

# chapter 8

## Relationship Issues and Trends

### CHAPTER EXPECTATIONS

While reading this chapter, you will:

- describe current perceptions, opinions, and demographic trends relating to intimate relationships, and speculate on the significance of these trends for individual and family development
- analyze current issues relating to intimate relationships
- identify the role of various social institutions as they relate to intimate relationships
- demonstrate an understanding of the cycle of violence in intimate relationships and of strategies for avoiding and responding to violence in relationships
- formulate research questions and develop hypotheses reflecting specific theoretical frameworks
- demonstrate an understanding of research methodologies, appropriate research ethics, and specific theoretical perspectives for conducting primary research
- use appropriate, current information technology to access or transmit information
- evaluate information to determine its validity and to detect bias, stereotyping, ethnocentricity, datedness, and unethical practices, and distinguish among perceptions, beliefs, opinions, and research evidence
- use current information technology effectively to compile quantitative data and present statistical analyses of data, or to develop databases
- distinguish among, and produce examples of, the following: an essay arguing and defending personal opinion; a reaction paper responding to another person's argument

#### KEY TERMS

assault  
cycle of violence  
divorce  
domestic  
  violence  
heterogamy  
infidelity  
intergenerational  
  cycle of violence  
intermarriage  
spousal violence  
stages of  
  engagement  
victim



## RESEARCH SKILLS

- identifying thesis and theoretical perspective
- detecting bias



Sooner or later, most Canadians form committed couple relationships. Current issues will affect whether they live “happily ever after.”

## CHAPTER INTRODUCTION

This chapter will examine issues that are affecting intimate relationships and marriages in Canada today. Current perceptions and opinions concerning intermarriage, same-sex relationships, infidelity, spousal violence, and divorce will be examined. Demographic trends will be presented to illustrate the changes in couple behaviour in Canada. Social, economic, religious, and legal aspects will be considered. Various theoretical perspectives will be used to investigate the impact of specific issues on couple relationships, families, and Canadian society.



## Relationship Issues

**M**en and women undertake marriage with the hope of having a meaningful and enduring relationship that meets their needs with someone they love. The motivation to marry is partly a biological desire to form a sexual relationship, perhaps to have children. The married couple is also the primary social group in most societies, as people enjoy their social lives and interact with others as couples. The acceptance of romantic love as a basis for marriage underlines the expectation that marriage meets individuals' need to be loved and desired and the reciprocal need to be exclusively with the one they desire. However, the focus on romantic love clouds the importance of marriage as a social, legal, and religious institution in Canadian society.

Whether couples have the enduring happiness they aspire to when they marry depends on their abilities to negotiate and maintain the relationship within the circumstances that surround them. Relationships that are outside the accepted norms of family or society appear to be less stable on the whole. Marriages between individuals from different social or cultural backgrounds are more likely to end in **divorce**, the legal dissolution of a marriage. It may be that the couples have to negotiate many more aspects of their daily lives because they have come from different lifestyles, or perhaps they have conflicting expectations concerning the roles of husband and wife. Similarly, relationships between partners of the same sex may face difficulties. The expectations and gender roles acquired in their families of origin, Claude Guldner's "roots" (examined in Chapter 7) are confusing when they are clearly linked to gender. Couples who join forces against the opposition of those outside the relationship might gain strength from this alliance, but may lose sight of the challenges of negotiating their own relationship.

Serious problems in negotiating mutually satisfying roles within a relationship might threaten the relationship's stability. Violence and extramarital sexual relationships are problems involving one individual betraying the trust and respect that are the basis of committed relationships. Whether couples will be able to maintain their relationship under these circumstances depends on their ability to change their behaviour. When problems in the relationship seem to be overwhelming, couples may seek counselling, or the help of a third party, in negotiating solutions to their problems. However, divorce has become the solution to a failed marriage for about one-third of married couples in Canada (Ambert, 1998). The various factors affecting the stability of relationships will be examined in this chapter, and the impact of social policy, religious and moral considerations, and legal rights and responsibilities will be considered.



Discussion of issues related to individual lives, family and intimate relationships, and the role of social policy, religion, and law in human lives often elicits strong feelings that are often based on personal experiences. Scholars and researchers conducting investigations into these issues attempt to deal with them objectively by focusing on facts and theories and setting aside their emotions. However, individuals may present their ideas in a more subjective way, allowing their personal beliefs, emotions, and opinions to affect their interpretation of the issues. Others present a biased viewpoint in an attempt to influence the behaviour of others. The Academic Skills Centre at Trent University recommends that you identify bias by asking whether the author uses the following errors in reasoning.

- Does the author **avoid the question** by arguing around the issue without ever actually dealing with it?
- Do the arguments **beg the question** by assuming the thesis is true rather than providing evidence to prove it?
- Does the author **assume something is true** because there is no evidence to prove it false?

- Does the author use **special pleading** to apply the evidence to some cases but not others?
- Does the author resort to **name-calling** and stereotypes to discredit an argument?
- Does the author present **black-and-white thinking** and ignore possibilities between the extremes?
- Does the author present **superstitious thinking** by suggesting a cause-and-effect relationship when there is no evidence to support it?
- Does the author use **non sequiturs** by making conclusions that do not follow logically from the evidence?

Biased sources may be useful for your research if you are careful to gather those that present alternative viewpoints. Understanding individuals' biases concerning issues that affect their personal lives can provide insight into the decisions that people make about their own lives and those concerning social policies and legal rights and responsibilities as citizens of a democratic country. ■

**Source:** *Thinking it through: a practical guide to academic essay writing.* (1989). Peterborough, ON: Academic Skills Centre, Trent University, 66–68.

## Intermarriage

**Intermarriage**, or **heterogamy**, means marriage between partners who are from different social, racial, religious, ethnic, or cultural backgrounds. It is the opposite of homogamy. Those who advocate marriage between partners who are similar are often quite specific in defining intermarriage, because they identify certain characteristics as the focus of concern. Although interracial marriages, for example, between an African American person and a white person might be controversial in parts of the United States and Canada, interfaith marriages between a Catholic and a Protestant are of greater concern in Northern Ireland, and a marriage between an Aboriginal woman and a white man has some legal implications, involving status, in Canada.



## point of view | Does “Love” Conquer All?

by Ted and Virginia Byfield

Given Canada’s multi-ethnic history, marriages of people from different cultures can hardly be considered novel. Yet in the first great wave of immigration to western Canada, between 1900 and 1913, the religious background of the newcomers was Christian, as was the religion of nearly everyone already here. Cultures differed, but religious origins did not. All three versions of Christianity—Catholic, Protestant, and Eastern Orthodox—share much the same Bible, and a common history up to the eleventh century. The same is true of the wave of immigrants from post-World War II Europe who, if not Christian, were from a culture with Christian origins. Even in the third wave, from the 1970s onward, many (perhaps most) of the newcomers are practicing Christians, be they Catholic Filipinos, Anglican blacks from Caribbean and African countries, evangelical Chinese, or Orthodox Lebanese and Egyptians. However, the third wave has also introduced tens of thousands from Muslim or Sikh backgrounds, and the case in point at Prince George concerned one of these. The Sikh girl’s wedding to someone from another cultural heritage attracted much local attention.

We personally have been acquainted with probably a dozen interracial marriages—about ten of them marriages of Caucasians with Asians, and two of blacks with whites. All of these survived and, so far as such things can be externally assessed, eminently succeeded. But in nearly all, the parties were both Christians, and would no doubt declare that theirs was indeed a three-way marriage—of husband, wife, and Jesus Christ.

Parents may become understandably concerned, however, when a couple decides that neither cultural nor religious background matters because they love



Mixed culture marriages may still be hindered by cultural differences.

each other and “love conquers all.” Whether this idea is valid depends on what they mean by the word “love,” and few ever try to define it. It is a dangerous omission, because “love” has become one of the most overworked and under-defined words in the English language. Chances are they share the sensation of being “in love,” a kind of wildly emotional interest each has in the other, an obsession that occupies the mind, body, nerves, and imagination in every available waking moment. Never has this condition been more extolled than in the present century. It was the subject of almost every popular song written in North America between roughly 1920 and 1960, and probably half of them since. It was the fuel upon which Hollywood ran from the beginning. It usually involves declarations of lifetime “commitment” and promises an undying passion.

But [it] doesn’t deliver on this promise. It never has. Interest in the other party may survive; enjoyment



of one another's company may actually increase; but the obsession, the heated passion with which the relationship began, the state of "being in love," rapidly fades. Christian writers regard this as natural and intended. They see the phenomenon of "being in love" as a sort of starter motor whose function is to get the main engine going. But the couple, indoctrinated by the prevailing social attitude, too often regard the starter motor as the whole thing. When it sputters out, they see their marriage as no longer viable. "I don't love her (or him) anymore," they say, as if that ended the commitment.

The parents, knowing all this because they themselves have experienced it, wonder what will sustain the marriage when this condition of infatuation ends. It is here that a cultural and religious tradition should come into play to hold it together. If those factors are absent, they fear the marriage will break up, leaving any children who may meanwhile have arrived minus one parent or the other. And they know their fears of

such a failure are valid because they are surrounded by countless instances of it.

In the current circumstances, therefore, you'd wonder why religious schools—whether Christian, Muslim, Jewish, or Sikh—many of which teach endlessly of the wonders wrought by God's "love," don't address themselves more diligently to explaining what they mean by this word. Maybe their students have something quite different in mind. ■

**Source:** *Alberta Report/Western Report*. (1996, August 5). 23, p. 35.

1. What is Ted and Virginia Byfield's thesis?
2. Explain how the thesis echoes Robert Sternberg's "Triangle Theory" of love. (See Chapter 7, page 196.)
3. What arguments do they present to argue their thesis?
4. What evidence do they use to support their arguments?
5. What further information is required to determine whether their opinion is valid? How could you gather that information?

Intermarriage, whether the difference is racial, religious, or ethnic, appears to be more common, particularly in Canada's urban communities. There are currently no restrictions on intermarriage. There has been very little research on intermarriage in Canada, yet it may be a factor that will affect a couple's satisfaction with their relationship and the durability of that relationship (Wu & Penning, 1997).

In a diverse society such as Canada's, children of all races, religions, and ethnic groups attend school together and grow up together. In many ways, they are socialized at school, in community activities such as Scouts or sports, and through increasing exposure to television and other media, into a similar mass culture. The more successful people become as a society in raising children to be "colour blind," to see others who are of a different race, religion, or ethnicity as equal and similar in culture, the more likely it is that young people will meet, be attracted to, and fall in love with someone from a different background.





Problems in interracial marriages are more likely to arise because of the racist attitudes of others than from differences between the partners.

#### web connection



[www.mcgrawhill.ca/links/families12](http://www.mcgrawhill.ca/links/families12)

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

The differences, if there are any, between individuals of different races, religions, or ethnic backgrounds exist in their personal family lives. Claude Guldner describes the different expectations, customs, roles, and rituals of family life as the “roots” of a family because they nurture and support individuals and families, yet they are invisible (1982). Intermarriage brings together two individuals who share a similar contemporary culture but discover that they have different “roots” when they begin to negotiate the roles, rules, and rituals of their marriage.

Interracial marriages are the most visible forms of intermarriage. Research on interracial marriage reflects the concerns of the societies. In the United States, prejudices about race have resulted in assumptions that individuals who marry

someone of another race are motivated by rebellion against their families or by a desire to marry up by choosing someone of a more “desirable” race. Clayton Majete, an American sociologist and anthropologist, negates those assumptions in his research (1997). When individuals have similar socio-economic backgrounds, racial differences have little impact on the aspirations of individuals, on their reasons for marrying, or on the daily routines of their married life, but the couple may have to identify more with one racial community than the other. Interracial couples adjust to marriage as well as any couple does. The real challenge of interracial marriage is raising a biracial child, because it requires that both partners reflect on their individual identities. To help their child develop a positive identity, the couple must first reflect on the role that race plays in determining their own identities (Majete, 1997).

Couples in interfaith marriages in Canada face a different set of problems because faith, unlike race, is a chosen attribute, as it is possible to convert to another faith. Partners in interfaith relationships may appear to be very similar and usually have a similar economic and educational background, but their family and social experiences might have been quite different. Unlike interracial couples who face the challenges of racism in society together, couples of different faiths face difficulties within their families and relationships. Of course, they will have to decide how they will recognize holidays and festivals, but on a deeper level, they also have to examine their personal and cultural value systems to negotiate the daily lifestyle they will share with each other. Studies of lasting marriages suggest that common values, similar leisure



by Clayton Majete, Professor of Sociology and Anthropology, City University of New York

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Why do Blacks and Whites marry each other?
2. How are their marriages different from or the same as same-race marriages?
3. How do they overcome the overt racial prejudices in society to function in their relationship?

### HYPOTHESIS

Interracial marriage is misunderstood because it is distorted by myth and bias based on the racial divisions in society.

### RESEARCH METHOD

Using *survey method*, during the 1990s, Majete interviewed over 200 American, interracial middle-class couples who volunteered to participate. The couples were well-educated, with 25 percent of the partners having post-graduate degrees. Although 6 out of 10 women worked outside the home, 90 percent of the couples reported a traditional patriarchal marriage structure.

### RESULTS

- These are love relationships. Couples met at school, at work, or at social events, and in most cases the White partner initiated the relationship. Partners have similar socio-economic backgrounds. There is no evidence that the marriages were motivated by a desire to improve the social status of either partner.
- Over 75 percent of families are accepting of interracial marriage, although Black families are more accepting than White families. Three-quarters

of Black families have no problem with their son's or daughter's choice to marry a White person, but three out of ten White families were concerned. The responses of families ranged from acceptance to hesitation to outright hostility, but most couples were eventually accepted and supported by their families. Those couples whose families were hostile were distressed by their reaction. This indicates that the marriage is not motivated by rebellion against the family of origin.

- As anticipated, the major concerns were about racial identity, the values that society places on race, and raising biracial children in a country that requires a racial identification. Although couples had struggled with racism, parents developed strategies such as adding "biracial" to the list; however, by historical precedent in America, biracial means "Black." Most reported that their children had adjusted well and had no more problems than middle-class Black children.

### CONCLUSIONS

Majete concludes that the hypothesis is proven. Couples in his study perceive themselves to be ordinary middle-class couples with the same concerns about their personal aspirations and their shared relationships as same-race couples. He suggests that the assumption that there are more problems than actually exist creates stress for interracial couples. Couples have responded by communicating openly about racial issues and by choosing to live in interracial communities. ■

**Source:** Majete, C. (1997, July 1). "What you may not know about interracial marriages." *The World & I*. 12, p. 300.





Decisions about the daily rituals of their faiths require that individuals in an interfaith marriage consider the roles that religious faith and culture play in their lives.

interests, and an active social life are important (Whyte, 2001). Couples who respect each other and are willing to compromise can find ways to share their lives. However, individuals from different faith backgrounds have to choose whether to compromise some of their beliefs and customs or to accept their spouse's beliefs and customs as well as their own. The couple must also decide what faith identity to provide for their children. Unlike race, faith is a chosen attribute that determines membership in a faith community. It is not surprising that interfaith marriages are more likely to succeed if at least one partner does not practise his or her religion or is willing to convert.

Marriage between individuals of different ethnic backgrounds is perhaps the most complex form of heterogamy. Ethnicity can be a complex

mixture of national and racial heritage, religion, and culture. In Canada, where many people are “hyphenated Canadians” or have two cultures—for example, Japanese-Canadian—self-identification as a member of an ethnic group suggests that an individual adheres to the specific value system, family structure, and role expectations that are associated with that ethnic group. The major variations among ethnic groups involve gender roles within marriage and in the workplace, the independence and responsibilities of children, and the relationship between the conjugal and the extended family. Each of these affects how a couple will negotiate their relationship at each stage (Baker, 2001). However, now that most women are working outside the home, that children are staying in school longer, and that social programs are providing some support for families, differences among ethnic groups are decreasing.

## Same-Sex Relationships

Over the past several decades, there has been increasing acceptance of heterosexual cohabitation, but there has been great resistance to the recognition of same-sex relationships. However, in recent years, there has been a tremendous acceleration in the acknowledgment of such relationships. A survey released in April 2001 showed that 55 percent of Canadians supported same-sex marriages, and another in June 2001 concluded that 65 percent supported them (Enviro-nics Research Group, 2001). The 2001 Canada Census for the



first time asked people whether they lived with a common-law partner of the same sex and explicitly stated that children of a person's common-law, same-sex partner should be considered that person's children as well. Some argue that continuing discrimination against lesbians and gay men will result in under-reporting of lesbian and gay families. Kathleen Lahey, who studies gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and transsexual people, summarized their feelings (1988, pp. 262–263):

Because I have now gone through the emotional process of realizing how much of myself I have had to shut down in order to function as a lesbian woman in Canadian society, I know that other doors must still lock important parts of my heart. And now that I am a member of a family, I know that important parts of my children's hearts are under lock and key as well. They know, as do I, that many areas of concrete discrimination and social disapproval still affect all of us. They know, as do I, that our entire family is still legally incapacitated in many ways that would never even occur to other people.

The existence of couple relationships between individuals of the same sex challenged our understanding of love and marriage long before the contemporary debate concerning whether they should have the right to marry. Same-sex relationships have always existed. In his discussion of the meaning of love, the ancient Greek philosopher Plato suggested that early humans were essentially two people combined, and that there were three sexes: those with two male halves, those with two female halves, and those with one of each. As punishment for their misbehaviour, the god Zeus cut all humans into two people, each of them doomed to wander the Earth in search of his or her other half. Since then, there have been homosexual men, lesbians, and heterosexuals, all seeking their other half, the one person with whom they can share themselves and their lives (Sullivan, 1997). In Plato's Greece, homosexual relationships were commonplace and were considered to be normal. Today, the legal debate concerning same-sex relationships challenges society to examine the purpose of marriage and the role of intimate relationships in the lives of individuals. At the root of the debate is whether homosexuality is normal and, therefore, acceptable (Sullivan, 1997).

In Canada, intimate relationships are usually based on the romantic attraction of partners, not on the traditional responsibilities that are defined in the law or by religious beliefs. Few heterosexual couples would identify their legal entitlement to spousal benefits as their reason to marry. Gays and lesbians, on the other hand, are not allowed to marry legally, but they acquired many of the economic benefits of heterosexual spouses in Canada in 2000 and are free to enter into financial contracts with each other.



## point of view | State Has No Place in Setting the Rules of Marriage

by Rachel Giese

With a crowded press gallery, a protester claiming to be a messenger from Jesus, and a notice asking for money for the legal fund (in lieu of gifts), it wasn't exactly a romantic wedding. But that wasn't the point. Anne and Elaine Vautour, Joe Varnell, and Kevin Bourassa have already been married, spiritually at least, in holy union ceremonies. Sunday's double wedding was about politics, not romance. About calling the provincial and federal governments' bluff and forcing their hand on gay marriage.

It's a testament to the durability of the mythology of marriage that people of both sides of the debate remain so passionate. After all, giving same-sex couples the right to legally marry wouldn't considerably alter the status quo. Gay couples already live together, raise children together, and receive almost all the benefits (health insurance, pensions, etc.) that "straight" married and common-law couples receive.

What's at stake here is something far less tangible, but arguably even more important: Winning the legal right to marry may not matter much materially to gay couples, but for some it would be a critical psychological victory. Because, at its heart, this is about seeking approval and acceptance. For people who have suffered daily indignities and hurts of parental rejection, not having a partner included at an office event, or being stared at disapprovingly for an innocent act of public affection, receiving approval is no mean feat.

Of course, the psychology runs both ways. There is something pathological about straight people erecting barriers around an institution they've so thoroughly mangled. Not to mention something pathetic about those who went to the Metropolitan Community Church on Sunday to voice their disapproval of the union of two couples whom they've never even met.



Anne Vautour, left, places a ring on the finger of her partner, Elaine Vautour, as Reverend Brent Hawkes looks on during their wedding ceremony at the Metropolitan Community Church in Toronto.

It's fair to say that marriage is in crisis or, at least, in a time of tremendous revolution: 50 percent of straight unions end in divorce and a woman and man who have never met can legally wed on television as a game show finale. And people think that gay marriage mocks this heterosexual institution? The only place to put blame for the erosion of traditional families is squarely on traditional families themselves.

Yesterday I received an e-mail from a frustrated television producer: "Look," she wrote, "we really want to do something on gay marriage, but aside from pointing out the two sides of this, what can we talk about? Is there any new angle on this debate?" To answer her question, I'd say that I'm fascinated by how such a private and intimate matter is being battled over in such a public way.



There isn't anything more personal than deciding how one chooses, acknowledges, and lives with a companion. So, to me, it's odd that there should be rules at all about how those unions should be celebrated, or whether some deserve more merit and respect than others. No one—gay or straight—should have to seek permission or approval of their relationship. People should not feel compelled to marry if it isn't meaningful to them, just as they should not be denied the right to marry if, for them, it's a valuable ritual.

The government shouldn't be involved in recognizing or validating relationships at all. There's no compelling reason. The way forward isn't to legalize gay marriage, but to delegalize marriage, making it strictly a private arrangement, with no automatic benefits, privileges, or responsibilities conferred at all. Which isn't to say that there couldn't be legal frameworks to relationships, just not one standard, Grade-A, government-approved one.

To protect themselves and their interests, people entering into a domestic arrangement could draw up contracts, wills, powers-of-attorney, and so on, to suit their own needs and situations, to make provisions for the joint ownership of property, occasions of financial dependence, and the raising of children.

Marriage, then, would strictly be a private and personal matter, with weddings, celebrated according to one's own spiritual, religious, and aesthetic values. Individual churches and congregations could decide their own criteria for who they would and wouldn't marry. People could create whatever kind of ceremony they want and use whatever terms—husband, wife, spouse, partner—they feel suited them.

It sounds radical, even heretical, but separating the legal and financial components of marriage from its emotional and spiritual ones would actually restore the deepest and most profound purpose of marriage—to celebrate the free choice of two people to make a home and life together. And that, I think, is the very thing needed to revive and rejuvenate this battered and fought-over institution. ■

**Source:** *The Toronto Star*. (2001, January 18), p. A31.

1. What thesis is Rachel Giese arguing in this essay?
2. What arguments does she use to support her thesis?
3. What appears to be the theoretical perspective behind her arguments?
4. Giese admits that this is a radical idea. What are the arguments against her thesis? What evidence can you offer to support these arguments?

Canadian law, reflecting the dominant Judeo-Christian heritage of early Canadians, assumes that couples are heterosexual, although often this fact is not stated. Religious opponents of homosexual relationships quote from the Bible to argue that God condemns them, whereas other religious scholars within Judaism and Christianity argue that the literal interpretation of the Bible no longer governs most sexual behaviour (John, 1997). Some Christian and Jewish religious scholars believe that God created homosexuality as normal behaviour for a minority of human beings, and therefore same-sex couples who wish to enter a relationship based on love and commitment should be able to have their relationship blessed within their faith (Spong, 1997; Kahn, 1997).



*“I love you.” We all hope these words will signal the end of our search and the beginning of a lifelong relationship.”*

—Dr. Kenneth D. George,  
*Mr. Right Is Out There*

Those who argue for legalizing same-sex relationships suggest that marriage would provide the same protection to partners and their children in existing gay and lesbian families that it provides to heterosexual couples (Stacey, 2001).

In the midst of the public debate about whether their relationships are acceptable, gay and lesbian couples are more concerned about the roles their relationship plays in their own lives. Gays and lesbians want stable love relationships based on affection and companionship (Peplau, 1988). Contrary to the stereotypes, same-sex relationships do not mimic heterosexual gender roles, with partners playing complementary male-female roles. An individual's gender identity as male or female is not affected by his or her homosexuality. Therefore, gay and lesbian couples who have few role models as they negotiate their relationships are more likely to choose roles on the basis of interests and personal strengths (Marecek, Finn, & Cardell, 1988). Satisfaction with same-sex relationships seems to depend on the same variables as heterosexual relationships: mutual respect, shared values and goals, and the ability to manage conflict (Jones & Bates, 1988). During the last decades of the twentieth century, as sociologists and psychologists began to study homosexual relationships as alternative, rather than deviant, lifestyles, it has become evident that, regardless of their sexual orientation, individuals have the same expectations of their intimate relationships.

The debate about same-sex relationships can be viewed from several theoretical perspectives. Questions concerning whether same sex-relationships are normal and whether they benefit society reflect the functionalist view of male and female roles in society. These often focus on procreation as the foundation of the family (Arkes, 1997). Symbolic interactionism can be used to investigate how being gay or lesbian affects individual identity and the nature of homosexual relationships (DeCecco & Shively, 1988). Systems theory can be used to explain how couples establish their lives together. Developmental theory can be used to illustrate how enduring same-sex relationships progress through a series of stages as couples adjust their relationships through the inevitable crises presented in the lifespan (McWhirter & Mattison, 1988). Each point of view on same-sex relationships requires that people clarify their values, beliefs, and expectations concerning sexuality and intimate relationships.

## Infidelity

Sexual fidelity remains an important value in intimate relationships in Canada (Nett, 1993). Although evolutionary psychologists' studies suggest that it is inherent in the nature of humans to be unfaithful, the norms of



by Justice Marvin Zuker

In Canada, gays and lesbians are recognized in a variety of legislative schemes as spouses or quasi-spouses but they cannot choose marriage. The most significant developments in the recognition of same-sex unions have occurred in employment and benefits concerns because sexual orientation is a prohibited ground of discrimination under many human rights statutes, including the Ontario Human Rights Code. In 2001, eight couples from Ontario, one couple from Québec, and five couples from British Columbia began legal actions to end what they feel is discrimination. They are seeking a court order that they be granted licences to marry, and a declaration that any law, practice, or policy of government that restricts otherwise lawful marriages between two persons of the same sex is contrary to the Charter of Rights and is, therefore, unenforceable.

Although the federal government has jurisdiction over capacity to marry, the provinces have jurisdiction over the solemnization of marriage. Except in Québec, provincial legislation does not require that a couple be of the opposite sex in order to marry, although the statutes do contain language that presumes the parties are heterosexual (the vows must include the words “husband” and “wife,” for example). However, when

Parliament enacted the Modernization of Benefits and Obligations Act, S.C. 2000, c. 12, it included in section 1.1 of that Act, under the title “interpretation,” the following:

For greater certainty, the amendments made by this Act do not affect the meaning of the word “marriage”; that is, the lawful union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

It is important to distinguish religious marriage from civil marriage. Only the latter is in issue in the same-sex marriage claims currently before the courts. Legally extending civil marriage to same-sex partners would not require religious congregations, contrary to their beliefs, to marry same-sex partners. The Charter’s guarantee of freedom of religion would presumably protect religious congregations from any legislative attempt to compel them to perform same-sex marriages. While human rights legislation prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation with respect to access to services customarily available to the public, it is doubtful whether marriage in any particular religious congregation would ever be held to be a service customarily available to the public. Therefore, same-sex partners could not legally compel a religious organization to marry them. ■

Western societies define extramarital sexual relationships as unacceptable behaviour. According to Helen Fisher (1992) and David Buss (1994), early man was motivated to have many sexual partners to enhance his chance of having offspring, whereas woman tended to be very selective about her sexual partners to improve the chances of having the man stay to support their offspring. There is no evidence that the sexual activity of humans is still motivated by these biological drives. Limiting sexual partners benefits a society because it strengthens the conjugal family, ensuring the greatest population growth and the support and socialization of offspring (Conway, 1997).



### web connection



[www.mcgrawhill.ca/links/families12](http://www.mcgrawhill.ca/links/families12)

To learn more about the topic of infidelity, go to the web site above for *Individuals and Families in a Diverse Society* to see where to go next.

Functionalists explain that all societies define role behaviours for individuals to ensure that the functions of society are met and that the social norms defining role behaviours are passed on through the process of socialization. Adultery does not work to the benefit of society, so people are taught that it is wrong.

Many Canadians do not approve of extramarital affairs. When Reginald Bibby asked Canadians in the early 1980s whether they approved of sex outside marriage, three out of four Canadian men and women considered extramarital sex to be wrong under any circumstances (1983). In 1998, a poll conducted by *Macleans*' magazine and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) found that attitudes had not changed: 89 percent said that it was "unacceptable" to have an extramarital affair, and 72 percent found it "very unacceptable" (Clark, 1998). Family therapist Betty Carter writes that in all her years of counselling married couples, she has never seen a situation in which partners accepted an extramarital affair (Carter & Peters, 1996). The actual rate of sexual **infidelity** is more difficult to determine. Some popular sources, such as *The Monogamy Myth* (Vaughan, 1998), suggest that, based on informal surveys,

60 percent of men and 40 percent of women have had extramarital sex. When the General Social Survey, conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, asked a representative sample of Americans, "Have you ever had extramarital sex?" 23 percent of men and 12 percent of women said they had (Wiederman, 1999). Considering the results of the *Macleans*'/CBC poll, if the statistics are the same in Canada, many people have extramarital sex despite their opinion that it is unacceptable behaviour.

Contrary to the excuses that evolutionary psychology might suggest, extramarital affairs do not appear to be about sex. Psychologists and marriage counsellors have found that individuals have affairs when their needs are not met in their marriages (Carter & Peters, 1996; Anderson, 2001). Just as the first stage of a marriage relationship is passionate and exciting (Goldstine, Lerner, Zucherman, & Goldstine, 1977), so infidelity is more exciting than marriage, not because the sex is better but because of the initial passion of a secret relationship, apart from the routine of everyday life (Leibow, 1995). Research on moral development suggests that individuals



An affair can be an exciting sexual adventure, but it has a short life. Although infidelity usually results in divorce, few individuals marry their extramarital lovers.



act initially out of self-interest, then learn to consider the needs of others, before becoming mature enough to conform to social norms of right and wrong and to accept the rules of society. David Leibow explains that an individual who has an affair when the opportunity arises is acting out of self-interest because affairs are “narcissistically gratifying” (Leibow, 1995, p. 73), and so affairs represent immature moral behaviour in an adult.

The behaviour of men and women differs when it comes to illicit sex. Perhaps because of the original biological motivation, men are more likely to have an extramarital relationship that is primarily sexual, whereas women are more likely to seek an “affair” based on romance and affection and to have sex only when they are “in love” (Nannini, 2000). The fact that intimate friendships would not be counted as extramarital sex might account for the gender difference in infidelity rates. This same motivation explains why women are more tolerant of sexual infidelity than emotional infidelity in their partners, but men are more threatened by their partner’s sexual infidelity than by their emotionally intimate relationships (Nannini, 2000). That men have greater opportunity for affairs and seek younger women for extramarital affairs could explain why one-third of men aged 60 to 69 reported one or more affairs, but the peak rate for women was 19 percent, of those aged 40 to 49. Another possible explanation is the “double standard” that tolerates and even expects more sexual activity for men than for women (Wiederman, 1999).

Infidelity results in divorce 65 percent of the time (Anderson, 2001). Prior to the legalization of divorce in Canada, extramarital affairs were tolerated as a solution to unsuccessful marriages as they have been in most societies for thousands of years (Kelman, 1998). Now that couples can divorce when they have irreconcilable differences, infidelity is the most common reason given for divorce. When an unfaithful partner leaves careless clues about an affair, the infidelity might be a “cry for help” that the relationship is in trouble and can be salvaged with effort from both partners (Carter & Peters, 1996). In these cases, Betty Carter suggests that counselling can help the couple recover from the affair and negotiate a better relationship. John Gottman (1999) counters that, although affairs don’t cause a marriage breakdown, few can recover from infidelity, because it destroys the trust in a relationship. The “wronged party” feels betrayed and humiliated, especially if others know about the affair. Marriage and enduring relationships cannot compete with an illicit affair for excitement. When a secret affair is maintained for a long time, the marriage is probably over, but very few people go on to marry their lovers (Carter & Peters, 1996).



by Norma Fitzpatrick

One recent Friday night, my husband and I sat around our kitchen table with Robert, a close mutual friend. We mentioned to him that we had recently come to an agreement regarding certain guidelines concerning my husband's behaviour. The guidelines included: not drinking alone socially with another woman, not dancing with a female when I am not present, and not physically touching a woman in a way he would not do to a male, such as rubbing her back in a supportive manner. In short, anything that could lead to being misconstrued as flirting.

I looked at Robert's eyes widen as his mouth opened just enough to let a quietly controlled gasp of disbelief escape. I felt an explanation was needed to restore his usually sedate exterior. "I expect my husband to be attracted to other women throughout our married lives, just as I may be to other men," I told him. "What I don't expect is for him to put himself in a position where he has the opportunity to act on these attractions. Flirting presents this opportunity. I will do the same for him and avoid placing myself in these situations where men are concerned."

Robert contemplated my explanation as he looked off momentarily to the right corner of the ceiling. He was silent. He prided himself on being diplomatic and I knew he was trying to temper his reaction and his words. He failed. "You must be worried that your husband will cheat on you. You, of all people, are feeling insecure? A woman who could model for Victoria's Secret?" His eyes pierced mine as he looked for a hint of the insecurity he felt he heard in my words.

Although I was flattered, our friend was missing the point. I feel comfortable with the manner in which my husband conducts himself socially. He is



This woman (background right) feels comfortable about her husband socializing with other women because, as a couple, they have established behaviour guidelines for their interactions with the opposite sex.

the life of the party and feels at ease in my presence to talk and dance with any woman without fear of hurting my feelings or suffering repercussions from me later on, in private. He also enjoys the occasional weekend trip and night out with his male friends. In 14 years, he has never given me cause to doubt his fidelity. And I know he never will.

Not in 14 years have I ever curtailed his social activities. He has a strong personality, being both assertive and, when need be, aggressive in his personal and professional lives. Even if I wished to, he would not allow me to control him. I, however, don't want to make the arrogant mistake of assuming my husband and I are immune to the human fallibility of being tempted, even fleetingly, to act on our impulses at least once in our lives. I have faith our marriage is



perfect in every way—we are each other’s best friends and supportive partners in all that we do. I have faith we will remain loyal to each other. But it is not a blind faith, rather an educated, deliberated one.

Failed marriages, not unlike successful ones, usually start with a promise to love each other forever and remain monogamous—not the intention to seize the opportunity to act on attractions to others. According to Statistics Canada, more than one in every three Canadian marriages end in divorce. Nearly one in five divorce applicants cite infidelity as the reason for their marital break-up.

Stating aloud guidelines assures husband and wife are of one mind and know what is and is not acceptable to each other. What may be friendliness to one may be a flirtation to another. To state the obvious is good. It leaves no room for misinterpretation or misunderstanding by either partner.

I have personally seen the powerful threat that seemingly innocent flirtations can be to a marriage: my boss’s endearing smiles and excessive compliments to his assistant culminated in a five-year affair; and my married neighbour ran away with another’s husband after countless flirtations flowed unchecked between them at different neighbourhood parties.

I admit, for the time being, my husband will be the one who will have to exercise the code more than me. He is an entrepreneur in the beauty industry—an industry dominated by young, attractive women, where socializing and working with women is a part of daily business. He also regularly attends week-long conferences in other countries to which he must bring some of his employees—again, predominantly young, attractive, and often single ladies.

I, on the other hand, have temporarily put my career on hold and am proud to be a stay-at-home mother. My closest encounter with the opposite sex is usually an inadvertent brush of the hand with some

17-year-old, acne-prone boy as he passes me my grocery bags. Not exactly an adrenaline rush.

I also admit that although we both collaborated on these guidelines and my husband is happy with the outcome because he, too, places our marriage above all else, I was the one who initiated the conversation. Unlike our friend, Robert, I see this initiation as a sign of security, not insecurity. I am not afraid to discuss what could be seen as an unpleasant issue for fear it may end up opening a Pandora’s box and become a self-fulfilling prophecy. I am also secure enough to know that even though I see myself as attractive, intelligent, and kind, my husband may still occasionally be attracted to other women. He is, like me, a human—not a saint. To him, however, I am worth showing respect by not acting in ways that would make me feel uncomfortable.

Regardless of which spouse opens up the discussion or has more interactions with the opposite sex, protecting a marriage from opportunities to be unfaithful is not a frivolity born from insecurity, rather a wisdom born from a mixture of realism and a wish to create and maintain the best marriage possible. ■

**Source:** Fitzpatrick, N. (2000, October 5). “Fear Pandora’s box? not me.” *The Globe and Mail*.

1. What thesis does Norma Fitzpatrick argue in her essay?
2. What arguments does she present to support her thesis?
3. What assumptions does she make about human behaviour? What theoretical perspective do these assumptions reflect?
4. What data would you need to determine whether the assumptions are valid? How could you gather the data?
5. Would you accept for yourself the agreement that Norma and her husband have negotiated for their relationship?



## Spousal Violence

In 1999, 8 percent of women and 7 percent of men in marriage or common-law relationships in Canada reported that they had been the **victim** of violence, or the person mistreated, by their partner in the past five years. The rate for women was down from 12 percent in 1993, but this was the first time that a rate had been determined for men (Johnson & Hotton, 2001). The North American ideal of a happy marriage based on enduring romantic love is tarnished by the reality that marriage can be dangerous, especially for women. Since **spousal violence** was first defined as a problem in the 1970s, research has resulted in a better understanding of the nature of violence, and the differences between ineffective conflict resolution skills or “arguments that get out of hand” and systematic violence (Browne, 1997). Using various theoretical approaches, researchers have attempted to explain the causes of spousal violence and to determine how it can be prevented.

Violence is any action that is intended to physically hurt someone, but it is only defined as a problem by the context. For example, just as a fistfight in a hockey game is defended as “just part of the game,” hitting a wife or a child was considered acceptable, even necessary, discipline in the past. The expression “rule of thumb” dates back to nineteenth-century common law, which gave a man the right to use a stick no thicker than his thumb to chastise his chattels; that is, his wife, children, and servants. In the early and mid-twentieth century, **domestic violence** was assumed to be a private matter. Police could lay charges only if they actually witnessed the assault themselves. Family and neighbours minded their own business. Women who sought help from their clergy were advised to return home and to work out the problem with their husbands. Early in the twentieth century, women who left their husbands were guilty of desertion. They lost custody of their children and were entitled to no support. When divorce was legalized early in the twentieth century, cruelty was grounds for divorce, but was difficult to prove. Until recently, men who beat their wives were protected from the justice system, and women had no choice but to stay in an abusive home. However, by the 1970s, public opinion about violence changed. Violence within intimate relationships is now legally defined as **assault**. Recent legal changes require that police respond to domestic violence calls and lay charges when there is evidence of assault (Conway, 1997; Ward, 1994).

In the 1970s, spousal violence was regarded as ineffective conflict resolution and the power struggle between husbands and wives. This viewpoint was supported by evidence that spousal violence occurred in relationships of all socio-economic, religious, and ethnic backgrounds. Some people developed

### web connection



[www.mcgrawhill.ca/links/families12](http://www.mcgrawhill.ca/links/families12)

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

*“When we do evil  
We and our victims  
Are equally  
bewildered.”*

—W. H. Auden



## Types of Violence in Marital Unions

	Violence by Previous Spouse				Violence by Current Spouse			
	Total		Violence Ended at Separation		Total		Violence Occurred After Separation	
	No. (000s)	%	No. (000s)	%	No. (000s)	%	No. (000s)	%
<b>Total Violence</b>								
<b>Female Victims</b>	<b>437</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>264</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>259</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>100</b>
Threatened to hit	307	70	168	64	145	56	137	80
Threw something	211	48	122	46	90	35	88	51
Pushed, grabbed	378	87	228	87	187	72	150	87
Slapped	203	46	113	43	77	30	89	52
Kicked, bit, or hit	177	41	102	39	50	19	75	44
Hit with something	127	29	65	25	28*	11*	61	35
Beat	139	32	71	27	33*	13*	68	40
Choked	114	26	56	21	26*	10*	58	34
Used or threatened to use a gun or knife	86	20	40	15	—	—	46	27
Sexual assault	117	27	57	22	21*	8*	60	35
<b>Total Violence</b>								
<b>Male Victims</b>	<b>259</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>173</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>303</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>100</b>
Threatened to hit	173	67	107	62	162	53	66	79
Threw something	147	57	99	57	163	54	46	55
Pushed, grabbed	135	52	84	48	103	34	51	61
Slapped	162	63	109	63	153	51	53	64
Kicked, bit, or hit	161	62	102	59	124	41	59	71
Hit with something	93	36	60	35	53	17	33	0
Beat	41	16	25*	14*	13*	4*	16*	20*
Choked	18*	7*	—	—	—	—	—	—
Used or threatened to use a gun or knife	35*	14*	20	12	—	—	15	19
Sexual assault	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

— Amount too small to be expressed.  
 \* Coefficient of variation is high (16.6% to 33.3%).  
 Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

**Source:** Adapted from the Statistics Canada publication, *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile 2001*, Catalogue 85-224, June 2001, Table 4.6, pg. 39.

1. What is the male/female ratio for victims of violence?
2. What are the most common types of violence experienced by male victims and by female victims?
3. Compare the incidence and types of violence during a marital union, ending at separation and continuing after separation, for male and female victims.
4. Does the data in this table provide evidence for Conway's argument that the violence experienced by female victims is more serious than the violence experienced by male victims?
5. What additional data would be required to complete your understanding of spousal violence? How could this data be gathered?



effective ways of settling their conflict amicably, and a minority of people used violent tactics. The **intergenerational cycle of violence** describes the evidence that individuals who experienced violence or abuse as a child, or who observed the assault or abuse of their mothers, are more likely to become either victims or perpetrators of violence in their intimate relationships (Nett, 1993). Social role theory suggests that individuals learn how to behave in a role such as “wife” or “husband” by observing and imitating significant role models. If violence is learned behaviour, and spousal violence results from arguments that get out of hand, social role theorists suggest that both victims and perpetrators of violence can learn more effective ways of dealing with anger and resolving conflict to break the **cycle of violence** (Lynn & O’Neill, 1995). The solutions put forth by social role theorists include counselling those who use violence and counselling children and youth who have experienced or witnessed violence. Domestic violence could be prevented by ensuring that individuals learn anger management, communication, and conflict resolution skills.

The focus on spousal violence in the 1970s and 1980s revolved around why women stayed in violent or abusive relationships. This focus reflected the systems theory perspective that views all participants as part of the problem and suggested that if the woman left, then the violence would stop. The cycle of violence, described by Lenore E. Walker in 1979, explained that the violent phase of the cycle was followed by a period in which the perpetrator was apologetic and remorseful or, at worst, acting as if nothing had happened. For couples with a commitment to a relationship, it was possible for both partners to believe that the violence would not happen again. Systems theory explains that the couples had established a pattern of interaction that is difficult to change. The social exchange perspective, on the other hand, suggested that women stayed because the consequences of leaving the relationship were worse than tolerating occasional assaults. Women usually experienced many bouts of violence before eventually leaving a violent spouse. Women’s shelters, transition houses, and counselling programs have been established in communities across Canada to help women break out of the cycle of violence and begin to establish a new life for themselves and their children.

The conventional understanding that spousal violence was a universal problem that affected couples of all walks of life was challenged by an analysis of the 1993 Violence Against Women Study. The evidence in this Canadian study suggested that poor men were twice as likely to beat their wives as well-off men, and half the perpetrators were under 29 years of age. The following key risk factors were identified, and the presence of each of these factors increased



## The Cycle of Violence



- **The tension-building phase** The victim attempts to maintain equilibrium by carefully acquiescing to her partner's demands. As the tension builds with any stress or conflict, the victim rationalizes minor violent outbursts and often accepts responsibility for them. This phase can last a long time.
- **The abusive incident or acute battering phase** One or more serious assaults occur, triggered by an event that is usually unpredictable. Medical treatment might be required. The victim might report the assault to the police or seek help, but she is more likely to conceal the fact that she was assaulted. As the cycle is repeated, the victim responds with anger and disbelief that the perpetrator has not kept his promise, or with relief that what she had feared would happen was finally over. This phase lasts 2 to 24 hours.
- **The calm-and-penance phase** The perpetrator becomes remorseful and apologetic and attempts to make up for the violence by affectionate or romantic acts, and promises never to do it again. The victim might withdraw her threats to leave, or refuse to give evidence against her partner. This phase may last a day or a few months, until the tension begins to build again.

**Source:** Timothy Jackson and Jeff Olson, *When Violence Comes Home*. Copyright 1995 by RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. The cycle of violence was first identified by Lenore E. Walker (*The Battered Woman*, Harper Perennial, 1979).

1. Systems theory suggests that both victim and perpetrator are caught within the cycle of violence. What would motivate each of them to stay in a relationship during the tension-building phase?
2. Why might the victim stay in the relationship after the acute battering or abusive phase? What theoretical perspectives support your answer?
3. What could be done to break the cycle of violence?

the likelihood that a man would assault his wife (Conway, 1997, p. 169):

- unemployment for more than one month
- personal bankruptcy
- a drop in wage or salary
- taking an additional job to make ends meet
- child support or alimony payments that he did not have before
- a move to less-expensive accommodations



- taking in a boarder to make ends meet
- one or more demotions
- loss of income due to a return to school
- some other important career setback
- some other significant negative change in economic circumstances

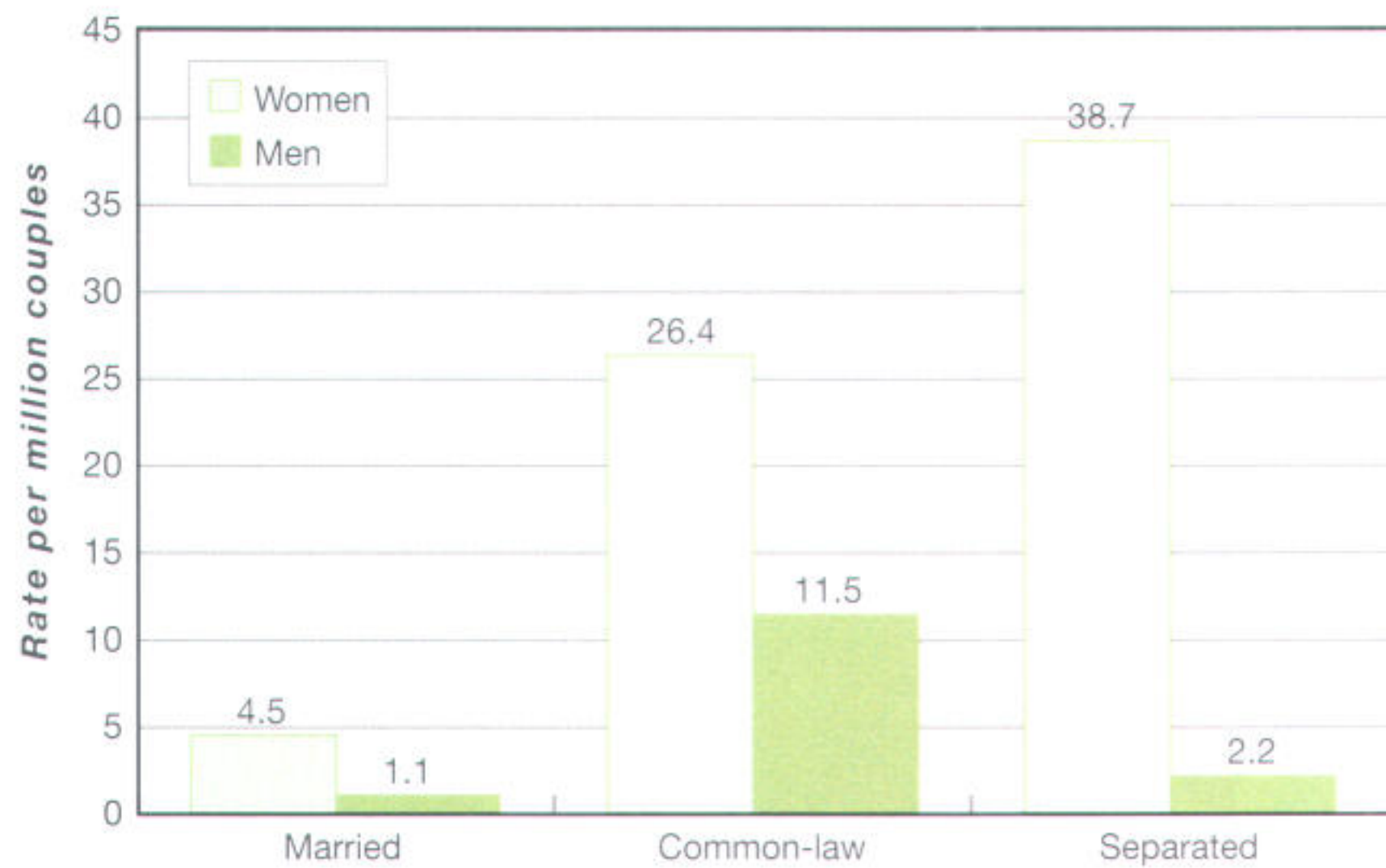
The rate of assault for men experiencing none or only one of these events was 8 in 100 men. For men experiencing six or seven of these events, the rate rose to 33 in 100 men—over four times the lowest rate. Women were most at risk of violence if they were in newer marriages, young, living in a low-income household, living with an unemployed man, pregnant, disabled, or ending or thinking about ending the relationship (Conway, 1997). These factors suggest a correlation between economic instability and domestic violence, but not causality. That is, there is no proof that financial hardship causes people to become violent, but individuals in difficult financial circumstances are more likely to experience spousal violence.

Feminist theorists argue that spousal violence is the misuse of power and control. They prefer the terms “violence against women” or “wife battering,” arguing that most violence is perpetrated by men, women are most at risk of violence from their intimate partners, and this violence is tolerated by a patriarchal society. They emphasize that although most men are not violent, a significant minority of men choose to be violent (Lynn & O’Neill, 1995). They suggest that as men lose control of their jobs in the workplace and become economically vulnerable, they lose power and seek to regain a sense of power by exerting control in their family. In a patriarchal marriage, men acquire power by their gender, their age, but also by their greater physical size and strength. What begins as controlling, possessive behaviour escalates into violence for some men, and the violence becomes most serious when the man believes he is losing control of the woman because she threatens to leave the relationship (Browne, 1997). The risk factors cited in the 1993 Violence Against Women Study and the pattern of violence in the 1999 study offer support for this theory. Feminist theorists suggest that the solution is to change the social structure so that there is greater equality between men and women, and to ensure that domestic assaults are treated as serious offences by the legal system.

The evidence of the Violence Against Women Study of 1993 and The General Social Survey of 1999 demonstrates that even separation does not always break the cycle of violence. Kathleen Ferraro (1997) argues that the cycle of violence does not sufficiently explain the progression of violence. She identified **stages of engagement** that include two additional stages that might occur after the cycle is broken. The first of these stages is “terror.” Some women stay in violent relationships because their lives or the lives of their children have been



## Estranged Women at Greatest Risk of Spousal Homicide, 1991–1999



The 1991 and 1996 Census were used to estimate the number of women and men aged 15 and older who were married, in a common-law union, and separated from legal marital partners during the reference period. Spousal homicide rates were not calculated for those separated from common-law partners, as there are no reliable estimates for this sub-population available from the Census. All known cases of homicide perpetrated by an ex-common law partner (as identified from police narratives) have been omitted from the separated rates. The denominators used for inter-censal years were estimated by averaging the difference from the known population figures in 1991 and 1996.

**Source:** Adapted from the Statistics Canada publication, *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile 2001*, Catalogue 85-224, June 2001, pg. 33.

1. What is the ratio of female homicides to male homicides in each category?
2. In what type of marital situation is a woman most likely to be killed?
3. In what type of marital situation is a man most likely to be killed?  
What are possible explanations for the different rates for men and women?

threatened, but others leave and attempt to hide from their ex-partner. Leaving or threatening to leave can make the violence worse for some women. In some cases, the final stage is homicide. Some women are killed by their partners or ex-partners and some women kill their partners. Thirty-nine percent of ex-partners who kill their wives commit suicide after the homicide, and six percent attempt it. According to police records, the motivation most often identified by men for killing an ex-partner is jealousy—the belief that if he can't have her, then no one will. In 74 percent of cases, the men have police records of previous violence. Women are much less likely to kill their partners and are most likely to act in defence during or following a violent assault (Johnson & Hotton, 2001).



In Canada, social and legal systems provide support for victims of domestic violence. The percentage of female victims who reported assaults to the police increased from 29 to 37 percent between 1993 and 1999, suggesting that there is greater faith that the criminal justice system will protect women. The policy of mandatory arrest for spousal violence reflects the attitude that domestic violence will not be tolerated. Shelters and counselling services offer support for abused women and assist them in starting a new life. In cases that indicate a clear threat of future violence, courts issue restraining orders forbidding contact between the perpetrator and the victim. Eight percent of men who murder their ex-partners had restraining orders against them. Spousal violence is a complex issue that requires careful consideration by men and women, but more importantly by governments that provide funding for social services. The decline in the spousal assault rate for women since 1993 raises hope that the solutions have been effective in Canada.

## point of view | With Friends Like Feminists . . .

by Chris Champion

Kimberlee Blair is raising five kids on her own in Leduc, Alberta, while her husband, Carl, serves a six-month minimum security sentence. Blair was convicted last month of beating up his wife while severely intoxicated. He'd been acquitted at an earlier trial in October 1994 on the basis of alcohol-induced automatism—that he was too drunk to know what he was doing. Mrs. Blair opposed the second trial. “There was never any need for all this,” she told the judge. Later, she added, “We were doing fine, working it through, and then those yacking do-gooders stuck their noses in our business.”

The 37-year-old woman was referring to feminist lobbies who have taken a loud interest in the couple's case. Mrs. Blair admits she was hit “with an open hand” by her husband, grabbed by the throat, and rammed against the wall. She testified that Carl only slapped her once in 12 years of marriage. A neighbour, Lucas Malic, contradicted her; he'd seen Blair slapping his wife before. Mr. Malic also said his neighbour had

Feminists' “support” has not helped.

telephoned him during the rampage and accused him of having an affair with his wife—testimony that undermined the automatism defence.

After the retrial, Mrs. Blair's remarks became the subject of feminist analysis in the media. Dorothy Mandy of the Alberta Status of Women Action Committee (ASWAC) told the *Edmonton Journal*, “I used to work in a women's shelter so I'm quite familiar with such reactions. . . . One day she'll realize she's a victim.” In the same article Edmonton Sexual Assault Centre director Catherine Hedlin said, “My role is to advocate for all women, for all people who might be victims.” As a battered wife, she feels Mrs. Blair was fair game for comment.





But Kimberlee Blair doesn't think she's been battered beyond common sense. "I'm not stupid," she insists. "I wouldn't be here if it [the abuse] had been an ongoing thing." Mrs. Blair says what Mr. Malic thought he saw was in reality a minor squabble, very different than the incident that triggered Blair's arrest. On that occasion, after a 30-hour binge, he went "berserk—I'd never seen that side of him before." The 42-year-old welder and backhoe operator, whose Nisku job awaits his release, had downed 80 ounces of liquor and 12 beers on top of heart and thyroid medications. "I don't condone it," Mrs. Blair adds, "but it was a one-time thing and we've worked it through."

Moreover, the activists who were so quick to analyze have offered no practical help in caring for and feeding Mrs. Blair's children. "I've never heard from them," she says. "Never had anything to do with them before the trial or since. They just go off on their [political] rampages." As for their diagnosis of alleged battered-wife syndrome, Mrs. Blair says, "They should wait for someone to ask for their help. These are women who have nothing to do with their time."

ASWAC's Mandy wondered aloud why Mrs. Blair feels her marriage somehow changes the situation. Assault is a crime and, in her view, drunkenness should never be a defence. "I don't see why this issue of her raising her kids alone is even coming up." But to Mrs. Blair, the children are one powerful reason why she and her husband should have been given the option of working out their own destiny if she, the injured party, wished to do so. ■

**Source:** *Alberta Report/Western Report*. (1996, February 12). 23, p. 22.

1. What evidence is presented for the case against Mr. Blair?
2. Why was he convicted, although Mrs. Blair opposed the trial?
3. Battered-wife syndrome refers to the behaviour of women in the cycle of violence. Based on the facts provided, was there a cycle of violence?
4. Evaluate the response of each of the individuals named in the article.
5. What point of view is Chris Champion expressing in this article? What perspective does this opinion reflect?

## Divorce

Divorce results from the failure of a marriage to meet the expectations of one or both marriage partners (Ahrons, 2001). The common perception is that there are more divorces now than ever before, and that people should be very worried by this. However, divorce rates have fluctuated in Western societies to reflect the current social and moral values concerning marriage and the levels of control held by religion and state. The changes in the pattern of divorce in Canada can be explained by examining the changes in divorce law and in values related to marriage.

In the early twentieth century, divorce was rare in Canada. The functionalist perspective on divorce is based on the prevailing attitude toward marriage at that time. Emile Durkheim, called the first sociologist, argued that the division



of labour along traditional gender lines is the basis of stability in marriage and of parental authority (Sev'er, 1992). In traditional marriages, the emphasis was on the economic, childrearing, and household responsibilities of marriage partners, and the happiness of husband and wife was not considered. Divorce was only granted when one partner sued the other for the “matrimonial offences” of adultery or cruelty, so being divorced resulted in social embarrassment. However, at that time many Canadians went to the United States for divorces, and there is no way of determining how many couples were living separate lives within their homes (Ahrons, 2001).

### Divorce Through the Years in Canada

Year	Number of Divorces	Rates Per 100 000 Population	Rates Per 100 000 Married Couples
1921	558	6.4	N/A
1941	2 462	21.4	N/A
1961	6 563	36.0	N/A
1968*	11 343	54.8	N/A
1969	26 093	124.2	N/A
1981	67 671	271.8	1 174.4
1985**	61 980	253.6	1 103.3
1986	78 304	298.8	1 301.6
1987***	96 200	362.3	1 585.5
1990	80 998	295.8	1 311.5
1994	78 880	269.7	1 246.3
1995	77 636	262.2	1 221.9

\* Reform of Divorce Laws

\*\* Divorce Act (“no fault”)

\*\*\* Peak year

Source: Ambert, Dr. A.M. (1998). *Divorce: facts, figures and consequences*. Toronto: York University. From The Vanier Institute of the Family web site: [www.vfamily.ca/cft/divorce/divorce.htm](http://www.vfamily.ca/cft/divorce/divorce.htm).

1. What happened to the divorce rates after the Reform of Divorce Laws in 1968?
2. What happened to the divorce rates after “no-fault” divorce was instituted by the Divorce Act of 1986?
3. Why is it more accurate to consider the rate per 100 000 married couples?
4. The highest rate of divorce occurs at five years after marriage. Does the passage of the baby-boom cohort through this peak time appear to have affected the divorce rate?
5. What other demographic factors might affect the divorce rate?



The development of romantic love as the basis for marriage and the changing economic role of women altered the criteria with which partners assessed their satisfaction with their relationship. The Divorce Act of 1968 reflected the expectation that marriage should be based on love and companionship and allowed divorce for “marriage breakdown” after a separation of three years. Subsequently, the divorce rate in Canada increased dramatically, perhaps because many who had been separated prior to 1968 rushed to divorce at this time, contributing to the large numbers of divorces. In 1986, the Divorce Act of Canada reduced the period of separation to one year and introduced “no-fault” divorce. Again, the divorce rate increased before beginning a steady decline. It is currently estimated that about one in three marriages will end in divorce. However, because those who have divorced are more likely to divorce a second or third time, most individuals have less than a one in three chance of ever divorcing (Ambert, 1998).

## legal matters | Divorce

by Justice Marvin Zuker

The Divorce Act of 1985 replaced the earlier Divorce Act that had been law since 1968 and changed both the grounds for a court of taking jurisdiction and the grounds for the recognition of foreign divorces. The 1985 Act expanded the court’s jurisdiction by requiring that only one spouse be ordinarily resident in the province for at least one year before the commencement of divorce proceedings.

The Divorce Act of Canada became law on June 1, 1986. The Act is federal in nature and applies throughout Canada. Matters of property are local, with each province or territory having its own legislation and sometimes its own approach to principle or details. A proceeding for divorce is brought to the Superior Court of Justice in Ontario or the Unified Family Court in Ontario.

There is a single ground for divorce, called “breakdown of marriage,” that must be established by showing one or more of three conditions:

1. The spouses were living separate and apart for at least one year immediately preceding the determination of the divorce proceeding and were living separate and apart at the commencement of the proceeding.
2. The other spouse has committed adultery.
3. The other spouse has been guilty of cruelty.

A separation entails the mental element of an intention to separate. The decision may be made by one spouse against the will of the other spouse. In other words, a valid separation may be created by one spouse “deserting” the other. As long as the separation persists for one year after the desertion, it qualifies to prove the breakdown of marriage ground.

The intention to live separate and apart may be made by one person (unilateral) or by both partners (mutual), but must be present in one of these forms. A mere physical absence of one spouse is not necessarily a separation. There must be a withdrawal from the matrimonial



relationship with the intent of destroying the matrimonial union. Spouses are not living separate and apart unless both conditions are met.

The separation need not be in terms of place, but may exist solely in terms of attitude toward each other. A physical separation evident to persons in the community is not required. A separation under the same roof, where it can be said that there are two households or that the spouses are living separate lives, is sufficient. The evidence that a couple under the same roof are living separate and apart must be clear and convincing, but such evidence is not impossible to produce at law.

Adultery or cruelty as evidence of a marriage breakdown goes back to the old theory of matrimonial offence. The first characteristic is that the offence must be committed by the other spouse. It is the "wronged" spouse who sues the "guilty" party. A spouse cannot petition for a divorce on the ground that his or her own adultery produced the breakdown. This means, for instance, that a spouse cohabiting with another person and wishing a divorce so that he or she can marry that person cannot use his or her obvious adultery as proof of breakdown of marriage to obtain an immediate divorce. Instead, he or she must prove the breakdown through a separation, which requires obtaining the divorce no earlier than one year from when the separation in the marriage began, or must prove the adultery or cruelty of the other spouse.

Another characteristic of the offence theory is that acts of adultery or cruelty can be wiped out as actionable offences for divorce purposes. Subject to an important exception in the statute, if the offence is condoned or forgiven (a substantial period of cohabitation after

knowledge of the offence usually implies forgiveness) or connived at (encouraged or promoted by the suing spouse), the offence is rendered inoperable and cannot be used to support a divorce proceeding. The standard of proof in a divorce case is the ordinary civil standard of establishing the allegations to meet the balance of probabilities, and not the higher criminal standard of showing proof beyond reasonable doubt. Direct evidence of adultery is rarely available. What is required is proof of opportunity and proof of facts from which it can be reasonably inferred that the opportunity was used.

Cruelty is physical or mental treatment "of such a kind as to render intolerable the continued cohabitation of the spouses." A spouse may be guilty of cruelty if, in the marriage relationship, the conduct causes wanton, malicious, or unnecessary infliction of pain or suffering upon the body, the feelings, or the emotions of the other, and is of such a kind as to render intolerable the continued cohabitation of the spouses. Only conduct that is of a "grave and weighty" nature can reach this standard. Conduct that is "trivial," or that could be characterized as little more than a demonstration of incompatibility of temperament, does not qualify. Cruelty occurring after separation is within the scope of the Divorce Act and may be relied on in support of a claim for divorce. Whether or not grave and weighty conduct amounts to cruelty in a particular case is measured against a subjective rather than an objective standard. It is not what the effect would be on any reasonably minded spouse that matters; it is the effect upon the petitioner with regard to his or her own particular temperament, sensibility, and state of health. ■



Divorce occurs for many reasons. Canadian sociologist Emily Nett (1993) identifies two categories of divorce: marriage “mistakes” and marriage “failures.” She suggests that the 17 percent of divorces that occur in the first five years of marriage reflect the basic incompatibility of couples that made the wrong choice of partner, whereas those couples who divorce later have failed to adjust their relationship through critical transitions in their marriage. A greater risk of divorce is associated with factors that could affect compatibility, such as dissimilar backgrounds, a teenage marriage, a brief courtship, or a pregnant bride. Low socio-economic status, limited education, or the presence of stepchildren can lead to more difficult adjustment problems for couples. Most divorces occur between five and fifteen years of marriage, although some couples choose to divorce much later, even in their retirement years.

The social exchange perspective suggests that when the costs of the relationship are high, or the alternatives become more attractive than the marriage, individuals may choose to divorce. Divorced people identify many “costs” as the reasons for divorce. Citing personal reasons, such as incompatibility, irresponsibility, or immaturity, suggests that a couple was unable to adjust to their married status. Other factors, such as infidelity, sexual deprivation, and cruelty, result from a deterioration of commitment to the relationship and to the partner (Sev’er, 1992; Nett, 1993). More women initiate the action for divorce, but it is possible that men act to encourage them to in order to avoid guilt (Nett, 1993). Since the consequences of divorce are complex, getting divorced is a process that most couples undertake with great difficulty.

The decision to divorce occurs in a three-phase process over a two- to three-year period. The adjustment occurs on both an emotional level, as the individuals separate from each other, and on a practical level, as they move into separate households (Peck & Manocherian, 1989).

- In the **Awareness Phase**, one individual decides to initiate a divorce, often after recognizing ongoing problems and a period of denial. The partner may eventually know what is happening but deny knowledge until confronted with a request for a divorce. During the first phase the partners begin to withdraw from the relationship by shifting their energies to other roles.
- In the **Separation Phase**, the couple plan the break-up of their marital system, settle child custody and financial issues, notify friends and family, and create separate households. At this time the two partners must accept the economic realities of divorce.

*“One of the reasons it feels so good to be engaged and newly married is the rewarding sensation that out of the whole world, you have been selected. One of the reasons that divorce feels so awful is that you have been deselected.”*

—Paul Bohannon



#### web connection

[www.mcgrawhill.ca/links/families12](http://www.mcgrawhill.ca/links/families12)

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



## point of view | After Divorce, Who Gets Custody of the Friends?

by Mary Beth Faller

In divorce, it's not only the marriage that's put asunder—often, it's the friendships, too. In some cases, long-time pals are cast into “his” and “her” alliances. Other times, a person can't handle the trauma of a friend's divorce. “Ultimately, a friend of a couple has to align with one person,” says Donna Rogg, a counsellor with Family and Children's Agency Inc. of Norwalk. “They can't maintain a level of friendship with both people. What I've seen, typically, is that they will align with the person who has been left or the one who was hurt.”

That's what happened with the friends of Bill Boccuzzi of Norwalk, Conn., who was divorced 3 1/2 years ago. “I hung on to them and she didn't,” he says of his former wife. “My friends don't hate her, but they don't respect her as much.” Sometimes, Rogg says, the friends can't decide what to do. “Frequently, they feel very torn and they disappear over time.” But even friendships between two women or two men can be shaky during a divorce, Rogg says. “Maybe the friend felt threatened by the divorce because their own relationship (with a spouse) is at risk. Or they idealized (the friend's) marriage and it fell apart.”

As searing as divorce is, the process can forge new friendships. “There's this whole new world of friends I never would have made,” says Diane, who didn't want to use her last name. Five years ago, she found new friends at a divorce support group at a church. “They were wonderful. They understand the ups and downs, the court process, the feelings of losing your self-worth, the parenting issues,” says Diane of Stamford, Conn. Rogg says that women who married young, submerged themselves in family life and later

divorced are amazed at the new friends they make as they re-enter the world of work and socializing.

Losing friends during divorce is hard. Venturing out to make new ones is hard, too. But maybe the hardest part is thinking of a former spouse as a friend. “In our culture, we don't have much permission to divorce as friends,” says Bill Ferguson, a former divorce lawyer in Houston. Ferguson runs a counselling service and Web site called [www.divorceasfriends.com](http://www.divorceasfriends.com), and has appeared on *Oprah* to discuss his work. He's also written three books on the subject. While Ferguson doesn't pretend to make bitter enemies into best buds, he says that becoming friendly with an ex is important for the welfare of any children and for the couple themselves. “When somebody carries resentment, a part of them dies inside, and they carry that in every relationship,” he says. “It destroys the quality of life.”

Easier said than done.

“I was with her since high school,” Boccuzzi says of his ex-wife. “I can talk with her. I am friends with her. But I can't trust her.” ■

**Source:** *The Toronto Star*, (2001, November 24). p. M14. Reprinted by permission of *The Stamford Advocate*.

1. What theoretical perspective does this article reflect?
2. Why does divorce cause disruptions in friendships?
3. How do recently divorced people form new relationships?
4. Research in the United States revealed that 50 percent of divorced couples eventually become co-operative, even friendly (Peck & Manocherian, 1989). Why does Bill Ferguson encourage divorced couples to become friendly with each other?



- In the **Reorganization Phase**, the two individuals establish their separate lives and negotiate their new parental roles if they have children (Peck & Manocherian, 1989; Ward, 1994).

Divorce is a non-normative event that presents individual developmental tasks similar to those experienced at a spouse's death. Individuals have to accept the loss and mourn the end of the relationship. However, the emotional adjustment is often complicated by feelings of guilt, anger, hurt, and a sense of failure. Individuals also have to redefine their identity as a single person and adjust their life structure. Finally, they have to adjust their social relationships with family, with friends, and at work, and form a new social network (Ward, 1994; Carter & Peters, 1996). The immediate emotional consequences include loneliness, sadness, and depression (Nett, 1993). Most divorced people make a satisfactory adjustment within a few years and many remarry, but the effects of the stress can last a lifetime. In the long term, divorced individuals have twice the rate of suicides, car accidents, and physical illness and six times the rate of psychological disorders compared to married people (Peck & Manocherian, 1989).

The economic consequences of divorce differ for men and women. Both will experience a reduced household income and a lower standard of living. The division of property leaves each former partner with half of what they had, but partners may also lose spousal insurance or pension benefits. The reduction in lifestyle is usually temporary for men because they have a greater earning potential, and most remarry to form a joint household again (Ward, 1994). Women, on the other hand, usually have a lower earning potential and are less likely to remarry, especially if they are older. Women who have custody of children suffer the greatest financial difficulties. The results of a study that traced the effects of divorce for 10 years found that while 10 percent of divorced people reported that their quality of life was greatly improved, 20 percent reported that it was significantly worse (Nett, 1993).

*"A divorce is like an amputation: you survive but there is less of you."*

—Margaret Atwood

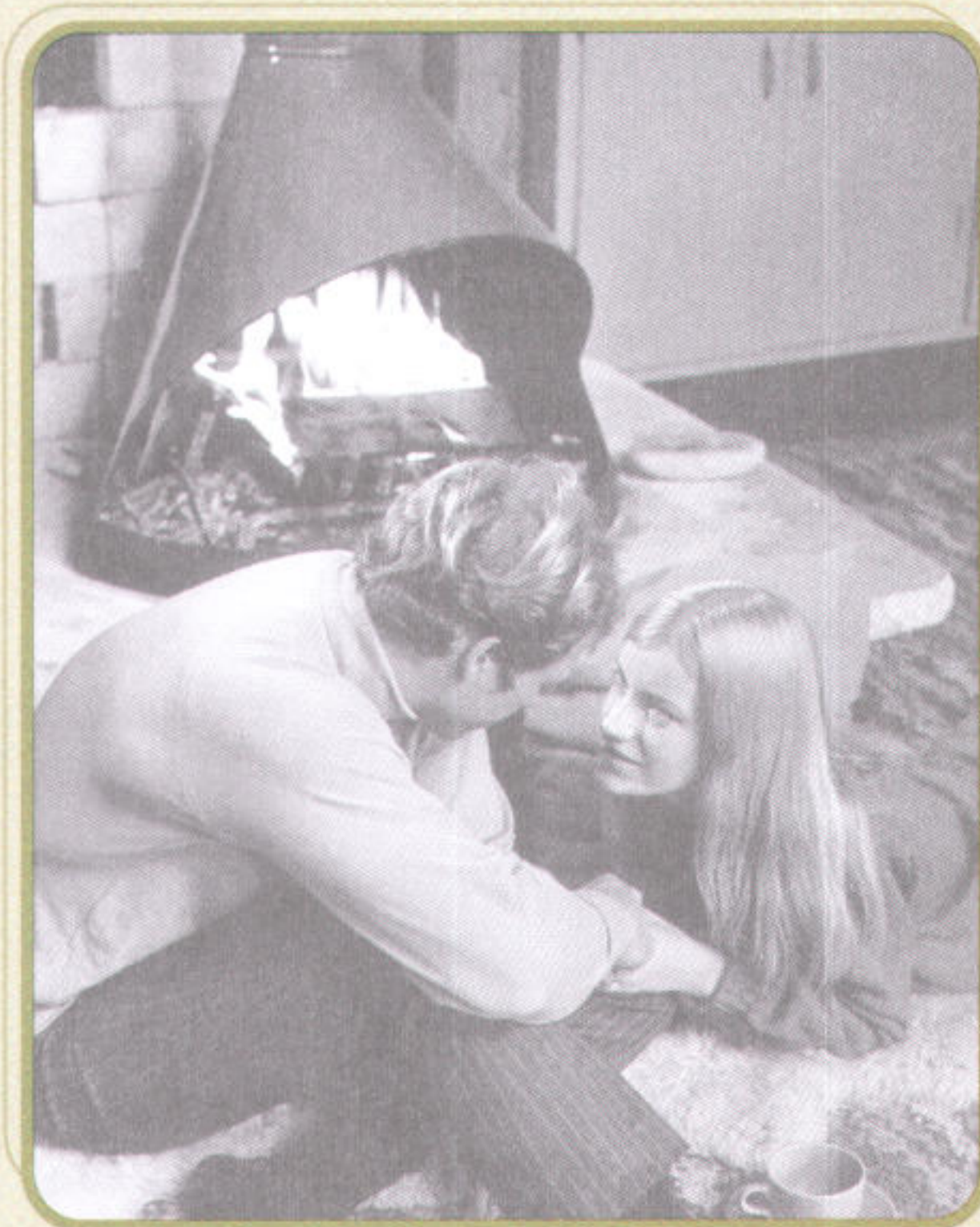


## case study | Peter and Jackie

Peter Harris was married when he was 23 to Jackie Phillips, whom he met while working as a staff member of an adolescent group home in Thunder Bay, Ontario. Peter was the middle child of an English family who had emigrated to Canada in the late 1950s and settled in a subdivision in Richmond Hill, Ontario. His parents divorced in 1965, when Peter was 14. Shortly after, his father moved in with a woman whom he had met at work and whom he eventually married. Peter's mother, Ethel, had never been happy in Canada. In fact, she only agreed to emigrate here with the hope that a new home and a new life might improve her marriage to her husband. Peter missed her presence in the family when she returned to England a few months after her separation.

Jackie had migrated to Ontario from her home in rural Alberta toward the end of her teenage years, which she acknowledged were turbulent. After Peter dropped out of first year at the University of Waterloo, he moved to Thunder Bay looking for a new start and worked at various jobs before becoming a youth worker in a group home. He liked this job very much and felt that he related to the home's residents successfully. This job provided him with a strong sense that he was "making a difference," and the group home environment provided him with a family atmosphere that he had been missing for a long time.

When Jackie was hired, Peter immediately felt strongly attracted to her. Both of them were seeking companionship and intimacy, and the fact that they were both from outside the Thunder Bay area naturally drew them together. Being a couple gave them a sense of family that neither of them had experienced for a long time. They became inseparable and within three months were married. Soon after, Peter and Jackie moved to Sudbury, where Peter began an



In 1974, Peter and Jackie were eager to marry and enjoy their lives together.

undergraduate program at Laurentian University. His positive experience of working at the group home resulted in a dream of getting a degree in social work and becoming a professional family counsellor. Peter was also motivated by his desire to have a successful marriage and to help others have happier family lives than he and Jackie had. Jackie supported Peter by working as a nurse's aide in a seniors' home, and Peter supplemented the family income by working as a taxi dispatcher on weekends.

The stress of going to school and trying to manage financially created problems in their relationship. Although the first three years of their marriage were not as happy as they had both imagined they would



be, they thought that once Peter was established as a family counsellor, things would work out. When Peter graduated from Laurentian, they moved to Brampton and rented a small apartment. Peter had been accepted at the School of Social Work at Laurier University, and Jackie began taking courses in nursing at Humber College. They chose Brampton because they wanted to settle down in southern Ontario and because it was situated between their respective schools. Also, Jackie wanted to be closer to Peter's extended family since, by then, she had completely cut herself off from her own family of origin. Commuting so far to school and working long hours at part-time jobs put an additional strain on their relationship, however, and eventually Jackie ended up in the hospital with a nervous breakdown.

From that point on, their relationship changed irreversibly. Jackie no longer seemed interested in making the marriage work and she began to spend more and more time with a girlfriend whom she met at Humber College. Peter and Jackie continued to live together in the Brampton apartment, but argued constantly, particularly about the amount of time that Jackie spent with her new friend. Eventually, Jackie revealed to Peter that she had been having an affair with her girlfriend and that she thought she was a lesbian. She left Peter and moved to Toronto to live with her girlfriend. A year later, Peter and Jackie were divorced.

It took Peter a long time to recover from his stormy relationship with Jackie and the subsequent end of his marriage. He had worked hard to make the marriage successful, and when it ended, he felt he had failed as a husband. He did complete his social work degree, however, and settled in Kitchener, where he worked for the local Children's Aid Society. He eventually had long-term common-law relationships with Lisa O'Brien and then Mary Cardinal, but was unable to make the final commitment of marriage to either of them. Today, he still lives in the Kitchener area, where he has built a successful family counselling practice. At present, he is not in a relationship. ■

1. What factors in Peter's and Jackie's family backgrounds increased the risk of divorce?
2. Why do you think Jackie married Peter?
3. In your opinion, would it have been better for Jackie to have ended her lesbian relationship and to have stayed married to Peter? Why?
4. How might Peter's relationship with Jackie have affected his subsequent relationships?
5. Examine the Harris-Vidoni family tree (see Chapter 1, page 19). Suggest reasons why Peter's history of intimate relationships with Lisa and Mary differs from that of his siblings.



# chapter 8 Review and Apply

## Knowledge/Understanding Thinking/Inquiry

- According to the research, what are the difficulties of intermarriages?
  - How do the challenges faced by couples in interfaith marriages differ from those in interracial marriages?
- Compare heterosexual and homosexual relationships using the following criteria:
  - purpose
  - attraction
  - negotiation of roles
  - conditions for satisfaction
- Based on the research on infidelity, develop a profile of someone who is likely to have an affair.
- Distinguish between violent arguments and the cycle of violence.
  - Summarize the evidence supporting the argument that women are more likely than men to be victims of the cycle of violence.
- Summarize the reasons why couples divorce and explain whether the reasons reflect a change in expectations about marriage in the twentieth century.

## Knowledge/Understanding Thinking/Inquiry Communication

- Write an essay defending your point of view on one form of intermarriage. Support your opinion with arguments reflecting at least two theoretical perspectives.
- Select a newspaper or magazine article expressing an opinion about same-sex relationships.
  - Identify the thesis and the theoretical perspective.
  - Write a response to the article from another theoretical perspective.
- Write an essay analyzing a character in a book, a television program, or a movie who has admitted to an extramarital affair. Include your moral belief about infidelity.
- Write a case study that distinguishes between couple violence and a pattern of violence in a couple relationship.



10. Write a brief article that outlines risk factors for divorce. Direct the article at unmarried adult readers of a local newspaper.

Knowledge/Understanding   Thinking/Inquiry   Communication   Application

11. a) Suggest reasons why there has been so little research on intermarriage in Canada.
- b) Write a proposal for a research study of a form of intermarriage that is common in your community. In the proposal, identify the research questions and suggest the hypotheses.
12. a) Conduct a survey of young adults to investigate how they define infidelity, whether it is acceptable, and how they think they would respond to infidelity in an intimate sexual relationship.
- b) Compare males' and females' responses and compare both to current research.
13. Explain which theory of spousal violence provides the best explanation of the evidence. Evaluate whether the laws concerning spousal violence and the social services available in your community reflect that theory.