



14

Emotional and Social Development in Early Adulthood

Erikson's Theory: Intimacy versus Isolation

Other Theories of Adult Psychosocial Development

Levinson's Seasons of Life · Vaillant's Adaptation to Life · Limitations of Levinson's and Vaillant's Theories · The Social Clock

Close Relationships

Romantic Love · Friendships · Loneliness

■ *A Lifespan Vista: Childhood Attachment Patterns and Adult Romantic Relationships*

■ *Cultural Influences: A Cross-Cultural Perspective on Love*

The Family Life Cycle

Leaving Home · Joining of Families in Marriage · Parenthood

■ *Social Issues: Spouse Abuse*

The Diversity of Adult Lifestyles

Singlehood · Cohabitation · Childlessness · Divorce and Remarriage · Variant Styles of Parenthood

Vocational Development

Establishing a Vocation · Women and Ethnic Minorities · Combining Work and Family

Summary

Important Terms and Concepts

For Further Information and Help



After completing her master's degree, Sharese returned to her home town, where her marriage to Ernie was soon to take place. A year-long engagement had preceded the wedding, during which Sharese had vacillated about whether to follow through. At times, she looked with envy at Heather, still unattached and free to pursue the full range of career options before her.

Sharese also pondered the life circumstances of Christy and her husband Gary—married their junior year in college and two children born within the next few years. Despite his good teaching performance, Gary's relationship with the high school principal deteriorated, and he quit his teaching position by the end of his first year. Financial pressures and the demands of parenthood had put Christy's education and career plans on hold. Sharese began to wonder if it was possible for a woman to have both family and career.

Sharese's ambivalence intensified as her wedding day approached. When Ernie asked why she was so agitated, she blurted out that she had doubts about getting married. Ernie's admiration and respect for Sharese had strengthened over their courtship, and he reassured her of his love. His career was launched, and at age 27, he felt ready to start a family. Uncertain and conflicted, Sharese felt swept toward the altar. Relatives, friends, and presents began to arrive. On the appointed day, she walked down the aisle.

In this chapter, we take up the emotional and social sides of early adulthood. Having achieved independence from the family, young people find that they still want and need close, affectionate ties. Yet like Sharese, they often fear losing their freedom. Once this struggle is resolved, the years from 20 to 40 lead to new family units and parenthood, accomplished in the context of diverse lifestyles. At the same time, young adults must learn to perform the skills and tasks of their chosen occupation. We will see that love and work are inevitably intertwined, and society expects success at both. In negotiating both arenas, young adults do more choosing, planning, and changing course than any other age group. When their decisions are in tune with themselves and their social and cultural worlds, they acquire many new competencies, and life is full and rewarding.

ERIKSON'S THEORY: INTIMACY VERSUS ISOLATION

Erikson's contributions have energized the study of adult personality development. All modern theories have been influenced by his vision (McCrae & Costa, 1990). According to Erikson (1964), adults move through three stages, each of which confronts the individual with

both opportunity and risk—"a turning point for better or worse" (p. 139). The critical psychological conflict of early adulthood is **intimacy versus isolation**. It is reflected in the young person's thoughts and feelings about making a permanent commitment to an intimate partner.

As Sharese's inner turmoil reveals, establishing a mutually gratifying close relationship is a challenging task. Most young adults have only recently attained economic independence from parents, and many are still involved in the quest for identity. Yet intimacy requires that they give up some of their newfound independence and redefine their identity in terms of the values and interests of two people, not just themselves. During their first year of marriage, Sharese separated from Ernie twice as she tried to reconcile her needs for independence and intimacy. Maturity involves balancing these two forces. Without a sense of independence, people define themselves only in terms of their partner and sacrifice self-respect and initiative. Without intimacy, they face the negative outcome of Erikson's stage of early adulthood: loneliness and self-absorption. Ernie's patience and stability helped Sharese realize that marriage requires generosity and compromise but not total surrender of the self.

A secure sense of intimacy is also evident in the quality of other close relationships. For example, in friendships and work ties, young people who have achieved intimacy are cooperative, tolerant, and accepting of differences in background and values. Although they enjoy being



Establishing a mutually gratifying close relationship is a challenging task for young adults. Intimacy demands that they give up some of their newfound independence and redefine their identity in terms of two people. This husband and wife, both police officers, share an occupation—a basis for common interests. But to achieve intimacy, they must also be tolerant and accepting of differences in background and values. (Dick Blume/The Image Works)

with others, they are also comfortable when alone. People who have a sense of isolation hesitate to form close ties because they fear loss of their own identity, tend to compete rather than cooperate, are not accepting of differences, and are easily threatened when others get too close (Hamachek, 1990). Erikson believed that successful resolution of intimacy versus isolation prepares the individual for the middle adulthood stage, which focuses on *generativity*—caring for the next generation and helping to improve society.

Research based on self-reports confirms that intimacy is a central concern of early adulthood (Ryff & Migdall, 1984; Whitbourne et al., 1992). But it also reveals (as we have noted before) that a fixed series of tasks tied neatly to age does not describe the life course of many adults. Child-bearing and child rearing (aspects of generativity) usually occur in the twenties and thirties, and contributions to society through work are also underway at this time. Furthermore, as we will see shortly, many combinations of marriage, children, and career exist, each with a unique pattern of timing and commitment (McAdams, de St. Aubin, & Logan, 1993; Weiland, 1993).

In sum, both intimacy and generativity seem to emerge in early adulthood, with shifts in emphasis that differ from one person to the next. Recognizing that Erikson's theory provides only a broad sketch of adult personality development, other theorists have expanded and modified his stage approach, adding detail and flexibility.

OTHER THEORIES OF ADULT PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

In the 1970s, growing interest in adult development, sparked by people's personal experiences with change, led to the publication of several widely read books on the topic. Two of these volumes—Daniel Levinson's (1978) *The Seasons of a Man's Life* and George Vaillant's (1977) *Adaptation to Life*—present psychosocial theories in the tradition of Erikson that have gathered considerable research support. Each is summarized in Table 14.1.

LEVINSON'S SEASONS OF LIFE

Conducting extensive biographical interviews with forty 35- to 45-year-old men from four occupational subgroups (hourly workers in industry, business executives, university biologists, and novelists), Levinson (1978) looked for an underlying order in the adult life course. Later he investigated the lives of 45 women, also 35 to 45 years of age, from three subgroups (homemakers, business executives, and university professors). His results, and those of others, reveal a common path of change, within which men and women approach developmental tasks in somewhat different ways (Levinson, 1996; Roberts & Newton, 1987).

Like Erikson, Levinson (1978, 1996) conceives of development as a sequence of qualitatively distinct *eras*

TABLE 14.1

Stages of Adult Psychosocial Development

PERIOD OF DEVELOPMENT	ERIKSON	LEVINSON	VAILLANT
Early Adulthood (20–40 years)	Intimacy versus isolation	Early adult transition: 17–22 years	Intimacy
		Entry life structure for early adulthood: 22–28 years	
		Age 30 transition: 28–33 years	Career consolidation
		Culminating life structure for early adulthood: 33–40 years	
Middle Adulthood (40–65 years)	Generativity versus stagnation	Midlife transition: 40–45 years	Generativity
		Entry life structure for middle adulthood: 45–50 years	
		Age 50 transition (50–55 years)	Keeper of meanings
		Culminating life structure for middle adulthood (55–60 years)	
Late Adulthood (65 years–death)	Ego integrity versus despair	Late adult transition (60–65 years)	Ego integrity
		Late adulthood (65 years–death)	

(stages or seasons), each of which has its own time and brings certain psychological challenges to the forefront of the person's life. Within each era, important changes occur in a predictable age-related sequence jointly determined by biological and social forces. As Table 14.1 shows, each era begins with a *transition*, lasting about 5 years, which concludes the previous era and prepares the person for the next one. Between transitions, people move into stable periods in which they concentrate on building a *life structure* that harmonizes the inner personal and outer societal demands of that phase.

The **life structure**, a key concept in Levinson's theory, is the underlying pattern or design of a person's life at a given time. Its components are the person's relationships with significant others—individuals, groups, or institutions. The life structure can have many components, but usually only a few (having to do with marriage/family and occupation) are central to the person's life. However, wide individual differences in the weight of central and peripheral components exist.

Look again at Table 14.1, and notice that each of Levinson's eras consists of alternating transitional and structure-building periods. The primary task of a structure-building period is to select and integrate components in ways that enhance one's life. A structure-building period ordinarily lasts about 5 to 7 years—at most, 10 years. Then the life structure that formed the basis for stability comes into question, and a new transition arises in preparation for modifying it. Take a moment to list the components of your own life structure. Are you in midst of building—choosing and blending components and pursuing values and goals within that structure? Or are you in transition—terminating an existing structure to create possibilities for a new one?

Biographical reports of many individuals confirm Levinson's description of the life course. They also reveal that early adulthood is the era of "greatest energy and abundance, contradiction and stress" (Levinson, 1986, p. 5). These years can bring rich satisfactions in love, sexuality, family life, occupational advancement, and realization of major life goals. But they also carry great burdens—serious decisions about marriage, children, work, and lifestyle before many people have the life experience to choose wisely.

■ **DREAMS AND MENTORS.** How do young adults cope with the opportunities and hazards of this period? Levinson found that during the early adult transition (17 to 22 years), most construct a *dream*, an image of the self in the adult world that guides their decision making. The more specific the dream, the more purposeful the individual's structure building. For men, the dream usually emphasizes an independent achiever in an occupational role. In contrast, only a minority of women report dreams in which career dominates. Instead, most career-oriented women display "split dreams" in which both marriage and career



To realize their dream, young adults form a relationship with a mentor, who fosters their occupational skills and knowledge of the values, customs, and characters of the workplace. This senior executive advises a young employee who is new to the banking business. (Sepp Seitz/Woodfin Camp & Associates)

are prominent. Also, women's dreams tend to define the self in terms of relationships with husband, children, and colleagues. Men's dreams are more individualistic: They view significant others, especially wives, as vital supporters of their goals. Less often do they see themselves as supporters of the goals of others.

Young adults also form a relationship with a mentor who facilitates the realization of their dream. The mentor is generally several years older and experienced in the world the person seeks to enter. Most of the time, a senior colleague at work fills this role, occasionally a friend, neighbor, or relative. Mentors may act as teachers who enhance the person's occupational skills, guides who acquaint the person with the values, customs, and characters of the occupational setting, and sponsors who foster the person's advancement in the workplace. As we will see when we take up vocational development, finding a supportive mentor is easier for men than women.

According to Levinson (1978), men oriented toward high-status careers (doctor, lawyer, scientist) spend their twenties acquiring the skills, values, and credentials of their profession. Although some women follow this path, for many others the process of developing a career extends well into middle age (Levinson, 1996; Roberts & Newton, 1987).

■ **THE AGE 30 TRANSITION.** During the age 30 transition, young people reevaluate their life structure and try to

change components they find inadequate. Those who were preoccupied with their career and are still single usually become concerned with finding a life partner. However, men rarely reverse the relative priority of career and family, whereas career-oriented women sometimes do.

Women who stressed marriage and motherhood early often develop more individualistic goals at this time. Recall that Christy had dreamed of becoming a college professor. In her mid-thirties, she finally got her doctoral degree and undertook the task of making it professionally. During the age 30 transition, women become conscious of aspects of their marriage that threaten to inhibit further development of the independent side of their dream. Married women tend to demand that their husbands recognize and accommodate their interests and aspirations beyond the home.

For men and women who are satisfied with neither their relational nor occupational accomplishments, the age 30 transition can be a crisis. For many others who question whether they will be able to create a meaningful life structure, it is a period of considerable conflict and instability.

■ SETTLING DOWN FOR MEN, CONTINUED INSTABILITY FOR WOMEN. Levinson (1978, 1996) describes age 33 to 40 as a period of settling down. To create the culminating life structure of early adulthood, men emphasize certain relationships and aspirations and make others secondary, or set them aside. In doing so, they try to establish a stable niche in society by anchoring themselves more firmly in family, occupation, and community. At the same time, they advance within the structure—by improving their skills and contributing to society in ways consistent with their values, whether those be wealth, power, prestige, artistic or scientific achievement, or particular forms of family or community participation. During these years, Sharese's husband Ernie expanded his knowledge of real estate accounting, became a partner in his firm, coached his son's soccer team, and was elected treasurer of his church. He paid less attention to golf, travel, and playing the guitar than he had in his twenties.

"Settling down," however, does not accurately describe women's experiences during their thirties. Many remain highly unsettled because of the addition of an occupational or relationship commitment that must be integrated into their life structure. When her two children were born, Sharese felt torn between her research position in the state health department and spending time with her family. She took 6 months off after the arrival of each baby. When she returned to work, she did not pursue attractive administrative openings because they required travel and time away from home. And shortly after Christy got her Ph.D., she and Gary divorced. Becoming a single parent while starting her professional life introduced new strains. Not until middle adulthood do many women attain the stability typical of men in their thirties—reaching professional maturity and taking on more authority in the community.

VAILLANT'S ADAPTATION TO LIFE

Vaillant (1977) examined the development of 94 men born in the 1920s, selected for study while they were students at a highly competitive liberal arts college and followed over the next 30 years. In college, the participants underwent extensive interviews. During each succeeding decade, they answered lengthy questionnaires about their current lives. Then Vaillant interviewed each man at age 47 about work, family, and physical and psychological health.

Other than denying a strict age-related schedule of change, Vaillant's theory is compatible with Levinson's. Both agree that quality of relationships with important people shape the life course. In examining the ways that men altered themselves and their social world to adapt to life, Vaillant confirmed Erikson's stages but filled in gaps between them. Following a period in their twenties devoted to intimacy concerns, the men focused on career consolidation in their thirties—working hard and making the grade in their occupations. During their forties, they pulled back from individual achievement and became more generative—giving to and guiding others. In their fifties, they became "keepers of meaning," or guardians of their culture. Many men became more philosophical—concerned about the values of the new generation and the state of their society. They wanted to teach others what they had learned from life experience and sought to perpetuate a capacity to care (Vaillant & Koury, 1994).

Unlike Levinson, Vaillant did not study women. But longitudinal research that includes women born around the same time as his participants suggests a similar series of changes (Block, 1971; Oden & Terman, 1968).

LIMITATIONS OF LEVINSON'S AND VAILLANT'S THEORIES

Although there is substantial consensus among psychosocial theorists about adult development, we must keep in mind that their conclusions are largely based on interviews with people born in the 1920s to 1940s. The patterns identified by Levinson and Vaillant fit the life paths of Sharese, Ernie, Christy, and Gary, but it is still possible that they do not apply as broadly to modern young people as they do to the previous generation (Rossi, 1980).

Two other factors limit the conclusions of these theorists. First, although non-college-educated, low-income adults were included in Levinson's sample, they were few in number, and low-income women remain almost entirely uninvestigated. Yet social class can profoundly affect the life course. For example, Levinson's blue-collar workers rarely implemented an occupational dream. Perhaps because career advancement is less salient for them, lower-class men perceive "early adulthood" to end and "maturity" to arrive at a younger age than do their middle-class counterparts (Neugarten, 1979). Finally, Levinson's participants

were middle aged when interviewed, and they might not have remembered all aspects of their early adult lives accurately. In sum, studies of new generations are needed before we can definitely conclude that the developmental sequences just described apply to most or all young people.

THE SOCIAL CLOCK

In the previous section and in earlier parts of this book, we emphasized that changes in society from one generation to the next can affect the life course. Bernice Neugarten (1968, 1979) points out that an important cultural and generational influence on adult development is the **social clock**—age-graded expectations for life events, such as beginning a first job, getting married, birth of the first child, buying a home, and retiring. All societies have timetables for accomplishing major developmental tasks. Being on time or off time can profoundly affect self-esteem, since adults (like children and adolescents) make social comparisons, measuring the progress of their lives against their friends', siblings', and colleagues'. Especially when evaluating family and occupational attainments, people often ask, "How am I doing for my age?"

A major source of personality change in adulthood is conformity to or departure from the social clock. In a study of college women born in the 1930s who were followed up at ages 27 and 43, researchers determined how closely participants followed a "feminine" social clock (marriage and parenthood in the early or mid-twenties) or a "masculine" social clock (entry into a high-status career and advancement by the late twenties). Those who started families on time became more responsible, self-controlled, tolerant, and nurturant but declined in self-esteem and felt more vulnerable as their lives progressed. Those who followed an occupational timetable typical for men became more dominant, sociable, independent, and intellectually effective. Women not on a social clock—who had neither married nor begun a career by age 30—were doing especially poorly. They suffered from self-doubt, feelings of incompetence, and loneliness. One stated, "My future is a giant question mark" (Helson, Mitchell, & Moane, 1984, p. 1090).

As we noted in Chapter 1, expectations for appropriate behavior during early, middle, and late adulthood are no longer as definite as they once were. Still, many adults experience some psychological distress when they are substantially behind in timing of life events (Rook, Catalano, & Dooley, 1989). Following a social clock of some kind seems to foster confidence during early adulthood because it guarantees that the young person will engage in the work of society, develop skills, and increase in understanding of the self and others (Helson & Moane, 1987). As Neugarten (1979) suggests, the stability of society depends on having people committed to social clock patterns. With this in mind, let's take a closer look at how young men and women traverse the major tasks of young adulthood.



All societies have social clocks, or timetables for accomplishing major developmental tasks. Yet today, expectations for appropriate behavior are not as definite as they once were. This first-time mother has taken time to establish herself as a research scientist before having children. Is she departing from the social clock or establishing a new pattern? (Bob Daemmrich/The Image Works)

BRIEF REVIEW

Erikson describes the critical psychological conflict of early adulthood as intimacy versus isolation. It involves establishing a mutually gratifying close relationship with an intimate partner. Other psychosocial theorists have expanded and refined Erikson's stages. According to Levinson, adults move through an age-related sequence of alternating transitional and stable periods in which they build and revise their life structure in response to personal and societal demands. In the twenties, young people construct a dream and form a relationship with a mentor who facilitates its realization. During the age 30 transition, they reevaluate relational and occupational commitments in preparation for readjusting their life structure over the following

decade. Vaillant fills in gaps between Erikson's stages. In his theory, the twenties are largely devoted to intimacy concerns, the thirties to career consolidation. Conformity to or departure from the social clock, a societal timetable for major life events, can profoundly affect self-esteem and personality development.

ASK YOURSELF . . .

- *Return to Chapter 1 and review commonly used methods of studying human development. Which method did Vaillant use to chart the course of adult life? What are its strengths and limitations?*
- *In Levinson's theory, during which periods are people likely to be moving within a social clock timetable? When are they likely to be moving out of one and establishing a new schedule?*
- *Using the concept of the social clock, explain why Sharese was so conflicted about getting married to Ernie after she finished graduate school.*

CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS

To establish an intimate tie to another person, people must find a partner, build an emotional bond, and sustain it over time. Although young adults are especially concerned with romantic love, intimacy is also reflected in other relationships in which there is a mutual commitment—friends, siblings, and co-workers. Let's examine the multiple faces of intimacy.

ROMANTIC LOVE

During her junior year of college, Sharese glanced around the room in government class, her eyes often settling on Ernie, a senior and one of the top students. One weekend, Sharese and Ernie were invited to a party given by a mutual friend, and they struck up a conversation. Within a short time, Sharese discovered that Ernie was as warm and interesting as he had seemed from a distance. And Ernie found Sharese to be lively, intelligent, and attractive. By the end of the evening, the couple realized they had similar opinions on important social issues and liked the same leisure activities. They began to date steadily. Four years later, they married.

Finding a partner with whom to share one's life is a major milestone of adult development, with profound consequences for self-concept and psychological well-being. It is also a complex process that unfolds over time and is affected by a variety of events, as Sharese and Ernie's relationship reveals.

■ **SELECTING A MATE.** Recall from Chapter 13 that intimate partners tend to meet in places where there are people of their own age, ethnicity, social class, and religion. Once in physical proximity, people usually select partners who resemble themselves in other ways—attitudes, personality, educational plans, intelligence, physical attractiveness, and even height (Keith & Schafer, 1991; Simpson & Harris, 1994). Although romantic partners sometimes have abilities that complement one another, there is little support for the idea that “opposites attract.” Instead, compatibility is the most powerful force in transforming strangers into lovers. The more similar two people are, the more satisfied they tend to be with their relationship and the more likely they are to stay together (Caspi & Herbener, 1990).

Sex differences exist in the importance placed on certain characteristics. Women assign greater weight to intelligence, ambitiousness, financial status, and character, men to physical attractiveness. Women prefer a same-age or slightly older partner, men a younger partner (Feingold, 1992; Kenrick & Keefe, 1992). Ethological theory helps us understand why. In Chapter 13, we noted that because their capacity to reproduce is limited, women seek a mate with traits that help ensure children's survival and well-being. In contrast, men look for a mate with characteristics that signal youth, health, and ability to bear offspring. Consistent with this explanation, men often want the relationship to move quickly toward physical intimacy. Women prefer a longer time for partners to get to know each other before sexual intercourse occurs.

As the Lifespan Vista box on the following page reveals, yet another influence on the partner we choose and the quality of the relationship we build is our early parent-child bonds. Finally, for romance to lead to marriage, it must happen at the right time. Two people may be right for each other, but if one or both are not ready to marry in terms of their own development or social clock, then the relationship is likely to dissolve.

■ **THE COMPONENTS OF LOVE.** What feelings and behaviors tell us that we are in love? According to one well-known theory, love has three components: intimacy, passion, and commitment. *Intimacy* is the emotional component. It involves warm, tender communication, expressions of concern about the other's well-being, and a desire for the partner to reciprocate. *Passion*, the desire for sexual activity and romance, is the physical and psychological arousal component. *Commitment* is the cognitive component. It leads partners to decide that they are in love and to maintain that love (Sternberg, 1987, 1988a).

The balance among these components changes as romantic relationships develop. At the beginning, **passionate love**—intense sexual attraction—is strong. Gradually, passion declines in favor of intimacy and commitment, which form the basis for **companionate love**—warm, trusting affection and caregiving (Berscheid, 1988; Hatfield, 1988). Each aspect of love, however, helps sustain

A LIFESPAN VISTA

CHILDHOOD ATTACHMENT PATTERNS
AND ADULT ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Recall from Chapter 6 (page 000) that according to Bowlby's ethological theory, patterns of attachment originating in the infant–caregiver relationship are crucial for later emotional and social development. Early attachment bonds lead to the construction of an *internal working model*, or set of expectations about attachment figures, that serves as a guide for close relationships throughout life. In Chapter 6, we saw that adults' evaluations of their early attachment experiences are related to their parenting behaviors—specifically, to the quality of attachments they build with their own babies (see page 192). Additional evidence indicates that recollections of childhood attachment patterns are also strong predictors of romantic relationships in adulthood.

In studies carried out in Australia, Israel, and the United States, researchers asked people to describe their early parental bonds (attachment history), their attitudes toward intimate relationships (internal working model), and their actual experiences with romantic partners. Consistent with Bowlby's theory, childhood attachment patterns² served as remarkably good indicators of adult internal working models and relationship experiences:

SECURE ATTACHMENT. Adults who described their attachment history as *secure* (warm, loving, and supportive) had internal working models that reflected this security. They viewed themselves as likable and easy to get to know, were comfortable with intimacy, and rarely worried about

² To review patterns of infant–caregiver attachment, return to page 189.

abandonment or someone getting too close to them. In line with these attitudes, they characterized their most important love relationship in terms of trust, happiness, and friendship.

AVOIDANT ATTACHMENT. Adults with an avoidant attachment history (demanding, disrespectful, and critical parents) displayed internal working models that stressed independence, mistrust of love partners, and anxiety about people getting too close. They were convinced that others disliked them and that romantic love is hard to find and rarely lasts. Jealousy, emotional distance, and lack of acceptance pervaded their most important love relationship.

RESISTANT ATTACHMENT. Adults who described a resistant attachment history (parents who responded unpredictably and unfairly) presented internal working models in which they wanted to merge completely with another person and fell in love quickly. At the same time, they worried that their intense feelings would overwhelm others, who really did not love them and would not want to stay with them. Their most important love relationship was riddled with jealousy, emotional highs and lows, and desperation about whether the partner would return their affection (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994; Mikulincer & Erev, 1991; Shaver & Brennan, 1992; Simpson, Rholes, & Nelligan, 1992).

Bowlby's predictions about the long-term consequences of early attachment are reflected not only in adults' self-reports, but also in the reports of their acquaintances and by their social behavior. Peers describe young adults with a secure attach-

ment history as more competent, charming, cheerful, and likable than their insecure counterparts (Kobak & Sceery, 1988). Perhaps because secure adults tend to choose partners who also have a childhood history of attachment security, their dating relationships last twice as long and their marriages are less likely to end in divorce than those of insecure people (Collins & Read, 1990; Hill, Young, & Nord, 1994). Furthermore, an insecure attachment history is associated with a variety of maladaptive social behaviors. For example, avoidant adults tend to deny attachment needs through excessive work and brief sexual encounters and affairs. Resistant adults are quick to express fear and anger, and they disclose information about themselves at inappropriate times. Both groups drink excessive amounts of alcohol to reduce tension and anxiety (Brennan & Shaver, 1995).

Because current psychological state might bias recall of parental behavior, we cannot know for sure if adults' descriptions of their childhood attachment experiences are accurate (Fox, 1995). Also, we must keep in mind that quality of attachment to parents is not the only factor that influences later intimate ties. Characteristics of the partner and current life conditions can powerfully affect relationships. When adults with unhappy love lives have opportunities to form new, more satisfying intimate ties, they may revise their internal working models, thereby weakening the continuity between early and later relationships. Still, a wealth of evidence suggests that unfavorable childhood attachment experiences predispose people to conclude that they are undeserving of love or that their intimate partners cannot be trusted.

modern relationships. Early passionate love is a strong predictor of whether partners stay together. But without the quiet intimacy, predictability, and shared attitudes and values of companionate love, most romances eventually break up (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1992).

An ongoing relationship with a mate requires effort from both partners, as a study of newlyweds' feelings and behavior over the first year of marriage reveals. Husbands and wives gradually felt less "in love" and pleased with married life. A variety of factors contributed to this change. A sharp drop in time spent talking to one another and in doing things that brought each other pleasure (for example, saying "I love you" or making the other person laugh) occurred. In addition, although couples engaged in just as many joint activities at the beginning and end of the year, leisure pursuits gave way to household tasks and chores. Less pleasurable activities may have contributed to the decline in satisfaction (Huston, McHale, & Crouter, 1986).

In the transformation of romantic involvements from passionate to companionate, commitment may be the aspect of love that determines whether a relationship survives. Communicating that commitment—through warmth, sensitivity, caring, acceptance, and respect—can be of great benefit (Knapp & Taylor, 1994). For example, Sharese's doubts about getting married subsided largely because of Ernie's expressions of commitment. In the most dramatic of these, he painted a large sign on her birthday and placed it in their front yard. It read, "I LOVE SHARESE." Sharese returned Ernie's sentiments, and the intimacy of their bond deepened.

Couples who consistently express their commitment to each other report higher-quality relationships (Duck, 1994; Hecht, Marston, & Larkey, 1994). The Caregiving Concerns table below lists ways to help keep the embers of love aglow in a romantic partnership.

Finally, we have seen that love is multidimensional and can be experienced in different ways. Passion and intimacy, which form the basis of romantic love, do not figure as heavily into mate selection in all societies, as the Cultural Influences box on page 460 reveals.

FRIENDSHIPS

Like romantic partners and childhood friends, adult friends are usually similar in age, sex, and social class—factors that contribute to common interests, experiences, and needs and therefore to the pleasure derived from the relationship. Friends offer many of the same benefits in adulthood that they did in earlier years. They enhance self-esteem through affirmation and acceptance and provide social support during times of stress. Friends also make life more interesting by expanding social opportunities and access to knowledge and points of view.

Trust, intimacy, and loyalty continue to be important in adult friendships, as they were in middle childhood and adolescence. Sharing thoughts and feelings is sometimes greater in friendship than in marriage, although commitment is less strong as friends come and go over the life course. Even so, some adult friendships continue for many years. In one study of people age 60 and older, the majority reported having at least one friendship that lasted through-



CAREGIVING CONCERNS

Keeping Love Alive in a Romantic Partnership

SUGGESTION	DESCRIPTION
Make time for your relationship.	To foster relationship satisfaction and a sense of being "in love," plan regular times to be together during enjoyable activities.
Tell your partner of your love.	Express affection and caring, including the powerful words "I love you," at appropriate times. These messages increase perceptions of commitment and encourage your partner to respond in kind.
Be available to your partner in times of need.	Provide emotional support, giving of yourself when your partner is distressed.
Communicate constructively and positively about relationship problems.	When you or your partner are dissatisfied, suggest ways of overcoming difficulties, and ask your partner to collaborate in choosing and implementing a course of action.
Show an interest in important aspects of your partner's life.	Ask about your partner's work, friends, family, and hobbies, and express appreciation for his or her special abilities and achievements. In doing so, you grant your partner a sense of being valued.
Confide in your partner.	Share innermost feelings, keeping intimacy alive.
Forgive minor offenses, and try to understand major offenses.	Whenever possible, overcome feelings of anger through forgiveness. In this way, you acknowledge unjust behavior but avoid becoming preoccupied with it.

Sources: Donatelle & Davis, 1997; Enright, Gassin, & Wu, 1992; Knapp & Taylor, 1994.

CULTURAL INFLUENCES

A CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE ON LOVE

Romantic love did not become a primary basis for marriage until the eighteenth century. It became the dominant factor in Western nations during the twentieth century, as the value of individualism strengthened (Hatfield, 1993). In the United States, mature love is based on autonomy, appreciation of the partner's unique qualities, and intense emotional experience. When a person tries to satisfy dependency needs through an intimate bond, the relationship is usually regarded as immature (Dion & Dion, 1988).

This Western view of love contrasts sharply with the perspectives of Eastern cultures, such as China and Japan. In Japanese, *amae*, or love, means "to depend on another's benevolence." Dependency throughout life is recognized and viewed positively (Doi, 1973). The traditional Chinese collectivist view defines the self in terms of role relationships. A Chinese man considers himself a son, a brother, a husband, and a father; he rarely thinks in terms of an independent self (Chu, 1985).

In Chinese society, acceptance of dependency on others lessens the emotional intensity of any one relationship because such feelings are dis-

tributed across a broader social network. In choosing a mate, a Chinese adult is expected to consider obligations to others, especially parents, in addition to personal feelings. As one writer summarized, "An American asks, 'How does my heart feel?' A Chinese asks, 'What will other people say?'" (Hsu, 1981, p. 50). Consistent with this difference, college students of Asian ethnicity are less likely than those of Caucasian-American, Cana-

dian, or European descent to endorse a view of love based on physical attraction and intensity of emotion and more likely to stress companionship and practical considerations, such as similarity of background, career promise, and likelihood of being a good parent (Dion & Dion, 1993; Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986). Clearly, the interpersonal standards of our culture shape the way we view love.



This young Japanese man and woman exchange vows in a traditional Shinto ceremony. Their view of love and marriage is likely to be very different from that of most Western couples. (David Ball/The Image Cube)

out life (Roberto & Kimboko, 1989). Friendship continuity is greater for women, who also see their friends more often—a factor that helps maintain the relationship (Field & Minkler, 1988).

■ **SAME-SEX FRIENDSHIPS.** Throughout life, women continue to have more intimate same-sex friendships than do men. When together, female friends say they prefer to "just talk," whereas male friends say they like to "do something," such as play sports. Consequently, female friendships have been described as "face to face," male friendships as "side by side" (Wright, 1982). Men report barriers to intimacy with other men. For example, they indicate that they sometimes feel in competition with male friends and are therefore unwilling to disclose any weaknesses. And they also

worry that if they tell about themselves, their friends may not reciprocate (Reid & Fine, 1992).

Of course, individual differences in friendship quality exist, to which gender-role identity and marital status contribute. Compared to traditionally oriented adults, androgynous men and women report disclosing more intimate information to their friends (Fischer & Narus, 1981; Lombardo & Lavine, 1981). And marriage reduces personal sharing between men, who seem to redirect their disclosures toward their wives.

■ **OTHER-SEX FRIENDSHIPS.** Other-sex friendships are also important in adulthood, although they occur less often and do not last as long as same-sex friendships. These bonds decline after marriage for men, but they increase

with age for women, who tend to form them in the workplace. Highly educated, employed women have the largest number of other-sex friends. Through these relationships, young adults learn a great deal about masculine and feminine styles of intimacy. And because males confide especially easily in their female friends, men with other-sex friends are granted a unique opportunity to broaden their expressive capacity (Swain, 1992).

■ **SIBLINGS AS FRIENDS.** Whereas intimacy is essential to friendship, commitment—in terms of willingness to maintain a relationship and care about the other—is the defining characteristic of family ties. As young people marry and need to invest less time in developing a romantic partnership, siblings become more frequent companions than they were in adolescence. Often there is spillover between friend and sibling roles. For example, Sharese described Heather's practical assistance—helping with moving and running errands during an illness—in kin terms: “She’s like a sister to me. I can always turn to her.” And sibling ties in adulthood are often like friendships, where the main concern is keeping in contact, offering social support, and enjoying being together (O’Connor, 1992). Relationships between same-sex siblings can be especially close. Despite rivalries and differences in interests that emerged in childhood, a shared background of experiences within the family promotes similarity in values and perspectives and the possibility for deep mutual understanding.

✿ Sibling relationships are among the longest we have in life. As we grow older, they become increasingly important sources of well-being. In Vaillant’s (1977) study of well-educated men, the single best predictor of emotional health at age 65 was having had a close tie with a sibling in early adulthood. In another investigation, one-fifth of married women identified a sister as a best friend (Oliker, 1989).

LONELINESS

Because it is a time when people expect to form intimate ties, early adulthood is a vulnerable period for **loneliness**—unhappiness that results from a gap between social relationships we currently have and those we desire. Adults may feel lonely because they do not have an intimate partner or because they lack gratifying friendships. Both situations give rise to similar emotions, but they are not interchangeable (Brehm, 1992). For example, even though she had several enjoyable friendships, Heather felt lonely from time to time because she was not dating someone she cared about. And although Sharese and Ernie were happily married, they felt lonely after moving to a new town where they did not know anyone.

✿ Loneliness is at its peak during the late teens and early twenties, after which it declines steadily into the seventies (Brehm, 1992; Liefbroer & de Jong-Gierveld, 1990). This is understandable, since young people must constantly develop new relationships as they move through school

and employment settings. Also, younger adults may expect much more from their intimate ties than do older adults, who have learned to live with imperfections.

Who is most likely to experience loneliness, and under what conditions? Separated, divorced, or widowed adults are lonelier than their married, cohabiting, or single counterparts, suggesting that loneliness is especially intense after loss of an intimate tie (Liefbroer & de Jong-Gierveld, 1990; Rubenstein & Shaver, 1982). When not involved in a romantic relationship, men feel lonelier than women, perhaps because they have fewer alternatives for satisfying intimacy needs. In marriages, wives report greater loneliness than husbands, especially if they are unemployed, have recently moved, or have young children—circumstances that limit their access to a wider social network (Fischer & Phillips, 1982).

Personal characteristics also contribute to the likelihood of being lonely. Temperament is involved, since shy, socially anxious people report more loneliness (Bruch et al., 1989; Cheek & Busch, 1981). When loneliness persists, it is associated with a wide variety of self-defeating attitudes and behaviors. Lonely people evaluate themselves and others more negatively, tend to be socially unresponsive and insensitive, and are slow to develop intimacy because they are reluctant to tell others about themselves. The extent to which these responses are cause or consequence of loneliness is unclear, but once in place, they certainly promote further isolation (Jones, 1990).



Loneliness is at its peak during the late teens and early twenties. It usually stems from lack of an intimate partner or gratifying friendships. When loneliness persists, it is associated with negative self-evaluations and socially unresponsive and insensitive behavior—responses that promote further isolation. (Ron Coppock/Liaison International)

Although loneliness is extreme for some people, most young adults encounter it from time to time as they struggle with unfulfilled relationship desires. As long as it is not overwhelming, loneliness can motivate young people to take social risks and reach out to others. It can also encourage them to find ways to be comfortably alone and use this time to deepen self-understanding. Much of healthy personality development involves striking this balance—between “[developing] satisfying relationships with other people and [creating] a secure, internal base of satisfaction within ourselves” (Brehm, 1992, p. 345).

BRIEF REVIEW

Finding an intimate partner to share one’s life is a major task of early adulthood. The greater the resemblance in background and psychological characteristics, the more likely two people are to fall in love and sustain their relationship. As romantic ties develop, passion gives way to warm, affectionate companionship.

Like friendships in middle childhood and adolescence, adult friendships enhance self-esteem, provide social support, and are based on trust, intimacy, and loyalty. Women continue to have more intimate same-sex friendships than men, although an androgynous gender-role identity enhances friendship closeness in both sexes. Cross-sex friendships decline after marriage for men, but increase with age for women. Sibling companionship strengthens and is a powerful predictor of psychological well-being. As young people strive to develop gratifying intimate ties, they are vulnerable to loneliness.

ASK YOURSELF . . .

- *After living together for a year, Mindy and Graham wondered why their relationship seemed less passionate and satisfying. What factors probably contributed to this change? Suggest ways that Mindy and Graham can breathe new life into their romantic partnership.*
- *Claire and Tom, both married to other partners, got to know each other at work and occasionally have lunch together. What is each likely to gain from this other-sex friendship?*

THE FAMILY LIFE CYCLE

For the majority of young people, the quest for intimacy leads to marriage. Their life course takes shape within the **family life cycle**—a sequence of phases that characterizes the development of most families

around the world (Framo, 1994). In early adulthood, people typically live on their own, marry, and bear and rear children. As they become middle aged and their children leave home, their parenting responsibilities diminish. Late adulthood brings retirement, growing old, and (mostly for women) death of one’s spouse (Duvall, 1977; McGoldrick, Heiman, & Carter, 1993).

However, we must be careful not to think of the family life cycle as a fixed progression. Recall from Chapter 2 that the family is a dynamic system of interdependent relationships embedded in community, cultural, and historical contexts. All of these factors affect the way it changes over time. Today, wide variations in sequence and timing of these phases exist. High rates of out-of-wedlock births, delayed childbearing, divorce, and remarriage are but a few illustrations. And some people—either voluntarily or nonvoluntarily—do not go through some or all of the family life cycle.

Still, the family life cycle approach is useful. It provides us with an organized way of thinking about how the family system changes over time and the impact of these changes on both the family unit and the individuals within it. Each phase requires that roles be modified and needs be met in new ways.

LEAVING HOME

After Sharese had been away at college for 6 months, she noticed a change in the way she related to her mother. She found it more enjoyable to discuss daily experiences and life goals, sought advice and listened with greater openness, and expressed affection more freely. Over the next few years, Sharese’s bedroom gradually began to seem more like a guest room. Looking around before she moved out permanently, Sharese felt some pangs of nostalgia for the warmth and security of her childhood days coupled with a sense of pride at being on her own.

Departure from the parental home is a major step in assuming adult responsibilities. The average age of leaving has decreased in recent years as more young people live independently before marriage. In 1940, over 80 percent of American 18- to 24-year-olds resided with their parents. Today, only about 50 percent do. Most industrialized nations show this trend (Kerckhoff & Macrae, 1992; White, 1994).

Timing of departure varies with the reason for leaving. Departures for education tend to be at younger ages, those for full-time work and marriage later. Since a larger percentage of young adults go to college in the United States than other nations, more Americans leave home early, around age 18. Still, studies of nationally representative samples in Australia, Great Britain, and the United States show that marriage is the most common reason for departure in all three nations. And because women usually marry at a younger age than men, they are likely to leave home sooner. Many young people also leave to be independent or to get away from friction at home (Kerckhoff & Macrae, 1992).

Nearly half of young adults return home for a brief time after initial leaving. Those who departed to marry are least

likely to return. But premarital independent living is a fragile arrangement. As people encounter unexpected twists and turns on the road to independence, the parental home serves as a safety net and base of operation for launching adult life. Failures in work or marriage can prompt a move back home. Also, young people who left because of family conflict usually return—largely because they were not ready for independent living. But most of the time, role transitions, such as the end of college or military service and the beginning of full-time work, bring people back. Contrary to popular belief, returning home is usually not a sign of weakness. Instead, it is a common and ordinary event among unmarried adults (DaVanzo & Goldscheider, 1990; White, 1994).

Although most high school seniors expect to live on their own before marriage, the extent to which they do so varies with social class and ethnicity. Economically well off young people are more likely to establish their own residence. Among African Americans and Hispanics, poverty and a cultural tradition of extended family living lead to low rates of home leaving. Unmarried Asian Americans also tend to live with their parents. But the longer Asian families have been in the United States and are exposed to individualistic values, the more likely their children are to move out after finishing high school (Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1993).

When young people are prepared for independence, departure from the home is linked to more satisfying parent-child interaction and successful transition to adult roles (Bloom, 1987). However, leaving home very early may contribute to long-term disadvantage, since it is associated with an emphasis on employment rather than education and lack of parental financial assistance, advice, and emotional support. Not surprisingly, those who depart at a young age have less successful marriages and work lives (White, 1994).

Besides timing of departure, personal characteristics make a difference. For example, young adults who perceive themselves as adaptable to change and in control of their environments and who find a middle ground between closeness and distance in family relationships adjust especially well to the first year of college. For men, attaining this middle ground often means developing themselves emotionally and expressively. For women, it usually means acquiring a firmer sense of autonomy (Holmbeck & Wandrei, 1993). Interventions directed at helping young people reevaluate traditional gender roles may be especially valuable at this time.

JOINING OF FAMILIES IN MARRIAGE

The United States remains a culture strongly committed to marriage. Nearly 90 percent of Americans marry at least once in their lives. Young adults wait considerably longer before marrying today than they did at mid-century. In 1950, the average age of first marriage was 20.3 for women and 22.8 for men; in 1994, it was 24.5 and 26.5, respectively (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996). As Figure

14.1 on page 464 shows, the number of first and second marriages has declined over the last few decades as more people remain single, cohabit, or do not remarry after divorce. Still, both marriage and divorce rates remain high.

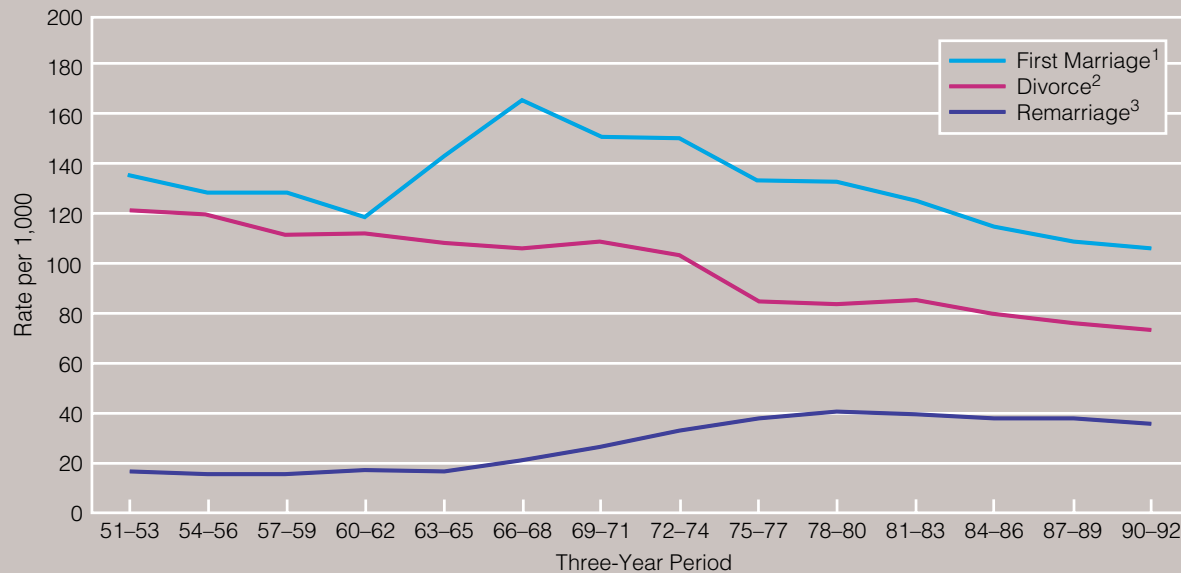
Marriage is often thought of as the joining of two individuals. In actuality, it requires that two entire systems—the husband's and wife's families—adapt and overlap to create a new subsystem. Consequently, marriage presents couples with complex challenges, especially today when husband-wife roles have only begun to move in the direction of a true partnership—educationally, occupationally, and in emotional connectedness (Eisler, 1987; McGoldrick, Heiman, & Carter, 1993).

■ **MARITAL ROLES.** Their wedding and honeymoon over, Sharese and Ernie turned to a myriad of issues that they had previously decided individually or that their families of origin had prescribed. They had to consider everyday matters—when and how to eat, sleep, talk, work, relax, have sex, and spend money. They also had to decide which family traditions and rituals to retain and which to develop for themselves. And relationships with parents, siblings, extended family, friends, and co-workers had to be renegotiated.

Recent alterations in the context of marriage, including changing gender roles and living farther away from family members, mean that modern couples must do more work to define their relationship. Although husbands and wives are usually similar in religious and ethnic background, “mixed” marriages occur more often today than they did in the past. Since 1970, other-race unions have quadrupled, affecting over 1 million American couples, or 2 percent of the married population (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996). More young people also choose a mate of a different religion than their own. For example, between one-third and one-half of American Jews who marry today select a non-Jewish spouse (Greenstein, Carlson, & Howell, 1993). When their backgrounds are very distinct, these couples face extra challenges in achieving a successful transition to married life.

Many modern couples live together before marriage, making it less of a turning point in the family life cycle than in the past. Still, the burden of defining marital roles can be great. American women who marry before age 20 (25 percent) are twice as likely to divorce as those who marry in their twenties. Women who marry after age 30 (20 percent) are least likely to divorce, but if they do, they end the marriage sooner (McGoldrick, Heiman, & Carter, 1993).

These findings suggest that it is better to marry later than earlier. They also indicate that people who fall outside the normative age range for marriage often face stresses that make the transition more difficult. Those who marry early may be running away from their own family or seeking the family they never had. Most have not developed a secure enough identity or sufficient independence to be ready for a mature marital bond. Early marriage followed by childbirth and reversals of family life cycle events



¹ First marriages per 1,000 single women, ages 15–44.

² Divorces per 1,000 married women, ages 15–44.

³ Remarriages per 1,000 divorced and widowed women, ages 15–54.

FIGURE 14.1

Rates of first marriage, divorce, and remarriage for women, 1951 to 1992. The number of first marriages has dropped steadily since mid-century. After increasing between 1960 and 1980, the divorce rate stabilized and then declined slightly. Remarriages rose sharply in the 1960s as divorce climbed. Since then, they have decreased. Still, both marriage and divorce rates are high in the United States. (From U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1992a.)

(childbirth before marriage) are more common among low-income young people. This acceleration of family formation complicates adjustment to life as a couple (Fulmer, 1989). People who marry very late—most of whom are economically advantaged adults—are sometimes ambivalent about compromising their independence or in conflict about marriage and career.

Despite progress in the area of women's rights, **traditional marriages** still exist in Western nations. In this form of marriage, there is a clear division of husband's and wife's roles. The man is the head of household; his primary responsibility is to provide for the economic well-being of his family. The woman devotes herself to caring for her husband and children and to creating a nurturant, comfortable home. However, traditional marriages have changed in recent decades. Motherhood remains a full-time job—or at least the top priority—while children are young, but many women return to their occupations at a later date. Unlike previous generations, their role is not fixed throughout adult life.

Egalitarian marriages reflect the values of the women's movement. Husband and wife relate as equals, and power and authority are shared. Both partners try to balance the time and energy they devote to the workplace, the children, and their relationship. Well-educated, career-oriented couples tend to adopt this form of marriage—especially before

they have children. But at least so far, women's employment has not had a dramatic effect on household division of labor. Men in these families participate more than do those in single-earner families. But their wives continue to do the bulk of the housework, averaging almost three times as many hours as their husbands (see Figure 14.2). True equality in marriage is still rare, and couples who strive for it more often attain a form of marriage in between traditional and egalitarian (Starrels, 1994).

■ **MARITAL SATISFACTION.** Despite its rocky beginnings, Sharese and Ernie's marriage grew to be especially happy. In contrast, Christy and Gary became increasingly discontent. What distinguishes marriages high in satisfaction from less successful partnerships? Differences between the two couples mirror the findings of a large body of research, summarized in Table 14.2.

Christy and Gary had a brief courtship, married at a young age, had children early, and struggled financially. Gary's negative, critical personality led him to get along poorly with Christy's parents and to feel threatened when he and Christy disagreed. Christy tried her best to offer Gary encouragement and support, but her own needs for nurturance and individuality were not being met. Gary felt threatened by Christy's career aspirations. As she came closer to attaining them, the couple grew further apart. In contrast,

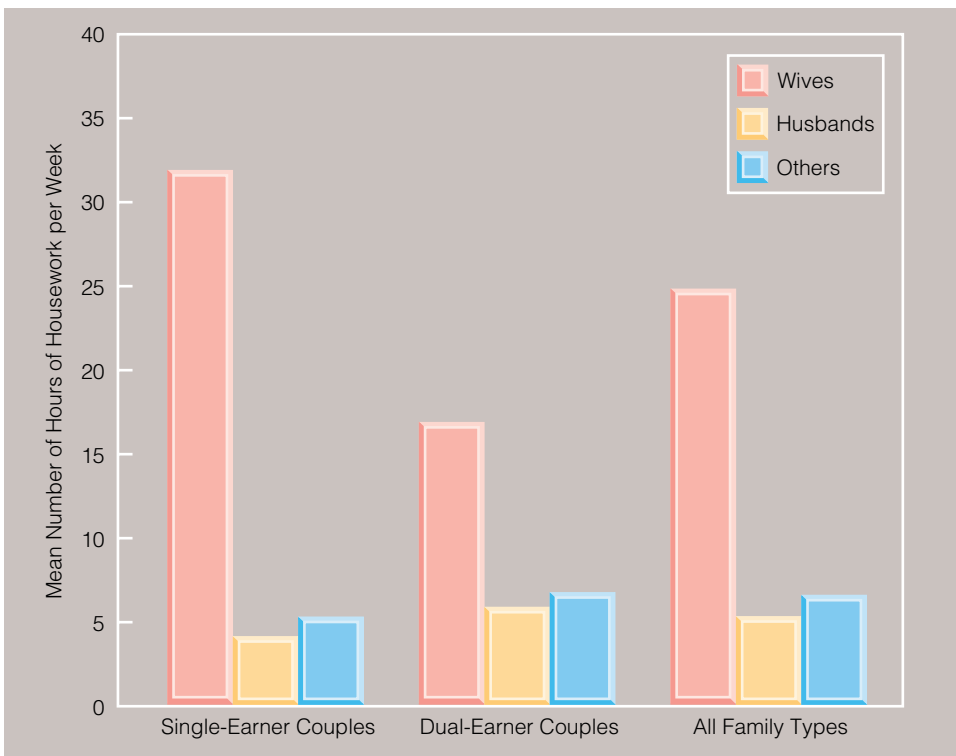


FIGURE 14.2

Hours of housework done by wives, husbands, and other family members for single-earner couples (only the husband is employed) and dual-earner couples (both husband and wife are employed). Wives in dual-earner households continue to do most of the work, averaging almost three times as many hours as their husbands. Total number of hours devoted to domestic work is lowest in these families because they have fewer children and tend to hire household help. In addition, many employed women handle work overload by reducing time devoted to housework. (Adapted from Berardo, Shehan, & Leslie, 1987; Starrels, 1994.)

Sharese and Ernie married later, after their education was complete. They postponed having children until their careers were underway and they had built a sense of togetherness that allowed each to thrive as an individual. Patience, caring, shared values, enjoyment of each other's company, and good conflict resolution skills contributed to their compatibility.



Although the factors just described differentiate troubled from gratifying marital relationships, research also reveals clear sex differences in marital satisfaction. Many more men than women report being happily married (Holahan, 1984; Kaslow, Hansson, & Lundblad, 1994; Lev-

enson, Carstensen, & Gottman, 1993). And marriage is associated with gains in men's mental and physical health, whereas married women are less healthy than single women in every respect—emotionally, physically, even in crime statistics (see the Social Issues Box on pages 466-467). Marriage can take a heavy toll on women who are overwhelmed by the demands of husband, children, household, and career. And when a marriage is not going well, women are more willing to evaluate the relationship as problematic and try to work on it. Men often withdraw from conflict, magnifying the stress on their wives (McGoldrick, 1989).

TABLE 14.2

Factors Related to Marital Satisfaction

FACTOR	HAPPY MARRIAGE	UNHAPPY MARRIAGE
Family backgrounds	Similar in social class, education, religion, and ages of partners	Very different in social class, education, religion, or ages of partners
Age of marriage	After age 20	Before age 20
Length of courtship	At least 6 months	Less than 6 months
Timing of first pregnancy	After first year of marriage	Before or within first year of marriage
Relationship to extended family	Warm and positive	Negative, wish to maintain distance
Marital patterns in extended family	Stable	Unstable; frequent separations and divorces
Financial and employment status	Secure	Insecure
Personality characteristics	Emotionally positive; good conflict resolution skills	Emotionally negative and impulsive; poor conflict resolution skills

Note: The more factors present, the greater the likelihood of marital happiness or unhappiness.

Sources: Levenson, Carstensen, & Gottman, 1993; McGoldrick, Heiman, & Carter, 1993; Russell & Wells, 1994; Skolnick, 1981.

SOCIAL ISSUES

SPOUSE ABUSE

Violence has reached epidemic proportions in the United States, permeating many families. In previous chapters, we discussed domestic violence several times—child maltreatment in Chapter 8, child sexual abuse in Chapter 10, and marital sexual assault in Chapter 13. Here we focus on spouse abuse, estimated to affect over 1.8 million women annually (Carden, 1994).

Within a given family, violence in one form predicts its occurrence in another. Recall the story of Karen in Chapter 13. Her husband Mike not only assaulted her sexually and physically, but abused her psychologically—isolating, humiliating, and demeaning her. Property destruction can occur as well. A violent husband may break his wife's favorite possessions, punch holes in walls, or throw things. Tactics used to force the woman into submission are diverse. If children are present, they may also be victims of abuse as well as pawns in the husband's effort to intimidate his wife (Carden, 1994; Jouriles & Le Compte, 1991).

FACTORS RELATED TO SPOUSE ABUSE. Karen's experience helps us

understand how wife battering may emerge and escalate. During their courtship, Mike felt suspicious of Karen's friends, so she began to distance herself from them. Soon he was her only companion. Shortly after their wedding, Mike's abuse began. First, he spewed insults about her family and co-workers. Then he started to restrict her activities, forbidding her to leave the house, controlling her access to money, and complaining so much about her job that she finally quit. Anxious and lonely, Karen spent her days at home and gained weight. The first time Mike struck her, he yelled about her careless housekeeping and her unkempt appearance. The next morning, Mike apologized and promised not to hurt her again. But his violence continued, becoming more frequent and extreme. Most of the time, it was followed by a brief period in which he went out of his way to atone for his loss of control.

These abuse–remorse cycles in which aggression escalates characterize many batterers (Walker, 1979). Why do some men behave this way? As with other forms of domestic violence, the reasons are multiple and

complex. Recall that a woman's characteristics do not predict sexual coercion. The same is true of spouse abuse (Hotelling & Sugarman, 1986). Rather, personality and developmental history of the husband, family circumstances, and cultural factors combine to make spouse abuse more likely.

Batterers usually have serious psychological problems. Many are overly dependent on their wives as well as jealous and possessive. The thought of Karen leaving induced such high anxiety in Mike that he resorted to violence to keep her (Allen et al., 1989). At the same time, these men are ambivalent about intimacy; they want but fear the intensity and sharing of a close relationship. An excessive need to be in control can be seen in the husband's desire to make all family decisions and monitor everything his wife does. Dissatisfaction with life, both at home and at work, is manifested in depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. Trivial events, such as an unironed shirt or a late meal, can set off violent episodes, indicating a tendency to react to frustration with hostility and great difficulty managing anger (Else et al., 1993; Vaselle-Augenstein & Ehrlich, 1992).

■ **MARITAL EXPECTATIONS AND MYTHS.** In a recent study in which 50 happily married couples were interviewed about their marriages, each participant reported good times and bad; none was happy all the time. Many admitted that there were moments when they wanted out, when they felt they had made a mistake. Clearly, marital happiness did not signify a “rose garden.” Instead, it was grounded in mutual respect, pleasure and comfort in each other's company, and joint problem solving. All couples emphasized the need to reshape their relationship in response to new circumstances and each partner's changing needs and desires (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1995).

Yet cultural expectations work against this view of marriage as an ongoing project requiring both partners' involvement and cooperation. Historically, women had lit-

tle power in marriage and society; a wife's status came from her husband. This gender gap has such deep cultural roots that it continues to influence marital expectations today. In a study of college students, more women than men said their partners should be superior to themselves, and more men than women said their partners should be inferior to themselves—in intelligence, education, vocational success, and income (Ganong & Coleman, 1992). Under these circumstances, women are likely to play down their abilities, sacrificing part of themselves. And men tend to limit themselves to the provider role rather than participating fully in family life.

Furthermore, many young people have a mythical image of marital bliss—one that is a far cry from reality. In a recent survey, a substantial number of college students endorsed the following beliefs not supported by facts:

A high proportion of spouse abusers experienced or witnessed abuse in their homes as children (Hotaling & Sugarman, 1986; Tolman & Bennett, 1990). Men who were exposed to domestic violence are not doomed to repeat it. But their childhoods provided them with expectations and behaviors to model in their future close relationships. Stressful life events, such as job loss or financial difficulties, increase the likelihood of battering, although it occurs in couples of all social-class and ethnic backgrounds. Alcohol abuse is also related to it, but rather than triggering violence, drinking probably helps the perpetrator avoid responsibility for his behavior (Vaselle-Augenstein & Ehrlich, 1992).

At a societal level, cultural norms that endorse male dominance and female submissiveness and use of physical force to preserve this inequality promote spouse abuse. Battering is far more likely to occur when a marriage is husband controlled, when the man holds traditional gender-role beliefs, and when he approves of violence as a way to solve family problems (Stith & Farley, 1993).

Why don't women leave these destructive relationships before the abuse escalates? A variety of situational factors discourage them from

doing so, including dependence on the husband's greater earning power; fear of retaliation against herself or her children; hope, based on promises after each explosive episode, that he will change; and the shame and embarrassment associated with going to the police (Carden, 1994). Furthermore, anxiety, depression, and physical injury can prevent an abused woman from thinking clearly about how to get help.

INTERVENTION AND TREATMENT. Community services available to victims of sexual coercion also provide shelter, protection, and advocacy for battered women (see pages 433–434). Because many return to their abusive partners several times before making their final move, community agencies usually offer treatment for batterers. The therapies available are diverse, and no single approach has been shown to be superior. Most rely on group sessions that confront rigid gender stereotyping; teach communication, problem solving, and anger control; and use social support to foster behavior change. Sometimes couple therapy is used, but only after the abuse has stopped (Harway & Hansen, 1994).

Although existing treatments are far better than no treatment, almost

all are too brief to pay sufficient attention to alcohol problems and marital difficulties. Consequently, of the small number of men who agree to participate, at least half continue their violent behavior with either the same or a new partner. At present, we have only a beginning understanding of how best to intervene in spouse abuse (Carden, 1994; Vaselle-Augenstein & Ehrlich, 1992).

TRY THIS...

- Return to Chapter 8, pages 268–269, and reread the section on child maltreatment. What predisposing factors do child abuse and spouse abuse have in common?
- What services are available in your community for battered women? Contact one of them and ask for a description. Is treatment for abusers provided? If so, how comprehensive is it? Does it address influences at the level of the individual, the family, and society?

- A couple's satisfaction increases through the first year of marriage.
- The best single predictor of marital satisfaction is the quality of a couple's sex life.
- If my spouse loves me, he or she should instinctively know what I want and need to be happy.
- No matter how I behave, my spouse should love me simply because he or she is my spouse. (Larson, 1988, p. 5)

As these myths are overturned, couples react with disappointment, and marriage becomes less satisfying and more conflictual.

In view of its long-term implications, it is surprising that most couples spend little time reflecting on the decision to marry before their wedding day (McGoldrick, Heiman, &

Carter, 1993). Courses in family life education in high schools and colleges can help dispel marital myths. More realistic expectations, in turn, can promote better mate selection and ease adjustment to marriage (Honeycutt, 1991).

PARENTHOOD

In the past, the issue of whether to have children was, for many adults, "a biological given or an unavoidable cultural demand" (Michaels, 1988, p. 23). Today, in Western industrialized nations, it is a matter of true individual choice. Effective birth control techniques enable adults who do not want to become parents to avoid having children in most instances. And changing cultural values allow people to remain childless with less fear of social criticism and rejection than was the case a generation or two ago.

In 1950, 78 percent of married couples were parents. Today, 72 percent of couples bear children, and they tend to have their first child at a later age. Consistent with this pattern of delayed childbearing, family size in industrialized nations has declined. In 1950, the average number of children per couple was 3.1. Currently, it is 2.1, a downward trend that is expected to continue into the twenty-first century (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996).

Nevertheless, the vast majority of married people continue to embrace parenthood as one of life's most meaningful experiences. Why do they do so, and how do the challenges of child rearing affect the adult life course?

■ **THE DECISION TO HAVE CHILDREN.** The choice of parenthood is affected by a complex array of factors, including financial circumstances, personal and religious values, and biological and medical conditions. Overall, women with traditional gender-role orientations are more likely to have children. Whether a woman is employed has less impact on her decision than her occupation. Women who work in managerial positions are less likely to become parents than women in less demanding careers (White & Kim, 1987).

When American couples are asked about their desire to have children, they mention a variety of advantages and disadvantages, which are listed in Table 14.3. Take a moment to consider which ones are most important to you. Although some ethnic and regional differences exist, reasons for having children that are most important to all groups include the desire for a warm, affectionate relationship and the stimulation and fun that children provide. Also frequently mentioned are growth and learning experiences that children bring into the lives of adults, the desire to have someone carry on after one's own death, and the feelings of accomplishment and creativity that come from helping children develop (Hoffman, Thornton, & Manis, 1978; Michaels, 1988).

Most young adults are also aware that having children means years of extra burdens and responsibilities. When asked about the disadvantages of parenthood, they mention "loss of freedom" most often, followed by "financial strain." Indeed, the cost of child rearing is a major factor in modern family planning. According to a conservative estimate, parents will spend about \$230,000¹ to rear a child from birth through four years of college. Finally, many adults worry greatly about bringing children into a troubled world—one filled with crime, war, and pollution (Michaels, 1988).

Careful weighing of the pros and cons of having children is increasingly common today. This means that many more couples are making informed and personally meaningful choices about becoming parents—a trend that should increase the chances that they are ready to have children and that their own lives will be enriched by their decision.

■ **ADJUSTMENT TO PARENTHOOD.** Childbirth profoundly alters the lives of husband and wife. Disrupted sleep schedules, less time to devote to each other and to leisure activities, and new financial responsibilities often lead to a mild decline in marital happiness. In addition, entry of children into the family usually causes the roles of husband and wife to become more traditional (Cowan & Cowan, 1988, 1992; Klinnert et al., 1992; Palkovitz & Copes, 1988). This is true even for couples like Sharese and Ernie, who were strongly committed to gender-role equality and used to sharing household tasks. Movement toward traditional roles is hardest on new mothers who have been involved in a career. The larger the difference in men's and women's responsibilities, the more conflict increases and

¹ This figure is based on a 1988 estimate, corrected for later inflation (Glick, 1990; U.S. Department of Labor, 1996). It includes basic expenses related to food, housing, clothing, medical care, and education.

TABLE 14.3

Advantages and Disadvantages of Parenthood Mentioned by Modern American Couples

ADVANTAGES

Giving and receiving warmth and affection

Experiencing the stimulation and fun that children add to life

Being accepted as a responsible and mature member of the community

Experiencing new growth and learning opportunities that add meaning to life

Having someone carry on after one's own death

Gaining a sense of accomplishment and creativity from helping children grow

Learning to become less selfish and to sacrifice

Having offspring who help with parents' work or add their own income to the family's resources

DISADVANTAGES

Loss of freedom, being tied down

Financial strain

Worries over children's health, safety, and well-being

Interference with mother's employment opportunities

Risks of bringing up children in a world plagued by crime, war, and pollution

Reduced time to spend with spouse

Loss of privacy

Fear that children will turn out badly, through no fault of one's own

Sources: Hoffman, Thornton, & Manis, 1978; Michaels, 1988.

marital satisfaction and mental health decrease after childbirth, especially for women (Belsky et al., 1991; Hawkins et al., 1993; Levy-Shiff, 1994).

Violated expectations about jointly caring for a new baby contribute to the decline in marital happiness just mentioned. Women, especially, count on far more help from their husbands than usually occurs (Hackel & Ruble, 1992). Postponing childbearing until the late twenties or thirties, as more couples are doing today (see Chapter 13, page 424), eases the transition to parenthood. Waiting permits couples to pursue occupational goals and gain life experience. Under these circumstances, men are more enthusiastic about becoming fathers and therefore more willing to participate actively. And women whose careers are underway are more likely to encourage their husbands to share housework and child care (Coltrane, 1990).

Men who view themselves as especially nurturant and caring show less decline in marital satisfaction after the birth of a baby, probably because they are better at meeting the needs of their wives and infants. The father's involvement may increase his understanding of the challenges a mother faces in coping with a new baby, reduce his feelings of being an "outsider" as the infant demands his wife's attention, and free up time for partners to spend together. Also, men's participation enhances the marital relationship because women tend to see it as a loving act toward themselves (Levy-Shiff, 1994).

In many non-Western cultures, the birth of children is less likely to threaten marital satisfaction. In these societies, parenthood is highly valued, family life is central for women, and traditional gender roles are widely accepted. Consequently, becoming a mother grants a woman considerable status, and husband–wife division of labor is not questioned. In addition, the extended family typically assists with household and child care tasks (Levy-Shiff, 1994; Lozoff, Jordan, & Malone, 1988). In Western industrialized nations, however, the trend toward gender equality and isolation of the nuclear family unit leads marital and parenting roles to be closely linked; happiness in one profoundly affects happiness in the other.

ADDITIONAL BIRTHS. How many children a couple chooses to have is affected by the same array of factors that influenced their decision to become parents in the first place. Besides more effective birth control, a major reason that family size has declined in industrialized nations is the increased career orientation of many women. Also, the high divorce rate means that many couples do not complete their childbearing plans.

Research indicates that adults and children benefit from small family size. Because parents are less economically and emotionally stressed, they are more patient with each other and have more time to devote to each child's development. Furthermore, in smaller families, siblings are more likely to be widely spaced (born more than 2 years apart), which adds to the attention and resources husband

and wife can invest in one another and in each child. Together, these findings may account for the fact that marital satisfaction tends to be greater and children tend to have higher IQs, do better in school, and attain higher levels of education in smaller families (Anderson, Russell, & Shumm, 1983; Blake, 1989; Powell & Steelman, 1993).

FAMILIES WITH YOUNG CHILDREN. With the entry of children, the family system becomes a permanent one for the first time. Before parenthood, if a spouse leaves, the system dissolves; afterward, it continues. In this way, the arrival of children constitutes a key change in the family life cycle.

A year after the birth of their first child, Sharese and Ernie received a phone call from Heather, who asked how they liked being parents: "Is it a joy, a dilemma, a stressful experience—how would you describe it?"

Chuckling, Sharese and Ernie responded in unison, "All of the above!"

Child rearing is an enormous task, and seldom are young people fully prepared for it. In today's complex



Despite its many challenges, rearing young children is a powerful source of adult development. Parents report that it expands their emotional capacities and enriches their lives. Involved parents say that child rearing helped them become more sensitive, tolerant, self-confident, and responsible. (James Wilson/Woodfin Camp & Associates)

world, men and women are not as certain about how to rear children as they were in previous generations. Clarifying child-rearing values and implementing them in warm, supportive, and appropriately demanding ways are crucial for the welfare of the next generation and society. Yet cultures do not always place a high priority on parenting, as indicated by the lack of many societal supports for children and families in the United States (see Chapter 2, pages 64–66). Furthermore, changing family forms mean that the lives of modern parents differ substantially from those of past generations.

In previous chapters, we discussed a wide variety of influences on child-rearing styles—personal characteristics of children and parents, family economic conditions, social class, ethnicity, and more. The marital relationship is also important. Husbands and wives who cooperate and respond to each other's needs are more likely to be sensitive to their children. Support from a spouse can even reduce the disruptive impact of stressful life events, economic strain, and parental depression on child rearing (Simons et al., 1990, 1992, 1993).

For employed parents, a major struggle during this phase of family life is finding good day care. The younger the child, the greater the parents' sense of risk and difficulty finding the help they need (Pleck, 1985). When competent, convenient, affordable day care is not available, it usually leads to additional pressures on the woman. Either she must curtail or give up her career, or she must endure unhappy children, missed workdays, and constant searches for new arrangements.

Despite its many challenges, rearing young children is a powerful source of adult development. Parents report that it expands their emotional capacities and enriches their lives. For example, Ernie remarked that he was very "goal oriented" before his children were born but felt "rounded out" by sharing in their care. Other involved parents say that child rearing helped them tune into others' feelings and needs and become more tolerant, self-confident, and responsible (Coltrane, 1990).

■ **FAMILIES WITH ADOLESCENTS.** Adolescence brings sharp changes in parental roles. In Chapters 11 and 12, we noted that parents of adolescents must establish a new relationship with their children—blending guidance with freedom and gradually relinquishing control. As adolescents gain in autonomy and explore values and goals in their search for identity, parents often complain that their teenager is too focused on peers and no longer seems to care about the family.

Flexibility is the key to family success during this period. As adolescents move from childhood to adulthood, they alternately become dependent when they cannot handle things alone and experiment with greater independence. Their behavior seems unpredictable and ever-changing. When parents try to tighten the reins by disciplining in ways

appropriate for younger children or withdraw to avoid conflict, they heighten family tensions. Although most couples handle these difficulties, others reach impasses. More people seek or are referred for family therapy during this phase of the family life cycle than any other (Young, 1991).

■ **PARENT EDUCATION.** In the past, when there was greater continuity across generations in family life, adults learned what they needed to know about parenting through modeling and direct experience. Today's world confronts husbands and wives with a host of societal factors that impinge on their ability to succeed as parents. In addition, the scientific literature on child development has mushroomed, much of it offering practical implications that can help parents do a better job of rearing children.

Modern adults eagerly seek information on child rearing through popular books. New mothers regard these sources as particularly valuable, second in importance only to their doctors (Deutsch et al., 1988). Special courses have also emerged, designed to help parents understand how children develop, clarify child-rearing values, explore family communication, and apply more effective parenting strategies. Day care centers, schools, churches, community health centers, and colleges often sponsor these parent education programs. A variety of positive outcomes have been demonstrated, including improved parent–child interaction, more open and flexible parent attitudes, and heightened awareness by parents of their role as educators of their children (Powell, 1986). Although these courses take a variety of forms, at present there is no convincing evidence that any one approach is best (Todres & Bunston, 1993). Perhaps the most effective programs adapt their goals and procedures to fit the specific needs and characteristics of their participants.

BRIEF REVIEW

In modern industrialized nations, the sequence and timing of phases of the family life cycle varies widely. Departure from the parental home usually marks the beginning of adult responsibilities, although many young people return temporarily as they launch their adult lives. Today, marriage requires that young adults work harder to define their relationship. Traditional marriages have changed as many full-time mothers return to their occupations when their children are older. Well-educated, career-oriented couples are more likely to have egalitarian marriages. However, true equality, especially in household division of labor, is rare. Consequently, men are more satisfied with and benefit more from marriage than do women.

The demands of new parenthood often lead to a mild drop in marital happiness, and family roles

become more traditional. A positive marital relationship promotes satisfaction with parenthood and effective rearing of young children. When children become adolescents, parents must cope with their unpredictable behavior and growing independence. Marital happiness is lowest at this time.

ASK YOURSELF . . .

- *After her wedding, Sharese was convinced she had made a mistake and never should have gotten married. Cite factors that helped sustain her marriage to Ernie and that led it to become especially happy.*
- *Suggest several ways in which a new mother and father can help each other make an effective adjustment to parenthood.*

THE DIVERSITY OF ADULT LIFESTYLES

The modern array of adult lifestyles arose in the 1960s, a decade of rapid social change in which American young people began to question the conventional wisdom of previous generations. Many asked, How can I find happiness? What kinds of commitments should I make to live a full and rewarding life? As the public became more accepting of diverse lifestyles, choices seemed more available than in the past—among them, staying single, cohabiting, remaining childless, and divorcing.

Today, nontraditional family options have penetrated the American mainstream. Many adults experience not just one, but several. As we consider these variations in the following sections, we will see that the factors that induce people to enter them are complex. Some adults make a deliberate decision to adopt a particular lifestyle, whereas others drift into it. The lifestyle may be imposed by society, as is the case for cohabiting homosexual couples, who cannot marry legally. Or people may decide on a certain lifestyle because they feel pushed away from another, such as a marriage gone sour. Thus, the adoption of a lifestyle can be within or beyond the person's control.

SINGLEHOOD

On finishing her education, Heather joined the Peace Corps and spent 5 years in Africa. Although open to a long-term relationship with a man whose sense of adventure equaled her own, she had only fleeting romances. When she returned to the United States, she accepted an executive position with an insurance company. Professional challenge and travel preoccupied her. At age 35, she reflected

on her life circumstances over lunch with Sharese: “I was open to marriage, but after my career took off, it would have interfered. Now I’m so used to independence that it would take a lot of adjustment to live with another person. I like being able to pick up and go where I want, when I want, without having to ask anybody or think about having to take care of anybody. But there’s a tradeoff: I sleep alone, eat most of my meals alone, and spend a lot of my leisure time alone.”

Singlehood characterizes individuals not living with an intimate partner. It has increased in recent years, especially among young adults. For example, never-married 30- to 34-year-olds have tripled since 1970, rising to 19 percent among males and 13 percent among females. Besides more people marrying later or not at all, divorce has added to the rate of singlehood. In view of these trends, it is likely that most Americans will spend a substantial part of their adult lives single, and a growing minority—about 10 to 12 percent—will stay that way (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996).

Because they marry later, more men than women are single in early adulthood. But women are far more likely than men to remain single for many years or their entire life. As women get older, there are fewer men available with characteristics that most look for in a mate—the same age or older, better educated, and more professionally successful. Men—whether never married, divorced, or widowed—find partners more easily, since they can select from a large pool of younger unmarried women. Because of the tendency for women to “marry up” and men to “marry down,” men in blue-collar occupations and women in highly demanding, prestigious careers are overrepresented among singles after age 30.

Ethnic differences also exist. For example, the percentage of never-married African Americans is nearly twice as great as that of Caucasian Americans in early adulthood. As we will see later, high unemployment among black men interferes with marriage. But many African Americans eventually marry in their late thirties and forties, a period in which the black and white marriage rates come closer together (Cherlin, 1992; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996).

Singlehood is a multifaceted experience with different meanings. At one extreme are people who choose it deliberately, at the other people who regard themselves as single because of circumstances beyond their control. Most, like Heather, are in the middle—adults who wanted to marry but made choices that took them in a different direction (Shostak, 1987). In a study in which never-married, childless women were interviewed about their lives, some said they focused on occupational goals instead of marriage. Others reported that they found singlehood preferable to the disappointing relationships they had with men. And still others commented that they just did not meet “the right person” (Dalton, 1992).

Of the various advantages of singlehood, those mentioned most often are freedom and mobility. But singles

also recognize drawbacks—loneliness, the dating grind, limited sexual and social life, reduced sense of security, and feelings of exclusion from the world of married couples (Chasteen, 1994). Single men have more physical and mental health problems than do single women, who usually come to terms with their lifestyle and fare well. The greater social support available to women through intimate same-sex friendships is partly responsible. In addition, never-married men are more likely to have problematic family backgrounds and personal characteristics that contribute to both their singlehood and their adjustment difficulties (Buunk & Driel, 1989).

Many single people go through a stressful period in their late twenties, when more of their friends get married and they become an exception. The mid-thirties is another trying time for single women, due to the approaching biological deadline for bearing children. A few decide to become parents through adoption, artificial insemination, or an extramarital affair.

COHABITATION

Cohabitation refers to the lifestyle of unmarried couples who have an intimate, sexual relationship and share a residence. Until the 1960s, cohabitation in Western nations was largely limited to low-income people. Since then, it has increased in all groups, with an especially dramatic rise among well-educated and economically advantaged young adults. As Figure 14.3 shows, seven times as many American

couples are cohabiting in the 1990s as did in 1970. About one-third of these households include children, since in half of cohabiting relationships, one or both partners are separated or divorced (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996).

Like singlehood, cohabitation has different meanings. For some, it serves as *preparation for marriage*—a time to test the relationship and get used to the realities of living together. For others, it is an *alternative to marriage*—an arrangement that offers the rewards of sexual intimacy and companionship along with the possibility of easy departure if there is a decline in satisfaction. In view of this variation, it is not surprising that great range exists in the extent to which cohabitators share money and possessions and take responsibility for each other's children.

Americans are more open to cohabitation than they were in the past, although attitudes are not yet as positive as they are in Western Europe. In the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden, cohabitation is thoroughly integrated into society. As a result, cohabitators are nearly as devoted to one another as are married people (Buunk & Driel, 1989; Kaslow, Hansson, & Lundblad, 1994; Ramsøy, 1994). When they decide to marry, Dutch, Norwegian, and Swedish cohabitators more often do so to legalize their relationship, especially for the sake of children. American cohabitators typically marry to confirm their love and commitment—sentiments that their Western European counterparts attach to cohabitation.

Largely as a result of cultural ambivalence about cohabitation, American cohabitators differ from people who are

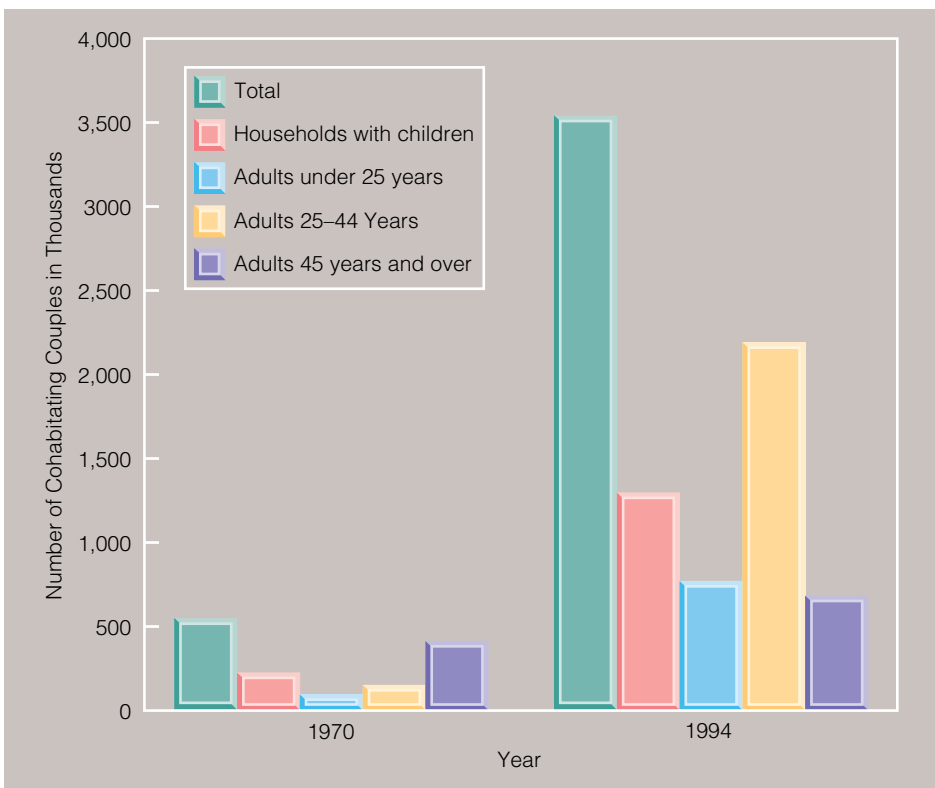


FIGURE 14.3

Rates of cohabitation in 1970 and 1994 in the United States. The figure shows total number of cohabiting couples, number of cohabiting couples with children, and cohabiting rates by age. Notice the dramatic rise in cohabitation for all groups. However, postponement of marriage and the high rate of divorce (see Figure 14.1) have caused the age distribution of cohabitators to change. In 1970, the majority were middle aged and elderly. Today, most are young adults. (From U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996.)

married or living in separate residences. They are less religious, more politically liberal, more androgynous, and have had more sexual partners. Overall, they are more likely to endorse and engage in nonconventional behavior. In addition, a larger number have parents who are divorced and say they get along poorly with them (Cunningham & Antill, 1994; Thornton, 1991; Thornton, Axinn, & Hill, 1992).

These personal characteristics are responsible for outcomes associated with cohabitation. Compared to married people, American cohabitators are less likely to pool finances or jointly own a house. (This difference is much smaller in Western Europe.) Furthermore, American couples who live together before marriage are more prone to divorce—an association not present in other Western countries (Buunk & Driel, 1989; Cherlin, 1992). But we must keep in mind that American cohabitators have experienced more conflict in their own homes, and they tend to emphasize self-fulfillment over obligations to others in their relationships. As they carry this individualistic outlook into marriage, they are more likely to dissolve a union when it becomes less satisfying.

Certain couples are exceptions to the trends just described. People who cohabit after separation or divorce often test a new relationship carefully to prevent another painful failure, especially when children are involved. As a result, they cohabit longer and are less likely to move toward marriage (Cherlin, 1992). In contrast to American heterosexual cohabitators, homosexual couples report strong commitment—as intense as that of married people. When their relationships become problematic, they end more often than marriages do only because there are fewer barriers to separating, including children in common, financial dependence on a partner, and concerns about the costs of divorce (Peplau, 1991).

Clearly, cohabitation has advantages and drawbacks. For people not ready for marriage, it combines the rewards of a close relationship with the opportunity to remain at least partially uncommitted. Although most couples cohabit to avoid legal obligations, they can encounter difficulties because they do not have them. Bitter fights over property, money, rental contracts, and responsibility for children are the rule rather than the exception when unmarried couples split up (Buunk & Driel, 1989).

CHILDLESSNESS

At work, Sharese got to know Beatrice and Daniel. Married for 7 years and in their mid-thirties, they did not have children and were not planning to have any. To Sharese, their relationship seemed especially caring and affectionate. “At first, we were open to becoming parents,” Beatrice explained, “but eventually we decided to focus on our marriage.”

In our discussion of reproductive technologies in Chapter 2, we noted that about 20 percent of couples have fertility problems. Because treatment is not always successful, some remain *involuntarily* childless. Others who are childless by

circumstance simply did not find a partner with whom to share parenthood. Beatrice and Daniel are in another category—men and women who are *voluntarily* childless.

How many American couples choose not to have children is a matter of dispute. Some researchers claim the rate has been low for several decades—between 3 and 6 percent (Houseknecht, 1987; Jacobson & Heaton, 1989). Others say it rose in the 1980s and early 1990s and is currently higher than ever before—from 10 to 15 percent (Ambry, 1992; Morell, 1994). These differing reports may be due to the fact that voluntary childlessness is not always a permanent condition. A few people decide very early that they do not want to be parents and stick to these plans. But most, like Beatrice and Daniel, make their decision after they are married and have developed a lifestyle they do not want to give up. Later, some change their minds.

Besides marital satisfaction and freedom from child-care responsibilities, common reasons for not having children include the woman’s career and economic security. Consistent with these motives, the voluntarily childless are usually college educated, have prestigious occupations, and are highly committed to their work. Many were only or first-born children whose parents encouraged achievement and independence. In a culture that negatively stereotypes childlessness, it is not surprising that voluntarily childless women are more self-reliant and assertive. Typically the wife is responsible for the decision not to have children (Houseknecht, 1987; Morell, 1994).

Voluntarily childless adults are just as content with their lives as are parents who have rewarding relationships with their children. In contrast, adults who cannot overcome their infertility and parents whose children have serious psychological or physical problems are likely to be dissatisfied and depressed (Connidis & McMullin, 1993). Think about these findings, and you will see that they do not support the prevailing stereotype of childless people as lonely and unfulfilled. Instead, they indicate that parenthood enhances well-being only when the parent–child relationship is warm and affectionate. And childlessness interferes with adjustment and life satisfaction only when it is beyond a person’s control.

DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

If current rates continue (see Figure 14.1 on page 464), about half of all marriages in the United States will end in separation or divorce. Most people who divorce do so within 5 to 10 years of their marriage, so many divorces happen when children are still at home. Furthermore, 61 percent of divorced men and 54 percent of divorced women remarry (Hetherington, Law, & O’Connor, 1994). Divorce occurs at an especially high rate during the first few years of second marriages—7 percent above that for first marriages. Afterward, the divorce rate for first and second marriages is about the same (Cherlin, 1992; Ganong & Coleman, 1994).

Why do so many marriages fail? As Christy and Gary's divorce illustrates, the most obvious reason is a disrupted husband–wife relationship. Christy and Gary did not argue more often than Sharese and Ernie did. But their style of resolving conflict was markedly different. When Christy raised concerns, Gary responded with resentment, anger, and retreat—a conflict-confronting–conflict-avoiding pattern that can be found in many partners who split up. Another typical style involves little conflict, but partners increasingly lead separate lives because they have different expectations of marriage and family life and few shared interests, activities, or friends (Hetherington, Law, & O'Connor, 1994).

A few decades ago, unhappy couples like Christy and Gary often stayed together. Shifting societal conditions, including widespread family poverty and the changing status of women, provide the larger context for the high divorce rate. Economically disadvantaged couples who suffer multiple life stresses are especially likely to split up. But Christy's case represents another trend—rising marital breakup among well-educated, economically independent women. Women are twice as likely as men to initiate divorce (Rice, 1994).

When Sharese heard that Christy and Gary's marriage had dissolved, she remarked that it seemed as if “someone had died.” Her description is fitting, since divorce involves the loss of a way of life and therefore part of the self sustained by that way of life. As a result, it carries with it opportunities for both positive and negative change.

Immediately after separation, both men and women are depressed and anxious and display impulsive, antisocial behavior. For most, these reactions subside within 2 years. Women who were in traditional marriages and who organized their identities around their husband have an especially hard time. As one divorcee remarked, “I used to be Mrs. John Jones, the bank manager's wife. Now I'm Mary Jones. Who is Mary Jones?” (Hetherington, Law, & O'Connor, 1994, p. 216). Many noncustodial fathers feel disoriented and rootless as a result of decreased contact with their children. Others distract themselves through a frenzy of social activity (Cherlin, 1992).

Finding a new partner contributes most to the life satisfaction of divorced adults. But it is more crucial for men, who show more positive adjustment in the context of marriage than on their own. Despite a drop in income, inadequate child care, and loneliness (see Chapter 10), most divorced women prefer their new life to an unhappy marriage. For example, Christy developed new skills and a sense of self-reliance that might not have emerged had she remained married to Gary. However, a few women—especially those who are anxious and fearful or who remain strongly attached to their ex-spouse—show a drop in self-esteem, become depressed, and tend to form repeated unsuccessful relationships (Ganong & Coleman, 1994). Job training, continued education, and career advancement play vital roles in the economic and psychological well-being of

divorced women. The availability of high-quality child care is essential for these activities (Hetherington, 1995).

On the average, people remarry within 4 years of divorce, men somewhat faster than women. Why do many remarriages break up? There are several reasons. First, although people often remarry for love, practical matters—financial security, help in rearing children, relief from loneliness, and social acceptance—figure more heavily into a second marriage than a first. These concerns do not provide a sound footing for a lasting partnership. Second, some people transfer the negative patterns of interaction and problem solving learned in their first marriage to the second. Third, people who have already had a failed marriage are more likely to view divorce as an acceptable solution when marital difficulties resurface. And finally, remarried couples experience more stress from stepfamily situations (Ganong & Coleman, 1994). Recall from Chapter 10 that adults in blended families have few societal guidelines for how to relate to their steprelatives, including stepchildren. As we will see in the next section, stepparent–stepchildren ties are powerful predictors of marital happiness.

In divorce and remarriage, as in other adult lifestyles, there are multiple pathways leading to diverse outcomes. It generally takes about 2 years for blended families to develop the connectedness and comfort of intact biological families. Family life education and couples and group therapy can help divorced and remarried adults adapt to the complexities of their new circumstances (Forgatch, Patterson, & Ray, 1996).

VARIANT STYLES OF PARENTHOOD

Diverse family forms result in varied styles of parenthood. Among these are a growing number of remarried parents, never-married parents, and gay and lesbian parents. Each type of family presents unique challenges to parenting competence and adult psychological well-being.

■ **REMARRIED PARENTS.** Whether stepchildren live in the household or visit only occasionally, stepparents are in a difficult position. Since the parent–child tie predates the remarriage, the stepparent enters as an outsider. All too often, stepparents try to move into their new role too quickly. Because they do not have a warm attachment bond to build on, their discipline is usually ineffective. Stepparents frequently criticize the biological parent for being too lenient. The parent, in turn, tends to view the stepparent as too harsh. These differences can become major issues that divide the remarried couple (Ganong, Coleman, & Fine, 1995; Papernow, 1993).

Stepmothers, especially, are likely to experience conflict and poor adjustment. Expected to be in charge of family relationships, they quickly find that stepparent–stepchild ties do not develop instantly. Even when their husbands do not have custody, stepmothers feel stressed. As stepchildren go in and out of the home, stepmothers compare life with

and without resistant children, and many prefer life without! No matter what a stepmother does to build a close parent–child bond, her efforts are probably doomed to failure in the short run.

Stepfathers with children of their own have an easier time. They establish positive ties with stepchildren relatively quickly, perhaps because they feel less pressure to plunge into parenting than do stepmothers. At the same time, they have had enough experience to know how to build a warm parent–child relationship. Stepfathers without biological children are new to child rearing. When they have unrealistic expectations or their wives push them into the father role, their interactions with stepchildren can be troublesome. After making several overtures that are ignored or rebuffed, they often withdraw from parenting (Bray, 1992; Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992).

A caring husband–wife relationship, the cooperation of the absent biological parent, and the willingness of children to accept their parents' new spouse are crucial for stepparent adjustment. Because stepparent–stepchild bonds are hard to establish, the divorce rate is higher for couples with stepchildren than for those without (Ganong & Coleman, 1994).

■ **NEVER-MARRIED PARENTS.** Earlier we mentioned that single adults occasionally decide to become parents and rear children on their own. Births to women in high-status occupations who have not married by their thirties have increased in recent years. However, they are still few in number, and little is known about how these mothers and their children fare.

🌐 During the past several decades, never-married parenthood has been especially high among African-American young women. For example, in 1993, over 60 percent of births to black women in their twenties were out of wedlock, whereas only 18 percent to white women were. A sharp difference between blacks and whites in the timing of family life cycle events underlies these trends. African-American women postpone marriage more and childbirth less than do their Caucasian-American counterparts (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996).

Loss of manufacturing jobs, rising unemployment, and consequent inability of many black men to support a family have contributed to never-married parenthood among African Americans (Rice, 1994). African Americans have also responded to changing family values—the shift toward cohabitation, postponement of marriage, and separation of marriage from childbearing that has spread throughout American culture (Cherlin, 1992).

Recall from Chapter 2 that never-married black mothers tap a traditional source of strength in their culture by relying heavily on their own mothers and other extended family members for help in caring for their children. For most, marriage follows birth of the first child by several years and is not necessarily to the child's father. Nevertheless, these couples function much like other first-marriage parents.



For most never-married African-American mothers, marriage follows birth of the first child by several years and is not necessarily to the child's father. Nevertheless, these couples function much like other first-marriage parents. The children are often unaware that the father is a stepfather, and parents do not report the relationship problems typical of blended families. (Bernard Boutrit/Woodfin Camp & Associates)

Their children are often unaware that the father is a stepfather, and parents do not report the relationship problems typical of blended families (Ganong & Coleman, 1994).

Still, never-married parenthood among low-income women is costly, since living in a female-headed household makes it more difficult to overcome poverty. Furthermore, the extreme deprivation and danger of crime-ridden, inner-city neighborhoods hinders extended family networks from providing assistance, thereby isolating many young mothers. (For an example, return to the story of Zinnia Mae in Chapter 2, pages 61 and 63.) Strengthening vocational education and employment opportunities for African Americans would encourage marriage as well as help unmarried-mother families. ♀

■ **GAY AND LESBIAN PARENTS.** Several million American gay men and lesbians are parents, most through previous heterosexual marriages, a few through adoption or reproductive technologies (Hare, 1994). In the past, laws assuming that homosexuals could not be adequate parents led those who divorced a heterosexual partner to lose custody of children. Today, several states hold that sexual orientation is irrelevant to custody, but in others, fierce prejudice against homosexual parents still prevails.

Families headed by a homosexual parent or a gay or lesbian couple are very similar to those of heterosexuals. Gay and lesbian parents are as committed to and effective at the parental role, and sometimes more so. Indeed, some research indicates that gay fathers are more consistent in setting limits and more responsive to their children's needs than are heterosexual fathers, perhaps because gay men's



Homosexual parents are as committed to and effective at child rearing as heterosexual parents. Their children are well adjusted, and the large majority develop a heterosexual orientation. (Mark Richards/PhotoEdit)

nontraditional gender-role identity fosters involvement with children (Bigner & Jacobsen, 1989a, 1989b). Children of gay and lesbian parents are as well adjusted as children of heterosexual parents, and the large majority are heterosexual (Bailey et al., 1995; Golombok & Tasker, 1996).

When extended family members have difficulty accepting them, homosexual mothers and fathers often build “families of choice” through friends who assume functions traditionally expected of relatives. But most of the time, parents of gays and lesbians cannot endure a permanent rift. With the passage of time, interactions of homosexual parents with their families of origin resemble those of heterosexuals (Hare, 1994; Lewin, 1993).

Partners of homosexual parents usually take on some caregiving responsibilities and are attached to the children. The extent of involvement varies with the way children were brought into the relationship. When children were adopted or conceived through reproductive technologies, partners tend to be more involved than when children originated in a previous heterosexual relationship (Hare & Richards, 1993). In a few instances, homosexual partners have become the joint legal parents of children, an arrangement that enhances family stability (Green & Bozett, 1991).

Overall, families headed by homosexuals can be distinguished from other families only by issues related to living in a nonsupportive society. The greatest concern of gay and lesbian parents is that their children will be stigmatized by their parents’ sexual orientation (Hare, 1994; Lewin, 1993).

BRIEF REVIEW

Since the 1960s, the diversity of adult lifestyles has expanded. Long-term singlehood occurs most often among women in high-status careers and men in blue-collar occupations or who are unemployed. Depending on their life circumstances, the adjustment of single people varies greatly. Cohabitation is common in Western industrialized nations. Since living together before marriage is not yet broadly accepted in the United States, American cohabitators tend to be less conventional than other young adults. For this reason, the marriages of former cohabitators are more likely to break up. Voluntarily childless adults are usually college educated, highly involved in their careers, and content with their lives. Widespread family poverty and the changing status of women have contributed to the high divorce rate in the United States. Divorced adults usually adjust to their new circumstances within 2 years. Finding a new partner contributes most to their life satisfaction. Unfortunately, the divorce rate for second marriages is high.

Modern families also include varied styles of parenthood. Stepparent–stepchild bonds are difficult to establish and depend on the support of the spouse and the cooperation of the absent parent and the child. Never-married parenthood is widespread among African-American women, who often rely on extended family members (particularly their own mothers) for child-rearing assistance. Gay and lesbian parents are just as effective at child rearing as are heterosexual parents.

ASK YOURSELF . . .

- Return to Chapter 10, pages 332–335 and review the impact of divorce and remarriage on children and adolescents. How do those findings resemble outcomes for adults? What might account for the similarities?
- After dating for a year, Wanda and Scott decided to live together. Wanda’s mother heard that couples who cohabit before marriage are more likely to get divorced. She worried that cohabitation would reduce Wanda and Scott’s chances for a successful life together. Is her fear justified? Why or why not?

VOCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Besides family life, vocational life is a vital domain of development in early adulthood. After choosing an occupation, young people must learn how to perform its tasks competently, get along with co-workers, respond to authority, and protect their own interests. When work experiences go well, adults develop new competencies, feel a sense of personal accomplishment, make new friends, and become financially independent and secure.

ESTABLISHING A VOCATION

In our discussion of Levinson and Vaillant's theories earlier in this chapter, we noted divergent paths and timetables for vocational development in contemporary adulthood. Consider, once again, the wide variation in establishing a career among Sharese, Ernie, Christy, and Gary. As is typical for men, Ernie and Gary's vocational lives were long and *continuous*, beginning after completion of formal education and ending with retirement. Like many women, Sharese and Christy had *discontinuous* career paths—ones that were interrupted or deferred by childbearing and child rearing (Betz, 1993; Ornstein & Isabella, 1990). Furthermore, not all people embark on the vocation of their dreams. For example, although half of young people aspire to professional occupations, only 20 percent of the work force attains them (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996).

Even for young people who enter their chosen field, initial experiences can be discouraging. At the health department, Sharese discovered that committee meetings and paper work consumed much of her day. Since each grant proposal and research project had a deadline, the pressure of productivity weighed heavily on her. Adjusting to unanticipated disappointments in salary, supervisors, and co-workers is difficult (Hatcher & Crook, 1988). As new workers become aware of the gap between their expectations and reality, resignations are common. On the average, people in their twenties move to a new job every 2 years; five or six changes are not unusual (Seligman, 1994).

After a period of evaluation and adjustment, young adults generally settle into an occupation. In careers with opportunities for promotion, high aspirations must often be revised downward, since the structure of most work settings resembles a pyramid. In businesses, there are few high-level executive positions; in factories, there are a limited number of supervisory jobs. In a longitudinal study of over 400 AT&T lower-level male managers, the importance of work in men's lives varied with career advancement and age. For men who advanced very little, "work disengagement" occurred early; family, recreation, and community service assumed greater importance by the early thirties. Men with average levels of career success emphasized non-work roles at a later age. In contrast, men who were highly successful became more involved in their jobs over time.



Wide variation exists today among young adults' career paths and timetables. Men's vocational lives are typically long and continuous. In contrast, women often have discontinuous career paths—ones that are interrupted or deferred by childbearing and child rearing. (Jonathan Nourok/Tony Stone Images)

Although the desire for advancement declines with age for many, most workers still seek challenges and find satisfaction in their work roles (Howard & Bray, 1988).

Besides opportunity, personal characteristics affect career progress. As we will see in the next section, a sense of *self-efficacy*—belief in one's own ability to be successful—affects career choice and development. (Return to Chapter 1, pages 18-19, if you need to review this idea.) Young people who are very anxious about the possibility of failing or making mistakes tend to set career aspirations that are either too high or too low. As a result, they achieve far less than their abilities would permit (Lopez, 1989).

Recall from our discussion of Levinson's theory that success in a career often depends on the quality of a mentoring relationship. Access to an effective mentor is jointly influenced by the availability of willing people and the worker's capacity to select an appropriate individual. Interestingly, the best mentors are usually not top executives, who tend to be preoccupied and therefore less helpful and sympathetic. Most of the time, it is better for a young person to choose a mentor lower on the corporate ladder (Seligman, 1994).

WOMEN AND ETHNIC MINORITIES

Although women and ethnic minorities have penetrated nearly all professions, they attain less than they otherwise would if their talents were developed to the fullest. Women in general—and African-American, Hispanic, and Native-American women in particular—remain concentrated in occupations that offer little opportunity for advancement, and they are underrepresented in executive and managerial roles (see Chapter 13, page 443). Despite the massive influx of women into the labor force, their earnings relative to men's have changed little during the past 50 years. For every dollar earned by a man, the average woman earns only 70 cents, a gap that is larger in the United States than in Western European nations (Adelman, 1991).

Women seem to go through a different, often more complex process of vocational development than do men. Especially for those who pursue traditionally feminine occupations, career planning is often short term and subject to considerable change. Low self-efficacy with respect to male-dominated fields limits not only women's occupational choices, but their progress once their vocational lives have begun. Women who pursue nontraditional careers usually have “masculine” qualities—high achievement orientation, an emphasis on individualism, and the expectation that they will have to make a life for themselves through their own efforts (Seligman, 1994).

Even when women enter high-status professions, very few move into high-level management positions. Gender-stereotyped images of women as followers rather than leaders and role conflict between work and family slow their advancement. Singlehood or late marriage and few or no children are strongly associated with career achievement in women—a relationship that does not hold for men (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987). Furthermore, since men dominate high-status fields, few women are available to serve as mentors. (A similar situation exists for ethnic minorities.) Some evidence suggests that women with female mentors are more productive than those with male mentors, perhaps because female mentors can provide guidance on the unique problems women encounter in the workplace (Goldstein, 1979).

Despite obstacles to success, women benefit greatly from achievement in the outside world. Recall the study of the highly gifted “Termites” who were followed over their life course, described in Chapter 13 (see page 418). At age 60, women who reported the highest levels of life satisfaction had developed rewarding careers. The least satisfied women had been housewives all their lives (Sears & Barbie, 1977). These findings suggest that at least some of the problems experienced by married women may not be due to marriage per se, but rather to lack of a gratifying vocation. Consistent with this idea, most young women express a preference for blending work and family in their adult

lives (Barnett & Rivers, 1996). For women in financially stressed families, this is usually not a choice; it is a necessity.

COMBINING WORK AND FAMILY

Whether women work because they want to or have to (or both), the dominant family form today is the **dual-earner marriage**, in which both husband and wife are employed. Most dual-earner couples are also parents, since the majority of women with school-age children are in the work force (see Chapter 10). In about one-third of these families, moderate to severe conflict occurs over trying to meet both work and family responsibilities (Pleck, 1985).

What are the main sources of strain in dual-earner marriages? When Sharese returned to her job after her children were born, she felt a sense of *work overload*. Not only did she have a demanding career, but (like most employed women) she shouldered most of the household and child care tasks. Furthermore, Sharese and Ernie felt torn between the desire to excel at their jobs and the desire to spend more time with each other and their children. At times, their lives became so busy that they had little energy left over for visiting or entertaining friends, relatives, and work associates (Pleck, 1985).

Work–family role conflict is greater for women, and it negatively affects quality of life in both settings (Higgins, Duxbury, & Irving, 1992). It is especially intense for wives



After a full day at the office, this mother picks up her baby from day care and runs errands, attending to her second full-time job. Like most women in dual-earner marriages, she shoulders most of the child care and household tasks. Work–family role conflict is greater for women. (Tom Stewart/The Stock Market).

in low-status occupations with rigid schedules and little worker autonomy. Couples in prestigious careers have more control over both work and family domains. For example, Sharese and Ernie devised ways to spend more time with their children. They picked them up at day care early one day a week, compensating by doing certain occupational tasks on evenings and weekends. Like other career-oriented mothers, Sharese coped with role pressures by setting priorities. She decreased the amount of time she spent on household chores, not child rearing (Duxbury & Higgins, 1994).

Having two careers in one family usually means that certain career decisions become more complex. A move to a new job can mean vocational sacrifices for one partner. Usually this is the wife, since a decision in favor of the husband's career (typically further along and better paid) is more likely to maximize family income. One solution to the geographical limitations of the dual-earner marriage is to live apart. Although more couples are doing this, the strain of separation and risk of divorce are high.

Clearly, dual-earner marriages pose difficulties, but when couples cooperate to surmount these, they gain in many ways. Besides higher earnings and a better standard of living, the greatest advantage for college-educated couples is self-fulfillment of the wife. Ernie took great pride in Sharese's accomplishments, and he reaped other

benefits. Sharese's career orientation contributed to his view of her as an interesting, self-confident, and capable helpmate in life.

In sum, a challenging, rewarding occupation in the context of a supportive spouse can strengthen a marriage and foster adult development. Under other circumstances—for example, when a woman tries to combine a low-status, low-paying job with marriage to a disapproving man—the physical and psychological toll can be severe. The Caregiving Concerns table below lists strategies that help dual-earner couples combine work and family roles in ways that promote mastery and pleasure in both spheres of life.

ASK YOURSELF . . .

- *Heather climbed the career ladder of her company quickly, reaching a top-level executive position by her early thirties. In contrast, Sharese and Christy did not attain managerial roles in early adulthood. What accounts for the disparity in career progress of the three women?*
- *Work life and family life are inseparably intertwined. Explain how this is so in early adulthood.*



CAREGIVING CONCERNS

Strategies That Help Dual-Earner Couples Combine Work and Family Roles

STRATEGY	DESCRIPTION
Devise a plan for sharing household tasks.	As soon as possible in the relationship, talk about division of household responsibilities. Decide who does a particular chore on the basis of who has the needed skill and time, not gender. Schedule regular times to rediscuss your plan to fit changing family circumstances.
Begin sharing child care right after the baby's arrival.	For fathers, strive to spend equal time with the baby early. For mothers, refrain from imposing your standards on your partner. Instead, share the role of "child-rearing expert" by discussing parenting values and concerns often. Attend a parent education course together.
Talk over conflicts about decision making and responsibilities.	Face conflict through communication. Clarify your feelings and needs and express them to your partner. Listen and try to understand your partner's point of view. Then be willing to negotiate and compromise.
Establish a balance between work and family.	Critically evaluate the time you devote to work in view of your values and priorities. If it is too much, cut back.
Make sure your relationship receives regular nurturance and attention.	See the Caregiving Concerns table on page 459.
Press for workplace and public policies that assist dual-earner couples.	Difficulties faced by dual-earner couples are partly due to lack of workplace and societal supports. Encourage your employer to provide benefits that help combine work and family roles, such as flexible work hours; parental leave with pay; and onsite high-quality, affordable day care. Communicate with lawmakers and other citizens about improving public policies for children and families.

SUMMARY

ERIKSON'S THEORY: INTIMACY VERSUS ISOLATION

According to Erikson, what personality changes take place during early adulthood?

- In Erikson's theory, young adults must resolve the conflict of **intimacy versus isolation**, balancing independence and intimacy as they form a close relationship with a partner. Research indicates that young people deal with intimacy concerns in the context of a variety of lifestyles. It also shows that aspects of generativity, including work and career as well as childbearing and child rearing, are prime concerns in the twenties and thirties.

OTHER THEORIES OF ADULT PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Describe Levinson's and Vaillant's psychosocial theories of adult personality development.

- Building on Erikson's stage approach, both Levinson and Vaillant outlined patterns in the adult life course that have been supported by research.
- Levinson described a predictable series of eras, each consisting of a transition and a stable period, in which the **life structure** is revised and elaborated. Young adults usually construct a dream, typically involving career for men and both marriage and career for women, and find a mentor to help them in their career. In their thirties, they focus on aspects of their lives that have received less attention. Men settle down, whereas women continue in an unsettled phase into middle adulthood.

- Vaillant refined Erikson's stages, portraying the twenties as devoted to intimacy, the thirties to career consolidation, the forties to guiding others, and the fifties to cultural and philosophical values.

What is the social clock, and how does it affect personality in adulthood?

- Although societal expectations have become less rigid, conformity to or departure from the **social clock**, the culturally determined timetable for major life events, can be a major source of personality change in adulthood. Following a social clock grants confidence to young adults, whereas departures can bring psychological distress.

CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS

Describe the role of romantic love in the young adult's quest for intimacy.

- Finding a partner is a major milestone of adult development. Intimate partners tend to resemble one another in age, ethnicity, social class, education, and various personal and physical attributes. The emphasis placed on romantic love as the basis for mate selection in Western nations does not characterize all cultures.
- The balance among passion, intimacy, and commitment changes as romantic relationships move from the intense sexual attraction of **passionate love** toward more settled **companionate love**. Effort and commitment are key in enduring relationships.

Describe adult friendships and sibling relationships.

- Adult friendships have many of the same characteristics and benefits as

earlier friendships and are based on trust, intimacy, and loyalty. Women's same-sex friendships tend to be more intimate than men's. Other-sex friendships are important in adulthood but less frequent and enduring than same-sex friendships.

- Siblings become more frequent companions in early adulthood than they were in adolescence, often taking on the characteristics of friendship, especially between same-sex siblings.

Describe the role of loneliness in adult development.

- Young adults are vulnerable to **loneliness**, but it declines with age as they form satisfying intimate relationships and learn to be comfortably alone.

THE FAMILY LIFE CYCLE

Trace phases of the family life cycle that are prominent in early adulthood, and cite factors that influence these phases today.

- Although the majority of young people marry, wide variations in the sequence and timing of phases of the **family life cycle** reflect the diversity of modern life.
- Leaving home is a major step in assuming adult responsibilities. A large percentage of American teenagers depart relatively early when they go to college. Social class and ethnicity influence the likelihood that a young person will live independently before marriage. Returning to live at home for a period of time is common among unmarried young adults.
- Nearly 90 percent of Americans marry, although most do so later

than in the past. Both **traditional marriages** and **egalitarian marriages** are affected by women's employment and changing gender roles. Husbands and wives today must work harder to define their marital roles.

- Many young people enter marriage with unrealistic expectations. Even happy marriages have their ups and downs and require adaptability on the part of both partners. Men tend to be happier and healthier in marriage than women.
- Effective birth control techniques and changing cultural values make childbearing a matter of choice in Western industrialized nations. Although most American couples bear children, they are doing so later, having fewer children, and weighing the pros and cons more carefully than in the past.
- The arrival of children is a key change in the family life cycle, making the family system permanent for the first time. New parents must adjust to increased responsibilities, less time for each other, and more traditional roles. Marital satisfaction typically declines somewhat with these adjustments.
- Challenges facing families with young children include inadequate preparation for child rearing, lack of societal supports for parenting, the need for cooperation in the marital relationship, and difficulties in finding good day care.
- In families with adolescents, parents must establish new relationships with their increasingly autonomous teenagers, blending guidance with freedom and gradually relinquishing control. Marital satisfaction is often lowest in this phase, but flexibility and parent education are helpful.

THE DIVERSITY OF ADULT LIFESTYLES

Discuss the diversity of adult lifestyles, focusing on singlehood, cohabitation, and childlessness.

- Diverse nontraditional family options are now part of the American mainstream. Adults may deliberately choose a lifestyle, drift into it, or be forced into it by circumstances.
- Singlehood has risen in recent years and includes both never-married and divorced individuals. Women with high-status careers and men who are unemployed or in blue-collar occupations are most likely to remain single. Single women tend to be better adjusted than single men.
- **Cohabitation** has risen dramatically, especially among well-educated, economically advantaged young adults. It serves either as preparation for marriage or as an alternative to marriage, and it often includes divorced partners and their children. Because American cohabitators tend to be less conventional than other people, their subsequent marriages are more likely to fail.
- Voluntarily childless adults tend to be well educated and career oriented and are just as satisfied with their lives as are parents who have good relationships with their children.

Discuss today's high rates of divorce and remarriage, and cite factors that contribute to them.

- Half of all marriages in the United States will end in separation or divorce, often while children are at home. More than half of divorced people will remarry, and many will divorce again. Unhappy marital relationships, family poverty, and the changing status of women contribute to the divorce rate.

- Finding a new partner is important to many divorced adults, especially men. Remarriages break up for several reasons, including the prominence of practical concerns rather than love in the decision to remarry, the persistence of negative patterns of interaction, the acceptance of divorce as a solution to marital difficulties, and problems adjusting to a stepfamily.

Discuss the challenges associated with variant styles of parenthood, including remarried parents, never-married parents, and gay and lesbian parents.

- Establishing stepparent–stepchild ties is difficult, especially for stepmothers and for stepfathers without children of their own. A caring husband–wife relationship, the cooperation of the absent biological parent, and children's acceptance are crucial for stepparent adjustment.
- Never-married parenthood is especially high among low-income African-American women in their twenties. Unemployment among black men and changing American family values contribute to this trend. Although these young mothers often receive help from extended family members, they find it difficult to overcome poverty.
- Families headed by homosexuals face difficulties related to living in an unsupportive society. Gay and lesbian parents are just as loving and effective as heterosexual parents.

VOCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Discuss men's and women's patterns of vocational development, and cite difficulties faced by women, ethnic minorities, and couples seeking to combine work and family.

- In addition to intimacy and family concerns, vocational development is a key task for young adults. Men's career paths are usually continuous, whereas women's are often discontinuous due to childbearing and child rearing. After adjusting to the realities of the work world, young adults settle into an occupation. Their progress is affected by opportunities for promotion in their chosen occupation, personal characteristics such as self-efficacy, and access to an effective mentor.
- Women and ethnic minorities have penetrated nearly all professions but have made limited progress in advancement and earnings. Women tend to be hampered by low self-efficacy with respect to traditionally male-dominated fields, gender stereotypes, role conflict between work and family, and difficulties in finding a suitable mentor.
- Couples, and particularly women, in **dual-earner marriages** experience stresses from work overload, work–family role conflict, and the need to make vocational sacrifices to further their partner's career. Benefits include higher earnings, a better standard of living, and self-fulfillment for the wife.

IMPORTANT TERMS AND CONCEPTS

intimacy versus isolation (p. 452)
 life structure (p. 454)
 social clock (p. 456)
 passionate love (p. 457)

companionate love (p. 457)
 loneliness (p. 461)
 family life cycle (p. 462)
 traditional marriage (p. 464)

egalitarian marriage (p. 464)
 cohabitation (p. 472)
 dual-earner marriage (p. 478)

FYI

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION AND HELP

PARENT EDUCATION

Family Resource Coalition
200 S. Michigan Avenue, Suite 1600
Chicago, IL 60604
(312) 341-0900

A national organization that helps families develop support systems to strengthen family life and children's development. Educates public, government, and business leaders about the needs of families and how family resource programs can meet those needs.

SINGLEHOOD AND DIVORCE

Single Mothers by Choice
P.O. Box 1642,
Gracie Square Station
New York, NY 10028
(212) 988-0993
Web site: www.parentsplace.com/readroom/smc

Organization of primarily single professional women in their thirties and forties who have either decided to have or are considering having children outside of marriage.

Parents Without Partners
8807 Colesville Road
Silver Spring, MD 20910
(301) 588-9354
Web site: www.fwst.net/interact/pwp.htm

Organization of custodial and noncustodial single parents that provides support in the upbringing of children. Many local groups exist throughout the United States.

REMARRIAGE

Stepfamily Association of America
215 Centennial Mall South,
Suite 212
Lincoln, NE 68508
(402) 477-7837
Web site: www.stepfam.org

Association of families interested in stepfamily relationships. Organizes support groups and offers education and children's services.

Stepfamily Foundation
333 West End Avenue
New York, NY 10023
(212) 877-3244

Organization of remarried parents, interested professionals, and divorced individuals. Arranges group counseling sessions for stepfamilies and provides training for professionals.

GAY AND LESBIAN PARENTS

Gay and Lesbian Parents
Coalition International
Box 50360
Washington, DC 20091
(202) 583-8029

Strives to educate society about the compatibility of homosexuality and parenting. Supports efforts to eliminate discrimination due to sexual orientation, coordinates support groups for parents and children, and conducts public education programs.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

National Council on Child Abuse
and Family Violence
1155 Connecticut Avenue, N.W.,
Suite 400
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 429-6695

Supports community prevention and treatment programs for women and children who are victims of abuse. Seeks to increase public awareness of domestic violence.

M

ILESTONES

OF DEVELOPMENT IN EARLY ADULTHOOD

AGE

20–30 years

PHYSICAL

- Athletic skills that require speed of limb movement, explosive strength, and gross body coordination peak early in this decade and then decline.
- Athletic skills that depend on endurance, arm–hand steadiness, and aiming peak at the end of this decade and then decline.
- Declines in touch sensitivity; respiratory, cardiovascular, and immune system functioning; and elasticity of the skin begin and continue throughout adulthood.
- As basal metabolism declines, gradual weight gain begins in the middle of this decade and continues through middle adulthood.
- Sexual activity increases.

COGNITIVE

- If college educated, dualistic thinking (dividing information, values, and authority into right and wrong) declines in favor of relativistic thinking (viewing all knowledge as embedded in a framework of thought).
- Narrows vocational options and settles on a specific career.
- With entry into marriage and employment situations, focuses less on acquiring knowledge and more on applying it to everyday life.
- Develops expertise (acquisition of extensive knowledge in a field or endeavor), which enhances problem solving.
- Creativity (generating unusual products) increases.
- Modest gains in a variety of mental abilities assessed by intelligence tests occur during this and the following decade.

EMOTIONAL/SOCIAL

- Leaves home permanently.
- Strives to make a permanent commitment to an intimate partner.
- Usually constructs a dream, an image of the self in the adult world that guides decision making.
- Usually forms a relationship with a mentor, who facilitates realization of the dream.
- If in a high-status career, acquires professional skills, values, and credentials (for women, may be delayed and take a longer time).
- Begins to develop mutually gratifying adult friendships and work ties.
- May cohabit, marry, and bear children.
- Sibling relationships become more companionate.
- As people move in and out of relationships, loneliness peaks early in this decade and then declines steadily throughout adulthood.



AGE

30–40 years

PHYSICAL

- Declines in vision, hearing, and the skeletal system begin and continue throughout adulthood.
- In women, fertility problems increase sharply in the middle of this decade.
- Hair begins to gray and thin in the middle of this decade.
- Sexual activity declines, probably due to the demands of daily life.

**COGNITIVE**

- As family and work lives expand, the cognitive capacity to juggle many responsibilities simultaneously improves.
- Creativity (generating unusual products) often peaks.

**EMOTIONAL/SOCIAL**

- Reevaluates life structure and tries to change components that are inadequate.
- Establishes a more stable niche within society through family, occupation, and community activities (for women, career consolidation may be delayed).

