

Commitments

Chapter 9



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MARRIAGE

- More than 90 percent of people in Western societies marry at some time in their lives.
- The tendency to marry later has important implications for women, because the increased time between high school and marriage offers opportunities to broaden experience.
 - A woman who enters her first marriage at an older age is less likely to exchange dependence on her parents for dependence on a husband.



MARRIAGE

- In a cross-cultural study of more than 9,000 people from 37 nations, participants were asked to assess the importance of characteristics in a potential mate. When all cultures were considered, women and men both rated mutual attraction and love, dependable character, emotional stability, and pleasing disposition as the four most important characteristics in a potential marriage partner (Buss et al., 1990).
 - Across cultures, women were somewhat more likely to emphasize a mate's earning capacity and ambition, and men to emphasize good looks and physical attractiveness.
 - A later study found that women's preferences for men with material resources was greatest in countries where women had least ability to gain power on their own through access to education and jobs (Eagly & Wood, 1999).



MARRIAGE

- *Marriage gradient*—tendency for women to “marry up” and men to “marry down” by sorting themselves into couples in which the man has higher prestige and income potential

MARRIAGE

- Marriage can be classified into three types based on the division of authority, how spousal roles are defined, and the amount of companionship and shared activities they provide:
 - *traditional marriage*—both husband and wife agree husband has (and should have) greater authority
 - *modern marriage*—spouses have a “near-peer” relationship; modern wives work outside the home, but the wife’s job is less important than the husband’s
 - Modern wives do a *second shift* every day—they put in a day’s work for pay, and another day’s work when they get home
 - *egalitarian marriages*—partners have equal power and authority; they share responsibilities equally without respect to gender roles.
 - *post gender relationships*—partners have moved beyond using gender to define their marital roles



MARRIAGE

- *myth of equality*—refusing to acknowledge how gender socialization and social forces have steered a couple toward traditional roles
- Factors associated with husband’s dominance in a marriage:
 - Social class and ethnicity
 - Traditional beliefs and social norms
 - *social exchange theory*—the partner who brings greater outside resources to the relationship will have the greater influence in it

MARRIAGE



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- The lifeline of a marriage:
 - Almost all studies of marital satisfaction over time show an initial “honeymoon period” followed by a substantial decline in happiness with the birth of the first child.
 - Wives are more likely than husbands to become dissatisfied with the marriage over time.

MARRIAGE



- Satisfaction often hits its lowest point when the children are school-aged or adolescents.
- Some studies have shown that the happiness of the early years is regained or even surpassed in later life, when the children have grown and left home.



LESBIAN COUPLES

- For many years, researchers and the public assumed lesbian couples mimic traditional heterosexual roles, with one partner being the “husband” (“butch”) and the other the “wife” (“femme”); however, most research shows no clear preference for masculine/feminine roles among lesbians (Peplau & Spalding, 2000).
- Because same-sex couples cannot assign the breadwinner role on the basis of gender and they tend to value independence, the importance of the work interests of each partner is much more likely to be fairly equal than in heterosexual marriages.
- Lesbians are highly likely to share household duties (Kurdek, 1993).
- Same-sex couples tend to share more leisure activities than heterosexual couples.

LESBIAN COUPLES

- Power differences in a lesbian relationship are usually due to the same factors that influence power in heterosexual relationships—one partner having greater resources of money, status, or education, or one partner being more committed.



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LESBIAN COUPLES

- Studies that compare the self-reported satisfaction and happiness of lesbian and heterosexual committed couples show few differences between the two types of couples (Peplau & Spalding, 2000).
- In a study of women in lesbian and heterosexual couples, both groups were similar in their capacity for intimacy. However, in heterosexual couples, the woman's capacity for intimacy had no connection with the intimacy of the relationship (Rosenbluth & Steil, 1995)



COHABITATING COUPLES

- ***Cohabitation***—heterosexual couples that choose to live together without being legally married
 - In the U.S., people choose to cohabit for various reasons: as a prelude to marriage, divorcees not ready to remarry, to show independence from parents, convenience
 - People who choose cohabitation tend to be liberal in attitudes about gender roles.
 - They are more sexually experienced and sexually active than non-cohabiters, and their relationships are less likely than married relationships to be monogamous.
 - In the U.S., Sweden, and Canada, studies show former cohabitants are *more* likely to divorce (Teachman & Polenko, 1990).

ENDING THE COMMITMENT: DIVORCE AND SEPARATION

- The U.S. has the highest divorce rate of any industrialized nation. Between 40% and 50% of American marriages end within 15 years.
- Correlates with divorce:
 - Women's participation in the paid workforce
 - Age at first marriage
 - Changes in laws and attitudes
 - Personal issues: infidelity, substance abuse, mental/physical abuse by partner



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ENDING THE COMMITMENT: DIVORCE AND SEPARATION



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- The adjustment to divorce seems to be more difficult for men than women—although both divorced men and women are more likely to commit suicide than their married counterparts, divorced men are 50 percent more likely to do so than divorced women (Price & McKenry, 1988).

ENDING THE COMMITMENT: DIVORCE AND SEPARATION



- Divorce in the U.S. has been characterized as an economic disaster for women. Women lose out financially because of state property laws that assume property belongs to the spouse who earned it.
- The majority of women entitled to child support do not receive it. Several national studies from the 1970s to the 1990s have shown that only 25 to 50% of men ordered to pay child support did so.



REMARRIAGE

- About two-thirds of women who get divorced remarry, about half of them within three years of the divorce.
- Women with lower levels of education and income are more likely to remarry than those with more economic options, partly to reduce divorce-induced poverty.

ENDING THE COMMITMENT: DIVORCE AND SEPARATION

- In general, the level of satisfaction in second marriages is about the same as in first marriages, and husbands tend to be more satisfied than their wives (Ihinger-Tallman & Pasley, 1987).
- Second marriages are even more likely to end in divorce than first marriages (Ganong & Coleman, 2000).



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

- In the U.S., researchers estimate that between 21% and 34% of women will be physically assaulted by a husband or boyfriend at least once in their lifetime, and that partners are responsible for the beatings of two to four million women every year (Smith, Smith & Earp, 1999).
 - However, statistics probably underestimate the actual incidence of abuse, which tends to be underreported due to shame, fear, and the belief that nothing will be done about it (Ellsberg et al., 2001).
- *Common couples violence*—gender-neutral violence where men and women inflict violence on each other

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

- *Patriarchal terrorism*—a pattern of severe, escalating male violence in which women rarely fight back and almost never initiate aggression
- A woman may remain with an abusive partner for many reasons: no money, no job, no safe place to go, no car, needs of children, leaving may increase the violence.
- Research shows that a woman is more likely to be seriously injured or killed by her partner *after* she leaves him than when they are living together (Jacobson & Gottman, 1998).
 - Much abuse is *cyclical*—the perpetrator goes through a period of increasing tension, a violent episode, and then a loving phase.
 - *battered women's syndrome*—a type of post-traumatic stress disorder

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

- *Battered women's movement*—international movement to educate the public about domestic violence, reform the legal system, and provide direct help to women whose partners are violent
- *Battered women's shelters*—refuges where a woman can find temporary safety, emotional support, information about their legal rights, and sometimes counseling



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