chapter 7

Intimate Relationships and Marriage

KEY TERMS

bundling
commitment
courtship
dating
egalitarian marriage
free-choice mate selection
limerance
marital system
natural selection
negotiation
non-normative crises
peer marriage
principle of least interest
serial monogamy
shared roles
social homogamy

CHAPTER EXPECTATIONS

While reading this chapter, you will:

- describe research findings on attraction and the development of intimate and love relationships in contemporary Canadian society
- explain initial role expectations in intimate relationships on the basis of theories of attraction
- summarize current research on factors influencing satisfaction within enduring couple relationships
- explain the role negotiation required for effective relationships at various stages of life, drawing on a variety of theoretical perspectives
- identify factors that are detrimental to maintaining satisfying relationships and explain strategies for communicating and negotiating to maintain satisfying relationships
- summarize research on the causes and nature of conflict, and evaluate strategies for managing and resolving conflict in intimate relationships
- demonstrate an understanding of research methodologies, appropriate research ethics, and specific theoretical perspectives for conducting primary research
- identify and respond to the theoretical viewpoints, the thesis, and the supporting arguments of materials found in a variety of secondary sources
- describe and produce an example of an essay arguing and supporting an opinion

RESEARCH SKILLS

- using experiments
- developing case studies
- writing anecdotal summaries

For many Canadians, getting married is the beginning of a relationship that will last a lifetime.

CHAPTER INTRODUCTION

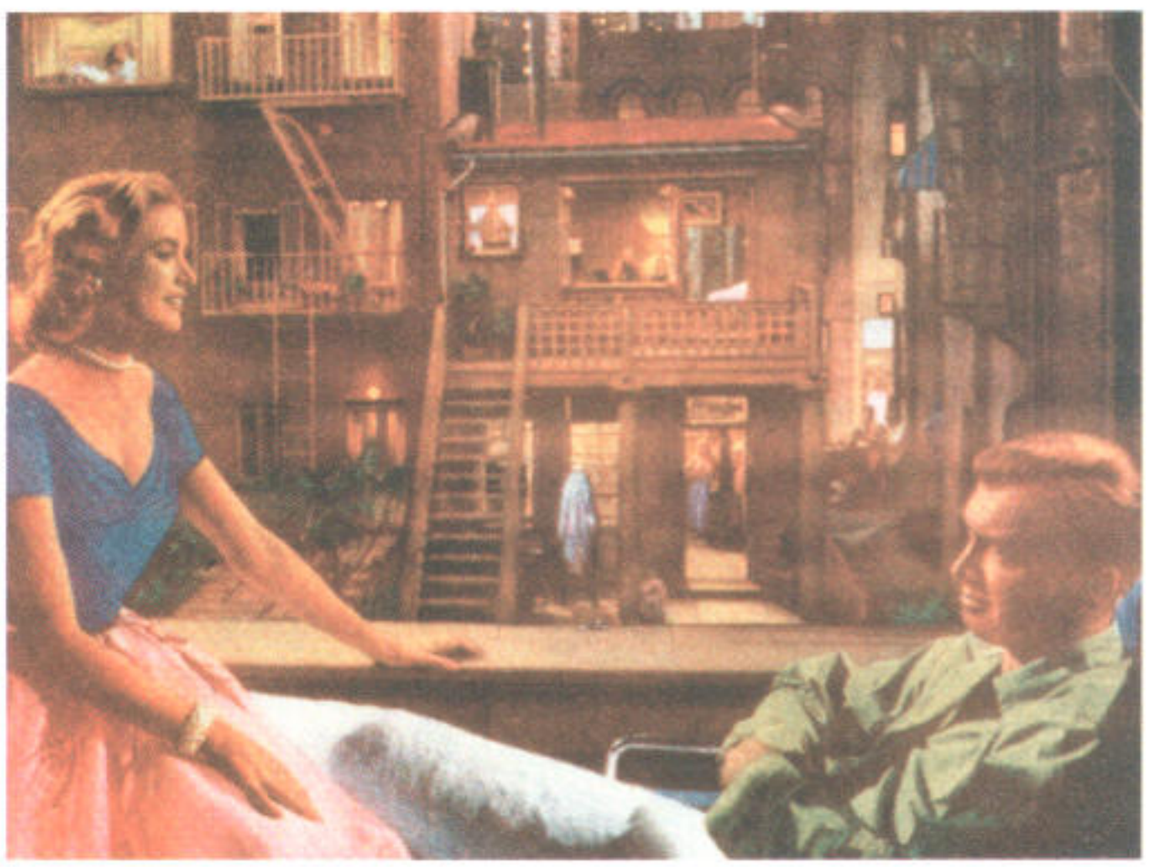
In this chapter, marriage and intimate relationships will be examined at several levels, starting with the personal level, using a psychological approach. To understand how couples develop, various theories of attraction, love, and mate selection will be examined. Next, the formation of committed relationships, including the negotiation of roles and the diversity of marriage relationships, will be explored. Factors that are harmful to marriage are also identified by research about factors that influence satisfaction in marriage. Finally, strategies for maintaining relationships and managing conflict will be discussed.

Forming Intimate Relationships

Intimate relationships are a common topic of movies, novels, television programs, poems, and songs, and these media often seek to portray them as pleasurable and to comment on their role in contemporary society. The romantic couple has become the dominant media icon (Dym & Glenn, 1999), and as such is assumed to be a desirable and natural relationship. In the 1954 Alfred Hitchcock movie *Rear Window*, Stella, the nurse, commented on the relationship between the main characters, Jeff and Lisa:

> When a man and woman see each other, they ought to come together—wham!—like a couple of taxis on Broadway, not be analyzing each other like two specimens in a bottle. . . . Once it was see somebody, get excited, get married. Now it's read a lot of books, fence with a lot of four-syllable words, psychoanalyze each other, until you can't tell the difference between a petting party and a civil service exam.

The decisions that Jeff and Lisa were having difficulty making about their relationship reflect the challenges for men and women in Canada today. Faced with the diversity of roles that they can play, individuals must decide whether to marry, who they *should* marry and who they *want* to marry, what their marriage will be like, or, increasingly, what other form of relationship would better meet their needs. Many Canadians still worry about whether they will be able to form a satisfying relationship that will last a lifetime without having to give up who they are and who they want to be.



The eternal question in romantic relationships is "How do I know if this is the right person for me?"

Marriage is assumed to be a binding and enduring relationship between a man and a woman, but that is not the case for many people. Some sociologists estimate that only about 10 percent of contemporary marriages are truly monogamous relationships, in which one man marries one woman for a lifelong relationship. Polygyny, marriage between one man and two or more women, and polyandry, marriage between one woman and two or more men, are considered more desirable by many people in the world, although few today can afford polygamous marriages—more than one husband or wife (Barrett, 1992). In Western countries and in many other parts of the world, **serial monogamy**, marriage

to several spouses one after the other, is a logical result of divorce. The arrival of immigrants from countries where the social norms concerning marriage include various forms of arranged marriage challenges Westerners to consider whether their dating and courtship customs are a better way. The increase in cohabitation and divorce rates also suggests concern about whether marriages are meeting individuals' needs. However, newlyweds in most societies expect that their marriage will be for life, regardless of the prevailing divorce rate, and choose their partners accordingly.

Despite Stella's advice in *Rear Window*, Canadians analyze their relationships on an ongoing basis. A psychological study of the interaction of individuals as they form and attempt to maintain their relationships will examine the role that these relationships play in individuals' lives. Given the diversity of intimate relationships, this chapter will focus on marriage and cohabiting relationships that are like marriages. Several research questions that will be explored are:

- What is the nature of sexual attraction, mate selection, and romantic love?
- What is the relationship between attraction and marriage roles?
- How do couples negotiate satisfying roles in their relationships?
- What are the factors that are detrimental to forming enduring relationships?
- How do couples manage conflict in their relationships?

Attraction, Mate Selection, and Romance

Many Canadians believe that lasting intimate relationships are based on romantic love and sexual attraction between two people. Many marriages in Canada result from **free-choice mate selection**, in which individuals are attracted to each other, fall in love, and decide to marry. It is not yet clear whether romantic love is a fairly recent social development or whether love has a basis in human biology (Wilson, 2001). Marriage probably had its roots in the biological urge to reproduce, but it has evolved as the basic social and economic unit in human societies. Although historically and in many cultures today romantic love has been considered a hindrance to marital stability (Kelman, 1999), in 87 percent of all cultures the relationships between men and women exhibit romantic love (Nadeau, 1997). In *The History of the Wife*, Marilyn Yalom of Stanford University suggests that a man and a woman who lived and worked together, shared a bed, and raised children together would

probably grow to love each other regardless of how their marriage came about (2001). The attraction of men and women has evolved also to reflect the increasing complexity of their relationships.

Theories of Attraction and Mate Selection

The new discipline of evolutionary psychology suggests that the origins of the human characteristics that people find attractive today can be traced back to our prehistoric ancestors. Using anthropological evidence, evolutionary psychologists explain that the mate-selection preferences that were most likely to ensure that children were born and survived to adulthood to reproduce most likely would be passed on to the next generation through the process of **natural selection** (Small, 1995). Women preferred to mate with men who would be good fathers and who would stay around to be good providers for themselves and their children because women were unable to both care for infants and gather enough food. Men preferred to mate with women who could bear healthy babies, who could feed their children, and who had the intelligence and temperament to raise them well. Prehistoric men formed lasting relationships because women could withhold sex until they got the qualities they wanted or needed in evolutionary terms. Children raised without a father were poorer and could not compete well in prehistoric society because they did not learn the necessary skills (Fisher, 1992). Men and women who made successful choices would have more children to inherit or be taught their mate selection preferences. Two processes were at work for men and women to exchange their valuable reproductive resources: individual preferences for an attractive mate and competition with others for a mate (Buss, 1994; Fisher, 1992).

At social events, men and women seek out partners who are attractive to them but who also appear to come from similar socio-economic backgrounds.

In his book *The Evolution of Desire*, David Buss, an American anthropologist and evolutionary psychologist, summarizes the results of extensive studies on sexual attraction today (1994). His research around the world suggests that people's behaviour as they interact with potential partners is still patterned to enable them to select the person with whom they can raise the most successful children.

Buss has determined that in all societies women seek to "marry up." They are twice as likely to seek financial resources in a man than

men are in women, even when women have substantial financial resources of their own. Buss also determined that women are attracted to men who are healthy, intelligent, well-educated, hard-working, and ambitious because these qualities enable men to be successful providers for their families in the long term. Men, on the other hand, are attracted to physically appealing, young, and healthy women. Shiny hair, clear skin, full lips, and a shapely figure are recognized as the common characteristics of female beauty in all societies. For example, a figure with hips that are wider that the waist is considered attractive in all societies, regardless of the current fashionably thin body size, even in remote societies that have not been influenced by media. This may be because this ratio indicates a pelvis that is wide enough to allow for an easy birth and sufficient body fat to sustain a pregnancy (Buss, 1994). In summary, anthropology explains that women are attracted to good providers, and men are attracted to women who appear to be fertile (Fisher, 1992; Buss, 1994; Small, 1995).

In the competition for a desirable partner who will meet one's social and economic expectations and will result in a stable and rewarding family life, it is fortunate that not all people find the same individuals attractive. Using the functionalist perspective, sociologists suggest that the variations in attraction can be explained using the theory of **social homogamy**. This describes how individuals are attracted to people from a similar social background (Wilson, 2001). Tests in which individuals rated the attractiveness of others have shown a mathematical correlation for social homogamy. The highest correlations were found for age, race, ethnic background, religion, socio-economic status, and political views. Correlations were also found for physical characteristics, such as length of fingers and space between eyes, suggesting that people find others with a similar appearance attractive (Buss, 1994). In a diverse society like Canada's, social homogamy can be used to explain the attraction of two individuals who are of different races or ethnic groups but who, because they were born and socialized within the same environment, are similar in other aspects of their social and economic background.

The contemporary image of a companionate marriage assumes that the relationship is based on romantic love. The *ideal mate theory* attempts to explain attraction from a symbolic interactionist perspective. Psychologists suggest that attraction is based on an individual's unconscious image of the ideal mate formed from his or her perceptions of the meaning of certain characteristics. The ideal mate theory supports the concept of "love at first sight," because everyone has an unconscious ideal with which they compare a person to find him or her attractive or to make the immediate judgment of the person as lovable. This theory also supports the evidence for social homogamy by explaining that perceptions of an ideal mate are formed from

Social homogamy theory explains that people usually look for someone with a similar appearance and background as their own.

pleasant experiences with other individuals in childhood, usually from a person's family, from people within the community, and from media personalities who are similar to one's self. Individuals also react to negative experiences by identifying unattractive characteristics that they perceive will be unacceptable for a successful marriage. The ideal mate image sets the standards that influence a person's judgment of potential mates without the person being aware of them (Nadeau, 1997).

Individual preferences determine who is attractive as a potential mate, but finding someone appealing does not guarantee that the feeling is mutual. In most societies individuals must compete with others to win the hand of the man or woman of their dreams. As many individuals have discovered in arranged marriages or on blind dates, having qualities that suggest an ideal match for marriage does not necessarily mean that someone is that person's counterpart (Kingston, 1999). The social exchange perspective suggests that attraction is based more on reality than fantasy, and explains that almost everyone finds a mate in his or her society because individuals are attracted to different people. People assess the resources they have to offer, such as physical attractiveness, wealth, pleasant personality, or social status, and look for the best possible mate who will be attracted by these resources (Small, 1995). In arranged marriages, the relative social values of the boy and girl are negotiated by the families or by the matchmakers on the basis of social homogamy, although in traditional societies a dowry may have increased the marriageability of a girl. That individuals are attracted to and fall in love with those who are equally appealing has been demonstrated in research studies, but this can also be observed by looking at the people who are attracted to each other within your own community (Buss, 1994).

In today's complex human societies, the social and psychological roles of couples determine the success of the marriage more than the biological role of reproduction does. Proximity is a major factor in mate selection. Individuals are attracted to, fall in love with, and marry those who live and work nearby, belong to the same religious community, or attend the same cultural events (Broderick, 2000). Social homogamy helps to ensure that couples are compatible. Similarity of backgrounds makes it more likely that couples will share common expectations for their relationship and their lifestyle, will manage their shared resources more efficiently and with less conflict, and will

"As a general thing, people marry most happily with their own kind. The trouble lies generally in the fact that people usually marry at an age when they do not really know what their own kind is."

—Robertson Davies

be able to raise children more easily. Couples who have similar backgrounds are more likely to raise their children according to their cultural expectations (Buss, 1994; Small, 1995). Two people who have similar beliefs about the roles of husband and wife and who share similar expectations for their family life will enjoy each other's company and will be more likely to fall in love. Since most parents wish their sons and daughters to have happy and lasting marriages and to pass on their cultural heritage to their children, social homogamy is also the basis of mate selection in societies that practise arranged marriages.

Intimacy in relationships requires a full appreciation of each other's uniqueness and separateness. The developmental perspective suggests that individuals are not able to relate to someone else without understanding first who they are and what their roles in life are. A lasting relationship based on companionship requires an understanding of what one has to offer another and what one needs from another in return. Therefore, individuals are not capable of a fully intimate relationship until the identity crisis of the transition to adulthood is resolved. Committing to intimate relationships earlier would result in defining identity through the relationship (Kimmel, 1990). However, as Levinson and Erikson suggested, women are more likely to define themselves through their connections with others, and so might develop a committed relationship as part of forming their identity. Men prefer to retain more independence in their relationships and, therefore, might delay forming committed relationships until their life structures are established (Levinson, 1976). Thus, as Stella argues in *Rear Window*, when a man is ready to marry, he will marry the woman he is with. The challenge of intimate relationships is gaining intimacy without losing self (McGoldrick, 1989).

The differences between what men and women want might explain why women usually marry older men. The age difference between men and women averages three and one-half years worldwide. The average age difference for Canadian men and women is two years—the lowest in the world. Iranians' average age difference—husbands are, on average, five years older than their wives—is the highest. Perhaps women are more likely to marry during the identity transition and are ready to marry earlier, but the age difference can also be explained in evolutionary terms. Older men, who are stronger, wiser, more stable, but not so old that they will not be around when the children grow up, are considered more desirable by women in all societies. Younger women are considered more sexually desirable, although few Canadian men are likely to describe the attraction in terms of fertility (Buss, 1994). The social exchange perspective suggests that younger, more attractive women have greater resources to offer older, successful men (Fisher, 1992). The conflict and feminist perspectives, on the other hand, suggest that a match between an

web connection

www.mcgrawhill.ca/links/families12

To learn about research studies on romance and attraction, go to the web site above for *Individuals and Families in a Diverse Society* to see where to go next.

older man and a younger woman ensures that the man has greater resources, and that the younger woman will need his resources to acquire an improved lifestyle. Therefore, the age difference is necessary for men to maintain a dominant status in a patriarchal marriage (Burggraf, 1997). Although women now have increased financial potential and extended fertility, the age differential between bride and groom continues to be the social norm.

Romantic Love

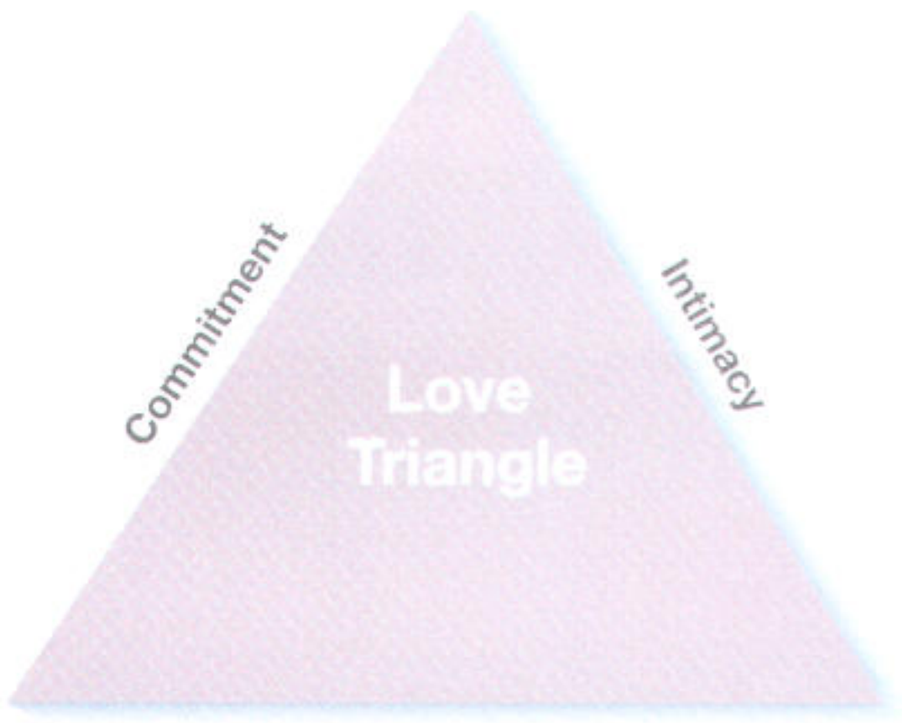
Despite the stereotypes perpetuated by cartoons and stand-up comedians, love and commitment are desired by both men and women for marriage (Balakrishnan, 1993; Wild, 1999). David Buss determined that a woman would not marry a man with all the qualities she desired unless she loved him or thought she could love him (1994). Although love has been described for thousands of years, it became the subject of social science research only recently. To determine the qualities of romantic love and to distinguish between romantic love and friendship, American psychologist Robert Sternberg interviewed hundreds of men and women who said they were in love. He determined that romantic love has three "faces": passion, intimacy, and commitment (Trotter, 1986). He also determined the following:

- Passion, a strong feeling of sexual desire for another, develops the most quickly of the three.
- The intense friendship of intimacy develops more slowly, as each individual shares himself or herself with another and becomes willing to meet the other's psychological needs.
- Commitment to maintaining the relationship grows as the rewards of this relationship over others become evident, and individuals accept reciprocal roles.

Sternberg chose to represent love as a triangle so that relationships with various proportions of passion, intimacy, and commitment could be depicted by varying the length of the sides. Because these characteristics develop at different rates, the nature of romantic love changes with time.

The passage of romantic love has been measured and explained in biological terms. The sudden and dramatic feelings of passion when lovers fall "head over heels in love" result from high levels of

Sternberg's Love Triangle



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The balance of passion, intimacy, and commitment may differ, but all three are found in romantic and companionate love in North America.

amphetamines, such as phenylethylamine (PEA), released by the hypothalamus gland. These amphetamines make lovers feel alert, a sensation that is accompanied by an increased heart rate, flushed face, and rapid breathing. Psychobiologists, such as Michael Liebowitz, who study the physiological basis of human behaviour, call this blissful emotional state **limerance**. Liebowitz, author of *The Chemistry of Love*, explains that limerance is similar to fear in its physical aspects and is distinguished from it only by the mind being focused on the loved one. This fact could explain why passion usually includes a feeling of anxiety about losing the other. After several years as a couple, amphetamine levels drop and are replaced by the hormone oxytocin. The highly aroused but exhausting state of limerance gives way to a state of calm and satisfaction that may be less exciting but is more enduring (Alaton, 1995). From an evolutionary perspective, love is advantageous: passion draws individuals together with a desire to reproduce, but the intimacy and commitment that follow allow them to maintain their relationship over the long term, to support each other, and to nurture and raise children.

"Love consists in this, that two solitudes protect and touch and greet each other."

—Rainer Maria Rilke

FYI

Romantic Love

Helen Harris of the University of California describes the psychological motivation for romantic love as "a desperate need to connect and a fear of being alone." Based on a metastudy in which she compiled the results of the various research studies on love, Harris identified the following attributes of romantic love:

1. A desire for a physical and an emotional merger: "Sexual desire and a desire for emotional intimacy are different but flip sides of the same thing."
2. Idealization of the love object: "Putting a positive spin on neutral and even negative traits."
3. Emotional dependency: "If there is some interruption of the progress to intimacy, people get very upset."
4. Desire for exclusivity.
5. Reordering of motivational priorities: "What used to be on the top of the heap—job, other relationships—moves down."
6. Intrusive thinking: Thoughts of the other person burst into everything, perhaps due to self-esteem problems in the obsessed lover.
7. Concern for the beloved. "This is seen as altruistic, although it can be an expression of self-interest. The flip side of this is how often love can turn to hate."

Source: Alaton, S. What is this thing called love? *The Globe and Mail* (1995, February 11).

By giving gifts of luxury items, such as flowers, men demonstrate that they can afford to support a family.

Romantic love provides the psychological motivation for individuals to want to marry or to form enduring intimate relationships in societies in which marriage is not a social, economic, or familial obligation. Since there is a biological basis for attraction and a psychological desire to be loved, individuals have a desire to connect with another and to follow the social norm of being a couple.

Courtship

In societies that permit free-choice mate selection, **courtship** allows individuals to win the affection of those to whom they are attracted. Whether you believe that evolutionary drives or social homogamy determine who would be appropriate marriage partners, individuals marry the person they love and who loves them in return. In courtship rituals in all societies, men display their resources to prove they have the potential to be good providers, and women display the qualities that make them desirable and nurturing (Buss, 1994). Diverse courtship customs and restrictions on courting can be described for each culture, historical period, and social class. However, many people are not conscious of the specific rituals of their society. In Canada, courtship is viewed as a quaint term from the past that no longer applies to relationships between men and women in the twenty-first century. Individuals may not be aware that their behaviour in a romantic relationship conforms to the traditional courtship rituals of their society, but the similarity in the choice of partners and the timing of marriage suggests that unspoken rules govern the choice of a desirable life partner.

The Evolution of Courtship

Courtship rituals in North America have evolved over the last century and have varied according to social class. In early Canada, following the formal customs established in Britain, young, middle-class women might invite men to call on them when they were "at home." A young man would leave his calling card if the young woman was not seeing visitors, in the hope that he would be invited back. Families would make discreet inquiries about the social and economic suitability of the callers. A young woman, with her mother, might receive several visitors, who would understand that they were expected to compete for her affection. Later, as a sign that she had made her choice, the young woman might receive only one man. Not until then would her mother

leave the couple alone to get to know each other. A New England custom in rural families with fewer rooms in their homes was called **bundling**. The young couple would be tucked into bed with a "bundling board" between them so that they could have private conversations without getting cold. The privacy allowed by both of these customs enabled men and women to get to know each other. During the 1700s in the United States, these customs resulted in one-third of brides being pregnant on their wedding day (White, 1992).

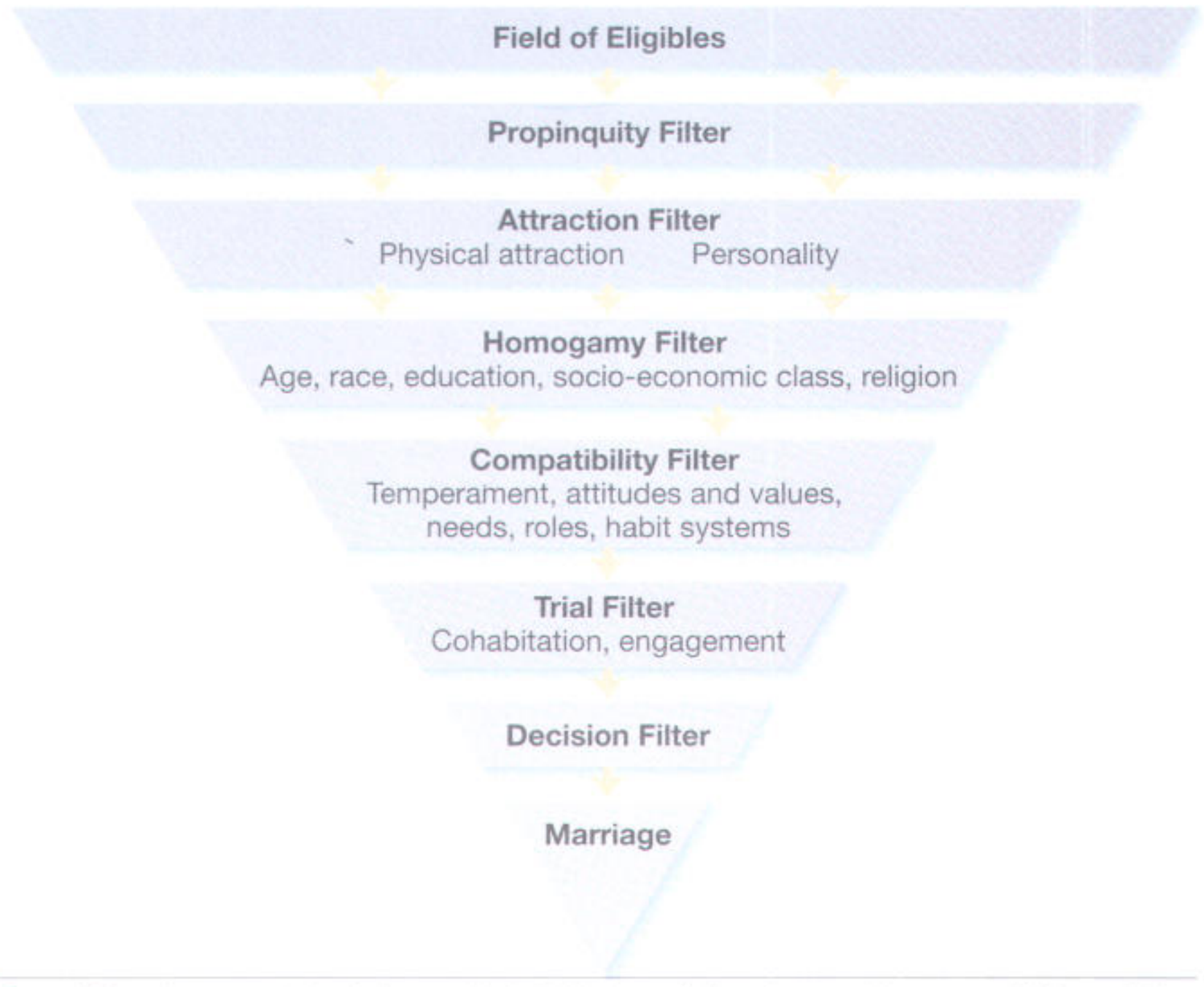
During the twentieth century, courtship evolved into the informal North American social invention of **dating**. Early in the century, young people met at church or community events and went out together to socials in groups. By the 1920s, however, when men began to take the initiative by asking women out and by organizing and paying for the activity, dating became common. Since women could accept or reject the invitations, the choice of activity and the amount of money spent indicated to them, not to their parents, the social and economic resources the men had to offer. In the 1930s "going steady" meant a couple had an exclusive relationship but were not necessarily discussing marriage (White, 1992). With the advent of the consumer society and the growing affluence of young people, couples were able to buy entertainment, and dating became an opportunity to spend time together for pleasure and romance. Teenagers began dating earlier, and there was less awareness that it was a process of choosing a suitable marriage partner (Whyte, 2001).

When teenagers gained disposable income and cars, dating became more of a recreational activity than a courtship ritual.

By the 1950s the Western ideal was that dating would lead to falling in love and becoming a couple. The *market experience perspective* suggested that dating was effective because it enabled individuals to learn to relate to the opposite sex and to judge character so that they would be able to determine what personal qualities they desired in a marriage partner (Whyte, 2001). Bernard Murstein explained the relationships among dating, social homogamy, and social exchange as a multistep process. He used the analogy of sifting to suggest that individuals pass their dates through a series of "filters" to screen out unacceptable marriage partners and to select those who are similar to themselves. As the relationship becomes more serious and the individuals get to know each other, the filters become finer until only one person passes through it for readiness to marry (Stevens-Long & Commons, 1992). The social rituals of dating, shared informally among young people, describe the

expectations for spending time together, for exclusivity or "cheating," and for when it is appropriate to hold hands, kiss, and progress through subsequent stages of sexual intimacy. Traditional dating norms enable sexual passion to be suppressed until the couple knows each other well enough for an intimate relationship, has invested enough time and energy into it to feel a commitment to it, and has fallen in love and chosen to marry.

Murstein's Filter Theory



Bernard Murstein suggests that dating enables individuals to sift through potential partners with finer and finer filters to select compatible partners and the one person they are ready to marry.
Source: From Rice, P.R. (1990). *Intimate relationships, marriages, and families*. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, p. 181. Reproduced with permission of The McGraw-Hill Companies.

Dating and Marital Success

"Dating is just a job interview that lasts all night."

—Jerry Seinfeld

The preference for free-choice marriage in North America suggests that dating experience leads to greater marital success, and that arranged marriages may be less successful because the partners would not know each other. Conventional wisdom suggests that marrying your first love is not a good idea because you do not have enough understanding of what you want (Whyte, 2001, p. 135):

> The rationale of our dating culture was that having had a variety of dating partners and then getting to know one or more serious prospects over a longer period of time and on fairly intimate terms were experiences more likely to lead to marital success.

In addition, an understanding that sex is very important in marriage, combined with a greater acceptance of premarital sex by the end of the twentieth century, has led many people to believe that they should test their sexual compatibility before marriage (Whyte, 2001). On the other hand, although dating reflects the pattern of competitive mate selection based on a "display of resources" that is found in all societies, it could be argued that dating encourages individuals to make their most critical judgment about others on the basis of people's best behaviour in artificial circumstances on "dates."

Martin King Whyte tested the hypothesis that dating experiences lead to successful marriages by conducting extensive interviews about dating with couples in Detroit. The results of his study found no correlation between dating experience, length of dating, engagement, degree of premarital intimacy, and marital success. Whyte argues against the market experience perspective by explaining that mate selection is not like buying a car, since you cannot "test drive" various partners at the same time. Also, if you decide on one you tried before, he or she might have moved on to someone else and not be available. Therefore, in free-choice mate selection as it is practised through dating, you have to decide "yes" or "no" to one person at a time. Paradoxically, the current practice in arranged marriages in Canada is more likely to allow young men or women to meet and consider a number of potential partners at the same time before choosing one. The fact that marriages are slightly less successful with more dating experience could also suggest that it increases an individual's expectations and, therefore, makes it more difficult for the person to make a choice or to feel satisfied in a relationship (Whyte, 2001).

Dating is not an indicator of marital success, but love is. The second conclusion of Whyte's Detroit study is that being in love when you marry is the best indicator of marital success. In practice, the process of getting to know someone to determine degree of compatibility is combined with increasing sexual expression. However, greater permissiveness about non-marital sex may mean that the expression of passion through sexual activity precedes the development of intimacy and **commitment**, or devotion, to the relationship (Wilson, 2001). Robert Sternberg's research found

Being deeply in love with a partner is more important than dating experience for predicting the success of a marriage.

that couples who reported they had a strong sexual desire for each other, who knew each other well to enjoy each other's company, and who had made the relationship a priority in their lives defined themselves as being deeply in love (Trotter, 1986). Couples who remember being deeply in love when they married have the happiest marriages, regardless of dating experience (Whyte, 2001).

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, when couples cohabit before marriage and delay marriage perhaps until they are ready to have children, the courtship behaviour of Canadians has changed. Many young couples no longer date in the formalized way of their parents' generation. The use of expressions such as "being with" or "seeing someone" to describe a relationship suggests a more casual approach to forming an intimate relationship, yet the rules have become more restrictive. For example, "seeing someone" implies an exclusivity that was not required until a couple was "going steady" in the past. In addition, the expectations that men and women have of their intimate relationships also may have changed. Now that women have the same financial potential as men, women, like men, may be concerned about pursuing their individual goals as well as marrying. There appears to have been a shift from competing to win someone's affection to being very selective about what the other has to offer (Dym & Glenn, 1993). A less formal pattern of courtship today masks a much more challenging process now that marriage, as well as mate selection, is a matter of free choice.

in focus | When Marriage Is a Family Affair

by Salem Alaton

The day Salma and Saleem Ataullahjan first met, they were at a special occasion—their wedding. That was 19 years ago in Pakistan. Today, they appear to have what most people seek in marriage, a loving, intimate, mutually respectful relationship.

Saleem, an electrical engineer in his mid-50s, first came to Canada in 1968 to study at the University of Windsor. He ended up staying and reaching his 30s as a bachelor. But one day he returned to visit his family, knowing the time had come. "I said, 'Here I am, get me married,'" he recounts.

Following a long tradition of family-arranged marriages in Muslim culture, Saleem's parents knew

Islam taught Salma and Saleem Ataullahjan about each other before they met at their wedding 19 years ago.

the kind of social compatibilities their son would need in a partner. In this case, Saleem's father and Salma's grandfather had been friends. Salma's family was wealthier, but both families were considered highly respectable; both belonged to the Pukhtun-speaking tribe in Pakistan's frontier region. And so the prospective couple didn't even bother with the

chaperoned meetings they were entitled to before committing to be wed. "I'm starting an arranged marriage, I don't want to meet the guy," says Salma, now a real estate agent. Despite her somewhat Westernized upbringing at British private schools in Pakistan, Salma, now in her mid-40s, felt confident in Muslim custom.

As incongruous as these attitudes may seem in a North American culture obsessed with romance and sex, they hold sway among countless Muslims, Hindus, and people of other religions, even among Jews and Christians. Indeed, throughout history and around the globe today, the West's romance model of marriage tends to be the exception. In most places where tribal identity is strong and people live in extended families, such as Asia, Africa, and parts of South America, marriages are either arranged or partners must at least be chosen with closely determined lines of family approval.

Since marriage governs sexual behaviour, guides family formation, and determines lineage, much rides on it, and its contractual overtones—such as each spouse's responsibilities, the role of the in-laws, and the material commitments of both families—are particularly strong in Muslim and Hindu customs.

"Marriages are arranged in many cultures because marriage is seen as something too important to be left to chance," explains Leslie Orr, a Hinduism specialist at Concordia University in Montréal. Moreover, arranged marriages often have a good track record. The three arranged marriages among Salma's siblings have held firm, while the two "love matches" ended in separation.

"The encouragement of the family is very highly recommended (for marriage) because the family structure in Islam is so strong," says Raheel Raza, who does some matchmaking on behalf of Muslim parents in the Muslim community here. "It has been the practice for many centuries, and very successfully, too, I might add."

Some marital customs abroad have led to abuses of women, such as the sometimes appalling experiences of dowry brides in India, but Hindus and Muslims here insist these are aberrations and contrary to religious law. "Especially the Western media seems to confuse arranged marriages with forced marriages or child marriages," Raza says. "It is the acceptable norm in Islam that the woman has the right to refuse a partner."

Even back in Pakistan and India, there is greater aspect of choice now and the parental decision isn't as rigid. "It's what I call 'influenced' marriage now," says Liyakat Takim, who teaches Islamic culture at McMaster University in Hamilton. "We tend to polarize between love marriage and arranged marriage, but there is something in between. It's a kind of parental guidance." Islam doesn't compel but strongly encourages marriage, Takim notes, adding that "even under strictly arranged marriages, people were not forced."

R.K. Moorthy, 60, and his wife Suganthan, 54, were brought together by their families in India before coming to Canada in 1977. They were introduced at a Hindu religious festival and met once again at a family function before their wedding 30 years ago. But they don't expect their own grown children, who have spent most of their lives in Canada, to follow suit. The most important factors in Hindu culture for marriage, says Moorthy, director of compensation for Ontario Hydro and a trustee for the Richmond Hill-based Hindu Temple society of Canada, are the reliability of the partner's family, the compatibility of the couple, and "the belief that marriage is a long-lasting institution."

A traditional view of compatibility means religious and ethnic sameness and similar socio-economic standing of both families. Issues of marrying within one's "class" are hardly unfamiliar in the West, but India's marital customs have been criticized for enforcing a caste system. Orr says this is changing even to the extent of on-line searches. "It may have been in the past that young people felt they had no choice but to agree to their parents' arrangements for

them." And despite an old custom of children being symbolically married as a way to designate their adult partner in advance, "In India the average age of marriage has been going up steadily," she says.

It is sometimes said that the West believes in love before marriage and the East in love after marriage. In Canada, the path the Ataullahjans took may be hard to imagine. Yet neither of them concedes to having had any doubt or anxiety at their wedding. What they needed to know about their unseen life partner that day, Islamic tradition had already taught them. ■

Source: *The Toronto Star* (1999, May 1). p. L14.

1. What are the benefits of arranged marriages, according to the couples in this article?
2. How can the various theories of attraction, mate selection, and love be used to explain arranged marriage?
3. If your parents were arranging a marriage for you, what qualities would they consider to be desirable in a spouse for you? What qualities of yours would they emphasize to suggest that you are a desirable spouse?

Negotiating Satisfying Roles in Relationships

Although marriage is no longer required for social status, financial well-being, or reproduction, it remains a major life transition for both men and women. Marriage can appear to be the happiest and the easiest transition in life because it is ritualized, highly organized, and supported by family and friends. Getting married signifies stability in the relationship with another. However, because Canadians romanticize marriage and focus on the wedding day, it is possible to view the wedding as the end of a process, not the beginning of a lifelong commitment to building a marriage. The couple might not realize that because their status has changed, they must negotiate the relationship they want to have and the compatible roles each will play (McGoldrick, 1989). Erik Erikson explained that individuals have to resolve the dilemma of intimacy versus isolation to develop the enduring strength of love within the relationship (Erikson, 1980). The challenge for two people who marry is how to grow both independently and as a partner within a couple (Carter & McGoldrick, 1989; Kingston, 1999).

Role Expectations in Marriage

In the late twentieth century, the purpose of marriage changed, and the traditional roles of husband and wife have become less attractive. Contemporary men and women seek friendship, caring, and support from their partner, in enduring intimate relationships based on companionship, not parenthood. In

the traditional marriage, women maintained the marriage, and men pursued independence; however, now that women bring financial and educational resources to the marriage, they may be looking for personal fulfillment and independence also (Dym & Glenn, 1993). Companionate relationships identify marriages or committed cohabiting couple relationships that are based on the principle of equality. The focus of these relationships is intimacy and commitment (Helgerson, 1997). Establishing a companionate relationship is a process, not an event, that occurs over the first years of the relationship. The couple may have tested their compatibility during the dating period, but negotiating the relationship really begins with the change in status that occurs with the transformation to becoming married or committed cohabiting partners.

Today, women and men share household tasks based on personal preference rather than role expectations.

According to systems theory, couples must discuss the structures, or the hidden rules, of their new marital system. **Negotiation** is a process of conferring with others in order to reach an agreement. The issues of daily living that must be agreed upon by the couple, such as when, where, and how to eat, talk, have sex, argue, work, and relax, might not seem important compared to decisions made outside the family, but they are not trivial simply because they are so personal (McGoldrick, 1989). In negotiating the details of their personal lives, couples are determining the rules for division of labour and decision making for the marital system (Nett, 1993). Marriage is not just the joining of two individuals but also the joining and overlapping of two family systems to create a third; therefore, couples need to adapt the structures that each brings from the family of origin (Carter & McGoldrick, 1989). Since the partners' expectations originate primarily in their families of origin, they take the details for granted and may not be aware of the collaboration involved in committing to **shared roles** in marriage.

Couples who commit to a lasting relationship will be establishing it within a social environment that presents competing demands. The expectation that people marry to have children and stay together for the purpose of raising them has given way to the expectation that marriage will be emotionally close and personally rewarding. A stable marriage can provide support to individuals as they attempt to meet the many demands of personal development and careers. However, the social environment may restrict individuals' freedom to establish the type of relationship they would like to have. For example, family law in Canada assumes that both spouses are making an equal contribution to both financial and household responsibilities, yet media stereotypes continue

to present financial matters as a man's responsibility and housework as primarily a woman's. The progress of cohabiting relationships differs from marriage's, because cohabiting couples are less likely to recognize the change in status and the necessity of negotiating their roles. Conflicting demands between personal needs and social and economic responsibilities create tensions for those in traditional patriarchal relationships and for those attempting to establish modern companionate relationships (Goldscheider & Waite, 1991).

FYI

Nine "Psychological Tasks" Needed for a Good Marriage

by Judith Wallerstein

Psychologists have long studied the factors that contribute to troubled marriages, but have devoted relatively little time to finding out what makes good marriages succeed. Judith S. Wallerstein, Ph.D., co-author of the book *The Good Marriage: How and Why Love Lasts*, listed nine "psychological tasks" as the pillars on which a marital relationship rests. Wallerstein identified the nine tasks after conducting separate and joint interviews with 50 San Francisco Bay-area couples who had been legally married at least nine years; had children together; and independently regarded their marriages as happy. She also conducted follow-up interviews two years later. The nine psychological tasks required for a happy marriage, as outlined by Wallerstein, are:

1. Separating emotionally from the family of one's childhood so as to invest fully in the marriage and, at the same time, redefining the lines of connection with both families of origin.
2. Building togetherness based on mutual identification, shared intimacy, and an expanded conscience that includes both partners, while at the same time setting boundaries to protect each partner's autonomy.
3. Establishing a rich and pleasurable sexual relationship and protecting it from the incursions of the workplace and family obligations.
4. (For couples with children) Embracing the daunting roles of parenthood and absorbing the impact of a baby's entrance into the marriage. The couple must learn to continue the work of protecting their own privacy.
5. Confronting and mastering the inevitable crises of life.
6. Maintaining the strength of the marital bond in the face of adversity. The marriage should be a safe haven in which partners are able to express their differences, anger, and conflict.
7. Using humour and laughter to keep things in perspective and to avoid boredom and isolation.
8. Nurturing and comforting each other, satisfying each partner's needs for dependency, and offering continuing encouragement and support.
9. Keeping alive the early, romantic, idealized images of falling in love, while facing the sober realities of the changes wrought by time.

Wallerstein emphasized that these nine tasks are not assigned from outside of the marital relationship, but are inherent in the marriage. They do not represent a chart to be hung on the kitchen wall and checked off daily.

Stages in a Marriage

"The meeting of two personalities is like the contact of two chemical substances: if there is any reaction, both are transformed."

—Carl Jung

What is the normal pattern in the development of a marriage? Although early marriages usually live up to peoples' expectations, many couples become disappointed, because marriage gets more difficult during the first five years (Lawlor, 2001). In the 1970s, when couples were beginning to challenge traditional role expectations and negotiate their own roles in their marriages, Daniel Goldstine, Shirley Zucherman, and Hilary Goldstine (1976) tracked the changes in marriage over time. They identified three predictable stages of a relationship:

- **Stage 1:** Relationships are romantic, warm, and respectful, focusing on exploration, sexual attraction, and the idealization of the partner. Individuals also build self-esteem as they try to develop the relationship they want.
- **Stage 2:** Conflict arises as individuals become more demanding to meet their own needs. This results in instability in the relationship and requires both partners to change their behaviour. Individuals feel let down because the relationship is less rewarding.
- **Stage 3:** Couples compromise and negotiate a relationship that meets their needs as well as possible. The relationship becomes more realistic, mature, and stable.

The key to surviving stage 2 is to recognize that intimacy means being honest about one's own needs and conferring with one's partner to solve problems. At each stage, individuals are transformed as they respond to their partner and adjust to the more flexible roles they play in the developing relationship. Goldstein et al. determined that the changes reflected development in that the relationships were improved if they were able to achieve stage 3.

In 1993, Barry Dym and Michael Glenn described a new understanding that goes beyond the three stages of relationships identified by Goldstein et al. Their studies of enduring relationships suggest that crises, many of which are normal and predictable, cause the instability of stage 2 to recur and require that the couple renegotiate their relationship repeatedly. The *family life cycle framework* explains that there are many predictable developmental crises in a relationship. They are:

- adjustment to marriage
- birth of a child
- teenage years
- children leaving home
- retirement
- growing old together

Some couple relationships will also be challenged by **non-normative crises**, such as unemployment, infertility, illness, or infidelity (Carter & Peters, 1996). Couples who achieve a resolution to their problems in the first stage establish their **marital system**, the characteristic structures that they will rely on when they need to resolve problems in the future. Although the initial starry-eyed romance may not appear again, the pessimism of the second stage gives way to perspective and enduring love, founded on the knowledge that the individuals can resolve their differences (Dym & Glenn, 1993).

in focus | Matrimony as the Ultimate Adventure

by Judith Timson

It is the month of love, and the dark of winter. Approaching Valentine's Day, I find myself meditating on my marriage but interrupted by the ringing telephone. It is yet another woman friend calling to say, "How can I off-load this jerk?" I wonder, Am I the complaints department of modern life? Or maybe a secular domestic priest(ess) whose confessional box is the telephone? Those complaints hover in the air, infecting me (who actually was feeling [positive] about love) with their [bitterness], and their truth: *He promised me he would organize our daughter's birthday party—did he not see me angrily stuffing 12 loot bags while he channel-surfed in the living room? . . . I worked all day, made dinner, cleaned up, and then he has the nerve to comment on my lack of a sex drive? . . . She comes in at night, saying she wants to spend time with us, gives the kids and me an absent-minded hug, and then sits down to read a report!*

Ah, modern marriage. That continual search, against all odds, for connection, for intimacy, for a moment the soul can revel in. When it is bad, it is so very bad. You long for a connection, you think you are the only one without it, you imagine everywhere happy women whose partners are standing in the kitchen looking a little like Hugh Grant (well, maybe not Hugh Grant, that creep), but anyway looking tousled and

Judith Timson, a Toronto-based writer, considers marriage as an adventure to discover "who we are."

handsome, drinking a glass of wine, and wittily recounting their day as you recount your own. Instead, whimpers one woman, "I just want a husband who comes in and doesn't fan the mail before he acknowledges me." Instead, moans one man, "She is always at me. No matter what I do, it is never enough."

I take cover from all this domestic disharmony in the words of Joseph Campbell. Campbell is the late American mythology professor who, during a series

of interviews he gave in the 1980s (later collected in a book, *The Power of Myth*), rivetingly discussed the nature of love and marriage.

Modern marriage as a concept, says Campbell, began in the twelfth century with the troubadours, who went in search of the perfect love, describing it as "perfect kindness." Before the troubadours, love was simply regarded as Eros—the god who excites you to sexual desire, a biological urge. Then, love was transformed into the highest spiritual existence, and the courage to love—to choose one's life partner—became the courage to affirm one's own experience against tradition.

In a committed marriage, says Campbell, love "is the high point of life," and the only point: "If marriage is not the prime concern, you're not married." Campbell does call marriage "an ordeal—the submission of the individual to something superior to itself," which is exactly how I see it on a morning when I am having trouble even with the sound of my partner chewing his cornflakes.

But Campbell's words urge all of us on to higher ground. "The real life of a marriage or of a true love affair," he says, "is in the relationship . . . here I am, and here she is, and here we are. Now when I have to make a sacrifice, I'm not sacrificing to her, I'm sacrificing to the relationship."

No friend I've ever talked to imagined that marriage would be as hard as it really is. To many, the terror of thinking you're with the wrong person is surpassed only by the terror of thinking you're with the right person—and it's still this difficult.

But Campbell manages to transform marriage into a romantic, even a heroic, struggle. What he celebrates is the sharing of pain—and destiny—with another human being. Most love affairs, says Campbell, last only as long as they benefit both parties. But a marriage? "A marriage is a commitment to that which you are."

Why do these words seem so thrilling to me? Lately, I confess, I have been regarding my own husband with renewed astonishment. His good qualities, were they there all along? His smile, for instance. His grace and equanimity on family excursions when I have lost it. His day-to-day resilience. His ability to master on the piano, after much practice, a Chopin sonata. His tremendous civility. His arms around me at night.

Isn't perfect kindness that morning cup of coffee he brings me after I stay up most of the night agonizing over a child's problem? Of course, if we were in a down phase, I would point out he chose to snore while I worried.

But I have just finished reading words that seem to me more powerful—and certainly more sexy—than any trumped-up message on a card could ever be. Sexier still because he gave them to me to read. Here I am, here he is, and here we are. ■

Source: *Chatelaine*. (1996, February). Courtesy of Chatelaine © Rogers Publishing Ltd.

1. Apply systems theory to explain "Here I am, and here he is, and here we are."
2. Why does Timson suggest that the relationship takes priority over the individuals?

Defining Success

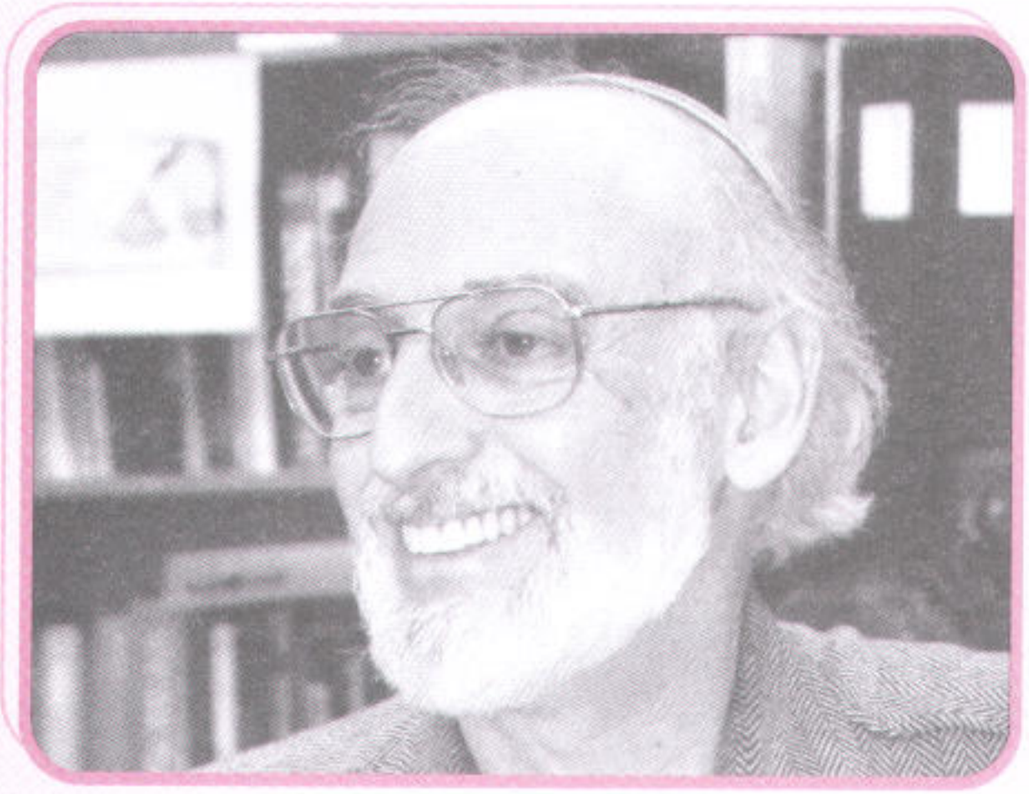
Martin Whyte's (2001) final conclusion of his Detroit study of dating and marriage suggests that marital success can be predicted. He found that although dating experience was not a predictor of success, enduring married couples had several characteristics in common. They are:

- having similar values
- enjoying similar leisure time activities
- pooling their incomes
- sharing in power and decision making in their relationship
- having friends in common
- having an active social life together

These characteristics suggest that social homogamy was a factor in their selection of a marriage partner, and that the couples have made their marital relationship a priority in their lives. The couples also suggest that they have settled the issues of power and influence in their relationships. These results echo the results of other studies on lasting marriages.

research study | Why Marriages Succeed or Fail

by Dr. John Gottman, Professor of Psychology at University of Washington



Dr. John Gottman, psychology professor and director of The Gottman Research Institute.

RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the differences between happy and unhappy couples?

HYPOTHESIS

The quality of the interaction between partners is a predictor of marital success.

RESEARCH METHOD

Using experiments in the laboratory, John Gottman observed what happens when couples interact. Couples were observed as they spent weekends living in the Family Research Laboratory. They were also given specific tasks to perform, such as discussing an issue that caused conflict in their relationship. Their behaviour and responses were recorded using video cameras, heart monitors, blood and saliva tests for hormones, even sensors

under the chairs to determine whether they were squirming. Couples also completed extensive questionnaires and were interviewed apart and together.

RESULTS

- Couples who stay together maintain a 5:1 ratio of positive to negative interactions in their relationship. They put a positive spin on the events of their relationship.
- There are three types of stable marriages based on how couples handle disagreements: emotionally stable or "validating"; emotionally intense or "volatile"; and emotionally inexpressive or "conflict avoiding." Couples do not benefit by changing their style, but couples who have different styles have to negotiate which style or combination of styles to use.
- Fighting and getting angry early in the relationship suggests a more successful relationship than not fighting at the beginning. Fighting seems to strengthen a relationship against later troubles by establishing a compatible fighting style.
- Men who do housework have happier marriages, better health, and more satisfying sex lives.
- There are no discernible gender differences in the quality and quantity of emotional expression in happy marriages.
- There are four destructive communication behaviours that can threaten the stability of a relationship—criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling—but couples can head them off with "repair attempts" to minimize the negative effect.

CONCLUSIONS

Marriages based on affection, humour, appreciation, and respect, in which partners have a positive attitude to the relationship and to their mate, and respond to destructive behaviours with "repair attempts," are more stable and enduring. ■

Source: Gottman, J., & Silver, N. (1999). *The seven principles for making marriage work*. New York: Crown Publishers, Inc.

Benjamin Schlesinger, Professor Emeritus of the Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto, asked Canadian couples to identify the most important factors for a lasting marriage. His study, conducted in 1981 in the Toronto area at a time when the role expectations of marriage were being transformed, determined the perceptions of educated, middle-class men and women. The results suggested that both men and women believed that companionship was more important in a marriage than parenting, and that it was based on love, mutual respect, trust, and open communication (Schlesinger, 1984). More recently, John Gottman's experiments to determine the nature of the interactions between married couples found that if the positive moments are to outweigh the negative ones by 5:1, mutual commitment to the relationship and effective communication are critical (Gottman & Silver, 1996).

"For those who have long-term, happy marriages, 'till death do us part' is not a binding clause but a gratifying reality."

—Jeanette and Robert Lauer, *Marriages Made to Last*

Every marriage is unique. Couples measure the success of their relationship in their own terms.

The definition of a successful marriage is very subjective. In his study, Schlesinger defined a stable marriage as one lasting 15 years and having one child. He asked participants about lasting marriage, with some questions about satisfying relationships, but he did not ask about happiness. Some people might say that any couple that lasts five years has been successful in a time of easy divorce. Individuals decide whether or not the marriage is successful based on the expectations they had when entering the relationship and on their willingness to adjust as the relationship matured. The criteria are also determined by the social context in which the couple lives. From a social exchange perspective, people stay in relationships when they perceive the balance of give and take to be fair, and when the benefits of staying in the relationship outweigh those of leaving. Since each individual uses subjective criteria to decide whether a relationship is satisfying, the nature of lasting relationships differs widely.

David Olson, a psychologist and professor of family social science at the University of Minnesota, and Yoav Lavee, of the University of Haifa, asked couples in lasting relationships to measure the level of satisfaction in their marriages. For most couples, the level of satisfaction was found to be affected by personal factors within the relationship itself, such as their sexual relationship. Couples were also influenced positively or negatively by factors outside their relationship, such as money, religion, family, and friends. The results of their study outline the diversity of lasting relationships. One in ten couples reported that they were very satisfied with every dimension of their marriage, but four in ten could not identify any satisfying dimension at all! In between were five different types of marriage with varying strengths and priorities. The variations in the different relationships reflected many common problems in marriage, but all couples had made the decision to stay in the relationship—for the time being (Kay, 1994).

Achieving a Satisfying Relationship

Familiarity breeds intimacy in a relationship. Knowing who you are, where you came from, and where you are going prepares you to know your partner well. Sharing values and activities must be based on honesty. Monica McGoldrick suggests that individuals who have not become independent from their parents may enter into an intimate relationship hoping to earn the

love of another by pleasing that person at the cost of denying who they really are (1989). Forming an identity enables individuals to be honest in their self-talk and to self-disclose, or reveal things about themselves to their partner. John Gottman's research demonstrated that the communication skills of self-disclosure and listening enable enduring couples to have clear "love maps" of each other's interests, values, feelings, and dreams (Gottman & Silver, 1999). Honest communication nurtures trust and shows respect for the other by allowing each partner to maintain his or her differences. A couple who knows each other well can develop a deep love and respect for each other and enjoy each other's company.

"Let there be spaces in your togetherness."
—Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet*

As evolutionary psychologists have pointed out, the "natural" basis for couple relationships is reproduction. Functionalists also advise people that marriage serves an important economic and social purpose in society. The psychological needs of individuals in companionate relationships are a fairly recent social invention, and therefore are not natural behaviour. People have to learn how to give and take in a loving relationship to meet each other's social and emotional needs (Naiman, 2001). They must learn how to communicate their needs and concerns to their partners (Goldscheider & Waite, 1991). For many people, especially men, this conflicts with the assumption that strength of character means being able to handle emotions and solve problems independently (Johnson & Marano, 1994). Betty Carter, family therapist and author of *Love, Honor and Negotiate: Making Your Marriage Work*, tells couples to each accept responsibility for themselves and their own needs and to take an assertive "I" position by stating what they want in terms that the other person can understand. Individuals who are assertive respect their own and others' needs, and trust that their partner will respond in a positive way (Carter & Peters, 1996).

"Rituals are the glue that hold a family together."
—Pierre Berton

Couples in satisfying relationships are able to make decisions jointly and to agree on solutions to their problems. Couples develop their strategies by negotiating the everyday details and establishing a shared meaning, or a mutual understanding of what their relationship means, in the early stage. From a systems perspective, they are developing a couple "mythology," an understanding of "who we are," and a set of strategies that will provide a framework for resolving bigger problems when they arise. Successful negotiation requires that each individual accepts the influence of the other by respecting and honouring his or her opinion. Sharing power in this way, putting "us" ahead of "me," results in solutions that are satisfying for both, and makes the relationship more stable. John Gottman found that successful couples turn *to*, not away from, each other when problems arise, and invest time and energy in maintaining the relationship. Couples who have experienced positive solutions in the past are more likely to survive the occasional negative experience (Gottman & Silver, 1999).

Zits

Few couples are truly **egalitarian,** or equal partners. However, the actual balance of power in a relationship does not matter as much as the couple's shared perception that they negotiate the solutions together (Peplau & Campbell, 2001). During childhood, boys are less likely to accept others' influence than girls are, perhaps because of a biological drive to compete to achieve an evolutionary advantage, so they become men who probably want to solve problems alone. Girls are more likely to accept others' influence because their play tends to be more co-operative, so they become women who want to solve problems together. Gottman found that a husband's acceptance of a wife's influence in decisions was beneficial to the marriage, even in traditional patriarchal relationships (Gottman & Silver, 1999). Dr. Ted Waring, retired professor of psychiatry at Queen's University, believes that a relationship is doomed if one of the pair cannot adjust his or her role in the relationship as a result of the other's influence (Helgerson, 1997).

FYI

Claude Guldner's Six Rs of Marriage

Claude Guldner, Professor Emeritus of Family Studies at the University of Guelph and a family therapist, uses "the 6 Rs" to summarize the systems perspective on the negotiations required in early marriage.

Roots

Roots are the boundaries and strategies learned in your family of origin. They are the "default setting" for your interactions in your new relationship. It is a good idea to check out each other's roots to understand how you have learned to relate to others.

Rhythms

Rhythms regulate the sharing of space, time, and emotional energy within the relationship. Couples need to negotiate the rhythms of separateness and togetherness in a new relationship.

Rules
Rules are the strategies for maintaining the system on a daily basis, but also for dealing with stress and conflict. Couples need to negotiate the mundane routines of their shared lives.

Roles
Roles are the fluctuating power levels in the relationship. The "Power Dance" allows couples to change power levels appropriate to the situation. Couples have to negotiate how they will share power so that they can manage their lives efficiently and avoid power struggles.

Relationships
Relationships pass through a series of stages of development and change in response to the needs of the individuals and the crises in their lives. Couples need to allow time for the relationship to mature, but also be open to change.

Rituals
Rituals are the unique patterns of behaviour that make up a couple or family culture. Creating unique patterns for companionship, affection, and sexuality holds the relationship together as a special place that outsiders do not share.

Problems, Conflict, and Power in Marriage

Problems that require a solution occur in all marriages, but few couples can anticipate what they will be. Potential problems might exist prior to marriage, but they have been difficult for researchers to identify, perhaps because rather than asking for help, couples split up (McGoldrick, 1989). However, when asked, young people in a Montréal study anticipated several problems if they married. Communication was the most frequently mentioned, but they thought that jealousy would probably be a bigger issue in their relationships. The authors, Jean-Marie Boisvert et al., suggested that fear of jealousy results from uncertainty related to today's liberal attitudes toward relationships and greater flexibility in roles. Only one in five of those questioned said they would take premarriage courses, and their concerns were more about adaptation to parenthood. Since the current trend in Canada appears to be for couples to delay marriage until they want to have children, but to cohabit for several years before marriage, perhaps they

Many young people believe that jealousy will be one of the big issues in their relationships.

think they have negotiated their roles already and know how to solve problems (Boisvert, Ladouceur, Beaudry, Freeston, Turgeon, Hardif, & Roussy, 1995).

Conflict, or the opposition of incompatible needs and principles, is natural in marriage because of the problems that individuals face in their lives together. Conflict theory suggests that the nature of intimate relationships and the changing roles of men and women in a diverse post-industrial society such as Canada's result in three related dilemmas for couple relationships:

- individual versus collective interest
- women's rights versus male entitlement
- "mine" versus "yours"

These dilemmas exist in society, but each couple has to deal with them within their own relationship (Dym & Glenn, 1993). On a personal level, the common conflicts resulting from these dilemmas concern two issues:

- division of labour
- expressive quality of the relationship (Dempsey, 2001)

In companionate relationships, the goal is neither sex for reproduction, nor economic efficiency, but maintaining intimacy, so fighting tends to be about how issues affect the balance of individuals versus couple (Johnson & Marano, 1994).

"No matter how much love you feel, relationships in our money-driven society tend to be governed by the Golden Rule: Whoever has the gold, makes the rules."

—Betty Carter, *Love, Honor and Negotiate*

Power is the ability to influence the behaviour of someone else. In personal relationships, the person who has resources that the other needs has the power. In prehistoric times, the women's reproductive and nurturing resources balanced the men's support and physical protection. In industrial society, men who worked to earn the money that was needed to buy the goods and services the family required had greater power than women, because housework was less valued since it was seen as unskilled (Eichler, 1997). In contemporary companionate relationships, the ability to meet the social and emotional needs of another is a source of power that motivates individuals to reciprocate in meeting each other's needs. The **principle of least interest** explains that the person with the least commitment to the relationship actually has the greatest power, since the person with the greater commitment is more likely to give in to maintain harmony (Peplau & Campbell, 2001).

In a recent study to determine what problems couples are likely to experience in contemporary North American marriages, men and women in the United States who had taken a premarriage course offered by the Roman

Catholic Church were asked to rate problems during the first five years of their marriage. The problems they identified related to time, sex, and money:

- balancing job and family
- frequency of sexual relations
- debt brought into marriage
- husband's employment
- financial situation
- household tasks

In general, men and women identified the same issues. They felt that there was a conflict between each person's individual performance in the workplace and their collective responsibility as a couple for the relationship (Lawlor, 2001). Having enough money to afford the lifestyle they want is a problem that many couples face together. However, sharing incomes that may not be equal and managing individual debts are problems likely to arise from the conflict of "mine" versus "yours" over money. Sex becomes a problem when there is conflict about emotional expression, but also from differing demands that cause physical and emotional fatigue. Problems related to household tasks reflect the conflict of traditional male entitlement and women's rights. The problems that arise during the first five years of marriage reflect the challenges of managing underlying conflict in marital roles (Kingston, 1999).

In general, men and women perceive conflict differently. Symbolic interactionism explains that men and women perceive the problems in their relationships differently because they express emotions differently. For example, men might complain that they do not get enough sex, but women might say they have insufficient time with their partner or not enough emotional support. The fact that women have also taken on the man's role of supporting the family but men have not equally taken on the female role of housework creates a different conflict from a woman's point of view than from a man's (Dempsey, 2001). Evolutionary psychologist David Buss explains that women's bodies evolved to recover from stressful events so that they could maintain breastfeeding, or children would not survive. Men evolved to recover slowly and become angry, perhaps so that they were able to fight off danger. Consequently, women are more willing to make complaints and raise conflict in a relationship (Buss, 1994). In general, women expect more than they get in a marriage, and men feel pressured to give more (Gottman & Silver, 1999). Women are more likely to define themselves in terms of their relationships and how they are loved, and consequently feel more responsibility for dealing with issues to maintain the marriage (Cancian, 1987).

web connection

www.mcgrawhill.ca/links/families12

To learn about couple relationships, go to the web site above for *Individuals and Families in a Diverse Society* to see where to go next.

Conflicts can arise in marriages if men and women communicate following conventions suited to their traditional gender roles. Deborah Tannen (1994) explains that male communication is competitive and based on the power of outdoing an opponent, whereas females relate to others on an equal footing. Therefore, when a man talks to a woman, she may be seen as slightly beneath the man, in his terms. Men like talking to women for this very reason. However, these conventions cause difficulty when negotiating solutions to problems. Women soften their complaints, but men are straightforward. Men make strong arguments and expect to be challenged, but women make tentative arguments to seek support, and view challenge as a personal attack. Women complain and expect their partner to commiserate with them, but men respond with a challenge or a suggestion. Men complain and women express sympathy but do not offer a solution (Tannen, 1994). From a symbolic interactionist perspective, gendered communication patterns can interfere with solving problems.

"If you're thinking of splitting, remember, you're going to have to take yourself with you."

—David Rubinstein

According to John Gottman, most marital conflict cannot be solved, but conflicts do not necessarily ruin a marriage (Gottman, 1999). Based on his observations of couples in a laboratory study, he contends that successful conflict resolution is rarely seen; couples can resolve each problem as it occurs, but the underlying conflicts recur. For example, a couple can negotiate how they will spend their vacation this year, but if one partner prefers quiet relaxation and the other craves adventure, the conflict will arise again next year. Some couples overcome conflict by avoiding arguments about areas of disagreement; others have explosive arguments over the same battles; and others calmly focus on the problems at hand (Gottman & Silver, 1999). Individuals with the basic strength of fidelity realize that they cannot change their partners (Erikson, 1997). However, systems theory explains that if they are willing to change their own behaviour, their partners will have to adjust their behaviour to maintain stability in the relationship (Naiman, 2001). Whatever their style, Gottman found that enduring couples manage conflict by tackling the specific problems that arise in a positive way, allowing themselves to be influenced by their partner, and giving in to the relationship when necessary (Gottman & Silver, 1999).

Money, Housework, and Power

Symbolic interactionism suggests that what is *perceived* as fair in a relationship, rather than an objective measure, affects the satisfaction in a marriage. In traditional marriages, the division of labour, including the paid and unpaid work, is usually perceived by both partners as being fair. Since a man earns the family income by pursuing his individual interests, "his" interests are

abstract | Gender Ideology and Perceptions of the Fairness of the Division of Household Labor: Effects on Marital Quality

by Theodore N. Greenstein, Professor, North Carolina State University

Under what circumstances will married women perceive inequalities in the division of household labor as unfair? This research develops and tests a model based on relative deprivation theory that suggests that gender ideology functions as a moderator variable in a process through which inequalities in the division of household labor come to be seen as inequities. Using data from the National Survey of Families and Households, three empirical tests of the model provide evidence that inequalities in the division of household labor are more strongly related to perceptions of inequity for egalitarian than traditional wives, and that perceptions of inequity are more strongly related to the quality of the marital relationship for egalitarian than for traditional wives. The findings suggest that researchers studying the division of household labor need to shift their focus away from analyses of objective inequalities and toward the study of perceived inequity. ■

Source: *Social forces*. (1996 March). 74 (3), pp. 1029–1042.

assumed to be "theirs." According to symbolic interactionism, men have greater power because they may have more money and may be considered stronger and smarter than women; therefore, men are entitled to make the decisions. Traditional roles are clearly defined for men and women. Dual-income couples expect their relationship to be based on egalitarian decision making and division of labour, but the evidence so far shows that the division of labour has not changed. Change is not occurring because it is not in men's best interests to do more housework, and women are not pressuring them enough to change, perhaps because the social norms reflect the traditional power balance (Dempsey, 2001). Barry Dym and Michael Glenn found that both men and women overestimate the power that the other wields because they both feel they have had to change (1993). Those who expect their relationship to be egalitarian are more likely to see differences as inequitable than those in traditional relationships (Goldscheider & Waite, 1991; Greenstein, 1996).

A comparison of housework over 30 years suggests how couples are negotiating the responsibility for it. Housework was defined as cooking meals, meal clean-up, house cleaning, laundry and ironing, outdoor chores, home repairs, garden and animal care, bills and accounts, but not child care. The results indicate that from 1965 to 1995, the average number of hours of housework done by women declined from 30 to 17.5 hours per week. The average number of hours done by men doubled from 4.9 to 10 hours per week. This result supports the belief that men are doing much more.

Although the ratio of work done by women to that done by men dropped from 6:1 in 1965 to 2:1 in 1995, women still do more than men. The total amount of housework done also declined, despite the fact that homes are an average of 39 percent larger than 30 years ago. Educated men do more housework than those who are less educated, perhaps because they have a greater sense of equity, the study concludes (Dubin, 1999).

What kind of relationships will Canadian couples negotiate in the future? Feminist sociologist Pepper Schwartz described the characteristics of **peer marriage**, a truly egalitarian companionate relationship. She was not able to find many. In these relationships there is no more than a 60:40 traditional division of household and child-care roles. Peer couples have negotiated gender roles so that each is equally responsible for financial and household duties and each partner's work is given equal importance, regardless of the income each receives. When peer couples assess their own relationships, both partners perceive that they have an equal influence over each other and equal control of their shared money. From a social exchange perspective, peer couples identify that their relationship is the most important aspect of their lives and that intimacy and commitment were benefits, but that placing a marriage ahead of careers might mean sacrificing opportunities. Couples reported that it is hard work being fair, especially when there are so few role models, and that their new roles, which were negotiated by agreement over values and flexibility to compromise, found little support from a society that is still organized on traditional roles. The costs of egalitarian marriages might explain why they are so uncommon (Schwartz, 2001).

case study | Emma and Sanjay's Marriage

Sanjay Wadhera and Emma Johnson are in their second year of marriage. They met while they were students at Queen's University and married a year after they both graduated. Sanjay, an Economics graduate, is working for a small investment firm in Toronto that specializes in investment opportunities in the e-business sector of the economy. Emma attends graduate school at the University of Toronto and is presently working on her Ph.D. in International Relations. She is hoping to have a teaching position at either U. of T. or at York University upon graduation. Since apartment rents are so high in Toronto, they have been living in a basement apartment in Emma's parents' home. It is conveniently located, close to both the downtown financial district where Sanjay works and to the university Emma attends. They both hope to be able to move into their own apartment as soon as Emma is employed full time and to eventually buy a small house where they can raise a family.

Although Sanjay and Emma have been happy in their marriage, their financial situation occasionally puts some strains on their relationship. Sanjay had a student loan debt of over $45 000 from his five years at university, and much of his salary is being used to

pay down that debt. Emma, on the other hand, came into the marriage debt-free, as her parents contributed toward her education to supplement the money she had earned as a student working part-time and during the summers. Now, part of Sanjay's earnings is being used to pay some of Emma's education costs, since the tuition for graduate programs has tripled in the last four years. Emma's parents have indirectly helped out as well by not charging rent for the basement apartment.

Sanjay and Emma share household responsibilities. Emma grew up in a family in which both finances and household chores were shared as equally as possible. Part of the Johnson's "family lore" is how her father had always done the laundry and had washed and folded all the children's diapers! So Emma came into the marriage with the expectation that Sanjay would also contribute equally. Sanjay, on the other hand, grew up in a more traditional family, in which his mother and older sister primarily looked after the household chores, so his adjustment to living with Emma was a little more difficult. His experience of sharing an apartment with three others while at Queen's University helped in this adjustment, however. Emma and Sanjay have developed a rotating work schedule for the housework that neither of them likes doing. They both feel that it is working fairly well. When they first started living together, Sanjay requested that he not do the laundry. That was fine with Emma, as long as Sanjay looked after cleaning the bathroom. Emma does a lot of her schoolwork at home. When Sanjay returns home from work late, even though it is his responsibility, he is often surprised to find that Emma has not prepared dinner.

Sanjay and Emma both like to cook, so they often entertain by inviting their friends over for dinner. Often, these friends are people they met while attending university or working. Sometimes, Emma will also get together with old high school and neighbourhood friends who are living in the city. Sanjay would like to do this as well, but since he grew up in Burlington, many of his old friends do not live in Toronto. As Emma and Sanjay have chosen not to own a car, visiting Sanjay's friends or family in Burlington is always difficult. When they do go, they generally borrow Emma's parents' car.

Emma and Sanjay's relationship with his parents remains strained. Although they finally have accepted Emma as a daughter-in-law, Sanjay's parents have never felt totally at ease with her, primarily because she is not a daughter of the local Hindu community. They also feel that Emma and Sanjay should be living with them in Burlington. Emma still feels that Sanjay's parents resent her because she "took their son away." Ironically, it is usually Emma who keeps in touch and who arranges the social engagements between them. They do, however, see Sanjay's brother Ameet regularly, since he works as an insurance firm accountant in Toronto and will often stop by before heading home to Burlington. ■

1. Analyze Emma and Sanjay's marriage using Wallerstein's "Psychological Tasks" of marriage. (See page 206.)
2. What problems do you expect Emma and Sanjay will face in the next few years? What factors in their relationship might prevent resolving those problems?
3. Based on the research, what advice would you give them for ensuring that their marriage is successful?

chapter 7 Review and Apply

Knowledge/Understanding **Thinking/Inquiry**

1. **a)** What are the various theories of mate selection, what discipline does each reflect, and what characteristics does each explain?

   b) Which of the theories do you think is the most effective for explaining mate selection in your community? Justify your choice.

2. The article on arranged marriage, "When Marriage Is a Family Affair," suggests that it and free-choice "love" marriages are simply two places on a continuum. Where would you place personal ads and dating services on the continuum between free-choice and arranged marriages? What other forms of mate selection practised in Canada would you place on the continuum?

3. Based on the research reported in this chapter, summarize the factors that might cause problems in a marriage. Discuss whether these problems could be prevented by making a better choice of marriage partner.

4. **a)** What are your expectations concerning the division of labour in your potential marriage?

   b) How did you acquire these expectations?

   c) What challenges will these expectations present if/when you marry?

Knowledge/Understanding **Thinking/Inquiry** **Communication**

5. **a)** Interview couples you know, perhaps neighbours, or friends of your parents, to determine how they met, how they "courted," and how they decided to get married.

   b) Record the results as anecdotal summaries—brief descriptions of their experiences written as case studies.

   c) Write a research paper in which you analyze their choices using various mate selection theories.

6. Do you agree with Judith Timson's viewpoint in her article, "Matrimony as the Ultimate Adventure"? Write a response expressing and supporting your opinion with evidence from the research done in question 5.

Knowledge/Understanding | Thinking/Inquiry | Communication | Application

7. a) What are the criteria for social homogamy today? Conduct an observation to determine whether social homogamy determines whom boys and girls in your school community find attractive as dating partners.

b) Analyze the results and design a questionnaire that could be used for a computer dating activity.

c) Why do you think computer dating and matchmaking organizations develop? Do they support a particular theory, or is the idea based in history? Defend your answer.

8. Does television present an accurate picture of marriage, according to the research on marital success? Using the research, develop criteria for assessing an effective marriage relationship and analyze one of your favourite family programs portraying a marriage. Present your analysis as a letter to the producer of your favourite family program. Support your evaluation with anecdotal evidence from recent episodes.

9. Couples who cohabit, and those who cohabit before marriage, are less likely to have a satisfying and lasting relationship than couples that marry. Based on marriage research, design a course for cohabiting couples that might improve their chances of success. Identify the topics you would include and a rationale for each.