

# CHAPTER 8

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# Singlehood, Pairing, and Cohabitation

## Outline

### Choosing Partners 280

The Marketplace of Relationships 280

Physical Attractiveness: The Halo Effect,  
Rating, and Dating 281

The Field of Eligibles 284

Understanding Homogamy  
and Inter marriage 289

Theories and Stages of Mate Selection 290

### Dating and Romantic Relationships 291

Beginning a Relationship: Seeing, Meeting,  
and Dating 291

Problems in Dating 294

Breaking Up 297

### Singlehood 302

Unmarried in America: An Increasing  
Minority 303

Relationships among the Unmarried 304  
Culture and the Individual versus  
Marriage 305

Types of Never-Married Singles 305

Singles: Myths and Realities 305

Gay and Lesbian Singlehood 306

### Cohabitation 306

The Rise of Cohabitation 307

Types of Cohabitation 308

Common-Law Marriages and Domestic  
Partnerships 310

Gay and Lesbian Cohabitation 311

Cohabitation and Marriage Compared 313

Effect of Cohabitation on Marital  
Success 316

### Summary 317

## What Do YOU Think?

Are the following statements **TRUE** or **FALSE**?

You may be surprised by the answers (see answer key on the following page).

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| T | F | 1 Looking for a mate can be compared to shopping for goods in a market.  |
| T | F | 2 Generally, the most important factor in judging someone at the first meeting is how he or she looks.                                       |
| T | F | 3 There is a significant shortage of single eligible African American men, which makes marriage less likely for African American women.      |
| T | F | 4 If a woman asks a man on a first date, it is generally a sign that she wants to have sex with him.   |
| T | F | 5 The lesbian subculture values being single and unattached more than being involved in a stable relationship.                               |
| T | F | 6 Singles, compared to their married peers, tend to depend more on their parents.  |
| T | F | 7 An important dating problem that men cite is their own shyness.  |
| T | F | 8 Cohabitation has become part of the courtship process among many young adults.   |
| T | F | 9 Compared to married couples, cohabiting couples have a more accepting attitude toward infidelity.  |
| T | F | 10 Previously married cohabitants are more likely than never-married cohabitants to view living together as a test of marital compatibility. |

**D**o you know what this is?

Real Life Juliet Seeks Romeo: I have been searching the world over, looking for my true love. I am a friendly, ambitious, compassionate, hardworking female, who enjoys music, dancing, travel, and the beach. Looking for someone who wants to share a movie, dinner, a laugh, and maybe a lifetime. I know you're out there somewhere.

Of course, we all know this is a personal ad, one of the many found each day in newspapers and magazines, or on multiple sites on the Internet. Along with dating services, computer matchmakers, and singles clubs, such personal ads represent some more recent ways in which Americans go about trying to find their “one and only.” In recent years, even reality television programs have been added into the mix, pushing such attempts into previously uncharted water. On February 15, 2000, the Fox Network aired *Who Wants to Marry a Multi-Millionaire?* Many wondered, what could be next? Now we know: two *Joe Millionaires*, *Who Wants to Marry My Dad?*, *Bachelor*, *Married by America*, and so on. Each of these reality shows has tried to capitalize on our age-old fascination with how people get together.

There is considerable social science interest, too, in understanding how people find their spouses or partners. In addition, researchers have studied *who* we choose and *why* we choose those particular individuals. In this chapter, we not only look at the general rules by which we choose partners but also examine dating, romantic relationships, and cohabitation. Not everyone is actively looking for a relationship or intending to ultimately marry. Thus, we look, too, in this chapter at the growth in the unmarried population and at the singles world.

Over the last several decades, many aspects of pairing, such as the legitimacy of premarital intercourse and cohabitation, have changed considerably, radically affecting marriage. Today, large segments of American society accept and approve of both premarital sex and

cohabitation. Marriage has lost its exclusiveness as the only legitimate relationship in which people can have sex and share their everyday lives. Increasing numbers of Americans experience both premarital sex and cohabitation in their lives. These issues, too, are examined in this chapter.

## Choosing Partners

How do we choose the people we date, live with, or marry? Your initial response might be, “Simple. We fall in love!” Although love is the major criterion used to select a spouse, and most people who marry would say they are doing so out of love, many factors operate alongside and upon love.

In theory, most of us are free to select as partners those people with whom we fall in love, but other factors enter the process and our choices become somewhat limited by rules of mate selection. Once you understand some principles of mate selection in our culture, without ever having met a friend's new boyfriend or girlfriend, you can deduce many things about him or her. For example, if a female friend at college has a new boyfriend, you would be safe in guessing that he is about the same age or a little older, probably taller, and a college student. Furthermore, he is probably about as physically attractive as your friend (if not, their relationship may not last); his parents probably are of the same ethnic group and social class as hers; and he is probably about as intelligent as your friend. If a male friend has a new girlfriend, many of the same things apply, except that she is probably the same age or younger and shorter than he is. Some relationships will depart from such conventions, and many will have one or two characteristics on which the partners differ (or differ more), but you will probably be correct in most instances. These are not so much guesses as deductions based on the principle of homogamy, discussed later in this chapter.

## The Marketplace of Relationships

The process of choosing partners is affected by bargaining and exchange. We select each other in a kind of **marketplace of relationships**. We use the notion of a “marketplace” to convey that, as in a commercial marketplace, when we form relationships we enter

### Answer Key for What Do You Think

- 1 False, see p. 280; 2 False, see p. 281; 3 True, see p. 283; 4 True, see p. 296; 5 False, see p. 306; 6 False, see p. 305; 7 False, see p. 297; 8 True, see p. 308; 9 True, see p. 313; 10 True, see p. 310.

exchange relationships, much as when we exchange goods.

Unlike a real marketplace, however, the “relationship marketplace” is more of a process, not a place, in which *we* are the goods exchanged. Each of us has certain resources—such as socioeconomic status, looks, and personality—that determine our marketability. As Matthijs Kalmijn (1998) puts it, “Potential spouses are evaluated on the basis of the resources they have to offer, and individuals compete with each other for the spouse they want most by offering their own resources in return.” We bargain with the resources we possess. We size ourselves up and rank ourselves as a good deal, an average package, or something to be “remaindered”; we do the same with potential dates and, ultimately, mates. Our “exchanges” are more often between equally valuable goods. In other words, we tend to seek people about *as attractive* or *as intelligent* as ourselves.

## Physical Attractiveness: The Halo Effect, Rating, and Dating

### The Halo Effect

Pretend for a moment that you are at a party, unattached. You notice that someone is standing next to you as you reach for some chips or a drink. He or she says hello. In that moment, you have to decide whether to engage him or her in conversation. On what basis do you make that decision? Is it looks, personality, style, sensitivity, intelligence, or something else?

Most people consciously or unconsciously base this decision on appearance. If you decide to talk to the person, you probably formed a positive opinion about how she or he looked. In other words, he or she looked “cute,” looked like a “fun person,” gave a “good first impression,” or seemed “interesting.” Physical attractiveness is particularly important during the initial meeting and early stages of a relationship.

### Reflections

**How important are looks to you?** Think back. Have you ever mistakenly judged someone by his or her looks? How did you discover your error? How did you feel?

Most people would deny that they are attracted to others *just* because of their looks. However, we tend to infer qualities based on looks. This inference is called the **halo effect**—the assumption that good-looking

people possess more desirable social characteristics than unattractive people. In a well-known experiment (Dion et al. 1972), students were shown pictures of attractive people and asked to describe what they thought these people were like. Attractive men and women were assumed to be more sensitive, sexually responsive, poised, and outgoing than others; they were assumed to be more exciting and to have better characters than “ordinary” people. Furthermore, attractive people are preferred as friends, candidates, and prospective employees, and they receive more leniency when defendants in court (Ruane and Cerulo, 2004). Research indicates that overall, the differences between perceptions of attractive and average people are minimal. It is when attractive and average people are compared to those considered to be unattractive that there are pronounced differences, with those perceived as unattractive being rated more negatively (Hatfield and Sprecher 1986).

### The Rating and Dating Game

In more casual relationships, the physical attractiveness of a romantic partner is especially important. Elaine Hatfield and Susan Sprecher (1986) suggest three reasons people come to prefer attractive people over unattractive ones. First, there is an “aesthetic appeal,” a simple preference for beauty. Second, there is the “glow of beauty,” in which we assume that good-looking people are more sensitive, modest, self-confident, sexual, and so on. Third, there is the deflected “status” we achieve by dating attractive people.

Research has demonstrated that good-looking companions increase our status. In one study, men were asked their first impressions of a man seen alone, arm-in-arm with a beautiful woman, and arm-in-arm with an unattractive woman. The man made the best impression with the beautiful woman. He ranked higher alone than with an unattractive woman. In contrast to men, women do not necessarily rank as high when seen with a handsome man. A study in which married couples were evaluated found that it made no difference to a woman’s ranking if she was unattractive but had a strikingly handsome husband. If an unattractive man had a strikingly beautiful wife, it was assumed that he had something to offer other than looks, such as fame or fortune.

### Trade-Offs

As we mix and meet people, we don’t necessarily gravitate to the *most attractive* person in the room, but rather to those about as attractive as ourselves. Sizing

up someone at a party or dance, a man may say, “I’d have no chance with her; she’s too good-looking for me.” Even if people are allowed to specify the qualities they want in a date, they are hesitant to select anyone notably different from themselves in social desirability.

We also tend to choose people who are our equals in terms of intelligence, education, and so on (Hatfield and Walster 1981). However, if two people are different in looks or intelligence, usually the individuals make a trade-off in which a lower-ranked trait is exchanged for a higher-ranked trait. A woman who values status, for example, may accept a lower level of physical attractiveness in a man if he is wealthy or powerful.

### Are Looks Important to Everyone?

For all of us more ordinary-looking people, it will come as a relief to know that looks aren’t everything. Looks are most important to certain types or groups of people and in certain situations or locations (for example, in classes, at parties, and in bars, where people do not interact with one another extensively on a day-to-day basis). Looks are less important to those in ongoing relationships and to those older than young adults. Those who interact regularly—as in working together—put less importance on looks (Hatfield and Sprecher 1986). In adolescence, the need to conform and the impact of peer pressure make looks especially important as we may feel pressured to go out with handsome men and beautiful women.

Men tend to care more about how their partners look than do women (Buunk et al. 2002; Regan 2003). This may be attributed to the disparity of economic and social power. Because men tend to have more assets (such as income and status) than women, they can afford to be less concerned with their potential partner’s assets and can choose partners in terms of their attractiveness. Because women lack the earning power and assets of men, they may have to be more practical and choose a partner who can offer security and status. Unsurprisingly, then, women are more likely than men to emphasize the importance of socioeconomic factors (Regan 2003).

Most research on attractiveness has been done on first impressions or early dating. At lower levels of relationship involvement, physical attractiveness is more important. As relationship involvement increases, status and personality become more important, appearance less. For long-term relationships (for example, marriage) women and men prefer mates about as



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■ *People tend to choose partners who are about as attractive as themselves.*

attractive as themselves. For short-term, less involved relationships, both men and women prefer more attractive mates. Bram Buunk and colleagues (2002) interpret this pattern to reflect potential costs of having as a long-term partner someone to whom others are strongly attracted.

Researchers are finding, however, that attractiveness is not *unimportant* in established relationships. Most people expect looks to become less important as a relationship matures, but Philip Blumstein and Pepper Schwartz (1983) found that the happiest people in cohabiting and married relationships thought of their partners as attractive. People who found their partners attractive had the best sex lives. Physical attractiveness continues to be important throughout marriage. It is, however, joined by other qualities, and these other attributes are deemed more important.

### Bargains and Exchanges

Likening relationships to markets or choosing partners to an exchange may not seem romantic, but both are deeply rooted in marriage and family customs. In some cultures, for example, arranged marriages take place only after extended bargaining between families. The woman is expected to bring a dowry in the form of property (such as pigs, goats, clothing, utensils, or land) or money, or a woman’s family may demand a bride-price if the culture places a premium on women’s productivity. Traces of the exchange basis of marriage

still exist in our culture in the traditional marriage ceremony when the bride's parents pay the wedding costs and "give away" their daughter.

### Gender Roles

Traditionally, relationship exchanges have been based on gender. Men used their status, economic power, and role as protector in a trade-off for women's physical attractiveness and nurturing, childbearing, and housekeeping abilities; women, in return, gained status and economic security in the exchange.

The terms of bargaining have changed some, however. As women enter careers and become economically independent, achieving their own occupational status and economic independence, what do they ask from men in the marriage exchange? Clearly, many women expect men to bring more expressive, affective, and companionable resources into marriage. An independent woman does not have to "settle" for a man who brings little more to the relationship than a paycheck; she wants a man who is a partner, not simply a provider.

But even today, a woman's bargaining position may not be as strong as a man's. Women earn only about three-fourths of what men earn, are still significantly underrepresented in many professions, and have seen many of the things women traditionally used to bargain with in the marital exchange—such as children, housekeeping services, and sexuality—become devalued or increasingly available outside of relationships. Children are not the economic assets they once were. A man does not have to rely on a woman to cook for him, sex is often accessible in the singles world, and someone can be paid to do the laundry and clean the apartment.

Women are further disadvantaged by the **double standard of aging**. Physical attractiveness is a key bargaining element in the marital marketplace, but the older a woman gets, the less attractive she is considered. For women, youth and beauty are linked in most cultures. Furthermore, as women get older, their field of potential eligible partners declines because men tend to choose younger women as mates.

### The Marriage Squeeze and Mating Gradient

An important factor affecting the marriage market is the ratio of men to women. Researchers Marcia Guttentag and Paul Secord (1983) argue that whenever there is a shortage of women in society, marriage

and monogamy are valued; when there is an excess of women, marriage and monogamy are devalued. The scarcer sex is able to weight the rules in its favor. It gains bargaining power in the marriage marketplace.

The **marriage squeeze** refers to the gender imbalance reflected in the ratio of available unmarried women and men. Because of this imbalance, members of one gender tend to be "squeezed" out of the marriage market. The marriage squeeze is distorted, however, if we look at overall figures of men and women without distinguishing between age and ethnicity. Overall, there are significantly more unmarried women than men: 87 single men for every 100 single women (U.S. Census Bureau 2003). This figure, however, is somewhat deceptive. From ages 18 to 44, the prime years for marriage, there are significantly more unmarried men than women, reversing the overall marriage squeeze. Combining widowed, divorced, and never-married people, in 2002 there were 113 unmarried men, aged 18 to 44, for every 100 unmarried women (U.S. Census Bureau 2003). Thus, women in this age group have greater bargaining power and are able to demand marriage and monogamy. But once ethnicity is taken into consideration, the many African American women of all ages are "squeezed out" of the marriage market. With eligible males scarcer, African American men have greater bargaining power and are less likely to marry because of more attractive alternatives (see Figure 8.1).

"All the good ones are taken" is a common complaint of women in their mid-30s and beyond, even if there are still more men than women in that age bracket. The reason for this is the **mating gradient**, the tendency for women to marry men of higher status. Sociologist Jessie Bernard (1982) comes to this conclusion:

In our society, the husband is assigned a superior status. It helps if he actually is superior in ways—in height, for example, or age or education or occupation—for such superiority, however slight, makes it easier for both partners to conform to the structural imperatives. The [woman] wants to be able to "look up" to her husband, and he, of course, wants her to. The result is a situation known sociologically as the marriage gradient.

Although we tend to marry those with the same socioeconomic status and cultural background, men tend to marry women slightly below them in age, education, and so on. The marriage gradient puts high-status

women at a disadvantage in the marriage marketplace. Bernard continues:

The result is that there is no one for the men at the bottom to marry, no one to look up to them. Conversely, there is no one for the women at the top to look up to; there are no men superior to them. . . . The never-married men . . . tend to be “bottom-of-the-barrel” and the women . . . “cream-of-the-crop.”

## The Field of Eligibles

The men and women we date, live with, or marry usually come from the **field of eligibles**—that is, those whom our culture approves of as appropriate potential partners. The field of eligibles is defined by two principles: **endogamy** (marriage within a particular group) and **exogamy** (marriage outside a particular group).

### Endogamy

People usually marry others from within their same large group—such as the nationality, ethnic group, or socioeconomic status with which they identify—

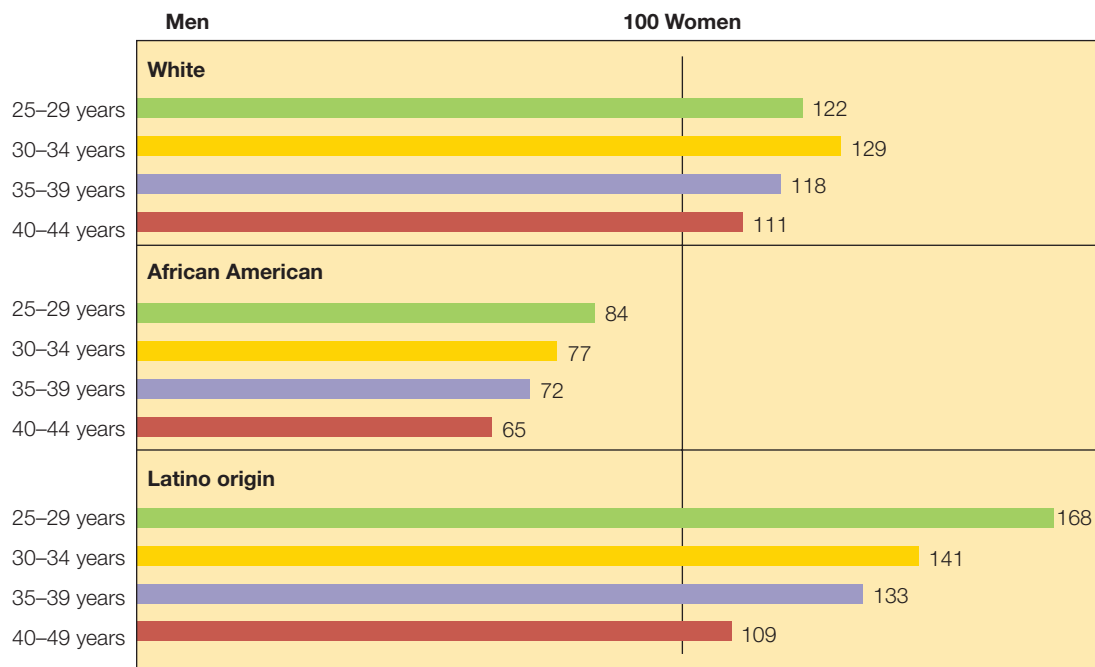
because they share common assumptions, experiences, and understandings. Endogamy strengthens group structure. If people already have ties as friends, neighbors, work associates, or fellow church members, a marriage between such acquaintances solidifies group ties.

To take an extreme example, it is easier for two Americans to understand each other than it is for an American and a Fula tribesperson from Africa. Americans are monogamous and urban, whereas the Fula are polygamous wandering herders. But another, darker force may lie beneath endogamy: the fear and distrust of outsiders, those who are different from ourselves. Both the need for commonality and the distrust of outsiders urge people to marry individuals like themselves.

### Exogamy

The principle of exogamy requires us to marry outside certain groups—specifically, outside our own family (however defined) and outside our sex. Exogamy is enforced by taboos deeply embedded within our psychological makeup. The violation of these taboos may cause a deep sense of guilt. A marriage between a man

Figure 8.1 ■ Ratio of Unmarried Men to Unmarried Women by Age and Ethnicity, 2002



SOURCE: *Current Population Reports 2002*, unpublished Table 7.

and his mother, sister, daughter, aunt, niece, grandmother, or granddaughter is considered incestuous; women are forbidden to marry their corresponding male relatives. Beyond these blood relations, however, the definition of incestuous relations changes. One society defines marriages between cousins as incestuous, whereas another may encourage such marriages.

Some states prohibit marriages between stepbrothers and stepsisters, as well as cousins; others do not. In Chapter 9 we will further consider the laws that specify who can and can't marry. In general, there has been a growing tendency toward allowing individuals choice of partners without state interference. For example, in 1966, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that laws prohibiting marriage between individuals of different races were unconstitutional (*Loving v. Virginia*). Massachusetts now allows same sex couples to marry and some other states provide same-sex couples the protection and rights heterosexuals receive when they marry. Denial of legal marriage rights and its many protections and benefits is otherwise unconstitutional.

### Homogamy

Endogamy and exogamy interact to *limit* the field of eligibles. The field is further limited by society's encouragement of **homogamy**, the tendency to choose a mate whose personal or group characteristics are similar to ours. (See this chapter's "Understanding Yourself" box, on page 295, which discusses Internet personals, computer dating, and homogamy.) This is also known as *positive assortative mating* (Blackwell 1998). **Heterogamy** refers to the tendency to choose a mate whose personal or group characteristics differ from our own. The strongest pressures are toward homogamy. We may make homogamous choices regarding any number of characteristics, including age and race, but also such characteristics as height (Blackwell 1998). As a result, our choices of partners tend to follow certain patterns. These homogamous considerations generally apply to heterosexuals, gay men, and lesbians alike in their choice of partners.

The most important elements of homogamy are race and ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, age, and personality characteristics. These elements are strongest in first marriages and weaker in second and subsequent marriages (Glick 1988). They also strongly influence our choice of sexual partners, because our sexual partners are often potential marriage partners (Michael et al. 1994).

**RACE AND ETHNICITY.** Most marriages are between members of the same race. Of the nearly 55 million married couples in the United States in 2000, 98% of them consisted of husbands and wives of the same race. Nearly 6% of marriages in 2000 were between people from different racial backgrounds. Interestingly, as the overall phenomenon of interracial marriage has been increasing since the 1980s, it has especially increased among highly educated people (Harris and Ono 2005). Although most often taken to mean *black-white marriage*, such marital pairings are only approximately 25% of all racial intermarriages. This is the pairing most likely to be the target of hostility and prejudice (Leslie and Letiecq 2004).

Racial intermarriage varies greatly among different cities and regions in the United States. David Harris and Hiromi Ono assert that without taking into consideration "local" marriage markets, we can't completely and accurately understand racial marriage patterns.

Although the United States is 75.1% white, 12.3% black, 3.6% Asian, and 12.5% Latino, the racial composition of major cities exhibits substantial deviations from the national pattern, and many cities differ from one another in important ways. For example, whites are 45% of the population in Philadelphia but only 12% in Detroit. Asians are at least 25% of the population in San Jose, San Francisco, and Honolulu but no more than 2% of the population in Phoenix, San Antonio, and Detroit (Harris and Ono 2005, 238).

Harris and Ono contend that by failing to take into account the reality of local marriage markets and assuming, instead, a single national marriage market, projected levels of relative likelihood of racial homogamy are exaggerated between 19% (between whites and blacks) and 53% (between whites and Latinos). Where there is greater opportunity to find spouses of the same race, rates of homogamy are higher and intermarriage is less. On the other hand, racial and ethnic heterogeneity are associated with higher levels of intermarriage (Kalmijn 1998).

Of the more than 1 million interracial couples, one-fourth were marriages between blacks and whites (Fields and Casper 2001). By 1993, 12% of all new marriages involving African Americans were interracial. This is nearly double the percentage in 1980 (6.6%), and four times the percentage from 1970 (2.6%) (Besharov and Sullivan 1996). It is suggested that the reasons both black groom-white bride and black bride-white groom are increasing is the rise of a black middle class, making African American men and women more attractive to middle-class whites.



Black women still face obstacles to marriage of any kind; they are more than twice as likely to have children born out of wedlock. About 1.2% of marriages consist of one partner who is white and one from an Asian, Native American, or other nonwhite group (Fields and Casper 2001).

Based on their study of 76 black–white intermarriages (52 black male–white female couples and 24 black female–white male couples), Leigh Leslie and Bethany Letiecq (2004) suggest that success in black–white intermarriages may depend upon the degree to which the partners possess pride in their race or culture without diminishing other races. This appears to be especially true for the black spouse in such marriages and seems to influence the quality of married life well into the marriage.

Those who had resolved issues of racial identity and developed a strong black identity while showing racial tolerance and appreciation of other races, more positively evaluated their marriage, felt less ambivalent about it, and/or worked harder to maintain it. However, those who had more negative assessments of one culture or the other experienced lower marital quality (Leslie and Letiecq 2004, 570).

To an extent, this challenges the idea that, for interracial couples, race becomes irrelevant or unimportant (Leslie and Letiecq 2004). How they think and feel about race is of major significance in the quality of their marital experience. Unexpectedly, social support only “modestly” predicted marital quality. This could be a byproduct of the relative prevalence and acceptance of interracial marriage in the area where the research was done, the relatively comfortable economic circumstances of the couples studied, or evidence that interracial couples have learned to survive, if not thrive, even in the absence of social support (Leslie and Letiecq 2004).

A qualitative study of 19 individuals who were involved in interracial relationships uncovered a range of harassment and hostility to which they develop a number of management strategies (Datzman and Brooks Gardner 2000). These include ignoring the harassment, limiting the settings where they would be seen as a couple to those they knew would be supportive or to staying home altogether, having others with them who are more supportive, and directly confronting any harassment. Especially when such harassment is new, the emotional impact might include shock and surprise, numbness, sadness and shame, and ultimately resentment or anger. Eventually, the anger might be replaced by pity felt toward the harasser or harassers.



Bob Pool/Getty Images/Photographer's Choice

■ *Interracial relationships are increasing but are still relatively uncommon. Such couples often find themselves the recipients of negative reactions.*

The degree of intermarriage between ethnic groups is of concern to some members of these groups because it affects the rate of assimilation and continued ethnic identity (Stevens and Schoen 1988). Almost half of all Japanese Americans marry outside their ethnic group (Takagi 1994). More than half of all Native Americans are married to non–Native Americans (Yellowbird and Snipp 1994). For both Japanese Americans and Native Americans, intermarriage leads to profound questions about their continued existence as distinct ethnic groups in the twenty-first century. Among European ethnic groups in this country, such as Italians, Poles, Germans, and Irish, only one in four marries within the ethnic group. The ethnic identity of these groups has decreased considerably since the beginning of this century. Interestingly, Louisiana Cajuns have high rates of ethnic homogamy, especially for a group of their size and considering the length of time they have been in the United States. Among married Cajun women, more than 75% were married to Cajun men; among Cajun men, more than 70% were also homogamous (Bankston III and Henry 1999).

Matthijs Kalmijn points out that marrying *outside* of the group is not the same for all ethnic groups. For

example, when Latinos marry “out,” they are more likely marrying Latinos of a different cultural origin than they are white, European Americans. Asians, on the other hand, are much less likely to marry Asians of a different background and more likely when “marrying out” to marry whites (Kalmijn 1998). Kalmijn further indicates that the highest rates of homogamy are among blacks. The lowest rates are among European ethnic groups and among American Indians. Hispanics and Asians have intermediate homogamy rates (Kalmijn 1998).

**RELIGION.** Until the late 1960s, religion was a significant factor in marital choice. Today, most religions still oppose interreligious marriage because they believe it weakens individual commitment to the faith. Nonetheless, interreligious dating and marriage have been increasing. Almost half of all Catholics marry outside their faith (Maloney 1986). Tracking changes over a quarter century, research found that where in the early 1960s only 6% of Jews chose non-Jewish partners, by the late 1980s almost 40% of Jews were marrying non-Jewish spouses (Mindel, Haberstein, and Wright 1988). Intermarriages between Jews and Gentiles have continued to increase, as have marriages between Catholics and Protestants (Kalmijn 1998).

Data drawn from a study of 105 never-married undergraduates enrolled in courtship and marriage courses at a large southeastern university reveal a relatively small role played by religion in considerations of mate choice (Knox, Zussman, and Daniels 2002). Specifically, only one in five (22%) respondents agreed that, “I will only marry someone of the same religious background.” Gender surfaced as an influence on attitudes, because females were more likely than males (27% to 15%) to agree that they would only marry someone of the same religion. Females were also more likely than males (20% to 15%) to believe that they would be disappointing their parents by dating outside their faith. Finally, Knox and colleagues determined that there were religious differences in the importance attached to religious homogamy, with Baptists being more likely than Methodists or Catholics to oppose marrying outside their faith, as evident in their belief that such marriages are at greater risk of divorce (Knox et al. 2002).

Those who marry from different religious backgrounds do have greater risk of divorce than those from similar backgrounds (Bumpass, Martin, and Sweet 1991; Lehrer and Chiswick 1993; Sander 1993). Jews who intermarry are twice as likely to divorce as those

who marry homogamously (Chintz and Brown 2001). Apparently, being of different faiths is not the only consideration. It seems that the *larger* the “religious distance,” or disparity between two people’s backgrounds, the more likely they are to characterize their marriage as “unhappy” (Ortega, Whitt, and William 1988). In a study of Jewish marriages, what matters more in predicting the amount of conflict and instability is the extent of agreement or disagreement on Jewish issues, not what self-reported labels people use to identify themselves (Chintz and Brown 2001).

Religious groups tend to discourage interfaith marriages, believing that such marriages, in addition to weakening individual beliefs, lead to children being reared in a different faith or to secularization of the family. Such fears, however, may be overstated. Among Catholics who marry Protestants, for example, there seems to be little secularization by those who feel themselves to be religious (Petersen 1986). Some who are from different religious backgrounds, however, do convert to their spouses’ religions.

**SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS.** Most people marry others of their own socioeconomic status and of the same or similar educational background. Even if a person marries outside his or her ethnic, religious, or age group, the selected spouse will probably be from the same socioeconomic level. Furthermore, some ethnic or racial homogamy may be increased because of tendencies toward socioeconomic homogamy (Bankston III and Henry 1999). Of the various dimensions of socioeconomic status (family background, education, and occupation), the weakest appears to be between spouses’ class origins (correlation of about 0.30). The correlation between husbands and wives occupational statuses is stronger (around 0.40). However, the strongest correlation is between spouses’ educational backgrounds (approximately 0.55). This holds true in the United States, as well as most other countries. In the United States, educational homogamy has “strongly” increased (Kalmijn 1998).

Socioeconomic homogamy results from the combination of *choice-shaping factors*, such as shared values, tastes, goals, and expectations, and *opportunity-determining factors*, such as residential neighborhood, school, and/or occupation. In addition, control is exerted by affluent families to ensure that their children marry at the “right” level.

Not everyone marries homogamously. Men more than women marry below their socioeconomic level (**hypogamy**); women more often “marry up”

(a practice known as **hypergamy**). When class *intermarriage* occurs, it is rarely a case of spouses from opposite extremes (that is, paupers and princesses). Both the upper and the lower levels of the class spectrum appear more “closed” than the middle levels (Kalmijn 1998).

Looking at the education component of socioeconomic position a little more closely, we find that the biggest barrier is the one separating college graduates from those with lower levels of education. Occupationally, the divide is between those in white-collar and those in blue-collar occupations. It appears as though the cultural status, not the economic status, of occupations is a more important factor in determining compatibility and attractiveness for marriage (Kalmijn 1998).

**AGE.** Reflecting the data in Chapter 3 on trends in age at marriage, Americans have long tended to marry those of roughly the same or similar ages. Typically, the man is slightly older than the woman. Age is important because we view ourselves as members of a generation, and each generation’s experience of life leads to different values and expectations. Furthermore, different developmental and life tasks confront us at different ages. A 20-year-old woman wants something different from marriage and from life than a 60-year-old man does. By marrying people of similar ages, we often ensure congruence for developmental tasks. The gap between grooms’ and brides’ ages has narrowed in recent years, as the ages at which both men and women enter marriage have climbed.

Research suggests that the importance individuals place on age varies *by age* differently for men than for women. As men age they prefer women progressively younger than themselves. Women, on the other hand, prefer for their partners to be about the same age (ranging from slightly younger through slightly older) up to 10 years older than themselves. This does not appear to vary much, even as women age. Generally, women prefer men slightly older than themselves as spouses (Buunk et al. 2002).

Interesting data from the United States and Australia reveal that the same age preferences that exist among heterosexuals exist among homosexual men and women—men prefer younger partners, women prefer partners of about the same age. This tendency first surfaces among older—middle-aged—gay men (Over and Phillips, 1997).

Despite the popular beliefs that we will be more compatible with partners similar to us in age and—

conversely—relationships with partners much older than ourselves will be plagued by problems of incompatibility, research suggests otherwise. A study by David Knox and Tim Britton of 97 female students and faculty involved with partners between 10 and 25 years older than themselves concluded that couples in “age discrepant” relationships were, indeed, happy. In the study, 80% indicated either agreement (40%) or strong agreement (40%) with the statement: “I am happy in my current relationship.” Only 4% disagreed. Furthermore, more than 60% stated that if their current relationship ends, they would enter another age-discrepant relationship. They identified the following benefits of such relationships: maturity (mentioned by 58% of the women), financial security (58%), dependability (51%), and higher status (28%). Each of the relationship problems in Table 8.1 was identified by at least 25% of the women.

Also of note, only 25% of the women stated that their relationships had the support of their friends or parents. Fathers were most disapproving, with more than 40% identified as not being in support of the relationship (Knox and Britton 1997).

### Marital and Family History

An interesting application of the concepts of homogamy and heterogamy (intermarriage) can be found with regard to marital history. Essentially, never-married people are more likely to marry other never-married people than they are to “intermarry” by marrying divorced people (Ono 2005). Hiromi Ono questions whether this is a “by-product” of other homogamous patterns (such as age, socioeconomic status, or parenthood status) or a deliberate choice that individuals make to marry someone of similar marital history. A divorced person may believe that only another divorced person will similarly understand and have experience with the lingering ties to prior marriages.

**Table 8.1 ■ Problems Identified by Women in Age-Discrepant Relationships**

Problem	Percentage Reporting
Money	39
In-laws	33
Recreation	33
Children	25

Conversely, never-married individuals who marry divorced partners may find that they have to deal with lower amounts of resources because of the continued demands of former spouses and the needs of children of former marriages. This, in turn, may give rise to jealousy and impede the development of needed levels of trust (Ono 2005). Ono determined that **marital history homogamy** occurs more as a result of deliberate choices than as a byproduct of other statuses. Ono also reasonably speculated that parental status, like marital history, operates in a similar fashion. Parents make lifestyle concessions to their parenting responsibilities that nonparents don't have to make. Where children and their needs become priorities for parents, nonparents can maintain other priorities.

The structure of an individual's family of origin also turns out to be a factor in the process of mate selection. Children of divorced parents often marry other children of divorced parents. Research by Nicholas Wolfinger suggests that coming from a divorced home increases by 58% the likelihood of choosing another child of divorce as a spouse. Although homogamy often is associated with a greater chance for marital happiness and stability, family structure homogamy may be a noteworthy exception because marriages in which both spouses are children of divorce face greater odds of marital failure. Marriages in which either spouse comes from a divorced family are twice as likely to fail as those in which neither spouse is a child of divorce. When both spouses are from divorced homes, their marriages face three times the likelihood of failure as marriages between two children of intact parental marriages (Wolfinger 2003).

### Residential Propinquity

An additional homogamous factor is based on the principle of **residential propinquity**—the tendency we have to select partners (for relationships and for marriages) from a geographically limited locale. Put differently, the likelihood of marriage decreases as the distance between two people's residences increases. The obvious explanation behind this is one of opportunity. In most instances, to start dating or get together with someone you have to first meet. Our chances of meeting are greater when our daily activities (shopping, commuting, eating out, and so forth) overlap.

Although it is easy to trivialize this tendency as too obvious to be meaningful, consider the implications it has for the other patterns of homogamy. American communities are often segregated by class, race, or both.

In some towns, they may even have religious splits (for example, the Catholic side and the Protestant side of town or a Jewish neighborhood). Public schools, being neighborhood based, further the tendency for us to associate with others like ourselves. Thus, the types of people we are most likely to come into contact with and with whom we might develop intimate relationships or eventually marry are a lot like ourselves. Meeting at school promotes age, educational, and social class homogamy (Kalmijn and Flap 2001).

Thus, within a society somewhat residentially segregated by race or social class, residential propinquity may explain some other homogamous tendencies by how it limits our opportunity. But the story is more complicated than just where we live. After all, unmarried people do not just wander around a region looking for a spouse; they spend most of their lives in small and functional places, such as neighborhoods, schools, workplaces, bars, and clubs. Such local marriage markets are often socially segregated, which is why they are important for explaining marriage patterns. In the sociological literature, three local markets have been considered most often: the school, the neighborhood, and the workplace. Of these three, schools are considered the most efficient markets because they are homogeneous with respect to age and heterogeneous with respect to sex (Kalmijn 1998, 403).

At the same time that the opportunities to meet others like ourselves are so much greater than the opportunities to meet people unlike ourselves, the cultural beliefs that homogamous marriages are better or more likely to be stable might reinforce people's tendencies to "look locally," where they are more likely to be surrounded by people like themselves.

### Reflections

**Keeping heterogamy and homogamy in mind**, think about those who are or have been your romantic or marital partners. In what respects have your partners shared the same racial, ethnic, religious, socioeconomic, age, and personality characteristics with you? In what respects have they not? Have shared or differing characteristics affected your relationships? How?

### Understanding Homogamy and Inter marriage

Factors in the choice of partner interact with one another. Ethnicity and socioeconomic status, for example, are often closely related because of discrimination.

Many African Americans and Latinos are working class and are not as well educated as Caucasians. Caucasians generally tend to be better off economically and are usually better educated. Thus, a marriage that is endogamous in terms of ethnicity is also likely to be endogamous in terms of education and socioeconomic status.

Matthijs Kalmijn (1998) suggests that “in general, marriage patterns arise from three social forces: the preferences of individuals for resources in a partner, the influence of the social group, and the constraints of the marriage market.” It appears that all three of these combine to produce the tendencies toward homogamy and the patterns of mate choice we observe, but it is difficult to determine the relative strength of the factors or what is “most influential” in shaping mate selection practices. What we can say with more certainty is that the presence of both opportunity constraints and outside influence (or “interference”) makes it unwise to conclude that homogamy automatically reflects hostility or animosity toward others unlike oneself. It may not even illustrate an outright preference for people like oneself.

In addition to questioning causes, we might ask about consequences. Are homogamous relationships “better” or “stronger” relationships? Data on intermarriages by religion, race, and/or class are inconsistent on this question. Some studies reveal greater difficulties in non-homogamous relationships and higher likelihood of divorce among those who intermarry. Others fail to substantiate the negative outcome (Eshelman 1997). The most consistent findings are related to those risks associated with religious intermarriages, although these risks are not great.

There are three possible explanations as to why heterogamous marriages might be less stable than homogamous marriages (Udry 1974):

1. Heterogamous couples may have considerably different values, attitudes, and behaviors, which may create a lack of understanding and promote conflict.
2. Heterogamous marriages may lack approval from parents, relatives, and friends. Couples are then cut off from important sources of support during crises.
3. Heterogamous couples are probably less conventional and therefore less likely to continue an unhappy marriage for the sake of appearances.

Still other “consequences” of homogamy, especially by social class, education, or race, can be identified.

Hiromi Ono (2005, 304) contends that—especially with regard to race, education, and social class patterns but also with reference to marital history—homogamy has the potential to widen social inequality. What about consequences of intermarriage? Matthijs Kalmijn argues that intermarriage potentially has the following effects:

- Intermarriage can decrease the importance of cultural differences because the children of mixed marriages are less likely to identify themselves with a single group. Even when mixed couples socialize children into the culture of a single group, the children are less likely to identify with that group when intermarriage in society is common.
- Through intermarrying, individuals may question and lose negative attitudes they have toward other groups. Spouses and their wider networks (of kin and friends) gain the opportunity to get to know people “different” from themselves and question any biases and stereotypes they previously held.

## Theories and Stages of Mate Selection

Say that you meet someone who fits all the criteria of homogamy: same ethnic group, religion, socioeconomic background, age, and personality traits—the person your parents always dreamed you’d marry. Unfortunately, you can’t stand this person. Homogamy by itself doesn’t work. A range of theories has been suggested to address the question of why we select particular individuals. Do “opposites attract”? Do “birds of a feather flock together”? Do we unconsciously select people like our parents? What is more important: finding someone who seems to think as we do about things, or finding someone whose behavior fits what we expect in a partner?

Each of the preceding questions illustrates an existing theory of mate selection. The commonsense notion that “opposites attract” is in keeping with **complementary needs theory**, the belief that people select as spouses those whose needs are different. Thus, an assertive person who has difficulty compromising will be drawn to a less outgoing and highly adaptable person. The notion that “birds of a feather flock together” is more in keeping with theories such as **value theory** or **role theory**, in which gratification follows from finding someone who feels and/or thinks like we do. Having someone who shares our view of what’s important in life or who acts in ways that we desire in a

partner validates us, and this sense of validation leads to an intensification of what we feel toward that other person. **Parental image theory** suggests that we seek partners similar to our opposite-sex parent. Some versions of parental image theory draw on Freudian concepts such as the Oedipus complex, whereas others point toward the lasting impressions made by our parents (Eshelman 1997; Murstein 1986).

Bernard Murstein developed a social exchange based, sequential theory known as **stimulus–value–role theory** to depict what happens between that “magic moment” with its mysterious chemistry of attraction and the decision to maintain a long-term relationship such as marriage. Murstein’s theory identifies three stages of romantic relationships. At each stage, if the exchange seems equitable, the two will progress to the next stage and ultimately remain together (Murstein 1986). In the *stimulus* stage, each person is drawn or attracted to the other before actual interaction. This attraction can be physical, mental, or social. During the stimulus stage, with little other information on which to evaluate the other person, we make potentially superficial decisions. This is especially evident during first encounters.

In the next stage, the *value* stage, partners weigh each other’s basic values seeking compatibility. Each person considers the other’s philosophy of life, politics, sexual values, religious beliefs, and so on. Wherever they agree, it is a plus for the relationship. However, if they disagree—for example on religion—it is a minus for the relationship. Each person adds or subtracts the pluses and minuses along value lines. Based on the outcome, the couple will either disengage or go on to the next stage. Values are usually determined between the second and seventh meetings.

Eventually, in the *role* stage, each person analyzes the other’s behaviors, or how the person fulfills his or her roles as lover, companion, friend, worker—and potential husband or wife, mother or father. Are the person’s behaviors consistent with marital roles? Is he or she emotionally stable? This aspect is evaluated in the eighth and subsequent encounters.

Although the stimulus–value–role theory has been one of the more prominent theories explaining relationship development, some scholars have criticized it, especially regarding the question of whether we actually test the degree of “fit” between us and our partners. We might underestimate the importance of certain issues or, conversely, be focused more extensively on others. For example, religious fundamentalists and goddess worshippers may sometimes believe

that they are compatible. They may not discuss religion; instead, they might focus on the “incredible” physical attraction in their relationship. They may believe that religion is not that important, only to discover after they are married that it is important.

## Dating and Romantic Relationships

As increasing numbers of people delay marriage, never marry, or seek to remarry after divorce or widowhood, romantic relationships will, according to Catherine Surra (1991), “take different shapes at different points in time, as they move in and out of marriage, friendship, romance, cohabitation, and so on.” As a result, researchers are shifting from the traditional emphasis on mate selection toward the study of the formation and development of romantic relationships, such as the dynamics of heterosexual dating, cohabitation, post-divorce relationships, and gay and lesbian relationships. The field of personal relationships is developing a broad focus that explores relationship dynamics (Duck 1994; Kelley et al. 1983; Perlman and Duck 1987).

### Beginning a Relationship: Seeing, Meeting, and Dating

Although the general rules of mate selection are important in the abstract, they do not tell us how relationships begin. The actual process of beginning a relationship is discussed in the sections that follow.

#### Seeing

On a typical day, we may see dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of men and women. But seeing isn’t enough; we must become aware of someone for a relationship

#### Reflections

**What are some settings** in which you “see” people? How do the settings affect the strategies you use to meet others? How do you move from meeting to “going out” with someone? What are your feelings at each stage of seeing, meeting, and dating?

to begin. It may only take a second from the moment of noticing to meeting, or it may take days, weeks, or months. Sometimes “noticing” occurs between two people simultaneously, other times it may take considerable time, and sometimes it never happens.

The setting in which you see someone can facilitate or discourage meeting each other (Murstein 1976, 1987). **Closed fields**, such as small classes or seminars, dormitories, parties, and small workplaces, are characterized by a small number of people who are likely to interact whether they are attracted or not. In such settings, you are likely to “see” and interact simultaneously. In contrast, **open fields**, such as beaches, shopping malls, bars, amusement parks, and large university campuses, are characterized by large numbers of people who do not ordinarily interact.

## Meeting

How is a meeting initiated? Among heterosexuals, does the man initiate it? On the surface, the answer appears to be yes, but in reality, the woman often “covertly initiates . . . by sending nonverbal signals of availability and interest” (Metts and Cupach 1989). A woman will glance at a man once or twice and catch his eye; she may smile or flip her hair. If the man moves into her physical space, the woman then relies on nodding, leaning close, smiling, or laughing (Moore 1985).

Regardless of who initiates contact, a variety of verbal and nonverbal signals are used to convey attraction and interest to a potential partner. Smiling, moving closer to, gazing at, laughing, and displaying “positive facial expressions” are all gestures to convey interest or “flirt” (Regan 2003). Touch is also an important element in flirting, whether the touch consists of lightly touching the arm or hand or the face or hair of the target of interest or rubbing fingers across the other’s arm (Regan 2003).

If a man believes a woman is interested, he often initiates a conversation using an opening line. The opening line tests the woman’s interest and availability. You have probably used or heard an array of opening lines. According to women, the most effective are innocuous, such as “I feel a little embarrassed, but I’d like to meet you” or “Are you a student here?” The least effective are sexual come-ons, such as “You really turn me on. Do you want to have sex?” Women, more than men, prefer direct but innocuous opening lines over cute, flippant ones, such as “What’s a good-looking babe like you doing in a college like this?”

A recent Web search for “pickup lines” identified more than 2 *million* sites. There were sites specializing in math pickup lines, *Dr. Seuss* pickup lines, “Christian” pickup lines, “Jewish” pickup lines, and gothic pickup lines, as well as “cheesy,” humorous, and bad pickup lines. There were lines for women to use with men, men to use with women, men to use with men, and women to use with women. The following list is a sampling of some opening lines men or women have used (or tried) to initiate contact: To many of us, these lines seem corny, shallow, and unlikely to generate the kind of impression that might lead to forming a relationship. Nevertheless, readers of this text may well spot one or a few that they have heard (or used).

“You must be tired, because you’ve been running through my mind all day.”

“You know, if you held up eleven roses in front of a mirror, you would be looking at twelve of the most beautiful things in the world.”

“Do you have a quarter? I promised my mother I’d call her when I met the girl (guy) of my dreams.”

“Did they just turn on a fan in here or was that you blowing me away?”

“If I had a nickel for every time I met someone as beautiful as you, I’d have a nickel.”

Much as they are more likely than women to use “a line,” men are more likely to initiate a meeting directly, whereas women are more likely to wait for the other person to introduce himself or herself or to be introduced by a friend (Berger 1987). About a third or half of all relationships rely on introductions (Sprecher and McKinney 1993). An introduction has the advantage of a kind of prescreening, as the mutual acquaintance may believe that both may hit it off. Parties are the most common settings in which young adults meet, followed by classes, work, bars, clubs, sports settings, or events centered on hobbies, such as hiking (Marwell et al. 1982; Shostak 1987; Simenauer and Carroll 1982).

The Internet continues to gain popularity as a major way for people to “meet” a potential partner. Online, people can introduce themselves in fantasy-like images. A growing number of people first “meet” in cyberspace, find common interests, and form relationships that develop and intensify before they ever actually meet. Eleven percent of all internet using adults in the United States state that they have gone to an internet dating site for the purpose of meeting a

potential partner (Madden and Lenhart, 2006). This translates to an estimated sixteen million adults. Moreover, Mary Madden and Amanda Lenhart report:

- Nearly a third of adults (31%), an estimated 63 million people, know someone who has used a dating website.
- A quarter of American adults (26%), 53 million people, claim to know someone who has gone on a date that was initiated via an internet site
- Fifteen percent of American adults, 30 million people, claim to know someone who has had a long-term relationship or married someone who they met on the Internet.

Single men and women also rely on printed personal classified ads, where men tend to advertise themselves as “success objects” and women advertise themselves as “sex objects” (Davis 1990). Their ads typically reflect stereotypical gender roles. Men advertise for women who are attractive and deemphasize intellectual, work, and financial aspects. Women advertise for men who are employed, financially secure, intelligent, emotionally expressive, and interested in commitment. Men are twice as likely as women to place ads. Other alternative forms of meeting others include video dating services, introduction services, and 1-900 party-line phone services.

Single men and women often rely on their churches and church activities to meet other singles. Black churches are especially important for middle-class African Americans, as they have less chance of meeting other African Americans in integrated work and neighborhood settings. They also attend concerts, plays, film festivals, and other social gatherings oriented toward African Americans (Staples 1991).

For lesbians and gay men, the problem of meeting others is exacerbated because they cannot necessarily assume that the person in whom they are interested shares their orientation. Instead, they must rely on identifying cues, such as meeting at a gay or lesbian bar or events, wearing a gay or lesbian pride button, or being introduced by friends to others identified as being gay or lesbian (Tessina 1989). Once a like orientation is established, gay men and lesbians usually engage in non-verbal processes to express interest. Lesbians and gay men both tend to prefer innocuous opening lines. To prevent awkwardness, the opening line usually does not make an overt reference to orientation unless the other person is clearly lesbian or gay.

## Dating

For many of us, asking someone out for the first time is not easy. Shyness, fear of rejection, and traditional gender roles that expect women to wait to be asked may fill us with anxiety and nervousness. (Sweaty palms and heart palpitations are not uncommon when asking someone out the first time.) Both men and women contribute, although sometimes differently, to initiating a first date. Men are more likely to ask directly for a date: “Want to go see a movie?” Women are often more indirect. They hint or “accidentally on purpose” run into the other person: “Oh, what a surprise to see you *here* studying for your marriage and family midterm!” Although women may initiate dates, they do so less often than do men (Berger 1987).

In addition, research indicates that both women and men believe that men *should* initiate first dates, that men display a greater willingness to do so, and that men have a higher frequency of actual “first moves.” Interestingly, men also express a desire for women to more actively participate in initiating relationships, either by asking directly for a date or at least hinting. Men report that the most passive stance, in which women wait for men to ask or initiate, is less preferred (Regan 2003).

## Costs and Benefits of Romantic Relationships

As anyone who has had a romantic relationship can attest, relationships bring positive and negative experiences. In other words, when asked, people identify both rewards (companionship, sexual gratification, feeling loved and loving another, intimacy, expertise in relationships, and enhanced self-esteem) and costs (loss of freedom to socialize or date, investment of time and effort, loss of identity, feeling worse about oneself, stress and worry about the health or durability of the relationship, and other nonsocial costs like lower grades) of romantic relationships (Sedikedes, Oliver, and Campbell 1994, cited in Regan 2003).

Males and females differ some in what costs and rewards they identify. More males than females identify sexual gratification as a benefit of romantic relationships, and women are more likely than men to identify the benefit of enhanced self-esteem. More women than men mention loss of identity, feeling worse about themselves, or growing too dependent on their partners as relationship costs. Males, on the other hand, stress perceived loss of freedom (to socialize or



■ *Dating is a source of pleasure, as well as problems. It is also the process through which most Americans find their spouses.*



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date) and financial costs more than women do (Regan 2003).

Issues arise from the question of who initiates, who touches, and who terminates sexual advances. Norms have prescribed male leadership and dominance. Even though many people do not wish to have unequal sexual relationships, modes of expression and resistance and difficulty in changing communication patterns help maintain an edge of inequality and imbalance among women. For equality to occur, women need to determine what they wish to express and how they wish to keep those behaviors that give them strength.

## Problems in Dating

Dating is often a source of both fun and intimacy, but a number of problems may be associated with it. Think about your romantic relationships. When a disagreement occurs, who generally wins? Does it depend on the issue? When one person wants to go to the movies and the other wants to go to the beach, where do you end up going? If one wants to engage in sexual activities and the other doesn't, what happens?

Consistent with material presented on communication patterns, the female demand–male withdraw pattern found in many marriages is also common among dating couples. Of the 108 subjects in dating relationships studied by David Vogel, Stephen Wester, and Martin Heesacker (1999), 51% reported having a female demand–male withdraw communication

pattern. Another 28% described their communication as male demand–female withdraw, and 21% had no pronounced pattern. The female demand–male withdraw pattern was more often the style used by couples engaged in “difficult discussions.” David Vogel and colleagues suggest that either version of demand–withdraw may prove to be a problem for dating couples as far as their relationship satisfaction and cohesion are concerned (Vogel, Wester, and Heesacker 1999). They recommend reduction of the overall level of demand–withdraw behavior as an important step toward enhancing the quality of relationships.

## Dating Scripts and Female and Male Differences

Divergent gender-role conceptions may complicate dating relationships. Often, the woman is more egalitarian and the man is more traditional. Another problem is who pays when going out on a date. Some women may fear that male acquaintances would be put off if they offered to pay their share. Other women who offer to pay, whether traditional or egalitarian, may find their gestures are expected by their dates. Some men who accept offers by their dates to pay might nonetheless insist on choosing where they go, whether the women want to go there or not. Still other men allow their dates to pay but not publicly.

Although both women and men have ideas about what behaviors are most likely of men and of women on first dates, their ideas don't always match. This can be seen in the following data from 103 women and

## Understanding Yourself

### The Science Behind Internet Personals



Many search engines and websites allow users to search through personal ads to find a suitable match. For example, Yahoo and America Online each have sections of “personals.” Sites specifically designed for matchmaking and finding dates are abundant. A Web search for “personals and dating services” netted nearly 1 million sites. There are free sites and pay sites; sites for finding Christian partners or Jewish partners; sites for people in the military, single parents, “shy folks over 30,” and nondrinkers; sites that specialize in interracial matches; and some that specialize in matching gay men, lesbians, or bisexuals with potential partners. The more popular sites include Match.com, DreamMates, Matchdoctor, AmericanSingles.com, and eHarmony.

According to research by James Houran, Rense Lange, Jason Rentfrow, and Karin Bruckner, published in the *North American Journal of Psychology* (2004, 508),

Internet dating services represent a significant and growing segment of online services and the general personals and dating services. Market data for [2003] . . . alone reveals that Web services accounted for approximately 43 percent of the \$991 million United States dating-service sector, which also includes print and radio personal ads and other offline operations. Consumers tripled their spending on Internet dating services between 2001 and 2002, and Jupiter Research expects online dating sites to record over \$640 million by 2007. Some have estimated that as many as 22 percent of the 98 million singles in the U.S. in 2002 used online dating. As the industry segment grows, its advertising is becoming ubiquitous.

Between 2000 and 2003, the number of online advertisements for internet dating services increased six-fold. As the stigma historically associated with Internet dating is seemingly diminishing, these services are targeting and reaching their intended audiences with unprecedented success.

Although users can often peruse the ads and photos without supplying information, most sites ask users to register and answer a series of screening questions about basic characteristics (such as height and weight (or body type), education, religious preferences, political views, and smoking habits), their interests and what they enjoy doing (for example, movies, outdoor activities, and travel), and what characteristics they seek in their “ideal matches.” Upon completing these initial screening questions, the database is then made accessible, and users can search through the ads and e-mail those who interest them.

Some sites do the matching themselves, after asking members to complete more extensive questionnaires or personality profiles. In compiling profiles, some sites seek detailed self-assessments with close to 100 personality characteristics, including warmth, intelligence, submissiveness, impulsiveness, perfectionism, and generosity. People rate themselves on such characteristics and indicate their importance in a potential partner.

They are then matched with someone with whom they are deemed “compatible.” Many of the more popular sites, such as eHarmony, Match.com, and Perfectmatch.com, claim that their methods of assessing compatibility and matching people successfully are based on sound sci-

entific research about relationships. Although “virtually none of these services

provide acceptable substantiation for their claims,” eHarmony has patented its methodology and compatibility test (Houran et al. 2004). Central to its strategy is the principle of homogamy, the idea that more alike partners are more likely to be successful. Although there is considerable research supporting the idea that homogamy is beneficial, so too is there research stressing *complementarity*, wherein compatibility stems from the “harmonizing” of differences between partners’ personalities and skills (Houran et al. 2004).

As you think about the processes described here, to what extent do you feel as though your “ideal match” could be found on the basis of homogamy? Do you accept the idea that people ought to be paired with people like themselves? Furthermore, what do you think would be your chances of liking a person who was your “ideal match”? What other characteristics would be important to you?

Finally, as Houran and colleagues (2004, 511–512) point out, matchmaking and dating online may succeed or fail for different reasons than relationships that commence from in-person meetings. As they note, we don’t yet know enough about the outcomes of relationships initiated on-line to be able to conclude that the same variables that influence “offline” relationships, similarly affect relationships that begin on-line.

How confident are you that you could find your “perfect match” or relationship harmony online?

103 men, all of whom were upper-division college students. They were asked about many possible “first-date behaviors” and to identify whether the behavior would typically be something that the man or the woman would do or whether it would be equally possible and likely to be done by both. The results identified 14 activities as “the man’s,” 8 as “the woman’s,” and 7 as something either or both are equally likely to do. Overall, men’s and women’s **dating scripts** define first dates in fairly traditional terms, with such activities as who asks the other out, decides on the plans for the date, and pays the bill expected of the

man (Table 8.2). In addition, he is expected to call the woman on the day of the date, buy her flowers, and pick her up. He is also identified by both women and men as the more likely to make affectionate moves, initiate sexual contact, and take the other home (Laner and Ventrone 2000).

Mary Riege Laner and Nicole Ventrone’s findings also indicate that women are slightly more egalitarian than men; almost twice as many women as men thought either gender could do the inviting or initiating, and 22% of women compared to only 9% of men thought either person could pick up the bill.

**Table 8.2** ■ Percentage of Women and Men Identifying First-Date Behaviors as “Men’s,” “Women’s” or “Either or Both”

Behavior	Men’s Responses (%)			Women’s Responses (%)		
	Man	Woman	Either or Both	Man	Woman	Either or Both
1. Ask someone for a date	83	2	16	68	1	29
2. Wait to be asked for a date	4	86	10	2	87	8
3. Decide on plans by yourself	71	3	17	52	9	26
4. Discuss plans with date	43	16	38	17	26	54
5. Talk to friends about date	11	29	60	1	53	44
6. Buy new clothes for date	3	69	22	0	80	17
7. Select/prepare clothes for date	7	31	61	1	41	57
8. Groom for date (shave or put on makeup)	6	9	84	1	4	94
9. Take extra time to prepare	5	45	48	2	53	43
10. Call date on day of date	53	10	22	47	15	23
11. Prepare car (get gas, etc.)	83	1	13	69	8	18
12. Prepare house/apartment	24	18	56	7	44	47
13. Get money; collect keys	63	5	30	44	1	52
14. Get flowers to bring to date	83	7	8	79	4	2
15. Wait for date to arrive	13	82	5	11	76	11
16. Pick up your date	84	7	8	81	4	14
17. Greet/introduce date to family	16	50	33	5	58	35
18. Go to dinner	13	10	75	6	5	87
19. Eat light	5	78	16	0	87	5
20. Make small talk	31	13	54	15	20	60
21. Pay the bill	91	0	8	77	0	21
22. Open doors for date	88	5	4	89	1	3
23. Go somewhere else (e.g., movie)	22	4	71	11	1	86
24. Pay the bill	88	6	5	67	6	22
25. Go to bathroom to primp	4	76	17	2	73	17
26. Go somewhere else (e.g., drinks)	21	11	59	10	12	73
27. Have a deeper conversation	16	43	37	3	50	38
28. Pay the bill	82	3	15	67	4	23
29. Make affectionate move (e.g., hug)	60	6	30	52	7	39
30. Make sexual move	75	2	12	67	2	15
31. Take date home/walk to door	90	2	7	88	0	7
32. Discuss possible second date	59	5	34	38	5	53
33. Thank date for a good time	9	18	72	4	30	65
34. Call a friend to discuss date	9	54	36	0	67	31

Egalitarianism scores, calculated by adding the “either or both” category for men and for women and dividing by the 34 items, were: Men = 31.85; Women = 35.85  
SOURCE: Laner and Ventrone 2000, 488–500.

These dating scripts introduce potential problems for men and women. A woman who wants to see a man again faces a dilemma: how to encourage him to ask her out again without engaging in more sexual activity than she really wants. Meanwhile, research with over 300 college-age men and women found that the No. 1 dating problem cited by men was communicating with their dates (Knox and Wilson, cited in Knox 1991). Men often felt that they didn't know what to say, or they felt anxious about the conversation dragging. Communication may be a particularly critical problem for men because traditional gender roles do not encourage the development of intimacy and communication skills among males. A second problem, shared by almost identical numbers of men and women, was where to go. A third problem, named by 20% of the men but not mentioned by women, was shyness. Although men can take the initiative to ask for a date, they also face the possibility of rejection. For shy men, the fear of rejection is especially acute. A final problem—and, again, one not shared by women—was money, cited by 17% of the men. Men apparently accept the idea that they are the ones responsible for paying for a date.

### Extrarelational Sex in Dating and Cohabiting Relationships

You don't have to be married to be unfaithful (Blumstein and Schwartz 1983; Hansen 1987; Laumann et al. 1994). Both cohabiting couples and couples in committed relationships usually expect sexual exclusiveness. But, like some married men and women who take vows of fidelity, they do not always remain exclusive. Philip Blumstein and Pepper Schwartz (1983) found that those involved in cohabiting relationships had similar rates of extrarelational involvement as did married couples, except that cohabiting males had somewhat fewer partners than husbands did. Gay men had more partners than did cohabiting and married men, and lesbians had fewer partners than any other group.

Large numbers of both men and women have sexual involvements outside dating relationships considered exclusive. One study of college students (Hansen 1987) indicated that more than 60% of the men and 40% of the women had been involved in erotic kissing outside a relationship; 35% of the men and 11% of the women had experienced sexual intercourse with someone else. Of those who knew of their partner's affair, a large majority felt that it had hurt their own relationship. When both partners had engaged in

affairs, each believed that their partner's affair had harmed the relationship more than their own had. Both men and women seem to be unable to acknowledge the negative effect of their own outside relationships. It is not known whether those who tend to have outside involvement in dating relationships are also more likely to have extramarital relationships after they marry.

### Breaking Up

"Most passionate affairs end simply," Elaine Hatfield and G. William Walster (1981) noted. "The lovers find someone they love more." Love cools; it changes to indifference or hostility. Perhaps the relationship ends because one partner shows a side that the other partner decides is undesirable. Or couples disclose *too much*, revealing negative feelings or ideas that lead to unhappiness and the demise of the relationship (Regan 2003).

Relationships are also susceptible to outside influences. Perhaps, some new opportunity for greater fulfillment appears in someone else or in a return to a more autonomous and independent state. Even



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■ *Because of the variety of problems that plague relationships, many couples break up. In the process of breaking up, both the initiator and the rejected partner suffer.*

## Exploring Diversity Arranged Marriage



In American society, the expectation is that through the process of dating singles find their eventual life partner. Dating, or whatever else it might be called, allows us to test out our suitability for each other, develop stronger and closer relationships, fall in love, and select our life partners. Marriage without love goes against the culture of romantic love and these established patterns of mate selection, and is often the subject of soap operas and whispered gossip: “He just married her for her money.” “She married his family name.” Although we might consider marriage without love an exceptional case, anthropologists tell us that in traditional cultures most people do not consider love the basis for their entry into marriage.

Marriage customs vary dramatically across cultures, and marriage means different things in different cultures. If we consider how marriages come about—how they are “arranged”—we find that it is usually not the bride and groom who have decided to marry, as is the case in our own society today. Typically, the elders have done the matchmaking, sometimes relying on intermediaries and matchmakers to locate suitable spouses for their children. These strategies are neither “old news” (that is, they are still practiced) nor entirely restricted to other countries. *New York Times* journalist Stephen Henderson tells the story of Rakhi Dhanoa and Ranjeet Purewal.

Quoting one of their friends, Erica Loomba, Henderson captures some of the motivation behind using others to arrange marriages: “Each wanted a love marriage . . . yet neither would

dream of marrying someone who wasn’t a Sikh.” An immigration lawyer in New York whose parents emigrated from Punjab, India, 27-year-old Dhanoa decided that she wanted to marry someone of the same faith. “I began to appreciate that my religion is based on complete equality of the sexes,” she said. At the same time, Purewal was beginning to think about finding a partner. His mother had approached Jasbir Hayre, a Sikh matchmaker, living nearby in New Jersey. She told Henderson, “Ranjeet’s mother had approached me several times to keep a lookout for a girl.” So, when it came time to throw a party for her own daughter, Hayre invited both Dhanoa and Purewal. Although he had firmly believed in choosing for himself, on the basis of love, like Dhanoa, Purewal came to feel as though there were important issues to take into account. “I was adamant that I’d marry whoever I wanted. . . . But seeing how different cultures treated their families, I realized the importance of making the right match.” After 2 months of mostly covert dating, “their cover was blown, on a double date, [and] the matchmaker was quickly summoned to negotiate marital arrangements” (Henderson 2002).

The story of Dhanoa and Purewal illustrates a variation of a phenomenon common in many parts of the world. In most cultures, marriage matches do not result from individuals meeting and dating; instead, the parents of the bride and groom are charged with arranging the marriage of their children. In some cultures, mothers are the primary matchmakers, as in traditional Iroquois culture. In others, fathers have a dominant voice in arranging marriage, as in traditional Chinese society. In still other cultures, the pool of elders involved in matchmaking is more

extensive, including grandparents, aunts, uncles, and even local political and religious authorities, such as tribal chiefs and clan leaders. In all of these instances, though, marriage is a major event in the life of two *families*—both the bride’s and the groom’s—as well as for the clan, tribe, and community to which each family belonged. As such, important matters must be taken into account before agreeing to any particular match. Families must know how a particular marriage affects the family as a whole.

With issues of this magnitude at stake, marriage could not be left to the young people. Sentimental feelings of love would certainly cloud their judgment. Marriage was not primarily a personal or intimate event focused on a young couple alone. The feelings and love between an individual bride and groom were subordinate to the greater interests and welfare of the family, clan, and community.

Among the Bedouin of northern Egypt, marriages are usually arranged between a young man and a young woman who belong to different camps, thus creating blind marriages. That is, the bride and groom typically have not met before their engagement and marriage. The practice of arranging blind marriages further enhances the control and authority of the older generation over the young couple. Without ever having met, two people can hardly be in love at the time of their marriage. The emotion, attraction, and commitment that we mean by the word *love* may in time develop between husband and wife. However, in Bedouin society, as in most traditional societies, love is neither a necessary nor an advisable condition in arranging a good marriage.

satisfying relationships may end under these circumstances (Regan 2003). Over the course of their lifetimes, most people will experience multiple relationships and endure numerous breakups (Tashiro and Frazier 2003).

Breaking up is typically painful because few relationships end by mutual consent. The extent of distress caused by breakups is revealed by research indicating that many people include breaking up among the “worst events” they can experience; they are also among the biggest risk factors for adolescent depression (Tashiro and Frazier 2003). For college students, breakups are more likely to occur during vacations or at the beginning or end of the school year. Such timing is related to changes in the person’s daily living schedule and the greater likelihood of quickly meeting another potential partner.

Research indicates that relationships often begin to sour as one partner grows quietly dissatisfied (Duck 1994; Vaughan 1990). Steve Duck (1994) calls this the *intrapsychic* phase, Diane Vaughan (1990) talks about “keeping secrets.” One partner decides that something is wrong with the relationship, considers the possibility of ending the relationship, weighs the likely outcomes associated with being out of the relationship, and begins to build an identity as a “single.” All of this may happen before the other partner learns what has happened. By the time the “initiator” informs the partner, the partner is forced to play “catch-up,” in that the initiator is a few steps ahead in the exiting process. This is further discussed in Chapter 14.

Breaking up is rarely easy, whether you are on the initiating or “receiving” end. As Pamela Regan (2003) summarizes, the more satisfied you are with your partner, the closer you feel to your partner; the more difficult you believe it will be to find another relationship, the harder it is to experience a breakup. Social support and self-esteem appear to be important factors in helping someone recover more quickly and completely (Regan 2003).

Also important are the **attributions** we make to account for the demise of a relationship. Attributions may be important factors in efforts to avoid such problems in later relationships, shielding us from experiencing the heartache that accompanies a breakup. Ty Tashiro and Patricia Frazier suggest that there are four such attributions:

- *Person.* Personal traits and characteristics are identified as causes of relationship failure (“if only I hadn’t been so jealous”).
- *Other.* Personal traits and characteristics of the partner are seen as the causes of relationship failure (“he or she was always so insensitive”).
- *Relational.* The unique combination of person and other is perceived as the cause of the breakup (“we just wanted different things”).
- *Environmental.* The social environment is identified as the cause of the breakup. It comprises many things, from familial pressure and disapproval of the relationship, to work pressures, to “alternative romantic partners.”

According to Tashiro and Frazier, “relational” attributions are usually cited by those who construct accounts to explain why their relationships failed. These are followed by “other” attributions, “person” attributions, and “environmental” attributions. Although environmental attributions are quite uncommon, environmental factors weigh heavily on relationships. Ironically, environmental factors may be the “real cause” of a breakup incorrectly attributed to something else.

Attributions are also related to how distressing a breakup is felt to be. People who apply relational attributions are happier, more confident, and more socially active. “Other” attributions are associated with greater distress, including sadness, lack of self-confidence, and greater pessimism. Research on person attributions is mixed, with some showing that it is related to less and some suggesting it is associated with more distress.

Research demonstrates that, alongside pain and distress, breakups can induce positive changes that improve the quality of subsequent relationships you might enter. We might expect that the degree to which breakups are associated with positive rather than negative outcomes (for example, growth rather than distress) would depend on such things as whether or not we initiated the breakup (noninitiators suffer greater distress), our gender (females more than males experiencing more positive emotions such as “growth” following breakups), and/or our personality (people high in traits such as “agreeableness” respond to stressful situations more positively; people high in “neuroticism” are more likely to suffer from distress). Of these, gender differences occur in “stress-related growth,” with women reporting more growth following breakups than men. In addition, people high in “agreeableness” reported more post-breakup growth (Tashiro and Frazier 2003).

## Popular Culture

### Chocolate Hearts, Roses, and . . . Breaking Up? What about “Happy Valentine’s Day”?



Every year on February 14, millions of Americans exchange tokens of love and affection. As the day approaches, post office branches fill with Hallmark cards. Florists take orders and send roses around the country. Chocolate hearts show up on store shelves. Diamonds and gold jewelry are bought for and given to those we love. Millions of dollars are spent in efforts to show and tell our “one and only” how much we love them and, collectively, the country celebrates love and romance in the name of Valentine’s Day. You may be familiar with such rituals as both a giver and a recipient. You may be wondering what if anything is noteworthy about such rituals. One of the lesser known aspects of this holiday devoted to love is the effect it can have on ongoing love relationships. This effect was provocatively captured by exploratory research undertaken by Katherine Morse and Steven Neuberg in their study following the relationship outcomes for 245 undergraduate students (99 male and 146 female; mean age of 19.5 years) from the week before to the week after Valentine’s Day. The average relationship across all research participants was 18 months, suggesting that these were meaningful relationships (2004, 525). The results may surprise you, especially if you fashion yourself a romantic at heart.

It seems that “Valentine’s Day is harmful to many relationships” (509). Although at first this may seem hard to imagine, Morse and Neuberg remind us that, although limited, research has shown that holidays can affect behaviors. The best illustration of this is the effect major holidays (for example, Christmas, Thanksgiving, and New Year’s Eve and Day) have on suicide rates: essentially they postpone such acts from before to after the holiday. And although there is research on the effect of such events as spring break on relationships (especially infidelity), there hasn’t been much attention paid to how “recurring cultural events and holidays” might have serious relationship implications (510).

Morse and Neuberg predicted that during the 2-week period straddling Valentine’s Day (from 1 week before the holiday to 1 week after the holiday) there would be more breakups than in comparison periods from other times of year, and indeed, Valentine’s Day posed relationship hazards. The overall odds of breaking up were 5.49 times greater during the Valentine’s Day period than during the comparison months (which did not differ from one another). They further determined that the effect of the holiday on breakups was the result of a *catalyst effect*. The holiday had no effect on breakups among high-quality or improving relationships but did affect breakups among those in moderately strong and weak relationships if they were encountering relationship downswings. Already

suffering from diminishing expectations and unfavorable comparisons to other relationships or potential partners, such relationships might be deemed not worth the effort and expenses associated with trying to successfully play out the Valentine’s Day script, thus “making the option of relationship dissolution more attractive” (512). In the absence of Valentine’s Day’s romantic expectations and comparisons, a relationship might weather the storm of disappointing comparisons and unmet expectations for at least a time, even eventually shifting to a more gratifying and healthier state. But couples in a “down” state or heading downward as Valentine’s Day approaches are more vulnerable to breaking up.

They suggest that the catalyst effect may in part be a favor to troubled relationships in that it facilitates a breakup that was likely anyway, and hence “saved these couples the psychological stress, wasted time, and wasted resources that result from perpetuating a doomed relationship” (524). However, they also admit that because many long-term relationships go through periods of ups and downs, it is

“at least plausible that a good number of our couples might have otherwise survived the downward blip in relationship expectations and quality had it not been for the catalytic effects of Valentine’s Day” (524).

SOURCE: Morse and Neuberg 2004, 509–527.

A study of 92 undergraduates (75% female; age range 18–35 with a mean age of 20 years) found that positive change, such as personal growth, following breakups was common. On average, respondents reported positive changes that they believed would strengthen their future relationships and the chances

for success in those relationships. Using the same four categories of attributions discussed earlier, the most commonly reported positive changes were “person-related” (for example, “I learned not to overreact”) followed by “environmental” (for example, improved family relationships, increased success in school),

“relational” (for example, better communication) and “other” (remember, “other” refers to characteristics of the other with whom we have a relationship). Individuals who use environmental attributions were most likely to report both distress from a breakup and having experienced growth as a result of the breakup. Potentially, those who can explain the failure of their relationship in terms of changeable environmental factors are in a better position to learn from and implement such changes in future relationships (Tashiro and Frazier, 2003).

### Breakups among Gay and Lesbian Couples

As we discussed in Chapter 6, there are both similarities and differences between same-sex and heterosexual couples. Couple relationships, especially those that entail sharing a household, encounter many of the same day-to-day issues (for example, housework, money management, and the effects of outsiders such as family and friends on relationships). Furthermore, all couples need to manage issues that we dealt with in the last chapter, such as communication and conflict management. Given these similarities, how do same-sex couples and heterosexual couples compare in terms of susceptibility to breaking up?

Same-sex couples are more likely to break up than are heterosexual couples (Wagner 2006). Citing research findings by Lawrence Kurdek, Cynthia Wagner reports that in comparisons of married heterosexuals, cohabiting heterosexuals, gay and lesbian couples, married heterosexuals had the lowest rate (4%) of breaking up within 18 months of getting together (“relationship dissolution”), and lesbian couples had the highest (18%). However, Kurdek argues that the cause of differences is more likely the result of *marriage* than of *sexuality*. All cohabiting couples had similar “dissolution rates,” and all were significantly higher than the rate found among married heterosexuals. Marriage is more likely to be associated with cultural acceptance and social support. Furthermore, once married, it is more difficult to simply walk away or to separate simply and easily. Using comparative data from Sweden and Norway, Kurdek illustrates that state-sanctioned and recognized legal unions between gay men or lesbians lowered the rates at which such relationships broke up, even though they still did so at levels greater than among married heterosexuals (Wagner 2006). With only recent passage of Massachusetts’ gay marriage law and Vermont’s civil union legislation, we don’t yet have enough data on whether breakups and

dissolutions have occurred at levels similar to those among married heterosexuals.

There will still be differences between married heterosexuals and married gay or lesbian couples that are products of something other than sexual orientation. Married gay or lesbian couples will not likely benefit from the same levels of social support and acceptance as married heterosexuals. Even if their own intimate networks of family and friends are supportive (and in the case of families that is far from automatic), the wider society doesn’t offer the same climate of acceptance and support to gay and lesbian relationships. Thus, differences in rates of dissolution may follow from different levels of acceptance and support versus hostility.

What becomes of relationships once couples breakup? How do former romantic partners relate to each other? Research on 298 individuals from same-sex and 272 individuals from heterosexual romantic relationships reveals some interesting similarities in “post-dissolution relationships” (Lannutti and Cameron 2002). Many gay men and lesbians, as well as many heterosexuals, report remaining (or becoming) friends with former partners, especially following the “let’s just be friends” type of breakup. Those friendships are different, however, from friendships in which two people have no shared romantic past. In comparing characteristics of post-dissolution relationships, Pamela Lannutti and Kenzie Cameron found the following: Heterosexuals reported moderate amounts of satisfaction and emotional closeness and low levels of interpersonal contact and sexual intimacy with former partners. Gay and lesbian respondents revealed high levels of satisfaction, moderate levels of emotional intimacy and personal contact, and low levels of sexual intimacy in their post-dissolution relationships. For both same-sex and heterosexual former partners, post-dissolution relationships are different from intact or ongoing romantic relationships and consistently platonic friendships (Lannutti and Cameron 2002).

### Some Recommendations about Breakups

Regardless of your gender or sexual orientation, if you *initiate* a breakup, thinking about the following may help:

- *Be sure that you want to break up.* If the relationship is unsatisfactory, it may be because conflicts or problems have been avoided or confronted in



the wrong way. Instead conflicts may be a rich source of personal development if they are worked out. Sometimes people erroneously use the threat of breaking up as a way of saying, “I want the relationship to change.”

- *Acknowledge that your partner will be hurt.* There is nothing you can do to erase the pain your partner will feel; it is only natural. Not breaking up because you don’t want to hurt your partner may be an excuse for not wanting to be honest with him or her or with yourself.
- *Once you end the relationship, do not continue seeing your former partner as “friends” until considerable time has passed.* Being friends may be a subterfuge for continuing the relationship on terms wholly advantageous to you. It will only be painful for your former partner because he or she may be more involved in the relationship than you. It may be best to wait to become friends until your partner is involved with someone else (and by then, he or she may not care if you are friends or not).
- *Don’t change your mind.* Ambivalence after ending a relationship is not a sign that you made a wrong decision; neither is loneliness. Both indicate that the relationship was valuable for you.

If your partner breaks up with you, keep the following in mind:

- *The pain and loneliness you feel are natural.* Despite their intensity, they will eventually pass. They are part of the grieving process that attends the loss of an important relationship, but they are not necessarily signs of love.
- *You are a worthwhile person, whether you are with a partner or not.* Spend time with your friends; share your feelings with them. They care. Do things that you like; be kind to yourself.
- *Keep a sense of humor.* It may help ease the pain. Repeat these clichés: No one ever died of love. (Except me.) There are other fish in the ocean. (Who wants a fish?)

## Singlehood

A quick question: Do you know what the third week of September is? Not Labor Day, that’s weeks earlier. Give up? According to a report by the U.S. Census Bureau, the third week of September is Unmarried and

Single Americans Week, a week in which we are supposed to recognize singles, celebrate the single lifestyle, and acknowledge the contributions single people make to society. First started as National Singles Week in 1982 in Ohio by the Buckeye Singles Council and taken over by the American Association for Single People in 2001, the weeklong “celebration” was renamed in recognition that many unmarried people are in relationships or are widowed and don’t identify with the “single” label ([http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/facts\\_for\\_features\\_special\\_editions/005384.html](http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/facts_for_features_special_editions/005384.html)). In 2002, the association changed its name to Unmarried America. Although the designated week has been around for more than a quarter century, and is recognized by mayors, city councils, and governors in some 33 states, as of 2005 it had yet to be “legitimized” and incorporated into mainstream American culture, as indicated by both the absence of greeting cards for the occasion and the number of people (including the millions of unmarried people) unaware that the weeklong recognition exists (Coleman 2005).

Even a casual inspection of demographics in this country illustrates the increasing phenomenon of singlehood. The trend, which has taken root and grown substantially since 1960, includes divorced, widowed, and never-married individuals. Each year more adult Americans are single (Table 8.3).

According to a 2005 U.S. Census Bureau report, there are *100 million* unmarried and single Americans, comprising 44% of all U.S. residents age 15 and over. Of this population, 64% have never married, 22% are

**Table 8.3** ■ Percentage of Population 15 and Older Who Are Unmarried

Year	Men	Women
1890	48%	45%
1900	47%	45%
1910	46%	43%
1920	42%	43%
1930	42%	41%
1940	40%	40%
1950	32%	34%
1960	30%	34%
1970	34%	39%
1980	37%	41%
1990	39%	43%
2000	42%	45%

Marital status data for 1890–1970 from U.S. Census Bureau 1989. Data for 1980–2000 from U.S. Census Bureau 2001.

divorced, and 14% are widowed. There are 49 million households headed by single men or women. There are more single women than men; a ratio of 87 men to every 100 women of the U.S. population, 18 and older, has never married. And 15% of the unmarried population, representing 14.9 million people, are 65 years old or older (U.S. Census Bureau 2005).

The percentage of unmarried Americans varies by race and ethnicity; 20.6% of non-Hispanic whites, 39.4% of African Americans, 28% of Hispanics, and 28.5% of Asian and Pacific Islanders had never married. Furthermore, an additional 10.1% of non-Hispanic whites, 11.6% of African Americans, 7.7% of Hispanics, and 4.6% of Asian and Pacific Islanders were divorced (Fields 2000). Thus, the population of singles is quite large.

The varieties of unmarried lifestyles in the United States are too numerous to fit under one “umbrella” and too complex to be understood within any one category. They include: never married, divorced,

young, old, single parents, gay men, lesbians, widows, widowers, and so on, and represent diverse living situations that affect how singleness is experienced. In research on the unmarried, however, those generally regarded as “single” are young or middle age, heterosexual, not living with someone, and working rather than attending school or college. Although there are numerous single lesbians and gay men, they have not traditionally been included as singles in such research.

## Unmarried in America: An Increasing Minority

The growth in the percentage of *never-married adults*, from 20.3% in 1980 to 24% in 2000, has occurred across all population groups. In part, this increase (like the creation of National Unmarried and Single Americans Week) reflects a change in the way in which society views this way of life. Many singles appear to be postponing marriage to an age which makes better economic and social sense (U.S. Census Bureau 2000). The growing divorce rate is also contributing to the numbers of singles. In 2000, 8.8% of men and 10.8% of women 18 and over were divorced (Fields 2000). The proportion of widowed men and women has declined somewhat but remains similar to past numbers. Among older people, singlehood most often occurs because of the death of a spouse rather than by choice. Nevertheless, as society moves toward valuing individualism and choice, the numbers of singles will likely continue to grow. In many large cities in the United States, including Washington, D.C., Cincinnati; Seattle; St. Louis; Minneapolis and Fort Lauderdale, 40% or more of the population consists of singles living in their own households.

The increases in the numbers of single adults are the result of several factors:

- Delayed marriage. With a median age at first marriage of 27.1 years for men and 25.3 years for women in 2003 (U.S. Census Bureau 2003), Americans are waiting longer than ever to first enter marriage. The longer they postpone marriage, the greater the likelihood of never marrying. As shown in Table 8.4, the percentage of never-married men and women of typical “marrying ages” dramatically increased between 1970 and 2000. It is estimated that between 8% and 9% of men and women now in their 20s will never marry.



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■ There has been a steady increase in the numbers of single, unmarried Americans, as a result of such factors as delaying marriage, increases in divorce, and more economic opportunities for women.

**Table 8.4 ■ Percentage of Never-Married Women and Men by Age, 1970-2000**

Age Year	Male		Female	
	1970	2000	1970	2000
20-24	35.8	83.7	54.7	72.8
25-29	10.5	51.7	19.1	38.1
30-34	6.2	30.1	9.4	21.9
35-39	5.4	20.3	7.2	14.3
40-44	4.9	15.7	6.3	11.8

SOURCE: Fields 2000.

- Increasingly expanded educational, lifestyle, and employment options open to women. These reduce women's economic need to be married and expand their lifestyle options outside of marriage.
- Increased rates of divorce coupled with somewhat decreased likelihood of remarriage, especially among African Americans.
- More liberal social and sexual standards.
- Uneven ratio of unmarried men to unmarried women.

## Relationships among the Unmarried

When intentionally single people form relationships within the singles world, both the man and the woman tend to remain highly independent. Singles work, and, thus, tend to be economically independent of each other. They may also be more emotionally independent because their energy may already be heavily invested in their work or careers. Their relationships consequently tend to emphasize autonomy and egalitarian roles. Single women work and tend to be more involved in their work, either from choice or from necessity, but the result is the same: they are accustomed to living on their own without being supported by a man. Early analysis of the various factors that draw people to singlehood or marriage identified the various “pushes” and “pulls” of each lifestyle. These are illustrated in Table 8.5.

The emphasis on independence and autonomy blends with an increasing emphasis on self-fulfillment, which, some critics argue, makes it difficult for some to make commitments. Commitment requires sacrifice and obligation, which may conflict with ideas of “being oneself.” A person under obligation can't

**Table 8.5 ■ Pushes and Pulls toward Marriage and Singlehood**

<b>Pushes/Pulls toward Marriage</b>	Cultural norms
	Love and emotional security
	Loneliness
	Physical attraction and sex
	Parental pressure
	Desire for children
	Economic pressure
	Desire for extended family
	Social stigma of singlehood
	Economic security
	Fear of independence
	Peer example
	Media images
<b>Pushes/Pulls toward Singlehood</b>	Social status as “grown up”
	Guilt over singlehood
	Parental approval
	Fundamental problems in marriage
	Freedom to grow
	Stagnant relationship with spouse
	Self-sufficiency
	Feelings of isolation with spouse
	Expanded friendships
	Poor communication with spouse
	Mobility
	Unrealistic expectations of marriage
	Career opportunities
Sexual problems	
Sexual exploration	
Media images	

SOURCE: Adapted from Stein 1975.

necessarily do what he or she “wants” to do; instead, a person may have to do what “ought” to be done (Bellah et al. 1985).

According to Barbara Ehrenreich (1984), men are more likely to flee commitment because they need women less than women need men. They feel oppressed by their obligation to be the family breadwinner. Men can obtain many of the “services” provided by wives—such as cooking, cleaning, intimacy, and sex—outside marriage without being tied down by family demands and obligations. Thus, men may not have a strong incentive to commit, marry, or stay married.

Nevertheless, “flying solo at midlife” appears to be more problematic for men than for women (Marks 1996). Single women appear to have better psychological well-being than do single men. For those socialized during an era of traditional gender roles and family values with marriage as the norm, there seemed

to be a degree of mental health risk associated with singlehood, especially for men.

## Culture and the Individual versus Marriage

The tension between singlehood and marriage is diminishing as society increasingly recognizes singlehood as an option rather than a deviant lifestyle. The singles subculture is glorified in the mass media; the marriages portrayed on television are situation comedies or soap operas abounding in extramarital affairs. Yet many are rarely fully satisfied with being single and yearn for marriage. They are pulled toward the idea of marriage by their desires for intimacy, love, children, and sexual availability. They are also pushed toward marriage by parental pressure, loneliness, and fears of independence. At the same time, married people are pushed toward singlehood by the limitations they feel in married life. They are attracted to singlehood by the possibility of creating a new self, having new experiences, and achieving independence.

## Types of Never-Married Singles

Much depends on whether a person is single by choice and whether he or she considers being single a temporary or permanent condition (Shostak 1987). If the person is voluntarily single, his or her sense of well-being is likely to be better than that of a person who is involuntarily single. Arthur Shostak (1981, 1987) divided singles into four types:

- *Ambivalents.* Ambivalents are usually younger men and women actively pursuing education, career goals, or “having a good time.” Voluntarily single, they consider their singleness temporary. Though not actively seeking marital partners, they remain open to the idea of marriage. Some ambivalents are cohabitators.
  - *Wishfuls.* Wishfuls are involuntarily and temporarily single, actively and consciously seeking marital partners.
  - *Resolveds.* Resolved individuals regard themselves as permanently single. They include priests and nuns, as well as single parents who prefer rearing their children alone. Most, however, are “hard-core” singles who prefer to be single.
  - *Regretfuls.* Regretful singles prefer to marry but are resigned to their “fate.” A large number of these are well-educated, high-earning women over 40 who find a shortage of similar men as a result of the marriage gradient.
- Singles may shift from one type to another at different times. All but the resolveds share an important characteristic: they want to move from a single status to a romantic couple status. “The vast majority of never-married adults,” writes Shostak (1987), “work at securing and enjoying romance.” Never-married singles share with married Americans “the high value they place on achieving intimacy and sharing love with a special one.”

## Singles: Myths and Realities

There are many long-standing myths about singles (Cargan and Melko 1982; Waehler 1996). Although first identified more than 20 years ago, notice how familiar these notions still sound:

- *Singles depend on their parents.* Few real differences exist between singles and marrieds in their perceptions of their parents (regarding warmth or openness) and differ only slightly in the amount and nature of parental conflicts.
  - *Singles are self-centered.* Singles value friends more than do married people.
  - *Singles are more involved in community service projects.*
  - *Singles have more money.* Married couples are better off economically than singles, in part because both partners often worked.
  - *Singles are happier.* Singles tend to believe that they are happier than marrieds, whereas marrieds believe that they are happier than singles. Single men exhibited more signs of stress than did single women.
  - *Singles view singlehood as a lifetime alternative.* Most singles expected to be married within 5 years. They do not view singlehood as an alternative to marriage but as a transitional time in their lives.
- Leonard Cargan and Matthew Melko also determined that the following statements characterize singlehood more accurately:
- *Singles don't easily fit into married society.* Singles tend to socialize with other singles. Married people

think that if they invite singles to their home, they must match them with an appropriate single member of the other sex. Married people tend to think in terms of couples.

- *Singles have more time.* Compared with their married peers, singles are more likely to go out two or three times a week, and they have more choices and more opportunities for leisure activities.
- *Singles have more fun.* Singles more often engage in sports and physical activities and have more sexual partners than do marrieds.
- *Singles are lonely.* Singles, especially formerly married singles, tend to be lonelier than married people.

## Gay and Lesbian Singlehood

In the late nineteenth century, groups of gay men and lesbians began congregating in their own clubs and bars. There, in relative safety, they could find acceptance and support, meet others, and socialize. By the 1960s, some neighborhoods in the largest cities (such as Christopher Street in New York and the Castro district in San Francisco) became identified with gay men and lesbians. These neighborhoods feature not only openly lesbian or gay bookstores, restaurants, coffee houses, and bars but also clothing stores, physicians, lawyers, hair salons—even driver’s schools. They have gay churches, such as the Metropolitan Community Church, where gay men and lesbians worship freely; they have their own political organizations, newspapers, and magazines (such as *The Advocate*). They have family and childcare services oriented toward the needs of the gay and lesbian communities; they have gay and lesbian youth counseling programs.

In these neighborhoods, men and women are free to express their affection as openly as heterosexuals. They experience little discrimination or intolerance, and they are more involved in lesbian or gay social and political organizations. Recently, with increasing acceptance in some areas, many middle-class lesbians and gay men are moving to suburban areas. In the suburbs, however, they remain more discreet than in the larger cities (Lynch 1992).

The urban gay male subculture that emerged in the 1970s emphasized sexuality. Although relationships were important, sexual experiences and variety were more important (Weinberg and Williams 1974). This changed with the HIV and AIDS epidemic. Beginning in the 1980s, the gay subculture placed increased

emphasis on the relationship context of sex (Carl 1986; Isensee 1990). Relational sex has become normative among large segments of the gay population (Levine 1992). Most gay men have sex within dating or love relationships. (Some AIDS organizations are giving classes on gay dating to encourage safe sex.) One researcher (Levine 1992) says of the men in his study: “The relational ethos fostered new erotic attitudes. Most men now perceived coupling, monogamy, and celibacy as healthy and socially acceptable.”

Beginning in the 1950s and 1960s, young and working-class lesbians developed their own institutions, especially women’s softball teams and exclusively female gay bars as places to socialize (Faderman 1991). During the late 1960s and 1970s, **lesbian separatists**, lesbians who wanted to create a separate “womyn’s” culture distinct from heterosexuals and gay men, rose to prominence. They developed their own music, literature, and erotica; they had their own clubs and bars. But by the middle of the 1980s, according to Lillian Faderman (1991), the lesbian community underwent a “shift to moderation.” The community became more diverse, including Latina, African American, Asian American, and older women. It has developed closer ties with the gay community. They now view gay men as sharing much with them because of the common prejudice directed against both groups.

In contrast to the gay male subculture, the lesbian community centers its activities on couples. Lesbian therapist JoAnn Loulan (1984) writes: “Being single is suspect. A single woman may be seen as a loser no one wants. Or there’s the ‘swinging single’ no one trusts. The lesbian community is as guilty of these prejudices as the world at large.”

Lesbians tend to value the emotional quality of relationships more than the sexual components. Lesbians usually form longer-lasting relationships than gay men (Tuller 1988). Lesbians’ emphasis on emotions over sex and the enduring quality of their relationships reflects their socialization as women. Being female influences a lesbian more than being gay.

## Cohabitation

Few changes in patterns of marriage and family relationships have been as dramatic as changes in cohabitation. What in the 1960s was rare and relegated to hushed whispers and secrets from families is now a common experience (King and Scott 2005).

**Table 8.6** ■ **Numbers of Individuals Cohabiting, by Age**

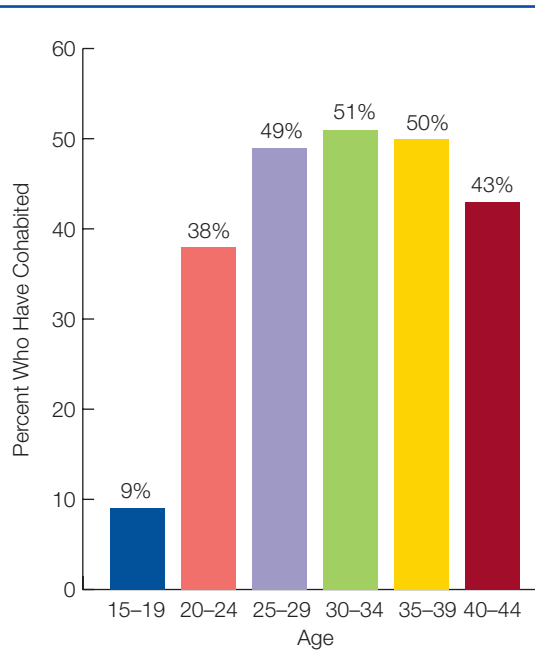
Age	Number of People Cohabiting
<30	3.6 million
30–39	2.6 million
40–49	1.7 million
> 50	1.2 million

SOURCE: King and Scott 2005; 2000 Census Public Use Microdata Samples.

## The Rise of Cohabitation

Over the past 40 years, cohabitation has increased 10-fold. It has increased across all socioeconomic, age, and racial groups. For example, just between 1980 and 1990 the rate of cohabitation nearly doubled among unmarried people less than 40 years old; during the same decade the cohabitation rate tripled among those 60 years old and older (King and Scott 2005).

Looking at the percentage of women, 15–44, who, according to a 2002 Centers for Disease Control study, have cohabited shows how commonplace this lifestyle has become (see Figure 8.2). This is especially true for women between the ages 25 to 44.

**Figure 8.2** ■ **Percentage of Women, 15–44, Who Have Ever Cohabited**

SOURCE: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2002.

As illustrated by both Table 8.6 and Figure 8.2, cohabitation appears no longer to be a moral issue but rather has increasingly become a family lifestyle. It also appears to be a lifestyle that is here to stay.

There are an estimated 5.5 million cohabiting couples in the United States, including 4.9 million heterosexual couples and nearly 600,000 gay and lesbian couples (U.S. Census Bureau 2002, Table 49). Forty years ago there were only approximately 400,000 such couples. Thus, we can see how steep an increase has occurred, especially since 1970 (see Figure 8.3).

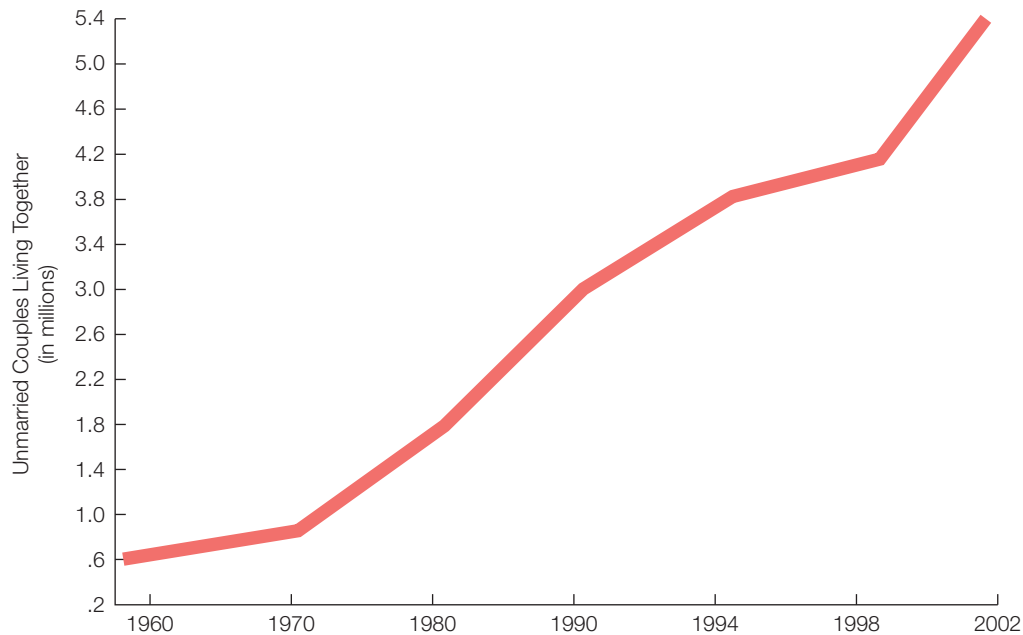
In the United States, cohabiting couples still lack most of the rights that married couples enjoy, a topic we return to shortly. According to Judith Seltzer (2000), children of cohabiting couples may also be disadvantaged unless they have legally identified fathers. This situation differs greatly in many other parts of the world. In Sweden, for instance, the law treats unmarried cohabitants and married couples the same in such areas as taxes and housing. In many Latin American countries, cohabitation has a long and socially accepted history as a substitute for formal marriage (Seltzer 2000).

Cohabitation has increased, becoming not only more widespread but also more accepted in recent years for several reasons:

- *The general climate regarding sexuality is more liberal than it was a generation ago.* Sexuality is more widely considered to be an important part of a person's life, whether or not he or she is married. Love rather than marriage is now widely regarded as making a sexual act moral.
- *The meaning of marriage is changing.* Because of the dramatic increase in divorce for most of the last quarter of the twentieth century, marriage is no longer thought of as a necessarily permanent commitment. Permanence is increasingly replaced by serial monogamy—a succession of marriages, and the difference between marriage and living together is losing its sharpness.

### Matter of Fact

Although cohabitation has increased for all educational groups and for Caucasians, Latinos, and African Americans, it is more common among those with lower levels of education and income (Seltzer 2000).

**Figure 8.3 ■ Cohabitation: 1960 to 2001**

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of the Census 2001.

- *Men and women are delaying marriage longer.* More than half of cohabiting couples eventually marry (Smock 2000). As long as children are not desired, living together offers advantages for many couples. When children are wanted, however, the couple usually marries.

## Types of Cohabitation

There is no single reason to cohabit, just as there is no single type of person who cohabits or one type of cohabiting relationship. One typology differentiates among *substitutes or alternatives for marriage*, *precursors to marriage*, *trial marriages*, and *coresidential dating* (Casper and Bianchi 2002; Phillips and Sweeney 2005). These can be distinguished by the expectations partners have for a married future, their perceptions of the stability of the relationship, and their general attitudes toward cohabiting relationships. In **trial marriages**, the motive for cohabiting is to assess whether partners have sufficient compatibility for marriage. They are undecided as to their likelihood of marriage and by cohabiting expect to assess their suitability. When the relationship is a *precursor to marriage*, there is an expectation that eventually the couple will marry.

In both of the other types (substitutes for marriage and coresidential dating), there is no expectation of marriage. As to the expected duration of the relationship, when either a substitute for marriage or precursor to marriage, couples expect to be together a long time. The coresidential dating situation is expected to last a short time. In the case of trial marriages, couples don't know whether and how long they will stay together (Heuveline and Timberlake 2004).

A second typology separates cohabitation into the following five types (Heuveline and Timberlake 2004):

- *Prelude to marriage.* Cohabitation is used as a “testing ground” for the relationship. Cohabitants in this type of situation would likely marry or break up before having children. The duration of this type is expected to be relatively short, and couples should transition into marriage.
- *Stage in the marriage process.* Unlike the prior type, couples may reverse the order of marriage and childbearing. They cohabit for somewhat longer periods, typically in response to opportunities that they can pursue “by briefly postponing marriage” (Heuveline and Timberlake 2004, 1,216). It is understood by both partners that they intend to eventually marry.

- *Alternative to singlehood.* Considering themselves too young to marry, and with no immediate intention to marry, such couples prefer living together to living separately. Having a commitment level more like a dating couple than that of a married couple, such relationships will be prone to separation and breaking up.
- *Alternative to marriage.* Couples choose living together over marriage but choose, as married couples would, to form their families. Greater acceptance of out-of-wedlock births and childrearing will increase the numbers of couples experiencing this type of cohabitation. Such couples would not likely transition into marriage but would likely build lasting relationships.
- *Indistinguishable from marriage.* Such couples are similar to the previous type but are more *indifferent* rather than *opposed* to marriage. As cohabitation becomes increasingly accepted and parenting receives support regardless of parents' marital status, couples lack incentive to formalize their relationships through marriage.

Consider one more typology of cohabitation, highlighting the factors couples consider in deciding to live together, the “tempo of relationship advancement” into cohabitation, and the language used, or story told, by couples in accounting for their cohabiting (Sassler, 2004). Sharon Sassler identifies six broad categories of reasons couples decide to cohabit: finances, convenience, housing situation, desire, response to family or parents, and as a trial, out of which she constructs a three category typology (2004, 498):

- *Accelerated cohabitants* decide to move in together quickly, typically before they had dated 6 months. Emphasizing the strength and intensity of their attraction and their connection, the fact that they were spending a lot of time together, and identifying finances and convenience as major reasons for their decision, they contend moving in together felt like “a natural process.”
- *Tentative cohabitant* admitted to some uncertainty about moving in together. Together for 7 to 12 months before living together, they typically saw each other less often than the “accelerateds” did before moving in together (for example, 3 or maybe 4 nights a week) or had experienced disruptions in their relationships with one of the partners being gone for a period, which slowed their progression into cohabitation. They often

mentioned “unexpected changes in their residential situation” as a reason for their decision (2004, 500). Absent such a situation, they might not have moved in together when they did.

- *Purposeful delayers* were the most deliberate in the decision-making process. Their relationships progressed more gradually, taking more than a year before they decided to live together, and allowing them opportunity to discuss future plans and goals. They most often mentioned housing arrangements and finances as the reasons they moved in together.

Obviously, not all cohabitants desire, intend, or expect to marry. Although cultural attitudes and values—as well as ideas about singlehood, dating, marriage, and cohabitation—somewhat determine whether someone expects to marry, socioeconomic criteria are also of importance. Wendy Manning and Pamela Smock (2002) suggest that the percentage of cohabiting women who expect to marry their partners remained fairly stable from the late 1980s through the mid-1990s, with 74% of cohabitants expressing an expectation to marry. Those women with higher probability of expecting marriage are women who live with partners of high socioeconomic status. In addition, men's age and religiosity (strength of religious involvement and identification) make a difference in women's expectations of marriage. In terms of race, black women have lower probability of expecting marriage than either white or Hispanic women. Furthermore, despite relatively worse economic circumstances, Latinos have higher marriage rates than whites. Among cohabiting women, Latinos and whites have similar expectations regarding the likelihood that they will marry their partners (Manning and Smock 2002).

### Matter of Fact

Children often turn cohabitation into marriage. Cohabiting couples in which the woman becomes pregnant have a greater likelihood of marrying than cohabiting couples where no pregnancy occurs. Also, cohabiting couples who already have children from previous relationships are more likely to marry than couples who don't have children (Seltzer 2000).

The meaning of cohabitation varies for different groups. For African Americans, cohabitation is more likely to be a substitute for marriage than a trial marriage, and blacks are more likely than whites to



conceive, give birth, and raise children in a cohabiting household. Indirectly this implies that cohabitation is a more committed relationship for blacks than for whites, a more acceptable family status, and a more acceptable family form within which to rear children—even though blacks are no more likely than whites to say they approve of cohabitation (Phillips and Sweeney 2004).

The same appears to be true among Hispanics, where the idea of “consensual unions” outside of marriage goes back a long way in Latin America, especially among the economically disadvantaged. More than among whites, for Hispanics cohabitation is more likely to become an alternative to marriage. Again, we draw this conclusion from rates of nonmarital pregnancy and childbearing. Julie Phillips and Meghan Sweeney report that for Hispanics cohabitation “may be a particularly important context for *planned* childbearing” (2004, 299; emphasis added).

The most notable social effect of cohabitation is that it delays the age of marriage for those who live together. *Ideally*, cohabitation could encourage more stable marriages because the older people are at the time of marriage, the less likely they are to divorce. However, as we shall soon see, cohabitation does *not* ensure more stable marriages.

Although there may be a number of advantages to cohabitation, there are also disadvantages. Parents may refuse to provide support for school as long as their child is living with someone, or they may not welcome their child’s partner into their home. Cohabiting couples may also find that they cannot easily buy houses together, because banks may not count their income as joint; they also usually don’t qualify for insurance benefits. If one partner has children, the other partner is usually not as involved with the children as he or she would be if they were married. Cohabiting couples may find themselves socially stigmatized if they have a child. Finally, cohabiting relationships generally don’t last more than 2 years; couples either break up or marry.

Living together takes on a different quality among those who have been previously married. About 40% of cohabiting relationships have at least one previously married partner. Remarriage rates have dipped as post-marital cohabitation has increased (Seltzer 2000). Still, most remarriages are preceded by cohabitation (Ganong and Coleman 1994).

About a third of all cohabiting couples have children from their earlier relationships. As a result, the motivation in these relationships is often colored by

painful marital memories and the presence of children (Bumpass and Sweet 1990). In these cases, men and women tend to be more cautious about making their commitments. Even though cohabiting couples are less likely to stay together compared to married couples, having children in the household somewhat stabilizes the couples (Wu 1995).

## Common-Law Marriages and Domestic Partnerships

At one point, cohabiting couples would, after a short period of living together, enter what is known as **common-law marriage**. A couple who “lived as husband and wife and presented themselves as married,” was considered to be married. Originating in English common law, as practiced in the United States common-law marriage was seen as a practical way to enable couples who wanted to be married but were too geographically removed from both an individual with the authority to marry them and a place where they could obtain a marriage license to marry (Willets 2003). Common-law marriage became less necessary in the nineteenth century as the availability of officials who could perform marriage ceremonies grew. Although most states no longer allow or recognize common-law marriage, as recently as 2005, in the United States the following 11 states and the District of Columbia still did:

### STATES WITH COMMON-LAW MARRIAGE

Alabama	Oklahoma
Colorado	Rhode Island
Iowa	South Carolina
Kansas	Texas
Montana	Utah
New Hampshire (for inheritance purposes only)	

If you happen to be reading this in one of those states and you meet the requirements described earlier, congratulations, you have just been pronounced married! Although we are being facetious, common-law marriage does unite into legal marriage two people who never sought and never obtained a marriage license. Once in such a marriage (Solot and Miller 2005),

if you choose to end your relationship, you must get a divorce, even though you never had a wedding.

Legally, common law married couples must play by all the same rules as “regular” married couples. If you live in one of the common law states and don’t want your relationship to become a common-law marriage, you must be clear that it is your intention not to marry.

In states that recognize common-law marriages, the amount of time a couple must live together before being considered married varies. What is essential is that they have presented themselves as if married, acting like they are married, telling people they are married, and doing the things married people do (including referring to each other as “husband” and “wife”). In states that don’t recognize common-law marriages, no matter how long you live together or how married you act, you are not married.

**Domestic partners**—cohabiting heterosexual, lesbian, and gay couples in committed relationships—are gaining some legal rights. Domestic partnership laws, which grant some of the protection of marriage to cohabiting partners, are increasing the legitimacy of cohabitation. In some ways, domestic partnerships are alternative forms of cohabitation, with certain formal rights and protections. Civil unions are more like alternative versions of marriage (Willetts 2003).

In 1984, Berkeley, California, was the first U.S. city to enact a domestic partnership ordinance and extend it to both heterosexual and same-sex couples (Willetts 2003). In 1997, San Francisco extended health insurance and other benefits to their employees’ domestic (which includes same-sex) partners. Individual employers, such as the Gap, Levi Strauss, and Walt Disney Company soon followed suit, introducing domestic partner policies, which have now become fairly commonplace in the private sector as well as in many local and state governments, colleges and universities. As of March, 2006, 49% of Fortune 500 (and 78% of Fortune 100) companies offered employees domestic partnership benefits, up from 25% of Fortune 500 companies in 2000.

A number of states—including California, Hawaii, Maine, Maryland, New Jersey and Alaska—have domestic partnership laws in place or pending. In Connecticut and Vermont, civil unions are available to same-sex couples. Additionally, some municipal governments provide domestic partner benefits even when their state governments do not. In New York City, for example, domestic partnership benefits extend to heterosexual or same sex couples, whereas the statewide laws are more narrowly framed, and available only to

gay or lesbian couples. Furthermore, because heterosexual couples *could* marry whereas same-sex couples cannot, some domestic partnership protections, such as those provided by the state of New Jersey, are restricted to same-sex couples and to opposite sex couples in which one partner is at least 62 years old. Note that even in the absence of laws recognizing domestic partnerships, many employers offer benefits to domestic partners of their employees. As Marion Willetts (2003) details, thousands of private companies, along with hundreds of colleges and universities, provide employees’ domestic partners with health benefits.

Domestic partners, whether heterosexual, gay, or lesbian, may still lack some of those legal rights and benefits that come automatically with marriage. Recalling only some of the rights and benefits noted in Chapter 1, these include the right to do the following:

- File joint tax returns
- Automatically make medical decisions if your partner is injured or incapacitated
- Automatically inherit your partner’s property if he or she dies without a will
- Collect unemployment benefits if you quit your job to move with a partner who has obtained a new job
- Live in neighborhoods zoned “family only”
- Obtain residency status for a noncitizen partner to avoid deportation

Keep in mind that heterosexual domestic partnerships and same-sex domestic partnerships and civil unions frequently result from different motivations. Among heterosexuals, domestic partnership is a *deliberately chosen alternative to marriage*. This is illustrated in the “Real Families” box in this section. For at least some gay and lesbian couples, domestic partnerships or civil unions are the closest approximation to legal marriage available to them. Some same-sex couples would marry if marriage was an option.

## Gay and Lesbian Cohabitation

The 2000 U.S. Census reported nearly 600,000 gay or lesbian couples living together. Other estimates put the number at more than 1.5 million same-sex cohabiting couples. The relationships of gay men and lesbians have been stereotyped as less committed than heterosexual couples because (1) lesbians and gay men cannot legally marry, (2) they may not emphasize sexual exclusiveness as strongly, and (3) heterosexuals

## Real Families

### Choosing Domestic Partnership



I get kind of upset when people say that a domestic partnership is an alternative to marriage. . . . That's not what it is. . . . It's a different approach to looking at partnerships in sort of a legal sense.

The preceding comment is from 26-year-old Marie as she talked to sociologist Marion Willetts about her 4-year-long licensed relationship. Willetts interviewed 22 other licensed heterosexual domestic cohabitants in the first study that attempted to uncover and document the motives for embarking on a domestic partnership instead of marriage. Although the rights and benefits bestowed by domestic partnership recognition could be obtained by marrying, some couples opt instead to enter licensed domestic partnerships. Typically, they must sign an affidavit declaring that they are not married to someone else and that they are not biologically or legally related to each other. They further pledge to be mutually responsible for each other's well-being and to report to authorities any change in their relationship—either marriage or dissolution (Willetts 2003, 939). Willetts notes that motives behind heterosexual couples' choice to *cohabit* rather than marry include economic benefits, as well as more personal and philosophical benefits, such as rejecting the assumptions that are part of legal marriage, not wanting the state to intervene in their relationships, and wanting to avoid past marital failures. But what about motives to license partnerships?

Economic benefits, including health insurance coverage, access to

university-owned family housing or in-state tuition benefits, or access to family membership rates in outside organizations, was the motive most cited by Willetts's interviewees. For formerly married cohabitants, licensed partnerships allowed them to avoid reentering marriage yet obtain the protection and recognition of documentation. For others, such as 31-year-old Leslie, obtaining a domestic partnership license with her partner, Alan, was a means to obtain recognition in the eyes of others, that they had made a deep and meaningful commitment to each other, even in the absence of a wedding: "I guess [we wanted] to sort of be counted. There's [sic] relationships that mean a lot that aren't recognized by law and to sort of be counted in that count in the city."

When Willetts posed the question of why that mattered, Leslie continued:

It's difficult to be in a relationship where people are like, "Oh, aren't you married?" or "Are you not married?" . . . It's like an issue all the time. "Why aren't you married, you've been together for 10 years?" . . . so we were like, "We'll get a domestic partnership [to have some sort of documentation in response to these questions]." But it wasn't really something that meant a great deal to us. . . . It wasn't a big deal.

Although Leslie and Alan desired recognition, they wished to avoid too much interference, such as what accompanies a marriage license: "We didn't want to have any law interfere in our relationship, or we didn't feel we needed to have a legal stamp on our relationship."

Other respondents stressed wanting to avoid the trappings of the

patriarchal institution they perceived marriage to be or wanting to demonstrate support for friends whose same-sex relationships were denied the right to marry. Licensed partnerships did not, however, give heterosexuals the same recognition and support with their families or friends that they would have had if they had married. Below, Marie comments on what her 4-year-long licensed partnership has lacked:

With a marriage license, there's that sort of social and economic and political legitimacy involved in it. . . . With our domestic partnership, nobody gave us any sort of crockery, nobody bought us a house, nobody sends us anniversary cards, and nobody sort of celebrated, or has celebrated that, you know, that special day [when she and her partner obtained their certificate].

Marie did not feel that legally defining licensed partners as though they were married was desirable: "Once the court says, 'Well, we're going to define this as marriage' . . . once you start having courts that intervene in using words that this is like a marriage, it takes away from, once again, the legitimacy of these other sorts of different types of families that can come about."

Willetts suggests that the wider implementation of civil union laws like those in Vermont may cause states and municipalities that already have domestic partnership ordinances to deem them no longer necessary and abandon them. Once same-sex couples can enter civil unions, and given that heterosexuals can legally marry, why continue to offer this other legal category?

misperceive love between gay couples and between lesbian couples as being somehow less “real” than love between heterosexual couples.

As we have already seen, numerous similarities exist between gay and heterosexual couples. Regardless of their sexual orientation, most people want a close, loving relationship with another person. For lesbians, gay men, and heterosexuals, intimate relationships provide love, romance, satisfaction, and security. There is one obvious difference, however. Heterosexual couples tend to adopt a gender divided model, whereas for same-sex couples these traditional gender divisions make no sense. Tasks are often divided pragmatically, according to considerations such as who likes cooking more (or dislikes it less) and work schedules (Marecek, Finn, and Cardell 1988). Most gay couples are dual-earner couples; furthermore, because gay and lesbian couples are the same gender, the economic discrepancies based on greater male earning power are absent. Although gay couples emphasize flexibility and egalitarianism, if there are differences in power they are attributed to personality or to dependency on the relationship (Peplau, Veniegas, and Campbell, 1996).

Letitia Peplau, Rosemary Veniegas, and Susan Miller Campbell (1996) describe gay and lesbian partners as maintaining a “friendship model” of relationships:

In best friendships, partners are often of relatively similar age and share common interests, skills and resources . . . best friendships are usually similar in status and power.

With this model, tasks and chores are often shared, alternated, or done by the person who has more time. Usually, both members of the couple support themselves; rarely does one financially support the other.

## Cohabitation and Marriage Compared

### Different Commitments

A lesser level of commitment characterizes cohabiting couples when compared to married couples. When a couple lives together, their primary commitment is to each other, but it is a more transitory commitment. As long as they feel they love each other, they will stay together. In marriage, the couple makes a commitment not only to each other but to their marriage. Cohabitants are less committed to the certainty of a future together (Waite and Gallagher 2001; Forste and Tanfer 1996; Schwartz 1983). Hence, living together tends to

be a more temporary arrangement than marriage (Seltzer 2000; Teachman and Polonko 1990). Half of cohabiting relationships end within a year because the couple either marries or breaks up. Cohabiting couples are three times as likely as married couples (29% versus 9% for married couples) to break up within 2 years (Seltzer 2000). A man and woman who are living together may not work as hard to save their relationship. Less certain of a lifetime together, they live more autonomous lives. In marriage, spouses will do more to save their marriage, giving up dreams, work, ambitions, and extramarital relationships for marital success.

Unmarried couples are less likely than married couples to be encouraged to make sacrifices to save their relationships. Parents may even urge their children who are “living together” to split up rather than give up plans for school or a career. If a cohabiting couple encounters sexual difficulties, it is more likely that they will split up. It may be easier to abandon a problematic relationship than to change it. Among cohabitants who intend to marry, relationships are not significantly different from marriages. The intention to marry is highest among cohabiting couples with high incomes (Brown and Booth 1996).

### Sex

There are differences in the sexual relationships and attitudes of cohabiting and married couples. Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher (2001) suggest that married couples experience more fulfilling sexual relationships because of their long-term commitment to each other and their emphasis on *exclusivity*. Because they expect to remain together, married couples have more incentive to work on their sexual relationships and discover what most pleases their partners.

Cohabitants, however, have more frequent sexual relations. Whereas 43% of married men reported that they had sexual relations at least twice a week, 55% of cohabiting men said they had sex two or three times a week or more. Among married women, 39% said that they had sex at least twice a week, compared with 60% of never-married cohabiting women. Sex may also be more important in cohabiting relationships than in marriages. Waite and Gallagher (2001) go as far as calling it the “defining characteristic” of cohabitants’ relationships.

Married couples are also more likely to be sexually monogamous. According to data from the National Sex Survey (see Chapter 6), 4% of married men said

they had been unfaithful over the past 12 months; four times as many, 16%, of cohabitants reported infidelity. Among women, the equivalent comparison shows that 1% of married women compared with 8% of cohabiting women expressed having had sex outside of their relationship. Similar findings were obtained by Judith Treas and Deirdre Giesen even when they controlled for how permissive individuals were toward extra-marital sex (2000, 59):

This finding suggests that cohabitants' lower investments in their unions, not their unconventional values, accounted for their greater risk of infidelity.

### Finances

Overall, cohabiting women and men have more precarious economic situations than married couples. The latter have higher personal earnings, higher household incomes, and are much less likely to live in poverty. There is also evidence that cohabitation carries an “economic premium” comparable to what accompanies marriage and that entering cohabiting relationships alleviates some financial distress, especially for Hispanic and African American women and their children (Avellar and Smock 2005). Unfortunately, as with the end of a marriage, when cohabiting relationships end there is considerable economic suffering, especially for women. Sarah Avellar and Pamela Smock

(2005) contend that where cohabiting men suffer modest effects when their relationships end, cohabiting women suffer “dramatic declines” in their standards of living. Men suffer declines of roughly 10% in their household income. For women, there is a more notable loss of household income (33%) and a striking spike in the level of poverty (nearly 30%) following breakups.

Cohabiting and married couples differ in whether and how they pool their money, typically a symbol of commitment (Waite and Gallagher 2001; Blumstein and Schwartz 1983). People generally assume that a married couple will pool their money, as it suggests a basic trust or commitment to the relationship and a willingness to sacrifice individual economic interests to the interests of the relationship. Among most cohabiting couples, money is not pooled. In fact, one of the reasons couples cohabit rather than marry is to maintain a sense of financial independence (Waite and Gallagher 2001; Blumstein and Schwartz 1983).

Finally, cohabitation brings financial benefits that result from our tax system and Social Security policies. When both partners earn approximately the same or similar amounts, by being legally single and filing their taxes as such they enjoy the benefit of larger standard deductions than they would if they were married. Regarding Social Security, some, especially elderly, men and women might decide to live together instead of

■ *Heterosexuals, gay men, and lesbians cohabit. A significant difference between heterosexual and gay cohabitation is that many gay men and lesbians who would like to marry are prohibited by law from doing so.*



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marry because if they were to marry they would lose some of their Social Security benefits (Willetts 2003).

### Children

The arrival of children tends to stabilize marriages, lowering the likelihood that couples will divorce. Young children and first-born children are especially associated with reductions in the likelihood of separation and divorce. Stepchildren have the opposite effect; their presence increases the risk of divorce (Manning 2004). How are cohabitators affected by the arrival and presence of children? Wendy Manning found that, for white women, conceiving a child while cohabiting promotes increased stability of the cohabiting relationship and increases the likelihood of marriage. Births during cohabitation do not seem to significantly affect—either positively or negatively—the cohabiting relationship. Such births reduce the likelihood of marriage for Latinas, but have no effect on the likelihood of marriage for either white or black women. However, cohabiting couples who give birth first but then marry face a greater risk of marital dissolution (Manning 2004).

### Health

Marriage bestows health benefits on the married. Generally, married people live longer and healthier lives and suffer from fewer chronic or acute health concerns than the single, divorced, separated, or widowed. Some of this results from healthier lifestyles, evident in such things as lower rates of alcoholism and problem drinking and healthier body weights. Researchers have asked whether the advantages result from healthier people being more likely to marry than unhealthy or less healthy people—the **selection hypothesis**—or are part of the protection people receive from marriage itself. In addition, do the health benefits marriage bestows apply to cohabitants (Wu et al. 2003)? After analyzing Canadian data on the health status of 6,494 women and 5,368 men, Zheng Wu and colleagues conclude that married people have somewhat better general health than cohabitants, who, in turn, have better health than the separated and divorced, widowed, and never married. The difference between cohabitants and married people loses statistical significance once researchers control for other factors. By providing us with the social support of a loving partner, both marriage and cohabitation appear to “protect” the health of those in stable unions compared to those who lack such relationships. One thing to keep in mind: because

cohabitation is typically of shorter duration, and more likely to fail or end, cohabitants are at a disadvantage compared to married people and may find that as their relationships end their health slides (Wu et al. 2003).

### Relationship Quality and Mental Health

Research by Susan Brown and Alan Booth (1996) indicates that cohabiting couples have poorer relationship quality than do married couples, reporting lower levels of happiness with their relationships, more fighting, and more violence. However, these differences disappear or greatly diminish when we consider only cohabitants who have expressed the intention to marry (Brown and Booth 1996). Brown and Booth point out that the relationships experienced by those (> 75% of) cohabitants who plan to marry their partners *are not qualitatively different from marriage*.

Researchers have looked at the mental health characteristics of cohabitants as they compare to singles and married couples (Ross 1995; Horwitz and White 1998). Some report cohabitants to be like married people, experiencing similar levels of depression, with both being less depressed than those without partners (Ross 1995). However, Alan Horwitz and Helene White’s research comparing rates of depression and alcohol problems among cohabiting, married, and single people found cohabitants to have higher rates of both depression and alcohol problems than married people. The mental health of cohabitants was more like single people than married ones. Furthermore, cohabiting men had the highest rate of alcohol problems of the three groups, suggesting that something about cohabitation (for example, unconventionality or financial pressures among those wishing to marry) may cause high rates of alcohol problems. Among married men, those who cohabited before marriage were no different in their level of alcohol problems than those who had not first cohabited (Horwitz and White 1998).

### Work

Traditional marital roles call for the husband to work; it is left to the discretion of the couple whether the woman works. Contemporary families often cannot afford the luxury of a one-wage-earner household. Still, gender roles in marriage have emphasized men’s economic provision as a major component of men’s family responsibilities. In cohabiting relationships, the man is not expected to support his partner (Blumstein and Schwartz 1983). If the woman is not in school, she

is expected to work. If she is in school, she is nevertheless expected to support herself.

Some married couples may fight about the wife going to work; such fights do not generally occur among cohabiting couples. With less certainty about the future of their relationships, cohabiting women may be less willing to restrict their outside employment or to spend time and energy on housework that could be spent on paid work.

Married couples often disagree about the division of household work. Both married and cohabiting women tend to do more of the domestic work than their male partners (Waite and Gallagher 2001; Seltzer 2000; Shelton and John 1993). But cohabiting women spend about 5–6 fewer hours on housework than do married women (Ciabattari 2004). Cohabiting women who are not employed or who have children in the home tend to do more housework. Whether or not women intend to marry their partners does not significantly affect their time spent on housework. However, marital intentions loom large in influencing men's housework performance. Men who intend to marry *someone other than their current partner* (that is, intend to marry “someday” but not the woman they are living with) do 8 fewer hours of total housework and 4.4 fewer hours of core housework (house cleaning, cooking, laundry, shopping, and dishes) than men who definitely plan to marry their cohabiting partners. Cohabiting men with stronger commitments to their partners do more housework than men who are least committed to their relationships (Ciabattari 2004).

## Effect of Cohabitation on Marital Success

Although it may seem surprising and goes against the logic used by cohabiting couples who think that cohabitation helps prepare them for marriage, as we've noted before, such couples are more likely to divorce than those who do not live together before marriage (Bumpass and Lu 2000). In marriages that were previously cohabiting relationships, there are higher levels of disagreement and instability, lower levels of commitment, and greater likelihood of divorce.

The effect cohabitation has on subsequent marriage is not the same for all groups. Julie Phillips and Megan Sweeney report that for Caucasian women, 37% of those who cohabited before marriage saw their marriages end within 10 years compared to 28% who did not cohabit. The “cohabitation effect” is much smaller

among African Americans and Hispanics. Among African American women, 51% of those who had cohabited before marriage and then married saw their marriages fail within 10 years compared to 48% of those who had never cohabited. Among Mexican American women, 32% who had cohabited experienced marital failure compared to 26% who hadn't cohabited. Among foreign-born Mexican Americans, there were more marital failures among women who *had not* cohabited than among those who had (Phillips and Sweeney 2004). Also of interest, cohabiting experience with only a subsequent spouse is still associated with risk of later marital failure for Caucasians but not for African Americans and Hispanics. Perhaps because cohabitation more often functions as a substitute for or precursor to marriage for blacks and Hispanics, they exercise more selectivity over their choice of partner than do whites. Phillips and Sweeney (2004) suggest that cohabitation among whites is more likely to consist of relationships between two people who begin their cohabitation less certain about their relationship.

Like race or ethnicity, age also matters. Older cohabitants are more likely than their younger counterparts to view their relationship as an alternative to marriage. Younger cohabitants more likely see their relationship as a prelude to marriage. Older cohabitants also report higher levels of relationship quality on numerous aspects of their relationships—fairness, having fewer disagreements, spending more time alone together, being less likely to argue heatedly, and being less likely to think that their relationship is in trouble or may end. Older cohabitants seem less negatively affected than younger cohabitants by the absence of plans to marry. Clearly, as Valarie King and Mindy Scott (2005, 283) suggest, “cohabiting relationships are indeed different for older and younger adults.”

What is still unclear is what about cohabitation causes later marital difficulties. Is it the *types of people* who choose to live together before marrying or something about the *experience of living together* that causes problems later? Susan Brown and Alan Booth (1996) suggest that the characteristics of people who cohabit are more influential than the cohabiting experience itself. People who live together before marriage tend to be more liberal, more sexually experienced, and more independent than people who do not live together before marriage. They also tend to have slightly lower incomes and are slightly less religious than noncohabitants (Smock 2000).

At the same time, there is evidence that cohabitation itself may affect individual partners and their

relationships. Compared with married couples, cohabiting partners tend to have more similar incomes and divide household tasks more equally. These arrangements may be harder to sustain once married, and strain or conflict may occur (Seltzer 2000).

As more people from different backgrounds enter cohabitation relationships, we will be better positioned to see whether the *experiences of cohabitation* or *characteristics of cohabitants* have greater effect on later marriage. As cohabitation grows in number and acceptability, its effects on marriage may also change. One thing we can suggest is that at least some poorly chosen relationships break up at the cohabitation stage. Thus, although it may not protect couples from

later marital failure, it does show some high-risk couples that they were not meant for each other. This spares them the later experience of a divorce (Seltzer 2000).

As we have seen, whom we choose as a partner is a complex matter. Our choices are governed by rules of homogamy and exogamy as much as by the heart. But the process of dating or cohabiting helps us determine how well we fit with each other. Although these relationships may sometimes be viewed as a prelude to marriage, they are important in their own right. Whatever their outcome, these relationships provide a context for love and personal development.

## Summary

- Aside from the popular emphasis on love, many factors shape our choices of partners and spouses, revealing the existence of rules of mate selection.
- The *marketplace of relationships* refers to the selection activities of men and women when sizing up someone as a potential date or mate. In this marketplace, each person has resources, such as social class, status, age, and physical attractiveness.
- In the marital exchange, women and men offer different resources.
- Initial impressions are heavily influenced by physical attractiveness. A *halo effect* surrounds attractive people, from which we infer that they have certain traits, such as warmth, kindness, sexiness, and strength.
- The *marriage squeeze* refers to the gender imbalance reflected in the ratio of available unmarried women to men. Overall, there are significantly more unmarried women than men. Marital choice is also affected by the *mating gradient*, the tendency for women to marry men of higher status.
- The *field of eligibles* consists of those of whom our culture approves as potential partners. It is limited by the principles of *endogamy* (marriage within a particular group) and *exogamy* (marriage outside a particular group), as well as by *homogamy* (the tendency to choose a mate whose individual or group characteristics are similar to our own).
- Interracial couples often receive negative nonverbal and verbal reactions from others.
- Similar gender-based age patterns in partner selection are evident among gay and lesbian couples and among heterosexual couples.
- Divorced people are more likely to select other divorced people as partners; adult children of divorced parents show a tendency to select other adult children of divorced parents.
- *Residential propinquity* refers to the tendency for partners to be selected from within a geographically limited locale.
- The patterns of mate selection and partner choice are affected by: preferences we form for certain types of people, reactions of and pressures from other people, and opportunities we have to interact and meet.
- The theories that attempt to explain mate selection include parental image, complementary needs, value, and role theories, and the three-stage *stimulus-value-role* theory.
- The setting in which you see someone can facilitate or discourage a meeting. A *closed field* allows you to see and interact simultaneously. An *open field*,



characterized by large numbers of people who do not ordinarily interact, makes meeting more difficult.

- Women often covertly initiate meetings by sending nonverbal signals of availability and interest. Men then initiate conversation with an opening line.
- Power tends to be more equal in dating relationships than in marriage.
- *Dating scripts* prescribe certain behavior as expected of each gender. For women, problems in dating include sexual pressure, communication, and where to go on the date; for men, problems include communication, where to go, shyness, and money.
- Breakups are commonplace. In accounting for breakups, we attribute the cause to one of the following: our own or our partner's personal characteristics, characteristics within the relationship, and environmental influences.
- Gay and lesbian couples are more prone to breaking up. Gay and lesbian individuals report higher levels of satisfaction with post-breakup friendships with former partners than do heterosexuals.
- Due to delayed marriage, increased economic and educational opportunities and commitments for women, increased divorce, and liberal social and sexual standards, there has been a dramatic increase in the unmarried population (including both formerly married and never married).
- Relationships in the singles world tend to stress independence and autonomy. Singles may be classified into four categories: ambivalents, wishfuls, resolveds, and regretfuls, depending upon their desire and expectation to ever marry.
- *Domestic partnership* laws grant some legal rights to cohabiting couples, including gay and lesbian couples. Cohabitation has become increasingly accepted because of a more liberal sexual climate, the changed meaning of marriage, and delayed marriage.
- Reasons for and types of cohabitation vary. Cohabitation may be a substitute or alternative to marriage, a precursor to marriage, a trial marriage, or a convenient alternative to dating or to singlehood. The meaning and impact of cohabitation differs depending on the age and race of the partners.

- *Common-law marriage*—where couples who live together, present themselves as married, and are considered to be legally married—has gradually become less common. Only 11 states still recognize common-law marriage.
- Between 600,000 and 1.5 million gay men and lesbians cohabit. Whereas heterosexual cohabiting couples tend to adopt a traditional marriage model, lesbians and gay men use a “best friend” model that promotes equality in roles and power.
- Compared with marriage, cohabiting relationships are more transitory, have different commitments, lack economic pooling and social support. They also differ in sexual relationships, finances, health benefits, relationship quality, and household responsibilities.
- Cohabitants who later marry tend to be more prone to divorce, due to both selection factors (the type of people who cohabit) and experiential factors (consequences of cohabitation itself).

## Key Terms

- |                                |                                  |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| attributions 299               | lesbian separatists 306          |
| closed fields 292              | marital history                  |
| common-law marriage 310        | homogamy 289                     |
| complementary needs theory 290 | marketplace of relationships 280 |
| dating scripts 296             | marriage squeeze 283             |
| domestic partners 311          | mating gradient 283              |
| double standard of aging 283   | open fields 292                  |
| endogamy 284                   | parental image theory 291        |
| exogamy 284                    | residential propinquity 289      |
| field of eligibles 284         | role theory 290                  |
| halo effect 281                | stimulus–value–role theory 291   |
| heterogamy 285                 | trial marriages 308              |
| homogamy 285                   | value theory 290                 |
| hypergamy 288                  |                                  |
| hypogamy 287                   |                                  |

## Resources on the Internet

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