daunting task. Finally, there is the distinct possibility that women may prefer not to marry again. Davidson (2001) interviewed men and women 65 and older who had lost their spouses about whether they would consider remarriage. The author found that women were less likely to consider remarriage and were less likely to be involved in new relationships because they felt their present lives were quite enjoyable the way that they were. Women saw their singlehood as positive and provided them with a degree of freedom they did not have when married, and they were now reluctant to give up their new freedom by remarrying. As one participant related to the interviewer:

[I don’t want to] take the responsibility of washing for somebody and ironing for somebody. First it’s the ‘home cooked meal’, then it’s the shirt that needs ironing. No. And I couldn’t bear to have an old man kiss me or anything. On no. Not anymore. ...And I can do what I want to do. It is selfish, absolute selfishness. So I’d rather just live my life as it is now. No obligations. I’ve done my bit. (Davidson, 2001, p. 311).

Interestingly, they saw their desire to enjoy themselves without having to provide care for another as a “selfish” attitude, but one they cherished. Although this cohort may be considerably more traditional in marriage roles than younger cohorts, some of the same motivations may be operating in women who are newly divorced and who delay or avoid remarriage.