









## Chapter 10: Dating, Love, Marriage and Sex

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## Introduction

All the topics covered in this chapter fascinate most of us. Finding and keeping love is an eternal quest. Sex too seems to interest most people. However, if you are working on a specific problem or in a particular stage, such as dating or divorce, you will find parts of the chapter more relevant to your immediate concerns. Subjects in this chapter range from meeting potential partners to being happily married forever or going through a divorce and remarrying. In addition, at the end of the chapter, sexual adjustment, sexual problems, and homosexuality are briefly discussed. This listing of topics should help you find the material you need.

No matter how successful they have been career-wise, most people would say their loves (and the resulting family) were the most important happenings in their lives. Love is fantastic. In the early

stages, you feel so euphoric and excited when love synergistically combines with sex. It is probably life's greatest emotional "high" for us romantics. Love is so universal, it must be biological. We need to be close and affectionate; we need to share our experiences and feelings; we need the security of being cared for; we enjoy caring for others; we need to be reassured that we matter; we need to be touched, stroked, and kissed; we need sincere affection and passionate sex.

To get the acceptance and love we need, we should understand love relationships. They are complex, sometimes starting with infatuation and sometimes with friendship. After several months, the relationship may evolve into secure, comfortable, warm attachment. Later, love may keep or lose its passion, may gain or lose commitment, may retain its positive intimacy, fade away, or become a hotbed of smoldering resentment. Love is also paradoxical. Like most things that give us great joy, love can also cause us great pain. Thus, we are excited but scared to ask for a date; we are crushed when a boy/girlfriend leaves us; almost 50% of marriages end in painful divorce, other marriages are "empty;" we are disappointed when passionate love turns to boredom; we are flooded with anger and an awesome sense of loss when a spouse is unfaithful; we may feel sexually inadequate even with our spouse; our greatest frustrations and resentments are often with our lover; the death of a loved one is our worst moment. We often hurt the people we love. And, although the threat of pain shouldn't stop us from loving, it does sometimes.

Considering the current emphasis on sex, sexually transmitted diseases, postponing marriage, materialism, marital problems, the divorce rate, and being successful in a career, one might suppose that "love is dead." Not true! Although only 1 in 3 high school seniors believe people are happier and have fuller lives if they marry, 9 out of 10 say marriage and family are important to them. In fact, more of us marry today than ever before in history, well over 90% of us. And, indeed, even if we marry and suffer through a divorce, 80% of us will get married again. "Hope springs eternal" in most human hearts.



Remarriage is the triumph of hope over experience.  
-Samuel Johnson



We value marriage but marriages in the U.S. are changing--thirty or forty years ago it was mom, dad, and three or four kids. Now it is often mom, step-dad, one child, and one or two kids (full-time or part-time) from a former marriage. More than half of all children live with a step or a single parent. Not only are the actors different, but the roles have changed in the last 30 years too. We have fewer children, so mom and dad's relationship with each other is more important and

more intimate. When there were eight or ten children, mom was very busy with house work and child care, and dad had to work long hours to earn the money. Marriage was for survival. If there are only one or two children, mom will probably (70% of the time and increasing) go to work outside the home. This means that mom and dad share the financial responsibilities *and* the housekeeping/child care roles. Marriages today are started for love. From there, marriages develop in many different directions, including about half heading towards anger and divorce.

Spouses are now asked to be more than "good providers" and "good homemakers," they are expected to be faithful lovers, fun companions, best friends, co-parents, and wise, understanding mutual helpers. Marriage is for intimacy, not just for economic security and not just for "a good mother to my kids." Love isn't dead; it is very alive. Love has become more complex, more challenging, and, perhaps, more valued, e.g. in the 1950's we strove to do a good job (doctor, lawyer, housewife, mother), now we seek to enjoy our jobs, friends, loves, family, and leisure time (Veroff, Douvan, & Kukla, 1981). Furthermore, today, because social and religious prohibitions against divorce are less, because we have fewer children later in life, because economic conditions are better, and because women are personally and economically more independent, we are much freer to change partners if we aren't getting what we want out of the relationship. And, we are changing partners frequently, but not without pain.

It is these kinds of complexities and decisions that this chapter focuses on: How should I find and select a partner? Is it reasonable to expect my potential partner to make major changes if I want him/her to improve? Do I really love this person? When should I make a commitment to another person? When should we have sex? How long should I wait to get married? Should I have more experience with the opposite sex before getting married? Should we get married or live together first? How good should sex be? If our sex should be better, how do we make it so? When should we have children and how many? Is my marriage working okay? What characterizes marriages that last? When should I seek marital counseling? When should I leave the marriage? What are the consequences of getting a divorce? These are life's toughest questions because there are no simple answers. Each individual's problem calls for a unique solution. Thus, simple answers are not given here, only some relevant information and possible solutions to consider.

## Meeting, Dating, and Selecting a Lover



## Learning to love

Hunt (1975) noted that humans take a long time to learn to love. It starts with the holding, stroking, kissing, and nursing of the infant, who learns what it feels like to be loved. Children 3 to 6 learn to love their parents but it is frustrating because you find out "you can't marry mommy" or "daddy." From 6 to 12, we learn more about love: we learn to make friends. But when the juices flow in adolescence, we suddenly feel intense urges for contact with the opposite sex. Our first love experiences, Hunt observed, are often in our imagination...a rock star, a movie star, a teacher. Then we feel attracted to someone real and try to hang out with him/her in small groups. Later, we want to be alone with our boy/girlfriend. These first affairs may be brief because they are based on superficial factors. Yet, through this 12-14 year process, if we are lucky, we learned a lot: to select and attract a lover, to express love, to give of ourselves, to get along, to disclose, to see beyond the surface, to attend to others' needs, to know our needs, etc. Each new love, ideally (but not always), is deeper and more realistic. We usually have from 2 or 3 to 10 "loves" before we marry. All this learning--this "education in love"--is important; however, much more learning is apparently needed since almost half of our marriages still fail (the divorce rate of persons married as teenagers is still higher). Love is serious business; we need to know a lot.

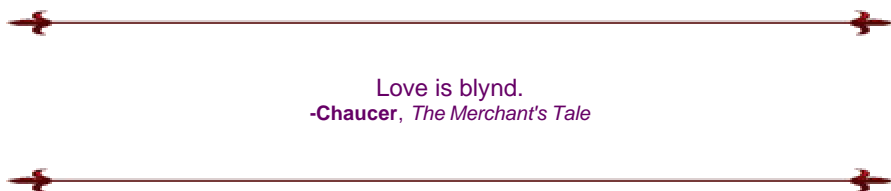
## Looking for an intimate partner: What turns us on?

Surely for most of us it is more accurate to say we were "mysteriously attracted to" or "stumbled into" rather than "carefully searched for" our love partner. Seeking a mate is not consciously planned; we are driven by our feelings. We don't take a check list of desirable traits in hand as we systematically search the world for our ideal mate. Perhaps we *should* do this, but we don't. How do we find love? An anthropologist, David Givens (1983), has written an entire book about how we attract and are attracted by potential lovers. Sternberg and Barnes (1988) say physical "chemistry" is predictable *if* we can see the underlying needs, such as needing to find someone who is strong and dominant... or someone attractive and seductive... or someone who seeks protection within a close family, etc. In other words, our radar is scanning for specific characteristics, but we are not likely to be aware of everything our emotions and instincts are looking for.

Once we have located an attractive target, Givens says love signals are "prewired" into the primitive parts of our brain. Guinea pigs with their cortex removed can still send and receive "love signals," mate, and care for the young. Facial expressions (a smile), postures (looking down), gestures (a touch and gazing into the eyes), and having sexual intercourse usually communicate love better than words. Thus, we woo a partner intuitively or impulsively (and then spend months wondering how it all happened). You don't need a course in seduction; it's innate, according to Givens; yet, he gives us a 235-page, charming description of the process. However, it would be foolish to assume

instincts are fully in charge and discount the role of learned social skills, consciously planned strategies, and various coping techniques in establishing a love relationship. Yet, instincts are important (and to some extent knowable and controllable).

So, if we are attracted to another person *and* we want a relationship *and* it seems wise, then we can just "let ourselves go" and enjoy the fantastic thrill of "falling in love." However, there is one BIG PROBLEM: love often starts before we know the person well. Even when there are no initial "danger signals," we have no assurance that we will only be attracted to personalities with whom we are compatible. The person's body and manner may turn us on but parts of his/her mind, habits, attitudes, or values, which we may not know for weeks or months, could repulse us. Moreover, the lover may be (or seem) charming for a while and then turn nasty. This lack of predictability is scary. Lovers have no guarantees; you risk getting hurt or, at least, wasting your time. But dwelling on and exaggerating the possibilities of pain and problems in a relationship are deterrents to love. The opposite is more common: feeling love and denying potential problems. No one gets married expecting to divorce. We need to understand *both* the reasons for our attraction to others and our blindness to potential disasters. Selection of a life-long partner is the hardest and most important decision we will ever make. It requires careful, rational thought, as well as instincts and "chemistry." Let's see if we can understand love better.



### Meeting someone

To fall in love you have to see or meet someone attractive to you. Someone has to be "available." Being single was a special problem among young adults 50 years ago; the single person was "the odd man out." Today there are four times as many singles, 1 in 5 Americans are single. It is no longer a stigma. But, in certain situations, it is still hard to find a partner. You may be shy (Wassmer, 1990). Your life style may be such that you don't meet many potential partners. You may need to change your social habits, e.g. go to church, classes, clubs, political or volunteer activities, bars, etc. to meet more or different people. Friends and family will offer introductions if asked. Most newspapers have personal ads. Because there are so many singles with specific interests, the modern specialized dating clubs and services have mushroomed. For instance, there are singles' clubs to serve various kinds of professionals, music lovers, book lovers, vegetarians, overweight persons, divorced

Catholics, older women interested in younger men, etc. If you can't find the right club for you, start your own by advertising in the paper. There are even travel services that will match up singles. Don't think you are helpless, reach out. Today, one of the common ways to reach out is on the Internet. There are discussion groups, forums, chat groups and a variety of other ways to meet someone. Joe Schwartz, author of "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Online Dating and Relating," has provided, at least temporarily, a long list of online places, means, and discussions of meeting people online. See [Complete Idiot's List of Web Sites \( http://www.size-eight.com/book/online\\_dating\\_and\\_relating\\_boo.html\)](http://www.size-eight.com/book/online_dating_and_relating_boo.html) . One of the more thorough recent sites uses a 250-item, research-based questionnaire to pair up couples: [eharmony.com \( http://www.eharmony.com/core/eharmony?cmd=home\)](http://www.eharmony.com/core/eharmony?cmd=home) . There is another serious problem, namely, the surplus of women. Because the death rate of males is higher at all ages, after age 23 there are more women than men, a total of 7 million more marriageable women than men (Brothers, 1984). The U.S. Census shows 99 single males for every 100 15-24-year-old single females, 89 single males for 100 single women 25-34, and 67 males for 100 women 35-45. If a woman is divorced in her 20's, there is a 75% chance she will remarry; if divorced in her 30's, 50% chance; if in her 40's, 30% chance. Statisticians say a woman who has remained single for 40 years is unlikely to get married. As a self-help advisor, I'd never say that, but the competition gets keen for women.



For every love there is a heart somewhere to receive it.... But when my love meets no heart it can only break.  
-Ivan Panin



### What kind of partner do you want?

In the 1990's, 90% of college students would not consider marriage if they were not "in love." In the 1960's, however, 33% of college men and 75% of college women would have considered marrying someone they didn't love. Why the radical change? Probably because college women have become much more secure and independent, more confident they can find love with someone. That's wonderful! I wonder if it will produce better marriages?

What specific characteristics do we tend to look for (consciously) in a mate? Both men and women agree that mutual attraction, dependable character, and emotional stability are *the most important traits*. However, men and women disagree about the importance of certain other characteristics, e.g. men value good looks more than women and women value good financial future and ambitiousness



more than men (Allgeier & Wiederman, 1991). Science doesn't yet know why the sexes--almost universally--have these particular preferences. Why should men want attractive women more than women want attractive men? Is it because men are more sexually obsessed than women? Is the valuing of attractive women and successful men simply an arbitrary, readily changeable cultural definition of what is "good?" Could there be evolutionary-sociobiological forces at work, reflecting the fact that men could spread more of *their* genes (produced by the millions every day) by mating with many healthy (pretty) women and women could propagate *their* very limited genes best by attracting a strong, devoted, capable mate? Regardless of the source, today, whether we like it or not, looking good is a major asset for women and having a promising future increases a man's appeal. See discussion of gender roles in chapter 9.

Looks have always been valued, but in recent decades, physical attractiveness of the partner has become even more important to both sexes. Men may admit their interest more openly, however. Men talk about being "leg men," "breast men," etc. and some women admit to being interested in "nice buns," "hairy legs," "broad shoulders," etc. No doubt body build influences who we seek out as well as how we feel about our own attractiveness. About 28% of single males consider themselves attractive; they are among the more socially active and assertive. Only about 13% of single females consider themselves to be pretty (Harper's, 1985). Interestingly, good looking women are happy with their social lives, but they tend to be less socially skilled and less assertive than other women (perhaps because very attractive people are sometimes resented and rejected by their own sex). Nevertheless, other people generally expect beautiful people to be poised, sociable, strong, interesting, happy and successful, thus, scaring off the insecure. In reality, many attractive people are shy and insecure themselves. Also, research shows that good looks in one's youth has little to do with middle-aged happiness or marital satisfaction (Brehm, 1985).

We are also likely to pursue a potential lover who is similar to us, i.e. likes attract. This includes family background, education, age, religion, personality (dominance, nurturance, mood), attitudes (opinions, beliefs), and physical attractiveness. Sharon Brehm suggests that we think Mr. or Ms. Right is just like us, only just a little better! Some writers (Brothers, 1984) believe that we should seek a mate who is, in some ways, our psychological opposite, e.g. if we are tense and shy, we should select a secure and outgoing partner; if we are a big spender, select a saver; if impulsive, select a careful, logical, controlled partner and so on. Certainly one partner can sometimes compensate for the other's weaknesses or extremes but it surely isn't always best to select our psychological opposite. Two highly controlling people wouldn't relate well. We need to be similar on some traits and different on others, but we don't yet know what mix is best. Eva Klohnen, at the University of Iowa, is researching the possibility that we are attracted to people with characteristics we like in ourselves and

to people who do not have the characteristics we dislike in ourselves. Finding a wonderful, permanent partner is complex.

If we think we might not be able to get and keep our Mr. or Ms. Right, our desire increases. Thus, when parents prohibit us from dating someone or when our lover moves away or when we fear we won't get a date or when the person we are interested in plays "hard-to-get," our longing for the lover grows. Yet, there must be some indication that he/she likes us; otherwise, we are likely to conclude that he/she is "stuck up." We like people who like us but we are leery of a person who will "go out with anyone." We are flattered if we are "the chosen one." Yet, some women hesitate to ask men out for fear of being considered "sexually loose." Interestingly, research has shown that women, who are judged to be intelligent by men, are not considered "sexually aggressive" even though the women take the initiative in asking for a date (Meer, 1985). So, ladies don't "play dumb." Also, men often don't pick up on hints that women are available. So, *explicitly* invite him to do something with you. Naturally, he may "make a move" to see if you are "loose." You can say "no" whenever you want.

### Approaching someone but guarding against infatuation and lust

How does all this research help us find a partner? First, we have to contact others before attraction can occur. Obviously, where we look has a bearing on who we meet. There are more potential alcoholics and philanderers in a bar than in a church, probably. There are more intelligent people in a classroom than at the race track, hopefully. Secondly, knowing how to approach someone and how to converse is an important skill that can be learned and practiced (see chapter 13). Thirdly, 55% of women and 63% of men believe in love at first sight (Harper's, 1985). As we will discuss shortly, infatuation certainly happens but *instant love is not a dependable sign of enduring love*. Many people will also tell you that the "body chemistry has to be right." But, in fact, this strong, instant physical-emotional attraction sucks us into both good and bad relationships. The body chemistry on the first or second date is no reliable indication of what the body chemistry will be like in the second or twenty-second year. The selection of a life-long partner must be based on more than initial physical-emotional attraction. Indeed, so long as breasts and pimples are more influential than brains and principles, we are in deep trouble. So, I will try to give you some information that will help you evaluate your own selection-of-a-partner process and help you disengage if there are signs of trouble.

## The Nature of Attraction and Love



## **Do we use our heart, our genitals, or our brains in mate selection? We idolize romantic love.**

Clearly we humans have some major problems selecting a mate (see Dreyfus, 1994). For one thing, in America since about 1800 (before that many marriages were arranged) *romantic love* has been idolized more and more. We expect to "fall in love:" our hearts should instantly throb, our thoughts constantly dwell on the lover, and our sexual organs continuously moisten. Many of us hunger for this kind of intense, consuming love, even if it isn't our nature to be wildly romantic. We believe that some magical day *it* will happen: we'll "meet and instantly recognize the right person" and "live happily ever after" until "death do us part!" How do these notions from movies and novels fit with reality? Poorly! It takes weeks or months, maybe years, to get to know another person and to find out how the two of you will get along. We can hardly do both--be madly in love *and* objectively assess our future with the partner--at the same time. So, this is another paradox. Is there a solution? Maybe not.

Few of us would want a marriage arranged by relatives, a dating service, or a computer, although these approaches are worth researching. Perhaps, in some situations, some of us can be cautious, rational, and able to avoid getting prematurely infatuated. But half of us or more are "head-over-heals" before we know much about the person; our heart (and/or genitals) has overwhelmed our brain. Tragically, this highly romantic person often lacks the will or self-confidence to withdraw from the relationship if problems appear. In this case, this wonderful phenomenon called love (maybe mixed with fear, shame, and dependency) has lead us into serious trouble. This is the basis for the often repeated advice to lovers: "date for a while," "get to know each other," "don't jump into anything," "live together for a while," etc.

## **Romantic and companionate love (Exchange Theory)**

Another important point: the belief that intense romance is necessary for a marriage causes many people to overlook or discount the romantic possibilities with good friends for whom they do not have a wild sexual craving. With a close friend, you know you have common interests and similar views, you trust and understand each other, you care about and like each other. These are good characteristics for a lover too. The sexual attraction may have been suppressed (or isn't there), much like with a brother or sister, in order to preserve the friendship. It is possible that a good friend is an excellent choice for a lover. In 75-80% of good marriages the spouse is the best friend. But it is also possible that a friend is a bad choice, primarily because getting romantic and sexual with a good friend could end a valued friendship. So, do not try to convert a friend into a lover without careful consideration: Are both of you interested? Explore why you

have been just friends--there may be good, continuing reasons for remaining just good friends. Explore the reasons for considering romanticizing the friendship now--is one of you temporarily feeling lonely or rejected or vulnerable or low in self-esteem? Don't act rashly. If you decide to try becoming more romantic, go slow to protect the friendship (this is hard to do if one person becomes deeply involved and is rejected).

Mate selection is a difficult task for many reasons: each person may pretend to be something he/she isn't, each may honestly describe him/herself but change later on, each may change his/her mind about what he/she wants and on and on. Let's consider the selection process further. It might seem, from what has been said thus far, that being a slow starter (a friend long before becoming a romantic lover) would be an advantage. The friends could objectively get to know each other. That sounds reasonable but recent research has suggested that persons who have stronger needs for emotional intimacy and who have already been in love (with someone else) are more likely to be warm, caring, sincere, appreciative, loving, and happy (McAdams & Vaillant, 1982). Perhaps such people would fall in love rather quickly and become very desirable partners.

Conventional wisdom has it, however, that marriages based on romantic "love at first sight" don't last, but there is no clear data for or against this dire prediction. There are many couples who fell in love instantly and it lasted forever. On the other hand, most of us have known immature people who impulsively become infatuated, getting into trouble repeatedly. (And we all know the opposite: wonderful people who avoid fast intimacy.) In short, the advantages and disadvantages of quickly getting emotionally involved are complex and not yet well researched. Perhaps, the pros and cons of instant infatuation doesn't matter much because you may not be able to change that basic part of your personality anyway. (You can learn to rationally control it to some extent, however.)

Regardless of whether we get into love quickly or slowly, once we are intensely involved with the other person, from that point on, while we may continue to experience ups and downs in this relationship, the issue becomes condensed into a simple question of staying or leaving: Will I stick with this person (and make the best of it) or leave and lose him/her forever? Thus, we often stay with a person even though we are unhappy and fear there will be serious problems. We have limited experience with other partners and, thus, can not be assured of a better option. We become stifled by our own indecision and dependency or fears or possessiveness. Love is powerful, especially when threatened; it isn't something we can turn on and off (while we try out another relationship). Maybe some of us can't make objective decisions while in love, but I don't believe that is entirely true. We can't eliminate all the craziness of love, but we can learn to be much more realistic by recognizing our denial and our needs (and by listening to others' opinions).

Sternberg and Barnes (1988) illustrate some mis conceptions common among persons looking for a mate: "We've lived together--so, no problems," "Other couples have different religions, it won't be an issue with us," "We both come from close families, so we'll get along well," "He/she really enjoys sex, so it will be great," "I'll build his/her self-esteem by always praising him/her," "If we love each other that's all that matters," "I wish he/she loved me more, but that is the way men/women are," "I'm sure he/she will stop drinking/smoking/gambling/loafing/driving dangerously...after we are married," etc., etc. The human capacity to deny and self-deceive is truly amazing. Be on guard.

We need to use our brain a lot more (without taking our heart or genitals out of the loop); we need to know a lot more about love, the different kinds of love, what kind of lovers we are, and many other things.

### Exchange theory

Some theorists see the selection and staying with a partner as a kind of trade-off or exchange based on (1) rewards received, (2) sacrifices made, and (3) a belief that the benefits from this relationship are better than each partner has been accustomed to or could get from another partner (Huston & Cate, 1979). What are the goods in this trade? Things like physical attractiveness, a nice personality, wealth or a good income, social status (e.g. a cheerleader or a "star" player), being fun to be with, a sexy build, a sense of humor, and many other traits. In general, we display our good points for which we try to get as much in return as possible. Thus, we may try to get as good looking a partner as we can, based on our looks plus our money, personality, or loyalty. It is common to see wealthy men with beautiful women. It is a trade-off. No doubt this kind of bargaining occurs at first, but if the love matures, one focuses more on giving (and enjoying doing so) than on receiving. Also, people in good relationships find things to do together that both enjoy, that reward both.

Being aware of the exchange theory may help you avoid some pitfalls. First, you can realize that thinking in these terms may encourage phoniness. You may try to impress someone but being deceptive is likely, in the long run, to hurt the relationship and may hurt your own self-esteem (Maier, p. 202, 1984). If the other person is deceptive, you can be hurt. The classic example is when the male professes to love the female as a means of getting sex. The woman later realizes the truth and feels used. Second, as we just discussed, some people, called romantics, are strongly dominated by a strong love response, but there are others, called non-romantics, who are not. Romantics go with their feelings; they don't even think of leaving the person they love. Certain types of non-romantics may not feel strong love; they may simply value economic, appearance, or social factors more than love, so if a better looking or higher status person comes along, they leave the relationship. Such "bargain-hunting" non-

romantics mystify romantics and scare the hell out of them. In truth, romantics probably can't avoid occasionally getting hurt, partly because they forget that they could find another wonderful lover (or be happy alone or with friends). Romantics can learn to fully enjoy the gush of thrilling and happy emotions, while accepting reality and the risk of being dumped sometimes.

Romantics may need to seek other kinds of lovers. They could try a different approach and seek good, lasting friendships with women/men that do not trigger their infatuation reflex. As discussed above, good friends can become good lovers. Unfortunately, it is not possible to instantly recognize what type of lover another person is, but by knowing that several types exist (see below) we should become a better judge of people. We can surely learn to select our lovers more wisely. See Sills (1987), Coleman (1972) and Cowan and Kinder (1985).



If I... have not love, I am nothing... I gain nothing. Love is patient and kind, not jealous or boastful or arrogant or rude or resentful. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

-1 Corinthians 13



## Love and infatuation; Love and dependency

According to Tennov (1978), infatuation is *unfulfilled* desire, i.e. your infatuation fades away if the person unconditionally and fully returns your love. This theory says it is the hard-to-get person that really turns you on. If they spurn you completely, however, you are crushed. It's a delicate situation. In addition, there are other problems with being "head-over-heels" in love. First, the infatuated person exaggerates the loved one's good traits and ignores the bad ones. It seems as though this is the only person who could satisfy his/her needs. One is infatuated with a fantasy, not the real person. Second, infatuation involves many of the same sensations and experiences as love--preoccupation with the loved one, strong attraction, an aching heart, butterflies in the stomach, restless sleep, etc. Not surprisingly, infatuation is likely to be interpreted as "true love" by inexperienced persons even though they do not know much about the lover and their needs are not being met. It is important to mentally realize (contrary to what you *feel*) that being infatuated with someone tells you very little about your compatibility with that person. How can one tell if it is true love or infatuation? There is no sure method. Tennov suggests it takes time and honest sharing of feelings in a variety of situations to know love. Eventually, you discover that besides yearning to touch

them, you genuinely like, enjoy, and respect each other as friends (if it is love and not infatuation).

Peele and Brodsky (1976) liken love to an addiction. If you feel someone is necessary to make your life bearable, you are addicted to that person. As they say, "The ever-present danger of withdrawal creates an ever-present craving." Certainly the thought of losing our loved one would traumatize many of us. What is the difference between healthy love and addictive love? Consider your answers to these questions: Is each person his/her own person, i.e. equal and independent? Are both improved by the relationship? Is one dedicated to serving, improving, or "saving" the other? Do both have outside interests, including other friendships? Do they foster or resent the other's growth? Are the lovers also good friends? Refer to the discussion of codependency in chapter 8. And, see Bireda (1992) and Forward & Buck (1990) for advice about obsessive love.



As there are as many minds as there are heads, so there are as many kinds of love as there are hearts.  
-Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*



## Beliefs and myths about love

There is limited research and very little truly usable knowledge about love. However, there are many beliefs--often contradictory or paradoxical--about love. Examples:

- Love grows after marriage--or--Love leaves after the marriage ceremony.
- People in love are crazy--or--A wise person marries for love.
- You know within minutes or hours if you can love a person--or--Love may develop after you have known each other for months or years.
- Love solves most of life's problems; it's the way to find happiness--or--You can't live with a man/women and you can't live without them.
- Love is nature's trick to insure the species--or--Love and sex are two different things.
- Love is the only thing needed for a good marriage; love conquers all--or--Constant work and many coping skills are needed to maintain a marriage.
- Love is blind; it is an addiction--or--Marriages are made in heaven.
- People in love shouldn't have sex until they are married--or--Sex is the most intense and noble expression of love.

- Love blots out all other interest in other people--or--You can love two people at the same time.
- Love is just between a man and a woman--or--Love between two women or two men is exactly the same as between straights.

Sometimes both of these different statements are true. Often both of the "beliefs" are questionable. Yet, they may play a role in our thinking about love. Skepticism about any "saying" is usually healthy; we know very little for sure about love. Borchardt (1996) tries to help us be rational about love.

I will briefly review for you a sampling of the additional research available. Some of the findings may be of little more value than the contradictory "wise sayings" above, but what other knowledge is available? There are interesting classifications for types of lovers (Goldstine, et al., 1977) and for types of loves (Fromm, 1956; Lasswell & Lobsenz, 1980; Brehm, 1985). Being aware of these types may help you recognize some aspects of your own love relationships.

## **Kinds of lovers**

There are many kinds of lovers. Love is expressed and felt in many ways. Falling in love can be frightening, as we become vulnerable. It can also be ego-boosting, reassuring (that we are OK), and fun. So, courtship becomes a complex combination of approaches and avoidances, of come ons and defenses. The specific ways we protect ourselves often determines what kind of lover we are. A prime example is the dance-away lover (Goldstine, et al., 1977) who is an expert at wooing but fears permanence so he/she fades away after a few months. This lover, although initially successful, assumes the relationship will fail and he/she will be rejected in due time.

The anxious ingenue or beginner is also so insecure he/she rushes into romances without honestly evaluating the partner. Later, when the relationship settles down, he/she begins to see the mistakes he/she has made. The disarmer is warm and understanding, he/she tries to protect the lover from all stress and pain, often denying his/her own rights and emotional needs in order to please the lover. This self-sacrifice may get tiresome in time. The provider is more action than words, more tactile than verbal. Because of underlying insecurity, he/she takes care of the loved one, provides well, and thinks this is the way to show love. When the partner says, "you never tell me you love me," he/she is taken aback. The prize winner seems to do everything right. He/she is "the best," doing well at work, a great lover, and a good parent. However, the self-confidence and emotional security may gradually change into a callousness towards the spouse.



The fragile lover is so scared of life's problems he/she feels helpless and seeks a partner whom he/she can depend on, who will protect him/her. Since the fragile one feels unworthy of attention with minor concerns, he/she develops big problems and "falls apart" repeatedly for attention. Such helpless dependency creates serious problems in the relationship (chapters 6 & 8). Like the fragile lover, the victim suffers much trouble but the purpose is to arouse guilt in the partner. Each problem is a statement blaming someone, e.g. "I'm unhappy because you don't care." Few partners will tolerate that for long.

The pleaser is different--he/she lives to please others and asks for nothing in return (seemingly). This may originate in a fear of failure or in needs to be a martyr. Eventually the pleaser may get tired of being taken for granted and try to change the "rules of the game." The ragabash is a rebel and wants to be different, different from his/her parents and ordinary people. He/she doesn't like to lose or win; he/she frequently runs away from trouble and does poorly at work. In relationships, which are often plagued with financial problems, he/she avoids dealing with problems and may seek another partner.

The tough-fragile appears strong, assertive, confident, and adventuresome on the outside. Inside he/she is self-doubting and needs an even stronger partner for support (but this capable partner threatens his/her self-esteem). Such a person is hard to live with; they act like they need no one; if support is given, it is resented. The tough-fragile inexplicably shifts from being a warm, delightful companion to being an angry, demanding, critical, competitive, and temperamental partner. Therefore, the tough-fragile's lover may "walk on eggs" and anxiously try to please, but this weak knuckling under only results in disdain and hostility. There is no way to win with a tough-fragile unless he/she learns to recognize his/her own internal fears and controls the anger.



Every man carries in himself the germs of every human quality and sometimes one manifests itself, sometimes another, and the man becomes unlike himself while still remaining the same man.

-Tolstoy



From the above descriptions it is obvious that most of these lovers change as the romance develops. Also, these descriptions are very "clinical," many of these lovers are surely destined for Goldstine's and Zucherman's couch. It would be a mistake to assume that all of us as lovers have such serious problems, but it would be wise to look for some of these tendencies in each of us. Each lover has his/her "favorite" emotion--anger, helplessness, blame, etc.--and emotions

he/she carefully avoids. Each of us might be better off if we controlled certain emotions, usually our dominant feeling, and expressed other emotions more, usually feelings we avoid.

Which lovers get along best? The provider-disarmer combination may have the best chance of surviving in a marriage but that is the traditional marriage. More progressive families are often pleaser-tough-fragile combinations. To last, this type of couple has to learn how to handle the underlying emotions, e.g. realize "someday the pleaser expects to cash in on all the points he has earned" and "the tough-fragile isn't as mad as she is insecure." Goldstine, et al., believe a successful marriage is the result of awareness and hard work, not chemistry.

A simpler classification system is: (1) Secure lover--comfortable, trusting, doesn't worry about being hurt, (2) Anxious lover--wants closeness but others seem to hold back, "I'm afraid I'll care more for them than they care for me," (3) Avoidant lover--"I don't need a lot of closeness," "I'm independent and don't want to depend on others or have them depending on me." Which one best describes you? It is thought that your style of loving depends on your very early relationships with your opposite sexed parent. A warm, attentive parent produces a secure lover; an aloof, rejecting parent leads to avoidance; an ambivalent (hot and cold) parent makes us anxious. Almost 50% of us are secure and we make the best mates. Avoidant lovers select anxious lovers, and, actually, an avoidant man and an anxious women often have a stable relationship. One value of this classification is that it reminds you that relationship problems have a history. Another value is that some of these traits of lovers are related to marital satisfaction 2 or 3 years later. Examples: disengaged (quiet) persons have rocky marriages but lovers who are expressively outspoken about conflicts while dating have the more satisfying marriages.

## Types of love; dimensions of love

There are many answers to the question, "What is love?" In the Bible, Paul speaks of a love of God and all humanity. Sometimes love is seen as selfless giving, sometimes as selfish clinging and self-centeredness. Some love is conditional, as in Fromm's (1974) "father's love" where it is said, "I'll love you ~~if~~ you don't talk back...stay a virgin...accept my values." Other love is unconditional (Fromm's "mother's love") where "I will love you regardless of what you do because you are my son... daughter... father... brother... friend."

Loving ourselves is sometimes seen as an impossible barrier to loving others, others see it as a necessary step towards being able to love others, as in the popular saying, "You have to love yourself before you can love others." Clearly both excessive self-love and self-scorn can kill romance. General self-tolerance probably facilitates the

acceptance of a lover's foibles. Human love relations involve very complex dynamics. In this section, we will review several kinds of love, some of which have been mentioned already (romantic, companionate, and bargain-hunting non-romantics). Different kinds of lovers mean different things when they say, "I love you." We all would like to think we know the real thing, real love, but do we? We assume everyone loves the way we do. That's not true. Also, we usually give love in the way we want to be loved, not in the way the lover wants to be loved. What kind of lover are you? What kind of love do you want from your lover? What does your partner want?



There isn't any formula for loving. You learn to love... by paying attention and doing what one thereby discovers has to be done.  
-Aldous Huxley



A Canadian sociologist, John Lee, has described six kinds of lovers. Two California sociologists, Thomas Lasswell and Terry Hatkoff, have developed a Love Scale to measure several of these types (Lasswell & Lobsenz, 1980):

- **Romantic love** --this lover thinks constantly about the loved one, is jealous, unrealistic, will tolerate anything, is sexually attracted by physical appearance, needs repeated reassurance he/she is loved in return. Typically lasts a few months or a few years (some anthropologists say it lasts 4 years, i.e. until the baby is through nursing and can walk and run. Then the love bond releases the more powerful males to find another female to impregnate with his genes.)
- **Best friend or companionate love** --this lover enjoys the companionship and intimacy of a close friendship. It is a comfortable, slowly developing, trusting, committed relationship, not intense excitement, desperation, or sexual obsessions.
- **Unselfish love** --the lover is devoted and self-sacrificing to the loved one, gives without expecting anything in return, is gentle, caring, and dutiful.
- **Logical love** --the lover carefully selects the "right person" logically, looking for someone with compatible interests, similar education and religion, a harmonious personality, common values, and long-term goals.
- **Game-playing love** --this person may be charming but is hardly a lover; he/she merely enjoys the dating game. He/she relishes the meeting, the impressing, the seducing, the challenge of a conquest but usually makes it clear there is little or no long-term commitment to the other person.

There are other kinds of loves and lovers, of course, like the one who searches for a physical ideal--a great body or some specific bodily feature--or the one who is so possessive he/she wants to control the other person and gets physically sick or depressed or does foolish things when the relationship seems threatened.

Perhaps you can easily tell which type of lover you are. If not, take the test (Lasswell & Lobsenz, 1980). You might also realize what kind of love you want to receive. You are probably wondering what kinds of love make the *best combinations*. According to Lasswell and Lobsenz, best friend partnerships work well, so do two logical lovers or a best friend-logical combination. What are likely to be *mismatches*? A romantic and a best friend (or a logical) lover may have problems because they certainly do not show love in the same ways. One wants to be wooed with candlelight dinners and passionate love-making; the other wants to have a quiet evening at home reading and planning a trip or a new house. Even a romantic lover may not please another romantic; indeed, romantic lovers will be unhappy if they do not find new ways to show love after three or four years when the thrills and sexual throbs have subsided (Lasswell & Lobsenz, p. 144, 1980). Likewise, the combination of a possessive and a best friend will be a clash of styles--one stormy and one easy going. If the possessive is gone for a while, she/he will be bothered that the best friend didn't miss her/him more, "If you loved me, you would have missed me a lot!" As one would expect, game players and possessive lovers are hard for anyone to love. Many lovers don't clarify what they need; they expect the lover to read their minds. They hesitate to say, "You can do this \_\_\_\_\_ to make me feel loved" and eventually end up saying, "When you do this \_\_\_\_\_ I know you don't love me."



Women give sex to get love; men give love to get sex.

People who are sensible about love may be incapable of it.



### Three dimensions of love

Robert Sternberg (Bennett, 1985) at Yale has a theory that there are three components to love: (1) Intimacy = baring souls, sharing, liking, and bonding (a slowly developing *emotional-interpersonal involvement*, as in a friendship). (2) Passion = *sexual attraction* (an instant or quickly developing motivation or addiction which usually declines over the years to a stable level). (3) Commitment = stable, dependable *devotion* (a slowly developing cognitive decision to stick by the other person in bad times, as in a marriage). Different mixtures of these three parts determine what kind of love it is, e.g.:

Type of Love	Intimacy	Passion	Commitment
Casual friendships/non-love	no	no	no
Liking--very good friends	yes	no	no
Infatuation	no	yes	no (only temporary)
Empty "love"	no	no	yes
Romantic love	yes	yes	no (only temporary)
Companionate love	yes	no	yes
Fatuous love/whirlwind courtships	no	yes	yes
Consummate love	yes	yes	yes

Notice that "romantic love" involves talking, sharing, and closeness (intimacy) and touching, kissing, etc. (passion) but not an agreement to stay with the other person if the friendship and passion decline sharply (commitment). Likewise, "companionate love" lacks passion and fatuous love lacks deep personal enjoyment of each other as people. There is nothing missing in consummate love, so wouldn't everyone want to have and get that kind of love? It is most peoples' ideal, but it is hard to achieve. Fortunately, love doesn't have to be that intense all the time.

A good-to-acceptable arrangement, according to Sternberg, is when both partners want, receive, and give the same amounts of the three ingredients, i.e. they both have the same kind of love in about the same intensity. However, as the partners' three dimensions of love differ more and more from each other, especially in terms of total investment, the quality of the love relationship deteriorates. For example, within limits, partner A can be primarily interested in sex (passion) while partner B is more interested in love (intimacy), providing both A and B are devoted to each other. But there are three threats to the relationship: if A loses sexual interest or B falls out of love or if either decides to "look around" for the ingredient they aren't getting. The less we get of what we want, the more unhappy we become.



Success in marriage is much more than finding the right person; it is a matter of being the right person.



Sternberg says divorces occur not because we make mistakes and chose the wrong partner but because the partners' needs change over time. That is, many people who get divorced may have made a very

understandable choice *at the time*. They just didn't accurately estimate the future changes in their loves and in their needs for love. He found the qualities that often increase in importance as a relationship matures are: sharing values and religious beliefs, willingness to change to accommodate the partner, and tolerance of the other's faults. Qualities of lessening importance over time are: interesting personality, attentiveness, and relationship with in-laws. Qualities of varying importance over time are: sexual attractiveness, skills at making love, ability to empathize, willingness to express feelings, and similar intelligence. The problem is to predict what qualities will be most important in your relationship in the distant future and how you and your partner will measure up on those traits. This is a very difficult task. But thinking in terms of these three dimensions may help you assess where you are now and what your relationship will be like in the future.

Brehm (1985) believes there are basically only two types of lovers—romantic (passionate) and best friend (companionate). Most love relationships, she thinks, are a mixture of both types. Romantic love is intense, sexual, and frantic (e.g. strong efforts to win and hold on to the affection). In contrast, companionate love is calmer, involves more relaxed love making and is based on respect, trust, and security as friends. Romantic love is what is measured on Rubin's (1973) Loving Scale and best friend love is measured on his Liking Scale. Using these two scales and measures of romanticism, it has been possible to study the differences between males and females.

## **Do men and women love differently?**

Brehm (1985) has a good summary of the research. On Rubin's (1973) Liking Scale, females tend to like their partners better than males do. Moreover, women fall in love more often, report more intense feelings (feeling euphoric and wanting to scream), are ready to marry earlier, love more often when it isn't returned, think love is more rewarding, and idealize the partner more than males do. In spite of the fact that women have more loves and more intense romantic experiences (their perceptions and behaviors are more affected by their affection), males score higher on the Romanticism Scales than females and they fall in love earlier in a relationship. Almost 25% of males are "in love" before the fourth date, only 15% of females are. In fact, 50% of women take over 20 dates to decide they are in love. There is also some evidence that males hurt more than females during a break up, but individuals vary greatly.

Both males and females score about the same on the Love Scale and they experience love at first sight about equally often (54% of women and 63% of men believe in love at first sight). It would seem that men and women love each other about the same amount but perhaps in different ways. Men may be more naive (lacking experience?) and believe more of the nonsense on the Romanticism

Scales, like "there is only one real love for a person" or "true love leads to almost perfect happiness" or "a person should marry whomever he/she loves regardless of social position." Women may be wiser (as long as their strong emotions have not overwhelmed their reason) and/or forced by socioeconomic reality to be slightly more careful and practical about whom they fall in love with, have sex with, and marry.

The more rewarding relationships are more likely to continue (unhappy ones may, of course, continue if the partners see no alternative). Also, giving the partner full credit for his/her contributions makes for a happier relationship. Unfortunately, about 75% of the time a partner over-estimates his or her contribution to daily activities, like cooking, cleaning, planning activities, etc. This indicates he/she is not giving full credit to his/her partner. It's also possible to disagree about the value of an activity, such as sweeping the floor or hugging the partner. Indeed, males and females have a major difference of opinion here. *Males think positive activities, like washing the dishes, are more important than positive affection, like kissing. Women think just the opposite.* Thus, when one man was told by a therapist to go home and do something affectionate towards his wife, he washed her car! His wife considered the car wash helpful but not at all affectionate. He saw it as a great way to show his love for her. Many traditional men would sincerely say, "I show her I love her by supporting her." Both men and women need to be aware of this difference. Men could say, "Sweetheart, I washed your car to say 'I love you'." Women could tell themselves "washing the car is how he shows his love for me." One way or another, both sexes need to be clearly told "I love you" often.

Of course, there are many differences in how males and females view love and relationships. For women, intimacy means talking; for men, a relationship means doing things together ("all she wants to do is talk"). Women value relationships more than men, especially relationships with parents. Women value most his income potential and fidelity and her ties to family and friends; men value most her sexuality and nurturance and their shared interests. Women complain more about the relationship and problems; men think "everything's fine." Women want to resolve disagreements; men want to avoid them.

## **How is self-love related to love? Do you have to love yourself first?**

A person in love does not see his/her lover as others do. Freud believed we saw the lover as our ideal, and the more dissatisfied with ourselves we were, the more we needed a lover to make up for our weaknesses and the more inclined we were to idealize our lover. In contrast, Neo-Freudians and Humanists would say "you have to love yourself first" before you can maturely and truly love others. If you are insecure and dislike yourself, you will be unable to love, avoid love, or

be fragilely dependent on love (see chapter 8). Both of these views imply that there are two kinds of love: immature love and mature love.

Surely, mature, healthy love would be better than immature, needy, neurotic love, right? Well, the research done to date (see Brehm, 1985, pp. 107-110 for a summary) doesn't support that reasonable-sounding statement. There is little relationship between our claimed self-esteem and how much we like (not love) others, such as friends, or how much we think others like us. You might think we would select partners with similar self-esteem, but that doesn't seem to be the case either. One problem with this research is that people tend to be defensive about their low self-esteem; they sometimes try to hide it and claim high self-esteem. If you study only people high in self-esteem and low in defensiveness (truly self-confident), they will tell you that they have frequently been in love *and* have frequently lost love. Thus, it isn't just the insecure, needy person who has a string of failed relationships, perhaps it's all of us who try to love. People who score high in self-esteem and high in defensiveness report the lowest frequency of loving and of losing. We don't know if these people take fewer risks or if they conceal their rejections. Low self-esteem people report a moderate frequency of loving and of losing.

There is some evidence that people who love themselves less, love their partners more. Compared to high-esteem persons, low-esteem persons (males and females) scored higher on the Liking and Loving Scales, trusted their partners more, and rated them more favorably. As we saw in the last section, women with either high or low self-esteem tend to get more involved in love relationships and idealize their partner more than men do. Apparently, the high self-esteem male tends to get less emotionally involved in his numerous love affairs. Does this mean that a low-esteem male is the better lover? We don't know, maybe both the high self-esteem and low self-esteem male brings his own unique problems to the love nest. This is an unclear area; we need more research. Surely the effects of insecurity and low self-confidence on a marriage will depend on how the partner responds in the long haul to these characteristics. Some of us like humble, self-depreciating, unassertive partners.

Besides self-esteem, another personality trait has been found to be related to love: externalizers (chapter 8) are more romantic lovers; they see attraction as mysterious and have had more love experience than internalizers. More personality traits will be discussed in the section about predicting marital adjustment.

## **The effects of separation and other environmental changes**

Besides cultural and personality factors, the situation can influence how we love each other. If you meet an attractive person in a slightly scary or emotional situation, say at a concert or amusement park or



going off to war or during final exams, you are likely to be more attracted to that person than if you had met in less exciting circumstances. The excitement adds to the attraction. In the same way, couples plan an exciting weekend or a special night out in order to revitalize their love for each other. This works well. However, not all excitement from external sources adds *love* to the relationship. College males who read an erotic story became, as you would expect, more affectionate with their girlfriends--we don't know if their love increased (Dermer & Pyszczynski, 1978). In another study, college students, male and female, lost some love for their partner after looking at pictures of nudes (Gutierrez, Kenrick & Goldberg, 1983). The next paragraph may give some explanation of these seemingly contradictory results.

What happens when lovers must be separated for a short while? Folklore tells us two things: "absence makes the heart grow fonder" and "out of sight, out of mind." Which is right? Well both probably are, depending on what you think about while you are separated. If you dwell on what the lover is doing and how wonderful he/she is and how much you miss him/her, your love will grow. If, on the other hand, you are busy and do not think much about him/her or, worse yet, think about another potential lover (or nudes in a magazine), your love is likely to decline. This is not just in matters of love; Tesser (1978) has a theory that as we think more and more about an issue, our opinion about that issue will become more extreme. In the chapters on depression and anger we saw the influence of repeated thoughts. Later in this chapter we will see the negative influence of thinking critically about our partner or our marriage.

## Is it true love?

Hunt (1975) suggests asking these revealing questions: (1) Do I treat the other person as a person or a thing? If you go out with him/her because he/she is good looking (a "prize" to be with) or a way out (a ticket to the movies), that isn't love. (2) Would you choose to spend the evening alone with him/her //there were no kissing, no touching, and no sex? If not, it isn't love. (3) Are the two of you at ease and as happy alone as you are with friends? If you need other friends around to have a good time, it isn't love. (4) Do you get along? If you fight and make up a lot, get hurt and jealous, tease and criticize one another, better be careful, it may not be love. (5) Are you still interested in dating or secretly "messing around" with others? If so, you aren't in love. (6) Can you be totally honest and open? If either or both of you are selfish, insincere, feel confined, or unable to express feelings, be cautious. (7) Are you realistic? You should be able to admit possible future problems. If others (besides a parent) offend you by saying they are surprised you are still together, that you two seem so different, that they have doubts about your choice, better take a good look at this relationship. (8) Are either of you much more of a taker than a giver? If so, no matter how well you like that situation

now, it may not last. (9) Do you think of the partner as being a part of your whole life? If so, and these dreams seem good, that is an indication of love.

An even better way to evaluate your love is to read *The Love Test* by Harold Bessell (1984). It is threatening to honestly assess our love for someone but this book is helpful, informative, and interesting. It is sometimes hard to tell the difference among sex, love, and infatuation (see Short, 1992).



You can tell that it's infatuation when you think that he's as sexy as Paul Newman, as athletic as Pete Rose, as selfless and dedicated as Ralph Nader, as smart as John Kenneth Galbraith and as funny as Don Rickles. You can be reasonably sure that it's love when you realize he's actually about as sexy as Don Rickles, as athletic as Ralph Nader, as smart as Pete Rose, as funny as John Kenneth Galbraith and doesn't resemble Paul Newman in any way--but you'll stick with him anyway.

-Judith Viorst

## Can Marital Success Be Predicted and Improved?



### Stages in the development of a relationship

Several theories speculate that a developing relationship goes through certain stages, such as initial attraction, establishing rapport (and checking out each other's values and attitudes), wooing and selective disclosure (getting to know each other--are we similar?), testing out the relationship (how well do we get along--are our needs met?), disillusionment (he/she is irritating...boring) and, finally, deciding whether or not to make a commitment to each other. If commitments are made, then a period of attachment may follow, involving warmth, security, and comfort. Likewise, there are stages within marriage (see below and Rock, 1986, as well as Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1995) and divorce (see chapter 6). These stage theories seem plausible but research suggests that the steps towards and within marriage are more complex than any theory suggests, not at all the same stages for different couples, and not even the same stages for males and females (Brehm, 1985, pp. 145-146; Huston, Surra, Fitzgerald, & Cate, 1981).

### Can we predict marital success?

Research (Weiten, 1986, p. 386) provides some tentative forewarnings of marital trouble, e.g. (1) one or both lovers' parents

have an unhappy marriage, (2) married at an early age, (3) married impulsively, (4) have a low income or financial problems, and (5) one or both lovers have psychological problems.

There are no real surprises here, but also nothing you can really depend on. In fact, some researchers question whether any particular dating or premarital experience helps us make wise choices for a mate (Whyte, 1990). Similar social-economic, religious, ethnic and racial backgrounds of couples are somewhat beneficial, but they don't in general predict marital satisfaction very well, certainly not in individual cases. Family of origin relationships are also only modestly related to marital success, e.g. good relations with mom and dad are slightly correlated with better marriages (Wamboldt & Reiss, 1989). Women with warm, caring fathers dated more trusting men; women with cold, distant fathers dated less trusting men. Men with cold or inconsistent mothers dated more anxious women (and those relationships had problems). There is some evidence that we seek partners similar to our parent of the opposite sex (even if that isn't a wise choice). This might be expected since we first learn about love relationships from our parents.

Many studies have found a moderate *negative* correlation between marital happiness (or intimacy and trust) and neuroticism, low self-esteem, impulsivity (expressiveness), shyness, and other personality problems, i.e. the better the psychological adjustment, the better the marriage. However, never assume that only *your* qualities determine how good your love life will be. You could be very well adjusted yourself and still be unhappy in love, if your partner is not well adjusted or has an incompatible attitude or life-style. I don't believe the common notion that it necessarily "takes two to cause marital problems."

According to Collins and Read (1990), if we are comfortable with closeness and feel we can depend on others, we tend to date people with similar characteristics. On the other hand, if we are doubtful that others will continue to love us, we avoid partners who have difficulty getting close and fear abandonment (because they confirm our fears). In general, the best relationships for women are with men who are at ease with closeness; the poorest relationships for men are with women who are afraid of being unloved. Why might this be? Other research confirms that men are more upset by possessiveness and restrictions on their freedom than women are. Women are more upset by uncommunicativeness and a lack of closeness than men are. These problems between men and women may reflect the gender stereotypes we are taught.

High satisfaction has been reported by couples who defy the traditional sex-typing, i.e. masculine, assertive, tough women married to sensitive, caring, relationship-aware men. Also, in a similar but rather surprising way, Type A women (anxious, highly motivated, pressed for time) do better with Type B men (more relaxed, less up tight). Of course, dividing the housework and child care equally and/or

fairly contributes greatly to a marriage, as does both spouses being "relationship-aware," communicative, and attentive year after year.

Our satisfaction with our marriage is predicted by how well we communicate, even *before marriage*, and by how we structure our day-to-day lives together after marriage. If interactions are meaningful *and* largely positive before marriage, it bodes well for the marriage. If the male is stubborn, defensive, or overly quiet, it is not a good sign. Likewise, men dismissing their partner's problems and women over-reacting to the man's negative feelings were both bad signs. These findings are not surprising but note this: getting angry (pre-marriage) was correlated with having early marriage problems but later with greater marital satisfaction! Perhaps this is evidence that it pays to express and work on problems--and not deny them. Fine, but now you have the problem (with no help from research) of deciding what is enough expressed anger to be a good sign and what is too much so that it becomes an ominous sign (see chapter 7).



**Caution:** don't assume that your marriage is doomed because one or two of your partner's individual characteristics aren't ideal. The predictive power of these studies is low. And, don't forget: the species, which seems designed to "make love" wherever children are being created, has survived and thrived in spite of lousy selection procedures. There are no perfect partners out there. You can forgive a few faults.



In summary, a *good* marriage partner will probably have a variety of skills, such as social-communication skills with you and others, emotional maturity and control of his/her emotions, tolerance and affection towards you and others, respectful and egalitarian viewpoints, similar interests and values to yours, ability to be responsible and earn an adequate steady income, and effective problem-solving and conflict resolution ability. See chapters 13 and 14 for many of these skills.



Love doesn't just sit there, like a stone, it has to be made, like bread; re-made all the time,  
made new.  
-Ursula K. LeGuin



## Unconscious needs and motives in mate selection

In the last section, the research usually involved the correlation within a large group of one test score, e.g. low self-confidence, and an outcome, e.g. rated marital happiness. You get an entirely different perspective if you study only one individual (or one couple) and his/her history, as a therapist might do. I think you will find it enlightening to read the theories and speculations therapists have about why we are attracted to certain kinds of people and why we seek certain kinds of interactions in marriage. I'll give a brief summary but you should do more reading in this area. The histories of a couple's dynamics and of their needs, fears, and resentments are often traceable back two or three generations. It is fascinating. If both your father and your grandfather failed in business in their late 30's and your mother and grandmother were very bitter about it, you have a legacy to live by or to live down. Knowing your history might help you understand your unconscious motives.

We may be attracted to people like our parents . Why not? Such people are what we know and feel comfortable with, especially if it is a positive characteristic. Most of the time this is beneficial, but we may also be attracted to problematic traits of a parent, e.g. an overly controlling, protective mom or an unemotional, unaffectionate father, which may lead to serious marital problems.

Wise observers have noted that characteristics which initially attract us, sometimes become a problem. Examples: the social skill, warmth, and charm become seen as shallow, self-serving manipulation; the dependability, predictability, and security become seen as boring. Likewise, after being attracted to an aloof, cognitive, quiet, unemotional husband (like dad), the wife may become increasingly dissatisfied and outspokenly critical of his remoteness; thus, driving the husband to be even more emotionally defensive and withdrawn.

We may be motivated to repeat old relationships even if unhappy, e.g. if you were the rescuing caretaker in your family, you may need to select a partner with problems who will need to be rescued or who will have children who need rescued. Likewise, if dad was a failure and mom a shrew or if mom and dad were "fighters" or if you fought constantly with a sibling, you may re-create that situation even though it was and will be unhappy. This is called "repetitive patterns." In effect, we "leave home" but maintain the same psychological environment with our spouse.

In some instances, we may repeat an old relationship in the hopes of working it out differently, e.g. a person with a cold, critical, distant father may marry such a man in the hopes of changing him and winning him over.

We are often motivated to *not* repeat the troubles we have experienced in previous relationships, e.g. if a parent was alcoholic

or abusive, we may demand a teetotaling or a very unaggressive spouse. If you have been dumped two or three times by the same kind of person, say a flirt, you will probably be very frightened of the next such person who comes along. If your father was in the military and gone a lot or left your mother for another woman, you may avoid deep intimacy with anyone (including a spouse) or select a partner who is very insecure, dependent, and afraid to leave. Levine (1992) discusses at length the resentment and ambivalence many women feel towards men in general and how this interferes with selecting a partner.

We may select a partner who will make up for our own weaknesses or who will satisfy some of our unconscious needs. We may seek through a mate the satisfaction of some need that was unfulfilled by a parent. Examples: a love-starved adult may have felt unloved and untouched as a child, an inarticulate person may select a talkative partner, a low ability person may seek a more able person. An angry person who can't express his/her feelings may find a hostile, expressive person very appealing (if it isn't turned on him/her very often). A person who would like to rebel and "act out" but can't, might be strongly attracted to a wild rebel.

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### Determining Your Love Story

After developing the popular 3-factor—intimacy, passion, and commitment--theory of love, Sternberg (see last section) felt a lot about love was still unexplained. He wondered: where do our attitudes, expectations, and feelings about love come from? What prompts a beginning relationship to change into love? Why do some loves last and others evaporate? It seemed likely to Sternberg (1998) that your "love story," i.e. your needs and how you imagine your love life will unfold, has a great bearing on who you are attracted to, how your love is expressed, how well it endures, and so on. For a love relationship to work, the two love stories need to be compatible—in some cases, that means similar stories and needs (e.g., both giving or highly social), and in other cases, complimentary or supplemental but congruent stories and needs (e.g., one a leader and the other a follower or one outgoing who helps the shy one socialize).

Sternberg and his students started by trying to identify people's love stories. They ended up with 26, for example:

Sacrifice story—love means both give up things for the other.

Police story—love involves the "Officer" watching the "Suspect" closely.

Travel story—life should be a happy journey for two lovers.

Sex story—love mainly involves an exciting sex life.

Domination story—love involves a strong, frightening leader-type and a follower.

Recovery story—love is helping a troubled person overcome serious problems.

Garden story—love requires work and time, constant weeding and nourishment.

Partnership story—love relationships are like a job—each person has duties to do.

Fantasy story—a prince/princess is waiting for me; we'll be blissful forever.

Let's Fight story—arguing and fighting is exciting, fun, and healthy.

Laugh-It-Off story—humor is easier and better than seriously discussing a problem.

Multiple-Lovers story—the more attractive people I can attract the better.

Give-and-Take story—one loves to make money, the other loves to spend it.

Science Fiction story—attracted to strange, unusual, crazy, wild lovers.

Theater story—all the world is a stage and I love acting on it.

### What is your love story?

Considering these stories (there are many possible), what is your love story? If your story isn't yet clear to you, consider these factors: (1) how and with whom did you learn to love as a child? (2) What kind of love experiences have you had—what kind of persons were attractive to you and what kinds did you attract? What were the attributes of your most appealing partners? What characteristics seemed to lead to your loss of interest? (3) What ideals or dreams about love still pluck your heartstrings?

If you are pretty sure of your love story but a relationship just hasn't worked out, then perhaps you can decide how your story needs to be changed and how you need to experiment with new approaches and expectations in love. The results of these new real life experiences may permit you to consciously change your unconsciously developed love story into a more satisfying life drama.

Sternberg's "story" approach is simple, appealing, and interesting. The stories make intuitive sense to us. One can readily imagine the likely course of events for people with specific personalities and needs.

It is also easy to speculate how two peoples' stories might interact and lead to love, how other stories combine to lead to an unhappy but lasting marriage, and how still other stories result in about 45% of all marriages ending in divorce.

The problems that concern me about this theory are practical ones: Do we or can we really know what our lover's story is before we get married? Do we even know our own real love story, which was unconsciously developing since infancy, until our secret ogre (e.g. anger, unfaithfulness, or self-centeredness) is out of the closet about 3 or 4 years into the marriage? Do the pre-marital fantasies tell us much about how we will change over time? (An issue raised earlier by Sternberg himself.) Does the love story indicate the ability of a lover to "work it out" or "tough it out" or to actually change his/her love story when things aren't working out? When marital troubles get very serious, does it help to analyze and make use of the love stories at that point? More research will tell us the answers.

Sternberg (1998) makes an interesting point: he says relationship problems can't be treated by changing habits and behaviors. (I doubt this statement.) He considers behaviors merely symptoms; the root problems are in the incompatible stories. If this is true, then problems in a relationship indicate we need to change our love story (or change partners), which Sternberg says we can do—sometimes? He suggests that correctly understanding both partners' stories would help a couple decide what needs and expectations are causing the difficulties. I agree and this is important. But believing you know the cause of the problems doesn't automatically result in a change in our well-entrenched love story. He doesn't give much help for this last crucial step. Therefore, if you have serious marital problems, I'd suggest selecting another book (see extensive list later). However, for help selecting and adjusting to a lover, Sternberg's intuitive narrative approach holds promise.

## Projection of traits and feelings

Object relations therapists believe we are born wanting a loving, nurturing attachment to a parent. Within the first year or two of life (long before the Oedipus phase), according to this theory, we all develop an image of our "love object" and our relationship with that person. These images ("internalized objects") are not realistic; they are the feelings, fears, and wants--the mental-emotional concoctions--of an infant and toddler for his/her parent(s). In time, the really scary parts of these feelings and images are repressed--pushed out of our awareness. Example: suppose our mother fails to meet our needs, as all parents do, and we (18 months old) get very mad and fearful of rejection. We have to repress these negative expectations and feelings because we need mom's love. Much later, however, in intimate relationships, we may project our negative repressed feelings and traits (the old distrust and intense anger) to our loved one, i.e. we see our bad characteristics in our partner. We may even unconsciously select the "right kind of partner" and behave in ways



designed to make that partner very emotional (angry) or untrustworthy, while we remain certain that we are well controlled and not resentful (Freud's ego defense).

*Both* spouses or lovers may be projecting personal traits to each other, e.g. he projects his depression to his wife (and via self-fulfilling prophesy she responds with weakness and despair) and she projects her repressed strength and independence to him (he reacts logically and confidently--and does his own thing). As a result of these projections to the other person, he never feels his depression and she never feels strong. But, while she, in part, is expressing his depression for him, her increasing depression creates an intolerable situation for both of them. They come to hate each other--indeed, they have hated or feared these projected traits all their lives--and they fight frequently. The solution? Become more aware of what feelings really are going on inside of us and how these conflicts often come from early childhood.

Some people, while in a love relationship, primarily experience only one side of a mixed or ambiguous situation. A classic example is a conflict between being an independent, separate person and being a interdependent, intimate person. In love, this ambiguity or conflict exists. Some people concentrate exclusively on wanting closeness and warmth; others dwell on needing space and distance; both types find it difficult to tolerate the *internal conflict* of striving for distance and closeness at the same time. So, if two people like this start a relationship, they handle the internal conflict by projecting part of their needs (closeness or independence) to the other person. Thus, when relationships are created between a "pursuer" and a "distancer," both tend to be blinded to part of their needs. They become irritated with the partner (their own characteristics each has rejected in him/herself and projected to the lover). No one in a relationship carries all the needs for closeness and the other person all the needs for independence, but they act and think that way.

A similar kind of polarization via projection of some of our emotions to the partner, similar to Shostrom and Kavanaugh's male-female relationships, *can occur within many dimensions*, such as reasonable-emotional, strong-weak, rescuer-troubled, boss-slave, smart-dumb, good-bad, etc. We have to recognize that we have--and should have--all kinds of feelings and motives (in varying degrees), not just one end of a dimension.

What can we do about *unconscious* motives? Become more aware of your feelings. Of course, I don't mean trying to remember your emotions as a 18-month-old. I mean becoming aware of your fears and anger *if* you don't think you have any. I mean finding out about your childhood, e.g. were you or one of your parents sick or absent? Were there family fights? Were you a caretaker as a child or considered helpless? What kind of expectations did others have of you? Are you repeating any of your early family conflicts? Observe the feelings you have toward yourself and your mate--ask yourself:

"Wonder if my background could be causing these feelings?" Could I be projecting characteristics or emotions to my partner? If the answer is "maybe," look for more evidence, pro and con. What and who molded my self-concept in childhood? You can read chapter 15 and some of the books recommended below, especially Hendrix (1992).

## **Are marriages better if you first "live together"?**

A good question but there is not a good answer yet. For one thing, there are several reasons for living together. Some people live together to test out their relationship--a "trial marriage." But, many other people, e.g. 25% of all college students sometime during their four years, just like each other and start sleeping together. (College students usually sleep in the male's room while the female keeps her room just in case it doesn't work out and to "fool" her parents.) Only 10% of college students living together consider it a life-long commitment; their purpose is not to test out or improve a future marriage; they are 20-22 and they don't want to get married until 8-10 years later. Meaningful research must, at least, separate the "trial marriages" from the "love affairs." Living together can also serve other purposes: it can be a way to entice someone into marriage, it can be a convenient way to get lots of sex or a companion, it can be a substitute for marriage. Be sure you and your partner are working for the same goals.

There are studies which supposedly "prove" that people who have "lived together" are more apt to fail in marriage (get a divorce) than those who have not lived together before marriage. *However*, there are other studies that show the opposite--that people who have "lived together" are more likely to stay together (White, 1987) than those who have not had that experience. Clearly, all of these people were serious about marriage; they tried it. But divorce is only a sure sign of marital unhappiness; remaining married is not a sure sign of marital happiness. So if the researchers have groups with different attitudes about the acceptability of divorce, they will get different results. It seems quite likely that couples who were open to living together will be more open to the idea of divorce if they become very unhappy. So, thus far, divorce rate doesn't tell us much about the wisdom of living together and mate selection. Ratings of marital satisfaction would tell us more. Recent surveys find that 38% of couples who lived together before marriage were divorced within 10 years; 27% of couples who did not live together were divorced within 10 years.

The research needs to focus on more specific questions, such as: How often (for whom and how) does living together help prepare us for marriage? How does living together cause harm? How are negative attitudes towards living together (and associated moral values) helpful or harmful in the subsequent marriage? How often does living together help us detect and escape bad relationships? How often does it

permanently entrap us in bad relationships? The limited research we have now provides only tentative suggestions and answers, as follows.

First of all, "living together" increased by 45% between 1970 and 1990. In recent years, approximately 70% of people getting married have lived together. But only about 20%-35% of the people living together end up getting married. Remember, many weren't seeking marriage, but it seems likely that many who "split" would say, "Thank God, we didn't get married." Therefore, at least some people learn things about the relationship that helps them avoid a bad relationship. Ideally, avoiding a disastrous marriage is an advantage of living together, but there are many reasons why we can't avoid all future unhappy relationships by living together. For example, many observers agree with Joyce Brothers (1984, pp. 123-128) that people living together are on their best behavior, "walk on eggs," and avoid confrontation because they are eager to have someone love them and insecure in the temporary relationship. So, living together isn't a good, honest "trial" (and Brothers recommends against it). Moreover, this super nice premarital behavior may partly account for the radical changes in behavior, personality, and attitudes (almost always for the worse) that sometimes occur shortly after marriage. Many married couples testify that living together didn't really prepare them for marriage; they still didn't know each other and had many adjustments to make, similar to couples who haven't lived together. Besides, the intense romance subsides in 2 or 3 years. So, 5 years and 2 children later, it is a different relationship. Living together is no sure cure for marital problems, but it may be your best bet when you want make as good a choice as possible.

Living together and getting pregnant as ploys for getting someone to marry you are usually ineffective and unwise. This kind of pressure, added to the other adjustment problems at this time, strains the relationship to the breaking point. The pursued partner starts to feel trapped and to find others very attractive; if they don't make the effort to work out their major problems, the relationship probably ends. In other cases, where one partner assumes more of the responsibilities (income, cleaning, cooking, etc.), that partner often starts to feel used. If the partner feeling used is a pregnant woman, she has two serious problems: what to do with the guy and with the baby. Finally, because a trial marriage is a test, the couple often postpones working on adjustment problems. The attitude is: "We'll just stay together as long as things work out." Few loves could survive without more commitment and work than that.

*My conclusions* on this very murky issue are: if you have strong moral-religious beliefs against living together, then don't. If you both are not ready for marriage but want a steady partner, living together offers obvious advantages and some risks. It can be a fantastic, real life learning experience of loving and adjusting on equal terms with another person. But, the "break up" can still be messy and painful, almost like a divorce. If you are considering marriage, have the time, and are psychologically aware of the pitfalls, living together may be a

good way to initially assess the compatibility of the two of you in an intimate situation. However, this is a tricky undertaking, because (1) you are deeply in love romantically, probably still infatuated, and eager to continue impressing and winning over the partner (who is not the same person you will live with for 60 years or so), but (2) you are also attempting to honestly assess the quality of this relationship *in the long run* and must be willing to leave the relationship (otherwise it isn't a test or a trial). While you are not unswervingly committed to marrying your partner, you must make every effort to make it work. While appreciating his/her efforts to be especially nice, you must not assume he/she will always be this nice. These are difficult undertakings and judgments, even for a mature, experienced person. But it is even more complex.

In addition, before starting a trial marriage (even before having sex), both people might want to consider the advantages of "saving" sex and living together until after marriage. For many people, their wedding day could be made an even more super-special event with great personal-social-sexual-spiritual meaning if they "saved themselves." In addition, during a trial marriage, both people have to consider how good the current relationship is in comparison to another relationship they could possibly have with a different partner. That's very hard to do. In short, there aren't compelling reasons either way, i.e. for "saving yourself" or for a "trial marriage." Therefore, it becomes an emotional, intuitive decision, rather than a logical one. Yet, in most situations (assuming religion wouldn't be a problem), I'd want to live with and/or be very involved with my lover on a daily basis for months before making a life-long commitment to marriage and children.

My last bit of obvious advice: don't get pregnant. In fact, wait 3 or 4 years after getting married and be sure the relationship is still happy before having children. Splitting without children is a lot easier than with children.

Keep living together in perspective. It is just one of many possible "tests" for a potential partner. The best predictor of a good marriage is a *long, relatively smooth relationship*, in which a wide variety of problems and successes are experienced. In addition, *long, detailed discussions* and commitments are needed about many possible future situations, such as educational and career plans of both, having and caring for children by both, family relationships, religious matters, money matters, life-style, social lives, buying a home, decision-making and division of labor, etc., etc. (Bozzi, 1986).

## Get pre-marital counseling

Several months before getting married it is a good idea to get pre-marital counseling. Many priests and ministers require it if he/she is going to perform the marriage. Clergy have more experience than

therapists in this area. Moreover, many clergy make wise use of a questionnaire, such as David Olson's [Prepare](http://www.eharmony.com/core/eharmony?cmd=home) ( <http://www.eharmony.com/core/eharmony?cmd=home>) , which measures the couple's strengths and weaknesses in such areas as communication, personality, expectations, equalitarian roles, leisure activities, conflict resolution, financial management, parenting, etc. The cost is \$25 for the test but these objective measures lead directly into counseling issues that need to be considered, e.g. will we have a family and, if so, when and how many. If you disagree about how decisions will be made or the division of labor, those are serious issues. If your "intended" has personality traits or ways of communicating which already bother you, these things need to be resolved long before marriage. Pre-marital counseling provides a great opportunity for couples to get to know each other better, learn communication, decision-making, and conflict resolution skills, prepare for marriage, and prevent future problems. Don't avoid this experience even if you think you are "perfect for each other." Maybe it is especially important if you think you have a perfect relationship.

## **Books give advice about selecting a partner**

Finding a mate for life is such an important step in life, of course there are specialized books. Schwartz (1999) has written *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Online Dating and Relating*. Branden (1981), Sternberg (1987), and Hendrick & Hendrick (1992) help us understand romantic love relationships in general. Several books by professional counselors could help you in the selection of a life-long mate--or to reconsider a decision to date only one particular person. They include Crowell (1995), DeAngelis (1992), Barbach & Geisinger (1992), and Whyte (1990). Giler (1992) guides career women along the path to Mr. Right. Short (1992) helps us differentiate among sex, love, and infatuation. Borchardt (1995) tries to help us stay rational while in love. Other therapists tell us why we select a particular kind of lover (Blinder, 1989) or get into a love-hate relationship (Arterburn & Stoop, 1988). If you seem to be afraid of getting "involved," try Callahan (1982) or Carter (1987) and see the books about intimacy mentioned in the next section. Matthews (1993) provides a survival guide for engaged women.

Cowan & Kinder (1985), Norwood (1985), and other writers (see books about marriage) focus on psychological needs and fears which give rise to foolish choices about partners. It is especially important that you distinguish between being "in love" and being in a good love relationship (Halpern, 1994). The partner that immediately turns you on may be unavailable or ultimately a disaster. Conversely, a good love choice may seem boring at first. Halpern helps you avoid poor choices and find excitement in a good-but-not-intoxicating partner. You need to know what real love is.

Many books suggest building your interpersonal skills and awareness that will increase your chances of finding intimacy and love (Sills, 1987; Burns, 1985; Bradshaw, 1993). If nothing produces a great relationship for you or if it just seems too much of a hassle, find a good book about growth and fulfillment as a single person (Edwards & Hoover, 1975). For the psychologically serious self-helper, I recommend Hendrix (1992) who carefully guides you to *explore your unconscious needs* from childhood that determine who you fall in love with and the kinds of conflicts you have in love relationships. The theory is that we select a lover who we think will meet our strong unmet needs from childhood. Such a self-analysis is an arduous task but worth doing *before* falling in love. Losing love can be one of life's most painful events; it can be crushing to your self-esteem. If your heart has been broken, refer to Baumeister & Wotman (1992) and to the many other books cited in chapter 6.



A relationship is like a dance: to stay close without stepping on each other's toes takes practice.  
**Harriet Goldhor Lerner**, *The Dance of Intimacy*



Lerner (1989) has written several highly regarded books. Her *The Dance of Intimacy* is mostly for women. It facilitates relating your early family history to your current reaction to intimacy and makes some cogent points. First, intimacy involves both separateness (being our true selves and living our own lives) and connectedness (being in love with and committed to another). It is a delicate balance; love requires that we avoid too much distance and too much intensity (over-focusing on changing, caring for, or depending on the partner). Second, we are prone to polarize disagreements. For example, as discussed under "unconscious factors" above, one partner may become the "chaser" and the other the "escaper." This polarizes the issue (how committed will we be?) in a very distorted way and keeps the two at odds and stuck. Both partners have reasons to seek and avoid a commitment, not just one on each side of the issue. That depolarized reality should be admitted and discussed. Moreover, if other events (past or present) are contributing to the "desperation" of the chaser or the "cold feet" of the escapist, this should be admitted at least to oneself and probably discussed. Open discussion would further clarify the situation and help avoid over-focus on the single issue of commitment. The chaser should also shift some energy to dealing with his/her other goals and problems in life--and, in time, consider putting a time limit on deciding about commitment.

Third, and I think most importantly, Lerner says every lover should have a *life plan* that does not require marriage (and certainly not

marriage to a particular person). It is a plan that insures our economic well-being, our development of our talents and potentials, our happiness with friends, causes, and activities, and our living in accordance with the values and morals we have decided to follow. Only in this way, during courtship, can we avoid becoming an emotional slave to a particular person we have met more or less by accident. Culture and biology have led us to think "I can't live without my lover." It is true that we need intimacy with others for our happiness and for meaning in life, i.e. a "life plan" can only rarely replace love relationships altogether. But the reverse is also true: intimacy can not replace a life plan. To be whole and healthy, we need both connectedness (interdependency) and self-sufficiency (independence).

In a similar way, other therapists do a good job of discussing for the lay person some of the deeper and more complex aspects of emotions in a relationship, especially Scarf (1986) and Hendrix (1988). Several other books cited below also attempt to help you wisely select a partner for life.

## Marriage and Love

One hundred years ago, even though the divorce rate was very low, there were a lot of unmarried adults. At that time, it is estimated that 65% of adult women were unmarried due to never marrying and early death of the spouse. In contrast, today, only 20% of adult women are unmarried. Marriage is still popular but the number of unmarried adults doubled between 1970 and 1993. Women are better off financially and there is less pressure to marry and stay married; we are freer to choose to be married or single.

You hear a lot of criticism and jokes about the "trap" of marriage. Yet, many are attracted to the "bait" at least -- 96% of us live with a partner sometime in our lives. Most of us are eager to do so--and for good reasons. Loving someone brings so many joys and thrills and so much comfort... it can be fantastic. An unhappy marriage, however, can be terrible. Marriage is very different for different people. We don't know a lot, yet, about making marriage be what we want it to be. Facts are confused with myths.

No human relation gives one possession in another...every two souls are absolutely different. In friendship and in love, the two side by side raise hands together to find what one cannot reach alone.

-Kamil Gibran

## Myths about marriage

Earlier we mentioned some common beliefs about love. There are similar beliefs about marriage, some true and some false. Learning how to cope involves unlearning popular misconceptions as well as learning the truth. We certainly have many misconceptions about marriage to unlearn (Lazarus, 1985; Glick & Kessler, 1974; Lederer & Jackson, 1968). We, unfortunately, make important decisions on the basis of these misleading beliefs. Examples: People marry because they are passionately "in love." Married people "love" (again, meaning wild ecstatic passion) each other. Maintaining romantic love is the key to marital happiness. Marriages should be totally happy and most of life's satisfactions should come from the partner. Men and women are very different emotionally. Opposites always attract. Marriage will cure loneliness. Family "togetherness" is crucial. Partners must be totally honest and tell all. Marriage requires total trust. Good marriage partners agree on every issue and never fight. Incompatible couples can't have a successful marriage. Volatile marriages never last, quiet unions last.

More myths: good sex means a good marriage. An affair means there are problems in the marriage. An affair will destroy a marriage. A good partner never thinks of him/herself. The husband's work is more important than the wife's career. Husbands are happier when their wives are homemakers. Competition between spouses adds zest. In an argument someone has to be wrong and it is important to know who. Most marriages can't survive a period of hate. In a good marriage, sex will take care of itself. Married people understand each other without talking. Good marriages simply happen ("are made in heaven") and don't require attention or work. A lover can be made over to your liking after the marriage. In a secure, devoted marriage, things do not change. Everyone knows what makes for a good wife and a good husband. Having children will improve and stabilize a marriage. Today's "normal" family is happy and doesn't have any real problems. Even a poor marriage should be held together for the children's sake. After the "high" of the first few months, marriage is all work and disagreements. Once gone, love can't be rekindled. You must feel positive towards your spouse before you can change your behavior towards him/her. If a marriage is not working out, an affair will help. Getting a divorce and finding another partner will solve most of the problems.

All of these "beliefs" are wrong to some extent; yet, there may be some truth in them. We misunderstand so much about love and marriage, it's not surprising that we aren't very good at loving, yet. But even though our ignorance leads to upsetting disagreements with our partner, the love is so thrilling and the companionship so satisfying that romantic relationships are a vital part of our lives. We should learn all we can about loving and insist that research tell us more of what we need to know to have a good love life.



It is not the lack of love, but a lack of friendship that makes unhappy marriages.  
-Friedrich Nietzsche

## Some facts about marriage

The percent of married people who say they are "very happy" has gone down during the last 20 years, especially among women. Maybe we are expecting more of marriage. In fact, when asked what their chance of divorce is, over 75% of couples refused to admit there was even a remote possibility. Happily married couples have rosy illusions about their marriage and they idealize their spouse. The more illusions, the happier the couple (Azar, 1995). Many of these once happy marriages fall apart. We certainly need earlier and more realistic efforts to prevent divorce.

While most people marry sometime in their lives, they are waiting longer to do it. In the early part of this century, many people left school after the 8th grade and got married by the time they were 14 to 16 years old. Another hundred years before that, about the time this country was founded, the age of consent was 9 or 10 in some places. However, by 1993, the median age of the first marriage was 24.5 for women and 26.5 for men. Between 1970 and 1985, there was a remarkable increase in the number of young people who remained single until 25 or 30. In 1985, 57% of women ages 20-24 were single, 26% of 25-29-year-olds were single. For men, the percentages were 75% and 38%. The overall percentage of single people is increasing; for every 1000 married people, there are about 100 single males and 150 single females. Remember that about 25% of all children live with a single parent, partly because the threat of divorce is highest in the first 10 years of marriage.

Sociologists Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) studied 6000 American couples. About 60% of the wives had jobs but only 30% of husbands thought both spouses should work. In fact, only 39% of wives thought so; 49% of the wives (in the early 1980's) thought their husbands should take care of them economically. Few young women today expect to be taken care of. Husbands sometimes hate housework but women do not ordinarily consider it demeaning; therefore, working wives still do much more than their share of the housework (see discussion of gender roles in chapter 9). Some couples have signed "prenuptial agreements" but Blumstein and Schwartz think this suggests a lack of trust which is harmful to the marriage.

Sex is, of course, important throughout marriage; the majority have sex at least once a week, even after 10 years (see later section). Within making love, women enjoyed intercourse the most, but men

enjoyed a variety of sexual activity. Women link love with sex more than men do. For this reason, reportedly, being unfaithful doesn't mean as much to men (if they do it) as to women (if they do it). Men have been unfaithful more often than women (it's becoming fairly equal) but it did not mean they were unhappy with their wives. When women have an affair, however, usually it isn't a one night stand; they are more likely to get emotionally involved. See the later discussion of infidelity and sexual problems.

What is most important in preserving a marriage? Skills: knowing how to manage conflict. Having the communication skills so you can respectfully negotiate, resolve disagreements fairly, and avoid the bitterness that drives spouses apart. Later we will discuss ways of avoiding the withdrawal, escalating anger, and vile insults that destroy love relationships.

## Stages within a marriage

Naturally, during 50-60 years of marriage, we go through several stages. Sarnoff and Sarnoff (1989) believe humans are born with powerful needs to love and propagate, and, at the same time, they instinctively fear losing their freedom and personal identity if they totally merge with another person (connect like a new born with its mother). These *threats of overwhelming love cause fears* which result in withdrawal, arguments, and undermining of the love. They describe six stages of marriage, common fears and resistance at each stage, and ways of handling the barriers to love:

Stages	Fears	Facilitating Love
Consummation--talking, touching, "making love"	Intimacy threatens freedom & arouses fear of rejection	Promise to put each other first
Having children--deciding, awe and work of children	Envy of her reproduction and of his freedom	Continue careers, share birth experience
Raising children--loving, providing, guiding	Fear of losing male & female roles=become traditional	Avoid sexist beh. don't fight over children
Focusing on self--avoid closeness (middle-aged)	Fear of being absorbed by other=go own way alone	Discuss their fears, stay close & warm
Children gone--increased time for relationship	Regret losing children, fear of aging=depression	Find new activities, remain best friends
Facing death--physical prob.--time running out	Fear losses and separation, hate "making	Vow to love deeply during rest of life

	arrangements"	
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Sarnoff and Sarnoff believe we need to be constantly aware of the fear of love in order to counter its destructive effects on love. They do not see marital problems resulting from childhood experiences, bad parenting, abuse, or early conditioning. They suggest we are able to control our love lives if we work hard at understanding and countering our fears (and resentment) of intimacy. They recommend many ways of countering these fears at each stage.

## Types of marriages

There are many classifications of marriages; I'll summarize a few. David Olson (1981) observed 1000 young couples *married only one or two years* as they discussed short stories about typical marital conflicts. He found nine types of marriages, five were husband dominated and three wife dominated and one equal:

1. **Husband-led disengaged** --the most common type. Even this early in the marriage, their love was not very strong; yet, they rarely fight. The male is the boss. Remember, this is 1980; we are changing.
2. **Husband-led cooperative** --the second most common. Emotional involvement is only average. They argue moderately often but they cooperate (with the husband's preferences given priority). Wife works, no children. They don't socialize much but get along with in-laws.
3. **Shared-leadership cooperative** --third most common and probably increasingly common. Average amount of love and conflict, but the decision-making is truly shared. Both work and like their jobs.
4. **Wife-lead disengaged** --fourth most common. Little conflict but little love too. Wife's views and preferences tend to dominate. Husband is financially insecure. This couple socializes to a moderate degree; husband gets along well with his mother and his mother-in-law.
5. **Husband-lead engaged** --few marital problems and lots of emotional involvement. They are sociable and satisfied with their income.
6. **Wife-lead congenial** --they get along well, financial situation is OK, average emotional involvement with each other and low-key about everything. Husband shares some of wife's leadership.
7. **Wife-lead confrontive** --the wife tends to be a homemaker, a mother and quite sociable; she leads. There is considerable marital conflict, emotional involvement is only average. Both get along well with in-laws.
8. **Husband-lead confrontive** --lots of conflict (second only to 9), husband is dominate, doesn't like his wife working, and has conflicts with his mother-in-law. Wife doesn't like his job or hers, if she works. Relatively uncommon type.

9. **Husband-lead conflicted** --lots of marital conflicts but emotionally involved with each other. Wife dissatisfied with family income; if she works, she doesn't like it. Both are very sociable and have trouble with in-laws. Least common type.

Very recently, in another study, Olson interviewed over 5000 *engaged* couples. He found that almost 25% had such serious relationship problems and such poor relationship skills that he wondered "why would they want to marry each other?" So, some "marriage problems" start well before the marriage and are easily detectable.

If you observe upper middle-class marriages of 10 years or longer, as did Cuber and Harroff several years ago (1965), you will probably still find five kinds of marriages: (1) *Conflict-habituated* which is a constant battle over almost everything. (2) *Devitalized* in which the partners have lost their love and "drifted apart," i.e. they take care of the children but they don't fight a lot. (3) *Passive-congenial* where the partners have been apathetic all along, e.g. marriage was a convenience--or economic necessity--or they are more interested in careers or friends than spouses. (4) *Vital marriage* in which being together and sharing are the major joys in life. (5) *Total marriage* is like the vital marriage, except almost everything is done happily together. Obviously, marriage ranges from wonderful happiness every day--only 15-20% are vital or total marriages--to miserable on-going fights (or divorce). This should offer some hope of happiness to those who are unhappy...but a warning to young people in an already rocky relationship.

Shostrom and Kavanaugh (1971) described six relationships between men and women based mostly on experience with couples in therapy. (1) A "Mother and Son" nurturing relationship is made up of a male who marries to be taken care of and a woman who not only mothers her children but her husband as well. She may feel inadequate but she runs the household. (2) A "Daddy and Doll" supporting relationship is one in which a serious, able, materialistic male acquires an attractive mate and enjoys her as a show thing. She may flirt and get a lot of attention from other men but, in general, she isn't interested in them. (3) A "Bitch and Nice Guy" challenging relationship is an ongoing conflict with one partner complaining and the other refusing to get involved (and, thus, appearing to be a nice guy while he subtly puts down his nagging wife). (4) A "Master and Slave" controlling relationship is the traditional dominating male and a female dedicated to serving the male. (5) A confronting relationship between two competitive "Hawks" is going to be stressful. Both are trying to prove their supremacy. Both are afraid of not being loved or of being hurt. The anger hides the pain. (6) An overly-accommodating relationship is between two "Doves" who pretend to be lovey-dovey instead of expressing the hurt and anger they really feel.

The six relationships above are based on ratings on just two dimensions: love vs. anger and strong vs. weak. In most marriages each person changes from day to day, sometimes being very loving but irritated at other times, sometimes being the leader but the follower at other times. However, some couples become frozen into one role. When we get stuck on one emotion (and deny the other feelings), our role often becomes a destructive, manipulative game. Many of us marry to meet pressing needs--often childhood needs--but marriage can't meet all our needs. When problems occur in our marriage, we blame the partner. Better adjusted couples remain able to express all their feelings--the full range of love, anger, strength, and weakness--with a balance among these emotions. This is Shostrom and Kavanaugh's key to helping failing marriages. They teach couples to experience all their emotions, to develop all parts of their personality, to avoid destructive games, and to meet their own needs rather than depending on or blaming the partner.

### Givers and Takers

Evatt and Feld (1983) suggest that most marriages are made up of one "giver" and one "taker." Givers feel loved when they are giving and have trouble taking. Takers feel loved when they are receiving; they love being adored. Unfortunately, givers eventually become resentful of doing so much for the taker and getting so little in return. The taker becomes bored (and a little guilty) with the ever faithful servant. Which do you think you are--a giver or a taker? Answering these kind of questions will give you a hint:

	<i>Giver</i>	<i>Taker</i>
1. I am more jealous than my lover.	Yes	No
2. I am quieter than my lover.	No	Yes
3. My partners have done mean things to me.	Yes	No
4. My partner is the clingy type.	No	Yes
5. My partner likes to give me gifts.	No	Yes
6. I am more easygoing and cheerful than my partner.	Yes	No
7. I run hot and cold; my partner is steady.	No	Yes
8. I'm trusting; I'm more trustworthy than my partner.	Yes	No
9. I am adored in most of my relationships.	No	Yes
Total =	___	___

The highest total should indicate if you are a giver or a taker. Even though there is no research to support this simple classification system, it rings true to many people (especially to givers who have been taken?). Givers need someone to give to, preferably someone

attractive they can adore. Takers are happy to take. What if you answer about half the questions as a giver and half as a taker? That's a good place to be. Evatt and Feld recommend only one basic solution--givers should learn to take and takers should learn to give more.

## Books, books, and more books about love relationships before and after marriage

### Books about love relationships before and after marriage

A survey by Santrock, Minnett & Campbell (1994) shows that mental health professionals consider four books (out of 100's) to be exceptionally useful in understanding love and intimacy: Lerner (1989), *The Dance of Intimacy*, Hendrix (1988), *Getting the Love You Want*, Scarf (1986), *Intimate Partners: Patterns in Love and Marriage*, and Sternberg (1987), *The Triangle of Love*. Three of the four emphasize how our family relationships and childhood needs or conflicts influence our choice of lovers. Awareness of these motives, which we are usually only vaguely conscious of, might help us understand and cope with our attraction to certain people. Besides clarifying for you exactly what is going on--what are the hidden agendas (Potash, 1991) in the search for love--there are many other approaches to dealing with specific problems that plague love relationships (to be reviewed in the next two sections).

Probably no other area has mystified us as much as love. So, there are lots and lots of books filled with theories... and cases to prove the theory. No doubt these books sell but we *must get beyond theory* in order *to change* a relationship. We must recognize, of course, that men and women often have different views of marriage (Sangrey, 1983). So, several excellent female authors have focused on understanding women's conflicts between submissively loving a man and being their own independent person (Horner, 1990; Lerner, 1988; Paul & Paul, 1983). The ideal egalitarian marriage is described by Fishman (1994), Schwartz (1994), Schwebel (1992), and others. Others offer help in building true intimacy (Emmons & Alberti, 1991; Young-Eisendrath, 1992; Gray, 1994; Napier, 1994, and see the discussion later under maintaining intimacy). O'Hanlon and Hudson (1995) try to get you away from "analyzing" and start you changing. I consider the books in the last two paragraphs to be the most helpful.

Of course there are more abstract, theoretical books about love (not just sexual attraction), including Erich Fromm's classic *The Art of Loving*. Focusing more on romantic love, Nathaniel Branden (1980, 1981) gives us insight into our feelings of love. And, Hendrick and Hendrick (1992) have a new book about liking and loving.

Love relationships change from one stage to another. Campbell (1980) sees the stages of increasing intimacy as steps toward inner

growth and wholeness. The early stages are scary and sometimes mystifying, so Matthews (1990) provides a general guide for women going through the first few years of marriage. Arond & Pauker (1987) also focus on the first year.

Although professionals often do not recommend his books highly, few people have written as much or as well about love as Leo Buscaglia (1972, 1984). He does not rely heavily on research nor does he deal with psychopathology, but his messages about the joys and foibles of love are masterpieces. He motivates you to be loving, rather than informs you. Read at least one of his books--or watch one of his tapes--if you are serious about loving someone or everyone. More recently and more focused on the problems of desperately seeking love, John Bradshaw (1993) describes how we self-sacrifice and lose a sense of our true selves in love relationships. He helps us see the hurt little child in our parents... and in ourselves (see discussion of shame in chapter 6). We select lovers who we hope will take care of our inner child's hurts, and when the partner's kisses fail to "make everything all right," we may blame the partner. We must learn to take care of our own hurts, then we can develop our own ideas of love, not just struggle to comply with our parents' notions of love. Bradshaw is saying that self-understanding, security, and mature thought about our purpose in life are necessary for "soulful love" in the broadest sense.

Obviously, many relationship problems can be traced back to early childhood experiences and to gender stereotypes in our family and culture. Another series of books analyze men's need for intimacy and their fear of it (Osherson, 1992; Rhodes & Potash, 1989; Carter, 1988; Carter & Sokol, 1993). It isn't that men can't love or show their feelings; indeed, they hunger and long for closeness and approval but are inhibited. Psychoanalytic theory suggests that it is frightening for men to become totally intimate with and under the control of a woman again. All men had to struggle to get away from and become different from mom. So, for many men, it seems shameful to express dependent, soft "feminine" feelings, because family dynamics and our culture require all 5-year-old males to "become a big strong boy," renounce these unmanly characteristics, and separate psychologically from his mother (see chapter 9). Both women and men could profit from studying personality development and their own childhood experiences.

Perhaps 15 or more highly publicized but of dubious quality books have attempted to explain male-female relationship problems. The titles are loaded with phrases which state or imply "women love too much," "women make foolish choices," "women who love men who hate and abuse them," "women hide their fears behind castrating anger," "women who are born to please," "men dislike aggressive successful women," "men can't love," "men leave women they love," "men who hate women," "men run from women," etc. The titles make it sound like women are foolish and men are sick and hateful. Most

likely we have two groups of writers who have identified different villains--women or men.

Some female psychologists have observed that the victims (i.e. usually women) are being blamed by many popular authors for the intimacy problems, e.g. women may be described as neurotic, self-destructive, foolish, weak, insecure, love starved, domination-seeking, or as equality-preaching hypocrites who are shamelessly pleading to be cared for by men. You might ask why are women, who, it is said, are superior at understanding, accepting, caring, disclosing, supporting, helping, and relating in loving relationships, being blamed for all these love relationship problems? Perhaps the answer has to do with who wants the relationship the most. This person, the seeker of love, seems to be--and perhaps is--less powerful. And, there is a tendency to blame the weak one.

Likewise, some of the authors who vilify men seem to be operating on the basis of a strong negative stereotype of all men (indeed, one writer even admits having been married to an emotionally abusive man, which should raise some doubt about her objectivity). There are, no doubt, many deep problems in our love lives, including some frightened men full of rage towards their mothers who abuse their wives. But is this the secret lurking within all the men who mistreat their wives? Surely not. Let's not fool ourselves, there are many complex causes. Our science at this time justifies only tentative speculation about childhood based dynamics. Moreover, the focus of our self-help literature should not be on the denigration of one sex or the other but on healthy development and on the correction of unhealthy behavior. And, we should carefully avoid stereotypes--not all women are codependent nor are all men afraid of women and intimacy.

Robin Norwood (1985) wrote a book in this area, *Women Who Love Too Much*, which was on the best-seller list for 37 weeks. It is about women who are excessive "givers" or "motherers." Some such women seek men--"sons"--who are weak and have problems (alcoholism, unfaithfulness, can't hold a good job) and are uncaring, self-centered "takers." The theory is that these women did not get enough love as children, especially not from their fathers, suffer from low self-esteem and, later in life, struggle to gain love by turning losers into perfect husbands. Of course, no matter how competent and devoted they are as rescuers, they almost always fail and suffer. Being addicted to pain, it is very hard to escape such relationships. Norwood's book has no doubt benefited some women. It is primarily designed to help women who blame themselves and often consider normal, healthy relationships boring, but find themselves repeatedly sucked into this kind of destructive rescuing interaction. By recognizing the dynamics, perhaps such sick relationships can be avoided. That's the theory. But are these always the true dynamics? Can the codependent always escape just with insight? See chapter 8.



In a very similar way, Kiley (1983) has written about *The Peter Pan Syndrome*: a man who has never grown up, can be charming, but is undependable, irritable, and self-centered--that's a "taker." In *The Wendy Dilemma*, Kiley (1984) describes women who fear rejection and, consequently, seek an immature male to mother--that's a "giver." Several other recent books describe many fears--fear of rejection, fear of intimacy, fear of losing one's own identity, fear of independence--that influence our love lives (Carter & Sokol, 1993; Dowling, 1982; Marshall, 1984; Paul & Paul, 1983; Russianoff, 1982). Don't forget, chapters 8 and 9 deal with dependency and sex roles and how both are intricately related to love and marriage. If you are seeking insight into a vast, complex morass, like love, be sure to read a lot and look upon many writers' biased opinions with an open, skeptical mind.

Our anxieties about our love relationships (women buy most of the books in this area) make us prime targets for publishers and writers who sell sensationalistic, poorly documented, repackaged ordinary common sense or insubstantial fluff. Check the credentials of the writer! Has he/she done publishable research in the area, not just interviewed a few people to get some juicy case studies to sell the book? Has he/she counseled a wide variety of people with this problem? Does he/she have advanced training and degrees in psychology, social work, or psychiatry? Has he/she published in this area before (but not the same content using another "hot topic" title)? Remember, just because a book is highly advertised, has a catchy title, and is a proven best-seller does *not* mean it will give you practical, sound, effective advice. Far more junk is published than wisdom. Don't read junk.

## Is happiness getting as much as you put into a relationship?

On one hand, many of us would say that the benefits of marriage should be equally divided between two equal partners. On the other hand, another viewpoint (called equity theory) is that a married person will be happy if his/her benefits-to-inputs ratio is about the same as his/her partner's. Inputs and benefits include such things as physical attractiveness of one's partner; love, devotion, and sex from the partner; help with housework, child care, and decision-making; friendship, social life, and intellectual exchange; financial help; understanding and appreciation; and so on. Thus, you may put less into your marriage than your partner and get less than he or she out of it...and both of you might still be happy, you've gotten what you've earned. You may feel dissatisfied, however, if you put in less than your partner and get as much ("over benefited") or certainly if you put in as much and get far less in return ("under benefited"). The idea is to keep the relationship proportional:

$$\frac{\text{Your benefits}}{\text{Your inputs}} = \frac{\text{Your partner's benefits}}{\text{Your partner's inputs}}$$

There are two cautions: (1) if actual changes can not be negotiated to make the relationship proportional or fair, some insecure people use psychological distortion in order to justify (to themselves) the inequity. Examples: a person may convince him/herself that the partner deserves a better deal because he/she is "special." Another person may say, "Oh, sure my husband gets a better deal than I do, but I'm as well off as most other women." If you have had to work very hard to make a relationship work, there is a tendency (because of cognitive dissonance) to believe that your partner is a real gem and the relationship is essential. Don't deceive yourself. (2) Research also suggests that men and women have different notions about fairness. Example: women are more likely to spread the available rewards around equally, regardless of who performed better, while men tend to give greater rewards to the persons who perform better. Every married couple must periodically reconsider the inputs made by each, the benefits available, and the needs of each, and then decide "what is fair" for each person. If you do more for a relationship, perhaps you should get more rewards. Don't cheat yourself.

## **Marriage and children: Life is changing for dad**

We start marriage with just two people, but it usually grows to 3, 4, or more. The children are permanently connected to both parents even if the parents divorce. Thus, one love relationship becomes 3 relationships as soon as a child arrives; a second child results in 6 person-to-person relationships. Children change marriages dramatically. In chapter 9, we saw that, on average, children reduce marital satisfaction, but increase overall satisfaction with the family situation, i.e. we love our kids. We also saw that marriage is changing: moms (70%) are employed outside the home and often (40% of the time) make as much or more money than dad, 20% of fathers (often unemployed) are the primary caretakers for children under age 5, and dads (50%) are helping out a lot more at home. Father's style of play and love add a lot to the children's lives... and closeness with children adds a lot to a father's life. In the 90's we are witnessing a major conflict, namely, more and more fatherless homes (2 out of 3 families in the inner cities) in the face of increasing evidence that an involved father is very important to the academic, social, and mental health of the children. (Other dire consequences of a fatherless home--delinquency, drug abuse, violence, teenage pregnancy, poverty, welfare--are discussed in the divorce section.)

It isn't women's willingness to work outside the home that causes divorce so much as it is some men's unwillingness to work at home (Hochschild, 1989). The second most common reason for divorce (after mental cruelty) is men's neglect of home and children. In the 1980's, about 20% of fathers shared the housework almost equally and 70% did 30-40% of the work (the percentages depend on who you ask--moms or dads). However, mothers still assumed more responsibility for organizing the work and child care, did more of the

daily cooking and cleaning, and did more of the dirty work. Fathers spend more time attending the kids than doing unpleasant chores. Almost 10% of fathers did very little to help out; they are very "over-benefited." But, in general, we have a new kind of involved dad for the 1990's. If you are a father and not very involved at home, better get with it! Gender roles were discussed at length in chapter 9.

## Handling Marital Problems

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### Marital adjustment: What are the common problems?

David Olson of the University of Minnesota, who has studied over 15,000 married couples, recently said that 50% of married people will never be happy, unless they get unusually good therapy. Other researchers agree (Strean, 1985); about 30% of marriages are "empty shells"--little love, little talk, little joy. Only about 25% of couples have "really good marriages." The remaining 25% could achieve a good marriage if they got therapy and/or really worked on obtaining the necessary skills via training or marriage enrichment (or, you can add, self-help). Olson believes the needed skills and characteristics are: communication skills (chapter 13), conflict resolution skills (chapter 13), compatible personality, agreement on values and religion (chapter 3), and good sex (later section).

Women have more complaints about their spouses and marriages, compared to men (Brehm, 1985). Is this because women are more critical and want more or because men give less? I'd guess both. Women initiate the break up of dating and marriages more often than men. Although the underlying "causes" are unknown, these are the commonly stated marital problems (Weiten, 1986):

1. Having unrealistically *blissful expectations* of marriage guarantee our disappointment (discussed in chapters 6 and 8). Living together may help us "get real" about what to expect from a relationship. In any case, it helps to be totally honest and discuss your feelings, your expectations, and your weaknesses, long before marriage.
2. Partners may have very *different role expectations*, i.e. who does the cooking, deciding, working outside the home, etc. Make these decisions jointly, honestly, and openly, don't just hope that the husband will do half the cooking and that the wife will stay home with the kids. Research indicates, contrary to popular belief, that the wife's working outside the home does *not* increase marital problems or harm the children's development.
3. All marriages have *money problems*. If not "there isn't enough money," then the conflict is likely to be "I want to spend our

money on something else." Work out these problems ahead of time in terms of basic priorities as much as possible.

4. *Poor "communication"* is the most common complaint (68%) among couples seeking counseling. The average couple talks only 4 minutes per day! This can be corrected; it is discussed below and in chapters 9 & 13.
5. *Problems with relatives* are common, especially when one spouse remains dependent on his/her parents for money or emotional support.
6. *Sexual problems* (see end of chapter) occur in about 45% of the couples seeking marriage counseling. But sex may not be the basic problem; you don't want to make love if you are uptight, sad, or mad.
7. Although your mom and dad may not have told you, marital satisfaction goes down for most couples after *children* are born. The work load becomes much greater. Parents frequently disagree about how to raise and discipline children. There are jealousies and criticisms: "You do too much for them" or "You don't do enough!" Of course, children are wonderful blessings (usually) but they aren't "good for the marriage."
8. Sometimes couples *drift apart*. They seek different friends, develop new interests, and grow in different directions. When there are few common interests, it is a problem.
9. There are other common problems--jealousy, being taken for granted, unfaithfulness, criticism and nagging, bossiness, clinging dependency, domination, abuse, loss of love, self-centeredness, etc., etc. Don't expect it to be easy; there are many challenging barriers to having a good marriage.

A list of *warning signs*: less respect and more disappointment in the other, more anger-arguments, more negative criticism, more blaming, doing less together, feeling lonely or neglected, less sex, less trust, less joint decision-making, less sharing of thoughts and feelings, less helping, less touching. Pay attention to these problems as soon as they occur and get to the root of the problem. Another study (Kurdek, 1993) provided these *danger signals* (early in the marriage): knew each other a short time, low income (h=husband), low education and income (w), previously married (h or w), harmful beliefs about marriage (h or w), highly neurotic (h or w), a stepfather (h), keep separate accounts, large differences in need to be autonomous, and different external reasons for marrying. During the marriage, these were danger signals: marked *decline* (h and w) in satisfaction, faith in marriage, degree of attachment, and pleasure or pay offs from the marriage.

### Previous discussions of other problems in marriage

In chapter 6 we discussed the stages of divorce and the loneliness and pain of losing a relationship. In chapter 7 we saw how anger, abuse, power struggles, jealousy, and distrust were all-too-often a part of marriage. In chapters 8 and 9 we realized how the social-emotional dependency and the oppression involved in sex roles and

chauvinism can cause special problems for married women. In chapters 9 and 13 we reviewed several skills involved in intimacy, such as liking yourself and self-disclosing, checking your hunches, assuming responsibility for your own feelings (and making "I" statements), giving empathy responses, overcoming being taken for granted, avoiding manipulation and being driven crazy, changing the sex roles of women and men, and reducing chauvinism in its many forms. There is more we need to know about communicating specifically with our spouse.

## **Destructive communication in marriage**

Communication is, of course, important in marriage. But, communication includes every message--every feeling, every desire, every thought that is conveyed to the other person. Some communication is helpful, some is destructive. The most useful knowledge is knowing how to avoid the unhappy, harmful interactions. Seeing how happy and unhappy couples communicate differently might help. Several researchers have studied this and summarized the results (Brehm, 1985; Derlega, 1984; Gottman, 1979, 1994).

Gottman says our stereotype of a happy marriage is a couple who like each other, understand each other well, and settle disputes easily. Yet, some stable marriages do not fit our stereotype: some are volatile (fighting openly but making up passionately) and others carefully avoid conflicts, i.e. they don't "work things out" but agree to disagree (Gottman, 1994). Apparently happy couples have developed various ways of handling the inevitable conflicts, unhappy couples haven't. Unhappy couples first *criticize* the partner's behavior but that gradually evolves into *attacking* his/her personality which eventually degenerates into expressing abusive *contempt*. Naturally the attacked partner becomes *defensive*, perhaps by saying "it's not my fault," by feeling indignant and counter-attacking, or by completely withdrawing emotionally (stonewalling). Both the attacks, usually by women, and the defensive refusal to deal with the issues, usually by men, are big parts of the problem. Men, in unhappy marriages especially, do not listen to the verbal messages nor pick up on their wives' non-verbal messages. Unhappy couples frequently just exchange hostile accusations ("You don't care about me--only about yourself") whereas happy couples may argue, even yell, but would then explore the topic more ("Are you really as unconcerned with this problem as you look?"), ending up resolving the difficulty. This is a summary:

### **Poor communicators**

A steady flow of criticism & putdowns or blaming

Neither partner feels cared for and listened to; too busy defending self

### **Good communicators**

Accentuate the positive and the hopes for the future

Both partners try to stay calm, see the other's point, and show respect, look for a compromise

Get off the topic, find no solutions (throwing all kinds of complaints & insults at the partner)

Stay on topic, be specific about the problem rather than expressing contempt, find a solution both can accept

"Mindread" (see ch. 9) and "psychoanalyze" the partner; name-call, show contempt by mocking, rolling eyes, insulting them, Yes-but (see ch. 9) and counter-attack; do a lot of interrupting

Listen carefully, give empathy and positive responses, assume responsibility for your own feelings ("I" statements), overlook the insults and focus on the complaint. State tentative opinions, not absolute certainties

Show a determination not to "give in," anger, and, eventually, deadly silence

Understand and forgive each other, both give in about 75% of the time

Respond to criticism with defensiveness, such as denying everything, making excuses, charging he/she is emotional

Respond to criticism as useful information (not an insult), a little empathy will work miracles.

Just not responding--tuning them out--when you are fed up with the attacks: stonewalling

Realize that stonewalling is an insult; it says you are contemptible and not worth listening to. You must listen for the pain (and hear the unspoken plea to improve the relationship)

Gottman found that in most marriages the wife is the one who tries to maintain the relationship. So, when she is unhappy, she complains and gets emotional. Men don't like negative emotions, so they try to downplay the emotions and rationally solve the problem... or men withdraw. His withdrawal makes the wife even madder. Sometimes she will suggest a truce or some solution, but often in the heat of battle both go on "emotional overload," feeling contempt for each other. The couple gradually comes to think of and remember their marriage negatively. The failing relationship typically dies a slow death when the male shows little understanding, gets irate, and starts hard-core blaming ("You're full of hate" or "You're so stupid"), which makes it hard for the wife to give in or compromise. Finally, she grows bitter too and the marriage fails. Fortunately, if caught soon enough, the warring couple can learn to increase the positive feelings and actions and decrease the negative. Gottman says the main task is not to solve (or stop) every argument but to stop the escalating bitterness. So good communication skills are needed, especially "I" statements and empathy responses (chapter 13). Gender differences in communicating are discussed in chapter 9 (Gray, 1993; Tannen, 1990).



Once anger turns to bitterness and contempt, it is hard to change.

-Gottman (1979)

Stable marriages have a 5 (positive feelings or acts) to 1 (negative) ratio.  
-Gottman (1994)



### **Coping with communication differences and hostile attributions (views of the partner)**

In general, *women are more socially sensitive* than men. They are better listeners, more empathic in some ways, and give more comforting (warm, caring) responses. On the other hand, young boys and adolescent males are more likely than same-aged girls to act on their empathic feelings for others, i.e. to give concrete help (Brehm, Powell & Coke, 1984). Furthermore, some evidence indicates that married men, when interacting with their wives, do more "good communicating" than married women, including showing concern for the wife's feelings, reassuring their wives, seeking forgiveness, suggesting compromises, and remaining calm and problem-oriented when arguing (Raush, Barry, Hertel, & Swain, 1974). Actually, both sexes need to be good at detecting nonverbal cues. Early in a romantic relationship, the ability of women to read a male's nonverbal cues seems to be important in building intimacy. Later, during periods of conflict, the woman's nonverbal skills and control of the male seem to be critical in avoiding destructive fights (Brehm, p. 209, 1985).

On the negative side, Tannen (1990) says *women show more strong negative emotions during a conflict*. They are more demanding, using threats, "guilt trips," and personal attacks to persuade. They send more double messages: smile and say, "You're terrible!" This research also suggests women more often reject their husbands' attempts at reconciliation. In another study, White (1989) says that dissatisfied spouses in troubled marriages (*both* men and women) attack, threaten, and walk out during fights, but the difference is that women are more open to making up, accepting the husband's plans, showing concern, and appealing to fairness. There seems to be a difference of opinion about which sex makes up first. I suspect "making up" is a function of how angry the person is, the seriousness of the issue, general satisfaction with the marriage, etc., more than a gender difference.

There is some general agreement among women about men, however. Their major complaint, bordering on calling males socially retarded, is that *men are uncommunicative and lack emotional responsiveness*. Men avoid interactions when dissatisfaction is or may be expressed. Could it be males' way of avoiding uncontrolled anger that would be regretted? Otherwise, how do we square this accusation of inaction with the evidence in chapter 7 of intense action by males involving verbal and physical abuse? We probably need to make a distinction between what is called "marital conflicts" and the verbal or physical abuse situations. Perhaps quiet inaction and violent verbal or

physical explosions are just two separate steps on the escalator from irritation to bitterness.

In a very general sense and in milder disagreements, the sexes seem to be at odds: women give more emotional responses and want an emotional response back. Men give more informational, unemotional responses and want practical, constructive, rational responses back. Neither response is bad, so if both sexes could learn to give both kinds of responses, we might be on the right track to improving understanding and relations between the sexes (see Tannen, 1990; Gray, 1993). Other skills would help too.

"Communication" is often given rather glibly as the solution to marital problems. It is no cure all; people who hate each other often communicate very well. One might ask, "Which comes first the poor communication or the resentment?" I'd say anger comes first most of the time. A husband once told me about coming home and commenting to his wife that a bill for \$350 had come to his office, which was unusual because most bills came to their home. The next morning his wife, clearly miffed, said the bill didn't have to be paid for 30 days, not immediately as he had nastily implied the night before. What the husband had considered a simple comment about getting a bill was seen by the wife as a critical attack. When he defensively tried to explain himself, she said, "You are unconscious of how hostile you are." He walked away thinking, "She is just taking her guilt about over-spending out on me, what a bitch!" In this case, the wife's anger resulted in her mind-reading, psychologizing, and angry communication. Without the underlying, stored up anger, the interaction wouldn't have happened (we don't know what or who originally caused the anger).

In other instances, the communication may, in fact, be minimal, and that causes anger. Lillian Rubin (1976) described a typical working class family. The husband may think he shows his love--he married her, works hard, comes home right after work, is faithful, and wants sex 3 or 4 times a week. The wife doesn't feel loved, however. She wants to talk more, to have more fun together, and to be affectionate without sex. She doesn't want to nag. She loses interest in sex. She feels mad. He feels rejected. Both say, "He/she just doesn't understand me" which is true. Had they communicated, it could have been different.

As emphasized in chapter 9, there are many *communication skills that can help* a strained relationship. We can learn to listen better and be more assertive instead of hostile; we can improve our social skills by role playing and learning to use "I" statements and empathy responses; we can check out our hunches, fight fairly, and negotiate compromises (see chapter 13); we can reduce our anger (see chapter 7). Encounter groups and marriage enrichment groups emphasize communication. There are *books* specifically written for improving couples' communication (Notarius & Markman, 1993; Tannen, 1990; Gray, 1993; Gottman, et al., 1976; Strayhorn, 1977;



Goodman & Esterly, 1988). Many other books document the value of good communication skills in marriage; they advocate these same methods (Austin, 1976; Bach & Deutsch, 1970; Bach & Wyden, 1976; Chaikin & DeVLaga, 1976; Charney, 1972; Ellis & Harper, 1975; Gallagher, 1975; McCary, 1975; Mace & Mace, 1974; Powell, 1974; Shain, 1974; Smith and Phillips, 1973; Viscott, 1976; Wilson & Wilson, 1976). Communication skills are very important.

## **Learning to communicate differently requires awareness and practice**

Notarius and Markman (1993) have trained couples to talk more positively to each other. But first the partners must learn to recognize their negative communications (the table above is a good summary of the common hurtful habits). Often we don't even know we are being nasty and hurtful. Also, some couples disagree so often that they just come to expect almost every interaction to become a disagreement; therefore, they hardly listen to the other person's opinions and start attacking right away. If your discussions almost always end in unresolved irritating disagreements, then why talk except to vent some of the vile resentment festering in your gut? Obviously, such couples must learn to talk differently. Notarius and Markman suggest the following procedure.

First, since negative communication may have become an unconscious habit, we have to be confronted with our comments and gestures that spew out negativity. One way is to audio or video tape one of your arguments and then review it together. Carefully observe every statement and movement, stopping the tape frequently and discussing openly the critical, hurtful, counter-attacking comments and looks. Another way is to have only one person talk at a time and have the listener give immediate feedback to the talker about how they (the listener) is feeling about each comment. Do this by using +, -, and 0 signs, meaning "that is positive and makes me feel good," "that is negative and upsets me," and "that is neutral and I feel okay." This feedback is an interesting, often eye-opening experience.

Second, both partners must study and practice "I" statements and good listening with empathy responding (methods 2 and 4 in chapter 13). It is helpful to have some discussions using these rules: each partner must carefully listen and accurately give empathic feedback to the person who has just spoken *before* he/she can express an opinion or reaction to what was said. This forces each person to hear what the partner is really saying and feeling... and it prevents the machine-gun like exchange of angry, critical comments. (Also, look for the attacked person's denial of responsibility responses and his/her avoidant, stonewalling reactions.)

Third, each partner needs to attend to his/her physiological reactions that signal being upset or mad or hurt. It isn't easy to do, but it is important to be able to stop a destructive, out-of-control

exchange. So when either partner gets beyond the point of being civil and rational, you must learn to ask for a "time-out," taking some time to calm down. Don't just drop the discussion, however. Be sure to agree on continuing the discussion when you have had time to think about it more reasonably and less hostilely. A long string of negative comments can over-ride hours of ordinary conversation. Your feelings need to be communicated, but not in a vile, brutal, uncaring, unending manner, which happens when we get really mad.

Lastly, during a calm moment, it is very important that both partners realize (and maybe tell each other so) the secret, unexpressed feelings that often underlie the anger and criticism. What feelings are these? Frequently, feeling unloved, rejected, hurt or neglected gives rise to the cutting criticism and nagging comments. In other words, what we really want is more love, tenderness and attention but when those needs are frustrated, we respond with critical, hurtful comments and outrage about all kinds of petty annoyances. How sad that love turns so quickly to resentment. If the criticized partner can see the underlying reasons for the hurts and anger, the entire interaction can change. The hurtful comments are disarmed. The criticism is seen as merely a way for your lover, who wants to be more loving with you, to vent his/her temporary frustration. Look for the hurt little child behind the attacking, bitchy mask. If a couple can become understanding, get closer, and show they care, the marriage can be turned around.

A somewhat similar approach to changing marital communication is taken by Christensen & Jacobson (2000), two seasoned therapists who have researched their methods. They believe marital differences are often reconcilable. When the ongoing talk between two people is laden with criticism or subtle demands or expressions of annoyance or signs of rejection, these psychologists teach them to be more "accepting." Too often when we are unhappy with someone, we want them to change...and when he/she doesn't change, our frustration starts to dominate our view of the relationship. Example: if the wife feels that hubby never discloses his thoughts or feelings, she finds evidence of his withholding and withdrawing in most of their conversations. If he feels "she criticizes me all the time," he sees more and more of her negativity in every interaction (and probably withdraws). Instead of letting the situation escalate building more anger, Christensen & Jacobson ask the couple to consider a different alternative, namely, to learn to tolerate or accept the faults of the partner and their disappointment in the relationship, realizing (if it is true) that the partner's trait that bugs the hell out of you is, in fact, a minor factor relative to the good aspects of the marriage. In short, keep in mind that perfect relationships do not exist, so some weaknesses, faults, self-centeredness, disturbing attitudes or beliefs, or whatever will just have to be accepted in any relationship.

How do these therapists increase the couple's acceptance of each other? There are several steps: (1) Help the clients understand how conflict and discontent develop. (2) Persuade each one to give up

demanding that the partner change and, instead, work on accepting the partner as is. (3) Each is asked to write his/her own story describing their "problem." Write the story so that it (a) clarifies the *differences* between them, but doesn't accentuate the defects or pathology, (b) is phrased *positively*, not negatively, (c) focuses on the *vulnerabilities*, not the offensive behaviors, (d) merely *describes* behaviors, not evaluate or degrade them, and (e) reveals one's *emotional reactions*, without moralizing or psychologizing. (4) They share their stories with each other, then make agreed upon changes until one story becomes acceptable to both. Don't rush this step; it may be difficult. (5) The final big step is to strive for acceptance of each other through compassion and empathy: (a) coming to see the other person's losses, hopes and needs, (b) becoming able to disclose feelings in depth when disagreeing, e.g. the hurt, insecurity, and fears underlying their anger, (c) making genuine efforts to empathize with each other most of the time, (d) stopping an argument early and asking "how did this start?," (e) asking if you had hurt them after a disclosure...try to understand their reactions, and (f) continuing to make ongoing efforts to do positive, caring things for each other. (See a series of [helpful skills](#) in chapter 13.)

If both can learn to accept the other, warts and all, the two people are well on their way to rebuilding a satisfying relationship. I'd recommend this kind of therapy or just buying the book and trying it on your own. Of course, if the partner's negative behavior or attribute is unchangeable, as shown by unsuccessful marital counseling, and too serious to be accepted, then the relationship may be over.

## Resolving marital conflicts

As we have just seen, we have a choice: we can "understand" our partner or we can blame him/her; how we view and explain the other person's behavior is crux of the emotional problem. And, how we explain or understand our situation, influences how we try to change those problems. Happy couples tend to accentuate the partner's good traits and motives as causes of his/her positive behavior; his/her negative behavior is seen as rare and unintentional or situational. The happy spouse, thereby, reinforces his/her partner's good traits.

In contrast, unhappy couples overlook the positive and *emphasize the partner's bad personality traits and negative attitudes* as the causes of marital problems (Brehm, 1985, pp. 289-297; Fincham & O'Leary, 1983). The partner's bad behavior is seen as frequent ("it happens all the time"), deliberate ("they know I hate it"), and wide ranging ("it effects everything we do"). Obviously, such mental explanations (attributions) are going to cause trouble and, especially, when conflicts arise, because we become much more concerned about understanding someone's actions when tensions mount. When breaking up, many of you have probably experienced a very intense need to understand why, to explain what happened. Perhaps we are

looking for some way to handle the problem. Maybe we are just hoping that if we understand the situation, the agony will go away. But, if within our marriage our "understanding" has become intensely negative and hostile, our view of things must change.

According to Orvis, Kelley and Butler (1976), during conflicts we also become more *self*-protective, believing there were good reasons (usually situational--"I just went along with the others") for whatever *we* did. Therefore, when we start strongly disagreeing with others about why we or they did something, the conflict is hard to resolve. Each partner sees different causes. We tend to excuse ourselves but believe that evil motives or bad attitudes--"you only care about yourself"--motivate the person we are in conflict with. Being aware of the irrationality of our own thought processes can bring some rationality to the situation. See methods #3 and #8 in chapter 14. Change your own thinking, and try to see and understand your spouse's viewpoint.

As discussed in chapter 9, once we start this kind of blaming or psychological labeling of the other person, the relationship is in deep trouble. For one thing, the next step is to conclude, "If this problem is your fault, only *you* can change it." While you are viewing yourself as totally blameless (probably untrue), you are also assuming you are helpless and can't do anything about the situation (probably untrue). Such attitudes only block change; try backing off, cooperating a little, and making plans for change.

Secondly, although we may complain later, bad-mouth them to others, and sulk, we are likely to stop saying something to our spouse about their disturbing behavior at the time it occurs. Seething silence doesn't help. Example: your spouse's constant interruptions burn you up but eventually you stop talking or walk away instead of saying, "You're interrupting" or "I'll talk when you'll listen." *Share your feelings* (tactfully, as with "I feel..." statements). Don't expect your partner to read your mind.

Thirdly, while "getting out of the way," being alone, and "keeping your mouth shut" are very wise reactions sometimes, they are mistakes if done all the time. Avoiding discussing conflicts and/or *denying there are problems builds the emotional distance* between spouses. If you don't talk about your feelings and thoughts, neither of you have a chance to correct the trouble-causing misunderstandings of the other. This self-protective approach (avoiding or stonewalling) becomes self-defeating. Men tend to avoid discussing their relationships. You must talk openly and calmly.

Fourthly, each person thinks the other should "make the first move to make up." Example: a couple goes to bed after an argument and both want to make up but he thinks, "She's still mad; I'll wait until she signals things are okay" and she thinks, "I'm not mad; I wish he'd reach out; he's so stubborn and he's not very affectionate; that makes me mad again." *You can make the first move!*

Finally, the worst way to try to change a partner is to say, "You have to change....or else!" The change demanded ("stop spending all your time with those people") may not be the change wanted ("show you love *me*"). Besides, *ultimatums are resisted*. Understanding the reasons, the meaning behind the demand for change, will facilitate change. Example: nagging your spouse to clean out the sink and put the cap back on the toothpaste tube isn't likely to work, but he/she may change if you honestly explain that the messy toothpaste tube by the dirty sink reminds you of your drunken, abusive, sloppy father who made you clean the bathroom after he vomited. People who understand each other accommodate each other better. Changes are needed in both spouses, not just one.

Remember from chapter 6 on depression that our optimism about changing the future depends on whether we think the causes of the unpleasant interactions are changeable or permanent. *Uncontrollable causes* are often permanent personality traits or characteristics (of you or the partner), such as selfishness, hostility, need for attention, stupidity and so on. These are an angry person's favorite explanations. Or, uncontrollable causes could be unavoidable situations, such as an illness. *Controllable causes* are temporary behaviors or circumstances, such as "having a bad day," "I approached it wrong," "it was an oversight" and so on. You can do something about the controllable causes; that's hopeful. Even being self-blaming can be hopeful if you feel the power to change yourself is in your hands. So, thinking in terms of controllable causes may lead to hope and more effort to improve the marriage. Whereas believing the causes are uncontrollable leads to despair and giving up on the relationship, "I could never stay with such an awful person." You can control how you think.

Awareness of these interpersonal dynamics can be helpful (Hendrix, 1990; Doherty, 1982; see chapters 4, 6, 7 & 9). If we understood others as well as ourselves, if we were as generous with our positive interpretations of the causes of their behavior as we are with our behavior, there would be less marital discord to suffer through. Not only must we change our "attributional style" from negative (blaming) to positive (see the good and understand the bad) but we must *at the same time* change our behavior (decrease the hate and increase the tolerance). This is no easy assignment to carry out in the midst of a heated emotional conflict, but try to remember the above points. When we disagree with another person there are only three options: fight it out, withdraw, or negotiate a compromise (see method #10 in chapter 13 for resolving conflicts). *Look for compromises that offer hope*. Be understanding. Plan together and carry out cognitive and behavioral changes. Accentuate the positive in your loved one. It is important to "debrief" after a fight and learn from it (Wile, 1995); unfortunately, most couples avoid talking about the fight. We can learn to find solutions and get along.

## Power struggles in marriage

There is an old adage about love: the person *least* in love (least needy) has the *most* power. Other truisms are: "you can't make anyone love you" and "when his/her love for you dies, your power over him/her is gone." Of course, there are many other power bases in marriage besides love: money, goods, services, sex, status or authority, friendship and respect for the partner, threats and punishment, useful knowledge, personal appeal and pleading, and others. All of these can be used to motivate or direct the other person; all can become a battleground.

In chapter 7 we saw that men tend to use anger, authority, and logic (knowledge) to get their way, while women use sadness (tears) and appeals of helplessness to influence their husbands. In our culture, at least in the past, male domination is approved; indeed, if the male isn't successful and doesn't earn a good living, he finds it hard to get respect. The lack of success, such as unemployment, is more distressing for married men than for married women. Conversely, being the breadwinner may be very hard but it is less stressful than being a spouse who needs to be a breadwinner but can't get a job. It seems to be generally true that having power is enjoyable and being powerless is stressful. However, in the specific instance of female-dominated marriages, neither the husband nor the wife, who has power, tends to be happy, not as satisfied as spouses in egalitarian and male-dominated marriages (Gray-Little & Burks, 1983; Horwitz, 1982).

It is commonly speculated that a person with high needs for power and control over others is secretly or unconsciously insecure and anxious. Such people presumably try to deny their weaknesses by dominating others. For example, an extremely insecure (and emotionally disturbed) man might abuse his wife, as in the film *The Burning Bed*. Research has shown that as men get more education they experience less and less need for power. In general, this is not true for women, in fact just the opposite; women want more power as they get more educated. This is probably because women have to fight for power in school and the work place even if they are well educated, whereas men are given power and respect along with the educational degrees (Veroff & Feld, 1971).

In any case, the need for power has profound effects on love relationships for men, not necessarily for women. Consider this. Undergraduate males with strong needs for power as shown by tests, compared to males with weaker needs for power, were found to have had more relationships with women in the past but have poorer relationships with their current partners. They also loved their current partners less than men with less need for power and they foresaw more problems in the relationship, expressed more interest in dating other women, and were more likely to leave the relationship (Stewart

& Rubin, 1976). What happens to these power-oriented college playboys? They move into the business world and eventually marry women who are less invested in a career. In other words, these men shift from dominating women sexually to dominating their wives economically. Does this mean they feel inferior? Not necessarily, they may feel superior (if that's possible without underlying insecurity). It is interesting to note, however, that college males who married highly motivated career-oriented women had less need for power, felt more need for close relationships, liked college, got higher grades, and, in general, seemed to be more secure (Winter, Stewart & McClelland, 1977).

Unfortunately, there is little research about the details of the many struggles for control that occur in marriages: Who will do the laundry? cook supper? change the diaper? go to the store? handle the money? decide when to buy a car? get a degree first? initiate sex? plan the social life? make the big decisions? Yet, we do know that even after women go to work full-time and should have more "power," they still do more than 50% of the child care and housework. Certainly, falling in love doesn't perform miracles and erase forever the desire to have one's own way, although for the first few months of courtship the self-centered tyrant is amazingly transformed into an accommodating charmer. It helps in marriage if you both have similar interests and values, equal educations, equal incomes, and are truly willing to compromise. When a disagreement arises, be sure to consider together the pros and cons of several alternatives. Don't get locked into a win-lose battle where either I win and you lose or the reverse. Strive for win-win innovative or compromise solutions (see negotiating in chapter 13 and Campbell, 1984). Jones and Schechter (1993) guide women around impossibly dominant relationships so she can reclaim her own life.

## Understanding and handling jealousy

Most of us have experienced Shakespeare's "green-eyed monster"-jealousy. In its intense forms, it is a horrible, tormenting obsession. Often in a crisis we'd like to kill the person who tries to take our lover away. It is estimated that 20% to 35% of all murders involve a jealous lover (White and Mullen, 1989; Pines, 1992b). A third of all couples in therapy have a problem with jealousy. It is common for a jilted lover to threaten suicide, and some do it. Certainly power is involved; we want the power to keep our lover to ourselves exclusively. Just as falling in love seems "natural" and unlearned, so does jealousy. It just comes over us when someone or something (like work, TV, or sports) threatens our love relationship. Of course, it isn't always painful and crazy-making, sometimes it's milder and fun--a tease--and a sexual turn on, as in swapping partners. We will focus on the more intense, unpleasant kind. How does it differ from envy and rivalry?

There isn't a clear-cut distinction between jealousy and envy but, in general, jealousy is experienced when something you have (e.g. a lover) is taken away or is threatened by someone else. Envy is when you do not measure up to someone else or you very much want something someone else has (e.g. an attractive lover, a sports car, success, a sexy build, etc.). Rivalry is when no one yet possesses the thing you desire (a particular person or position or status) and there is keen competition for the desired goal. Obviously, all of these feelings increase as our desire--our desperation--for the "prize" increases. Jealousy is the most intense. It involves having something highly valued and losing it to the competition--that hurts, angers, and shames us.

Nancy Friday (1985) has written an enormous volume on *Jealousy*. Schoenfeld (1980) discussed jealousy in a practical way. But, Barker (1987) has been considered most personally helpful by my students.

The greater the threat, the more intense the jealousy. Accordingly, a large *Psychology Today* survey (Salovey & Rodin, 1985) showed that separated and divorced persons suffered the most jealousy, followed by cohabiting single people, and married people the least. How we perceive the threat influences the jealousy; thus, men and women have somewhat different experiences. A jilted man gets mad at the other male; a jilted woman dwells on the loss of her partner's commitment and love.

There are five stages of jealousy (White, 1981; Brehm, 1985):


1. **Suspecting the threat:** If you are insecure about a love relationship (not necessarily about yourself in general) and very dependent on your lover, you are likely to be jealous. You may see "signs" of disaster when none are there. Conversely, some people overlook very suggestive signals. In reality, 45% of the people in the *Psychology Today* survey had cheated on a partner while pretending to be faithful. Men are more likely to deny feeling jealous; women more readily admit it. If the threat to our relationship--the competitor--is attractive, intelligent, successful, etc., we will be more threatened and more disturbed. If we have or want an exclusive sexual relationship with our lover, we will be more threatened by a competitor than if we were in a non-sexual relationship. If we ourselves have been unfaithful to our partners, others might expect us to be less jealous if our partner also has an affair, but research shows that some unfaithful spouses are more jealous (perhaps, in these cases, the greatest threat to the relationship is when *both* partners have had affairs).

2. **Assessing the threat:** We may spy on our lover and the rival; we probably lie awake nights worrying about the situation and reviewing the evidence, "Did she come on to him?" "I wonder if he has talked to her." "Does he love her?" "Wonder if everybody but me knows about it?" Women are concerned about their partner becoming attracted to other women by sex, intelligence, and other attractions, *and* dissatisfaction with the current relationship. Thus, women feel




multiple threats. Men are consciously more concerned about their partner finding someone who will offer a more secure, committed relationship. Men are more concerned (than women) about protecting or re-building their egos if they are "beaten out" by another man; they worry about their partner having sex with someone else (but they'd probably blame the partner if that did happen). Men see a threat and feel jealous first, then worry that something is wrong with them. Women are more concerned with maintaining the relationship; they worry about losing love; they feel inadequate first, then jealous. It is in this intensive worry and spying stage that we go crazy, see the discussion of irrational ideas in chapters 6, 7, and 14.

3. **Emotional reactions:** If we decide there is a threat to our love, we can have a very wide range of responses: clinging dependency (more women but many men too), violent rage at the competitor or the partner (more men), morbid curiosity, self-criticism, and depression with suicidal thoughts (more women), hurt and resentment of the partner's lack of devotion and resistance, social embarrassment, selfish--sometimes realistic--concerns ("I'd better take the money out of the bank"), urge to "get back at" the partner, fear of losing companionship, loneliness, regrets at giving up all the future plans, etc., etc.



Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned,  
Nor hell a fury like a woman scorned.  
-William Congreve, *The Mourning Bride*, 1697



In spite of Congreve's famous quote, there is some evidence that men have a more intense jealousy response to losing a loved one than women do, and they take more time to get over it (Mathes, 1988).

The 1950's advocated "family togetherness." In the late 1960's and 1970's there was an "open marriage" movement (O'Neill & O'Neill, 1973); we were told that jealousy was a sign of inconsiderate possessiveness and immaturity, that we were selfishly restricting our partner's love for everyone. Certainly many people tried gallantly to suppress jealous feelings while being open and modern "swingers," but many failed. At the same time, there were arguments that jealousy was a natural, inevitable, and useful reaction (Mace, 1958; Harrison, 1974). Surely, a couple deciding on exclusiveness in their love and sexual life is not always a master-slave relationship, not necessarily one-sided possessiveness. Yet, love is scary. We can be hurt; the lover has power over us; we need to be #1 in his/her life. How does someone become so important in our emotional life? In the same way *The Little Prince* loved his rose bush (Saints-Exupery, 1943). It's a neat part of the story; I'll summarize:

The Little Prince lived on a tiny planet all his own. He had only one rose bush. He loved it. It was so beautiful; it gave him so much pleasure. He remembers tenderly planting the little bush in his richest soil, building a fence to protect it and a trellis to hold it, trimming it and watering it every day. With pride he watched his rose bush grow into a healthy, mature rose bush which faithfully produced beautiful blossoms year after year. Then he went to another planet, Earth, and saw thousands of roses, much bigger and more beautiful than his one little bush. At first, he felt foolish for having liked his rose bush so much. After all, there was nothing special about his bush. Then he realized he didn't love his rose bush for its bigness or its outstanding beauty, he loved it because he had personally cared for his bush and because so much of his time and pleasure had been with only one rose bush, "his" roses. Like the Little Prince, we hurt when we lose "our" love. The hurting doesn't necessarily mean we lack confidence or that we believe we possess the other person; it means we are human, we long for things we have lost.

4. **Coping response:** There are two basic choices--desperately trying to shore up the threatened relationship or trying to protect or bolster your sagging ego. Men are more likely than women to become competitive and/or have angry reactions, often including getting drunk or high. Women more often become weak and depressed; sometimes they act like they don't care; more often, they cry, plead, and blame themselves (Brehm, 1985). Bar talk suggests that recently rejected lovers are sexually on the make and/or sexually "easy." An interesting study by Shettel-Neuber, Bryson, & Young (1978) suggests that men and women, when threatened by an *unattractive* competitor, are about as likely to go out with "someone else" and be sexually aggressive. However, when threatened by an *attractive* competitor, men felt an even stronger urge to make it with "someone else," while women didn't want to get involved with any other men at all.

5. **The outcome:** It is important to know if particular emotional and coping responses help or harm threatened relationships. Also, do these responses build or destroy self-esteem? Both self-esteem and love are important. For instance, a threatened lover, who temporarily keeps his/her partner (and protects his/her ego) by threatening violence or suicide or by frantically begging, will probably lose the lover's respect in the process. What are the best responses?

Before looking at ways to cope with jealousy, let's try to understand its causes better. Different therapies have different explanations of jealousy. Examples: Freudians say the overwhelming dread and pain of rejection originates in childhood when we discover that we are not Mommy or Daddy's favorite (Daddy or Mommy is). Of course, this insecurity is unconscious. The Family Systems therapists point out that both partners contribute to the jealousy-producing situation. If one partner has an affair, it reflects a troubled relationship, for which *both* are responsible. Yet, behavioral therapists use psychological techniques to reduce one individual's jealousy response--desensitization, flooding, and satiation (having the

unfaithful partner "report in" every hour). Sociological treatments emphasize cultural influences. For instance, all societies tell us we should be jealous but in different circumstances, e.g. certain Eskimo men consider it a compliment if a visiting male wants sex with his wife but a visitor wanting to keep the wife would be highly resented. Thus, jealousy is a learned social reaction, not our innate nature. On the other hand, the sociobiologists, like Darwin, believe jealousy is innate and instinctive for genetic survival. Men want exclusive sexual partners (to pass on their genes) and women want devoted helpers (to help with the kids' survival). Thus, after an affair, men want sexual details and women want to know how serious the relationship is. All these "understandings" can reduce intense jealousy and blaming each other (Pines, 1992a).

### So, what can be done about jealousy?

Needless to say, the best protection against jealousy is a good relationship, i.e. prevention is better than a cure. If the love can be kept alive and exciting, that is much more effective than trying to revive a threatened love. Once jealousy has occurred, however, what works best? Salovey and Rodin (1985) asked 100 college students what had worked for them. *Best was "tough it out,"* i.e. controlling their emotions and becoming even more committed to and attentive to the loved one. A second method was somewhat effective, namely, *"selective ignoring,"* i.e. telling themselves that the desired object (the lover or some achievement) was just not that important. A third method, telling themselves their good qualities and doing something nice for themselves, was not helpful in this case. Read on.

Branden (1981) advocates an openly honest "I feel..." response. Example: you see your partner flirting with a very attractive person at a party. Rather than bitterly attacking the partner, what if later you said: "As I watched you with *him/her*, I immediately felt anxious. There were butterflies in my stomach and I started to imagine that you might try to see *him/her* later and get all emotionally involved. The idea of your touching and holding *him/her* really upset me. I'm scared you will leave me." Such a frank, non-attacking response, which discloses the true feelings underneath the jealousy, should make it easy for the flirting partner to respond sympathetically and honestly to the heart of the matter, namely the jealous person's hurt and fears. This honesty is usually the best way to handle jealousy.

What is the best protection against being devastated by an actual break up or the possibility of a break up? *Self-esteem and a belief that your future will work out okay.* But esteem has to be developed before the break up, not afterwards. Some simple techniques may be useful in reducing jealousy: *stay active*, distract yourself with friends, fun, hobbies, work, self-improvement, etc.; *thought stopping* (ch. 11) should reduce the jealousy arousing fantasies; *desensitization* (ch. 12) can reduce the emotional response of jealousy just as if it were a fear; *venting* (ch. 12) will relieve the hurt and angry feelings; *seek support* from friends and tell them how you feel. Also, you must *challenge your*

*irrational ideas* that drive you "crazy" (ch. 14), including understanding that jealousy is probably unavoidable to some degree, that you are responsible for your feelings, that the thrill of a new love will initially overshadow a taken-for-granted relationship, that some "games" are played to make us jealous, that some partners are so self-centered they can not be faithful, that no love comes with a life-time guarantee, that there may be very good reasons for your former lover to be interested in someone else, etc. Most of us who have been deeply hurt by a rejection know, however, that little can be done about the pain during the first several days or weeks. You can try to keep busy and "keep your mind off of it," but in the main you just have to *tough it out*.

Before long, the basic solution to these many irrational thoughts and expectations surely involves a counterattack with rational thinking. One important point to realize is that intense jealousy *does not prove there is intense "true love"* between two people. In fact, jealousy only reflects *your* intense needs, *your* desperation to keep what you want (at the moment), and *your* unrealistic (perhaps) demands about what the future should hold. Thus, *jealousy reflects self-interest and self-love*, rather than mutual "true love." A second important point is that your lover can decide to like or love someone else without that proving in any way that you are less worthwhile or less desirable or less lovable. There are hundred of reasons why people lose interest in others, including paradoxical reasons like "I'm not good enough for him/her," "I'm just not as serious or ambitious as they are," etc. And, there are many good reasons for changing partners that demean no one, e.g. "I have more interests in common with another person," "Our cultural-religious backgrounds are so different," "Our futures will take us in different directions," etc. *Being rejected doesn't mean you are no good*.

For many hurting people, it is helpful to realize that the pain of childhood wounds may intensify your reactions to the hurtful situation. Sometimes, putting yourself in your partner's shoes is very helpful. One partner can write a defense for the actions and feelings of the unfaithful or rejecting partner, while the other partner writes a description and defense of his/her partner's pain and jealousy. It may also help if the jealous person acts as if he/she is not jealous. It will probably help to know that jealousy is common and normal, not a shameful personal weakness, and that jealousy is a result of the situation. Ask yourself: "Have you been constantly jealous in every relationship?" If no, then you aren't an unavoidably "jealous person." In short, your understanding of both the hurtful and the hurting person can be reframed, i.e. the unfaithful person may be seen as seeking a childhood dream or desperately signaling that the marriage is in deep trouble. There are many ways to reduce jealousy (Pines, 1992b). In any case, the pain will normally go away in a few weeks.

Unquestionably, it is often wise for lovers with doubts to break up. Considering the divorce rate, perhaps we, even in pain from rejection, should be thankful and accept it. Not likely! Yet, a person with "true

unselfish love" would say, "I love you enough to let you do whatever you think is best for you, even if that means leaving me." But, romantic love is selfish. Perhaps the best you can hope for is to learn from this relationship and select a better partner and be a better partner next time. If you break up, the most important thing to remember is: "I am a valuable, lovable person regardless of whether you love me or not. It hurts but I can handle it. I'll get on with my life." For me, the best way to get over pining for a lost love (after a month or so) is to begin carefully looking for a better relationship (Mathes, 1988, found several women reduced their jealousy this way, men did not). Other people need some time alone. See discussion of divorce and re-marriage.

## **Avoiding facing marital problems**

Some married people avoid expressing their unhappiness to "keep peace." Although well intentioned, this concealing of your feelings and pain from your spouse month after month causes serious harm to your marriage. The quiet one is denying the truth, pretending to be happier than he/she is, minimizing the marital problems, endangering his/her own health, avoiding a vital task merely because it is stressful, trying to play it safe, acting uncaringly and hostilely towards his/her spouse, and reneging on his/her sacred vows to preserve the marriage. This is kind of keeping the peace is the kind of behavior that causes problems. Honest openness is needed to maintain a marriage. Don't cop out. Learn about "I" statements and empathy responding in chapter 13, then get to work.

Some writers, e.g. Cole & Laibson (1982), believe that the hiding of disagreements between husband and wife also gives children a distorted view of marriage and deprives the children of the chance to learn how to handle conflict. We need to realize that (1) all thinking people disagree occasionally and (2) anger doesn't have to destroy love. Many happy couples fight verbally or argue. Cole and Laibson think parents should "fight" (disagree or argue but not get verbally or physically abusive) in front of the kids and especially show the children that arguments can and should lead to workable solutions. Children shouldn't witness certain arguments, however, such as about sex, child-rearing, money, relatives, or divorce, nor should the children become involved in the argument if it is just between the parents. Always assure the children that they aren't causing the marital problems. No parent should ever involve a child as an emotional substitute for the spouse, an ally against the other parent, or as a pawn in the marital wars. The rules for fair, good, constructive "fighting" are given in chapter 13; two psychologists have written a book on how to conduct effective, beneficial family fights (Rubin & Rubin, 1988). If you can't follow these rules and the arguments become vicious, name-calling, destructive battles, both partners should get counseling.

Judith Siegel's new book, "What Children Learn from Their Parents' Marriage," may help frightened or irritable or distant spouses uncover the source of their emotions. Her point is that, as young children, we observe closely the interactions between Mom and Dad. Those experiences form a lasting basis for our expectations and fears of marriage and intimacy. Unfortunately, many children accurately see unhealthy relationships between their parents... plus, and causing even more problems, the child him/herself probably has distorted perceptions of the parents' interactions and many children go beyond mere misperceptions into gross distortions and horrible fantasies about their parents' relationship, e.g. possibly imagining that the angry spats of their parents could turn into dangerous out-of-control rages, making the child very afraid of having disagreements with anyone (as a child or later as a spouse/lover).

As Freud observed, we are, for unclear reasons, prone to repeat the disturbing problems we observed or experienced in the past--presumably so we can try to find a way to resolve the troubling situation. However, if we come to realize what we are doing, for instance, carrying our distorted fears as a child into our own marriage, maybe we could find a way to avoid this "repetition neurosis." Siegel's book should, at least, help some people review their childhood experiences of their parents' marriage and, hopefully, find the childhood origins of their current difficulties with intimacy. Siegel's basic purpose, however, is to help parents realize that their children are not only affected by the child's relationship with each of them as individuals but also deeply affected by the way they see Mom and Dad relating.

## **Loveless marriages: Lasting doesn't mean loving**

With divorce being common, why would anyone stay married to someone he/she didn't love or even like? There are lots of reasons, according to Florence Koslow, a well known marriage counselor. This would include the same reasons young people do not break engagements or leave boy/girlfriends when they suspect they haven't made the best possible choice. If there are children, there are powerful reasons to stay married, even if the marriage is strained or dead. Even in a loveless marriage *both* parents can preserve their close relationships with the children. Divorces often strain and even destroy parent-child relationships as well as terminate a marriage (see the discussion of step-parents later). Many people are also trapped in marriage by their own fears: fear of the unknown, fear of losing status (people gain status by marrying an attractive, successful partner), fear of criticism, fear of being alone, fear of intimacy and sex with someone new, fear that all marriages are unhappy, fear of losing income, fear of doing harm to the children, and a fear of raising children alone. These are serious matters to consider.

## Unfaithfulness

Even though surveys vary greatly in their estimate of infidelity (from 25% to 70% of partners), the Kinsey Institute estimates that about 35% of husbands and 30% of wives have been unfaithful. Janus & Janus (1993) also found that more than 1/3 of husbands and more than 1/4 of wives have had an extramarital experience, but less than 1/4 of divorces are caused by affairs. Of course, as time goes on, more of the faithful will become unfaithful. It may be hard at first to separate the chronically unfaithful from those who have only one brief affair in 50 years, but these are very different people. Pittman (1989) distinguishes between adulterers and womanizers. Adulterers (males) usually have one affair, typically during a crisis--when passed over for a promotion or when his wife is very busy--and then feels guilty. Womanizers compulsively seduce women as a full-time avocation and hide this from their wives. They often claim to have a high sex drive and a lust for sexual variety. Their therapists say such men often don't like women or even sex. Womanizers have a disease or an addiction, in which they see women as the enemy. They think of "being a real man" as escaping a woman's control and as being someone who can powerfully manipulate and deceive women. Like a rapist, he seeks power and superiority. Many had fathers who escaped their mothers via work, divorce, or alcohol. There are some 12-step programs for womanizers. Advice for therapists of people who have had affairs is given by Eaker-Weil and Winter (1993) and Brown (1991).

On the positive side, Greeley, Michael, & Smith (1990) report that *a high percentage of married people* (ranging from 91% and 94% for men and women under 30 to 95% or more of both sexes over 30) *were monogamous*, i.e. had only one sex partner, *during the last year*. But, the years roll on and those 5% and 9 percents add up. However, most marriages today are faithful and *the belief in being faithful to your spouse has steadily increased* during recent decades, even during the time that premarital sex was being approved of more and more.

Unfaithfulness is always a devastating blow to the partner. We feel crushed, like a part of us had been ripped out. We may be very angry or sad or both. It isn't just that our partner wanted and did have sex, the ultimate expression of love, with someone else, but he/she lied to us, betrayed us, and had so little concern for our feelings. Yet, two thirds of marriages survive infidelity. Many people say they would "immediately throw the b-----/b---- out." The situation is more complex than that. A brief affair doesn't always mean there is a serious problem with the marriage. Men having an affair are not more unhappy with their marriage than faithful men; women are more unhappy. Nevertheless, infidelity is a huge problem even if the marriage survives. Putting love back together is a long-term, difficult task in our culture (it's no big deal in some cultures).



We need to realize how widely the rules about sex differ from culture to culture: we expect our spouse to be faithful, but 75% of societies are polygamous.



Frank Pittman (1989) clarifies some of the *misconceptions about infidelity*.

1. No, *not everyone has affairs*, about one third to one half of us do (although some new research suggests maybe up to 73%) over a period of years. Women, especially younger employed women, are having about as many affairs as men, but the difference is that men frequently have brief affairs or one-night-stands while women are more likely to get emotionally involved. Only about 20% of married men are continuous, compulsive philanderers or womanizers. Pittman's experience is that womanizers usually get divorced (often after many years). Faithful partners rarely get divorced.
2. No, having *an affair doesn't always mean that love is gone*. Both men and women sometimes just want sex, not love. Occasionally, a spouse has an affair as a warning or a "wake up call" for his/her partner. Often an affair reflects an ego that needs inflating. Or, a person finds him/herself in a tempting situation or in a friendship which gets out of sexual control. Affairs frequently mean that the wayward spouse has a problem, not that he/she doesn't love you any more. Nevertheless, it often inadvertently ends in divorce. Pittman says with honest work on the marriage, couples therapy, and with forgiveness (once), the marriage can gradually revive.
3. No, *the "other woman/man" is not always beautiful/handsome or sexually "hot."* Pittman says the choices are mostly neurotic or a mishandled friendship. Sex is not usually the main purpose. No, the deceived faithful spouse did not "make me do it." The unfaithful one makes the decision to "act out" his/her feelings via an affair. No, it isn't best to keep your affair secret or to pretend you don't know about your partner's affair. For sake of the marriage, the mess of the affair and other problems need to be dealt with. *Affairs often die when exposed; marriages often die when problems are unexposed.* Only 1 in 7 new marriages resulting from an affair are successful.
4. No, *the best approach is not to "keep it a secret."* In fact, the suppressed emotions erupt and the marital problems multiply; thus, much honesty and work, usually in couples therapy, is almost always needed to salvage the marriage. (An isolated, meaningless one night stand may be another matter.) If you are tempted to be unfaithful, read Pittman's book or one of several others, e.g. Lawson (1989) or Linguist (1989), before doing so, to find out what you are facing and why. It's seldom worth it. If your spouse has been unfaithful to you, read Golabuk (1990) or Dolesh & Lehman (1985). Pulling your



marriage back together is possible (Reibstein & Richards, 1994; Weil, 1994; Spring, 1997--recommended), even trust, forgiveness, and intimacy is sometimes possible.

## Lessons from lasting marriages

Rather than studying failing marriages, several people (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1995; Gottlieb, 1990; Hendrix, 1991; Klagsbrun, 1985; Lauer & Lauer, 1985) have explored successful marriages to see why they last. Both men and women give the same basic reasons:

- My partner is *my best friend* and I like him/her as a person; I put him/her first over all others, over my work, over TV, over everything. It isn't just "you're # one" in spirit; I actually give him/her my whole attention and make time every day.
- I regard marriage as a deep, almost *sacred commitment*, we've had some disagreements but never for a moment did I seriously consider divorce. We worked it out. To love, you must feel emotionally safe--totally accepted, respected, and supported. Therefore, we don't criticize or strike out in anger, instead we gently request a change (see method #4 in chapter 13).
- *I enjoy my partner*, we laugh and touch, we confide, we agree on values, goals, and sex. We look for the good in each other and in life; thus, we are optimistic. We have wide interests and try new things. We try to have fun.
- We have equal power; we *respect* our partner's wishes and know we can't always have our way; disagreements are negotiated (method #10 in chapter 13). Decisions are made fairly, some together, some by me, and some by him/her. We both make changes when needed, tolerate losses, and accept unresolved conflicts. We are patient and forgiving.
- We accept and *trust* each other, permitting honesty and security; I tell him/her everything (methods #6 and #7 in chapter 13). I love the closeness; we share our minds, hearts, and souls. We listen to the other (see method #2 in chapter 13).
- We are equally dependent on each other in ways that enrich our lives; and we are *equally independent* from each other in ways that enrich our lives. We do so much together and agree on most issues, but we have a clear sense of self and do things by ourselves. Clearly, we think for ourselves.
- We *cherish our time together*, expressing our appreciation of each other for little acts of kindness as well as major sacrifices. We treasure our memories and frequently remind each other of the good times.



**Note:** Of course, everyone would stay together if they were getting *all* these benefits. No one has it so good but some come close. These are ideal goals which require a good

psychological adjustment, great skill, and effort to achieve. In this sense, good marriages are not "made in heaven."



Interestingly, these lasting marriages challenge several ideas put forth by professionals. For instance, less than 10% say that good sex keeps their marriage together. Few buy the idea of fighting fairly; they say intense anger would hurt their relationship. Many said that the egalitarian relationship notion can be damaging, if it is understood to mean everything is 50-50, because the truth is that both partners need to give in 60% or 70% of the time, at least it seems that way. About 33% of these older women feel the women's movement has helped their marriage, 22% say it has harmed, and 21% see good and bad consequences (Sangrey, 1983). Marriage experts stress that spouses *need* separate interests and activities; these married people say they do some things independently but the emphasis should be on trying to spend as much time together as possible (Lauer & Lauer, 1985, 1986).

## **Maintaining intimacy throughout marriage (self-help exercises)**

John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth developed the theory that attachment to another person is our primary motive in life. Between 6 months and one year of age, human infants who are "securely attached" to mommy (or a caretaker) begin to explore the world in brief excursions, starting the process of gaining self-confidence and independence. If a child of that age is taken away from his/her mom, however, they usually respond with crying, reaching out, and other protests. When mom is brought back, they want to be close--they hug, cling, look at her with hurt eyes, and then they turn on the charm, cooing and smiling. The point? We need attachments (intimacy). We don't all respond that way to detachment, however. About 40% of infants are very upset when separated but when re-united with mom, they *approach and reject* her, presumable because she is sometimes attentive and affectionate and sometimes not. They are considered "insecurely attached" and have trouble exploring the world. These attachment styles supposedly last a lifetime. So, perhaps 40% of us adults respond with anger when we feel rejected.

Marriage therapists (Johnson, 1994), following the attachment theory, consider anger expressed by a spouse to be an effort to restore closeness and intimacy to the relationship (although the attacked spouse is likely to see it and feel it as tearing the marriage apart). Anger is considered a natural protest to losing security or love. So, if both partners can re-interpret or "reframe" the spouse's anger into being a cry for regaining lost love and attachment, then the angry partner can become aware of the loneliness behind the anger

and the criticized partner can be more sympathetic, a better listener, and more open about his/her own insecurities. Thus, the cycle of attack, building resentment, and counter-attack is broken. If both spouses can disclose their tender underlying feelings, such as the fear behind silent withdrawal, the couple is well on the way to a "secure attachment" and a good marriage.

There are lots of detachments in life. In a mobile society, we often leave our families of origin at 18, never to return. With marriage, we often lose contact with our college and casual friends. We never get over our need for intimacy, however, and in today's culture, we seem to be looking more than ever for continuing intimacy with our spouse. Ordinarily lots of disclosing occurs early in a relationship, but within a few years it fades away. In the past, there were many barriers to intimacy in marriage: gender inequality (e.g. men more educated), false or unreasonable expectations of the opposite sex, dependent ties with families of origin, "unfinished business" from family or previous relationships, women involved with children, men obsessed with work, few examples of intimate parents, etc. Several of these barriers are declining and, as that happens, the emphasis on obtaining true intimacy in marriage is increasing (Gordon & Frandsen, 1993; Young-Eisendrath, 1993; Barbach & Geisinger, 1992; Campbell, 1980, 1984; Emmons & Alberti, 1991).

Young-Eisendrath (1993) sees old gender stereotypes as engendering false expectations of the opposite sex. She feels a spouse can find out what the other is really like by talking. Research by Bradbury and Fincham (1990) supports this notion, except they say that it is the way we have learned to explain our spouse's behavior that must be changed first. As discussed above, unhappy spouses see their spouse as having bad intentions, selfishness, and permanent negative traits that cause problems. With this attitude, it is hard to give any praise or to be nice. In fact, faking it by "talking" and feigning being "understanding" or pretending to make efforts at reconciliation usually make things worse, until in your own mind your views of the spouse's motivations become more positive. This cognitive aspect--viewing the partner positively--is part of all these efforts to increase intimacy. Barbach and Geisinger (1992) concentrate on understanding how our previous relationships, such as an absent father or a critical former wife, influence our current love. They emphasize friendship, respect, trust, and sexual satisfaction.

Firestone and Catlett (1999) operate on a very different theory, namely, that the fear of intimacy stems from early childhood when we develop a primitive "fantasy bond" with Mom as a defense against separation anxiety. The parent's negative qualities or anything seen as rejection are responded to with anger, fear, and maybe guilt. Later on, with the idea of death, the child strengthens the fantasy bond (for safety), the idealization of one or both parents, the withdrawal of feelings from the world, and the depreciation of his/her own self. In the ongoing attempt to defend ourselves from hurts, we develop an internal "voice" that talks to us mostly about grave dangers and

painful feelings. It is our earliest self-concept; it tells us what we should do and controls us with criticism, commands, and warnings. The result is a lot of fear and guilt. Later in life, after we fall in love, the voice is still very alive--telling us we are unlovable, inadequate, stupid, etc. and often trying to get our partner to treat us like our parent(s) did. To further defend ourselves we become insensitive, numbed and withdrawn. Firestone's "Voice Therapy" helps you become aware of the cruel, nasty, intense things the voice says about you, your partner, and others. Awareness of the voice sometimes brings back memories of childhood that explain our current feelings. The task then is to plan ways to change one's harmful behavior, expectations, fears, and prejudices, so the relationship can grow positively. It is not an easy therapy and may require a therapist but the book is easily read and understood.

Lori Gordon (Gordon & Frandsen, 1993) has developed a 120-hour class for teaching intimacy skills to people who haven't gotten what they wanted from marriage and, subsequently, stopped confiding, walled themselves off, found other ways to spend their time, etc. The course has been shown to reduce anxiety and anger, increase marital satisfaction, and improve self-esteem. Her approach is to *encourage confiding to each other*, and from this comes self-understanding, insight into the history of the expectancies or emotional baggage we bring into a marriage, mellowing of one's negative feelings towards the partner, feelings of security, and intimacy. The course teaches the skills of open, honest communication; listening, empathy, and forgiveness (see chapters 7 and 13). Much of the confiding is about their personality and emotional development in the context of their family's emotional history, i.e. what were we taught about ourselves, love, sex, morals, unspoken family rules, confiding, trust, intimacy, etc. Eventually, we find that the source of our marital misunderstandings and negative expectations is *our history*, not our spouse. Here are some exercises Gordon recommends:

1. *Daily Temperature Reading* --at the same time every day, hold hands and (a) express *appreciation* for something your spouse has done, (b) share some *information* about your mood or activities, (c) *ask* about something you don't understand ("Wonder why I got so upset about the phone bill?" or "Why were you quiet last night?"), (d) *request some change* without blaming the spouse ("Please call if you won't be home by 5" or "Please don't wear the pants with the rip in the crotch any more"), and (e) express some *hope* ("I hope we can go hiking this weekend").
2. *Bonding exercise* --when you are upset with your spouse, ask for some bonding. (a) Lie down and hold each other. (b) Describe what is bothering you (your partner just listens), be specific. (c) Share your memories of the past that seem connected with your emotional reaction to the spouse ("Your having lunch with \_\_\_\_\_. made me think of my first wife's/husband's affair..."). (d) Tell your spouse what you needed to have happen in your history that would have reduced your being upset now. (Maybe your spouse can say or do, at

this time, what you needed long ago.) (e) Discuss how the past--the inner child, old hurts, Papa's rules, unfinished business, etc.--has a powerful effect on you today. (f) Plan ways both of you can help avoid the unwanted emotional reaction in the future.

3. *Play dead*--Arrange for an hour in a private place. One person lies on the floor and pretends to be dead. The other person imagines his/her spouse is dead. The purpose is not to emotionally grieve so much but rather to talk about things you appreciated about the partner, what you will miss about the partner, and what you wish you had done while he/she was alive. The "dead" person can't talk, just listen. When finished, then the other person plays dead. This can be a powerful experience. Use what you learn to improve the relationship in the future.

Gottman (1994) reminds us that for a good relationship our negative emotions (criticism, contempt, emotional withdrawal, boredom, loneliness) must be out numbered by positive emotions (interesting activities, conversation, affection, appreciation, concern, fun, sex) by 5 to 1. We all need love and respect. It is important that spouses don't dismiss their partners' complaints nor let their complaints become personally insulting or expressions of contempt. Make your requested changes very behaviorally specific. It is crucial to keep love relationships positive. How? Call "time out" in any fight as soon as it starts to get out of control. Do this by taking a break for 15-20 minutes and calming down; you can't be irate and rational at the same time. Be sure to replace your hate-generating thoughts with more positive or tolerant thoughts about your spouse. Express your unhappiness, gently, but curb the vitriolic attacks on his/her character. Belligerent or domineering talk has no place in a marriage. In fact, attempt to frequently communicate some praise and admiration to your spouse (even during a confrontation). Remember the good times. Be optimistic. Be an empathic listener; don't shut out your partner. Let them know you understand their feelings and desires. All this self-control when being criticized is not easy, it takes skill (chapter 13) and lots of practice.

Next, we will review more ways of coping with marital problems, including professional help.

## Additional Sources of Help with Marital Problems



Starting in the late 1980's, Americans seem to be more reluctant to leave a marriage, at least more are seeking marriage counseling. Poor economic conditions and AIDS may be factors. In the 1960's and 1970's, we expected too much from marriage. When it wasn't ideal and marital problems developed, we suffered for a while but then, still

idealistic, we looked for a better partner. Gradually, people recognized the terrible cost of divorce in terms of human misery--single-parents struggling to make it alone, fathers seeing their kids only on weekends and trying to pay for two families, children upset by divorce and re-marriage and/or torn apart by two bitter parents. In the early 1990's, the divorce rate is still very high but has possibly leveled off (others say it is still increasing); the median length of marriage has stabilized at seven years which means that many marriages only last 3, 4 or 5 years.

Arond and Pauker (1987), who studied the first year of marriage, say that couples either found the first year to be their easiest or hardest year. A hard first year can be a good sign. The ones who said it was hard worked through their adjustment problems; many who found it easy denied and avoided facing their problems. You have a better chance if you start working on the minor problems early. Attend to the little stuff: spending too much time with friends, not helping with the housework, spending too much on clothes, drinking too much, gaining weight, watching TV, etc. Don't wait until one partner is about to walk out (Matthews, 1990).

Not only are the disadvantages of going through a divorce becoming more clear, the possibilities and advantages of working out the marital problems are also becoming easier to see. Notarius & Markman (1993) observed that all couples, early on in marital conflicts, want to preserve their love, that most disagreements are not world-shaking, that small changes in one person's behavior (more attentiveness, more compliments, more affection, less complaining, etc.) can make great changes in the relationship, that men withdraw from conflicts while women insist on resolving them immediately, and that the use of skills (empathy, "I" statements, decision-making, negotiating, etc.) can sooth negative feelings and overcome most differences. In other words, as a society, we may be becoming more hopeful of preserving our marriages.

## **The importance of problem-solving: The warning signs**

We started this marriage section by describing different types, some happy but several unhappy or blah. At that point some danger signs were described: factors that predict future trouble in the marriage or characteristics of deteriorating relationships. You may want to review that list.

It is common for one spouse to not realize the other spouse is unhappy--very unhappy (McGinnis, 1986). How can you tell? Look for these signs: (1) you no longer laugh together or do nice things for each other, such as send a love note, give a little present, bring a flower, etc. (2) You talk to someone else more than you do to your spouse, especially if the talk is about being unhappy with your spouse and/or how attractive someone else is. (3) You frequently become

irritated with your spouse and your discussions escalate into nasty fights. (4) You seldom remember good times together or share your hopes and ideas. (5) You don't try to do things with your spouse, are bored with sex, and avoid him/her by sleeping, working, drinking, playing sports, community work, etc. If you see several of these signs in your life, start working on the relationship soon.

## Self-help exercises: Learning to meet each other's intimacy needs

Scarf (1987) interviewed Stuart Johnson (formerly at Yale Psychiatric Institute) and described several ways to break out of the polarized interactions in which couples can only fight. Keep in mind the previous discussion of unconscious motives influencing our selection of a partner: a partner may be selected to re-enact a childhood situation or a partner may be selected because he/she enables us to deny our faults by projecting these negative traits to the partner. Most fighting spouses do not understand all the complex underlying reasons for the quarrels; thus, they have no idea how to change.

These simple exercises force the couple into new ways of interacting which require each person to self-explore, to self-disclose, to listen carefully without having to defend one's self, to have some control, to give up bitter accusations, to understand the partner, etc. Try them:

The couple should schedule an hour in a private place, at least once or twice a week. During the first half hour, one partner simply *talks about him/herself. But, nothing can be said about the partner or about the marriage.* The second partner says nothing at all for 30 minutes but listens attentively. During the second half hour, they reverse roles. Each "speaker," in turn, talks about his/her life, needs, hopes, characteristics, disappointments (no blaming!), hurts, joys, plans, etc. When both are finished, there should be *no discussion* -- not one word about the session for at least three days. This is important. Each person listens to the other but inhibits the attack-counterattack elements.

This exercise also sidetracks "projective identification." Example: if a wife is projecting "feeling stupid" to her husband, for the process to work the husband must respond in some way suggesting he thinks she is stupid (that's the basic purpose, namely, to get the painful, horrible self-accusation out of her mind and into his mind and behavior, so she can hate "being dealt with as stupid" rather than thinking "God, I'm so stupid!"). If the wife is not conscious of feeling stupid, then she isn't going to say that as she talks about herself. Since the husband is prohibited from responding, the usual trigger to an outrage ("you think I'm stupid") can't occur and they learn more about each other. However, if while talking the wife

becomes more aware of her *own* feelings of inadequacy, i.e. takes personal responsibility for the "I'm stupid" self-evaluations, then the couple have made remarkable progress towards reducing the tension between them. In any case, they are practicing interacting as separate, responsible, autonomous, and respectful people, not as people who are defined and judged by others. The exercise increases intimacy.

With some thought, you can see how the exercise cuts through many "games," such as the I-want-total-intimacy pursuer with the I-want-space distancer or the I'm-the-boss with the I'm-so-helpless partner. These relationships, like so many, are based on self-put-down, restricted views of our needs and potential.

You may not need to continue this exercise for a long time. Use it as long as it is beneficial. After increasing communication in this way several times, it is important to try the next one (even if you haven't made much progress thus far). Ideally, the next exercise should be added so that you are doing both #1 and #2 together for a while.

On designated days, say Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, one partner gets to *make one "intimacy" request*. On Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday the other partner makes one intimacy request. (Sunday is a day of rest.) The requests must be reasonable and do-able that day; it can't be unrealistic, like "adore me forever," or a demand for an uncontrollable feeling, like "forgive me for last night." The request must also be made clear in terms of the behavior involved, for instance if you ask for "some attention and tenderness," it needs to be spelled out as "take a long walk with me," or "help me decide tonight what courses to take," or "give me a back rub," etc. Since this exercise is to increase intimacy, offensive, disgusting, disturbing, inconsiderate requests must not be made. Some couples may want to make certain areas off limits, such as sex or money matters. Within these limits, however, the other partner agrees in advance to carry out the intimacy request. After several days, two or three requests could be made.

For couples made up of "givers," who never think of themselves, and "takers," who never do for others, this exercise is an eye-opening experience. Likewise, for couples in a power struggle who have trouble thinking in terms of shared or equal power, this experience opens up vistas. They will find, in small ways, at least, that it is safe for someone else to be in control. The pursuer-distancer couple will also have to change, with the distancer shifting from always running from his/her partner to specifically thinking "how do I want to be closer." We don't have to have problems to ask for and do nice things for each other.



When exercise #2 has been worked out, a simple change should be made so that *both* are in control of the intimacy. On your day to make "intimacy requests," you can now make as many requests as you want, BUT your partner now has the choice of doing them all or not doing any, i.e. if you ask for too much, they can stop the whole process for that day. Your partner can't choose to do some of your requests and forget the others; it is an all or none decision. Also, *the decision can not be discussed or negotiated or argued*, the partner says "okay to all the requests" or "no requests granted today." If he/she says "no," you lose your turn and the partner makes his/her requests the next day. Of course, the two of you can be nice and intimate with each other during the rest of the day, you just can't make requests.

The idea is to enable both of you to be in charge--to have some control--at the same time. It is important for the person who can't say "no" to learn to assert him/herself as a person with rights. Under these conditions, much like what would occur in a good marriage, saying "okay" means you really want to be intimate in these ways with your partner.

Most importantly, these exercises, as Scarf says, "provide an ebb and flow of emotional exchange--experience in recognizing intimate needs and in getting them met." We can become self-aware, self-directing individuals who still have a feeling of closeness and intimacy.

## Self-help books for improving a marriage

There are hundreds of marriage-improvement books. In fact, 20 years ago one book reviewed 80 others, all involving improving marriage (Suid, Bradley, Suid & Eastman, 1976). Two of the better older marriage books are Zerof (1978) and Rogers (1972). Many helpful books which deal with special, specific problems that can destroy a marriage, such as jealousy, unfaithfulness, and power struggles, have already been cited in this chapter. A textbook for a Marriage and Family course might be of value; they usually have a sociological orientation, however.

Earlier (in the Marriage & Love section) *four well regarded books* were cited for providing insight into love relationships. Hendrix (1990) essentially provides an excellent self-help marriage course at home. But understanding your family history and dynamics is only one way to improve a marriage. In addition to insight, there are many other approaches to mending a marriage. Examples: a leader of Cognitive therapy, Aaron Beck (1988), recommends cognitive self-help techniques to overcome misunderstandings, negative attitudes, improbable expectations, and anger that destroy love. Another leading researcher in the area of love, Robert Sternberg (1991), advocates

bettering relationships by increasing your understanding of the basic qualities of love (passion, intimacy and commitment) and sharpening specific communication or problem-solving skills used in a relationship. A very different approach is taken by Weiner-Davis (1992), a social worker, who persuasively argues against divorce and urges her readers to take specific, concrete steps to quickly rejuvenate their affection for each other rather than splitting. Markman, Stanley & Blumberg (1994), Notarius & Markman (1993), Gottman (1994), and Kottler (1994) also concentrate on resolving conflicts and preventing a divorce. Their methods are based on research.

Many other *general books* focus on understanding and improving marriage: Barbach and Geisinger (1992), Bradshaw (1993), Broder (1993), Lauer and Lauer (1986), and Sarnoff and Sarnoff (1989). They are useful to many people but not as highly rated by professionals as the books in the last paragraph.

Also, there are books addressing specific problems which I have not dealt with at length in this chapter, such as obsessive love (Forward, 1991), love-hate relationships (Arterburn & Stoop, 1988), foolish relationships (Schlessinger, 1994), codependency (chapter 8; Covington & Beckett, 1988), sexual boredom (see end of this chapter), increasing commitment (Bugen, 1989; Schwartz & Merten, 1980; Smedes, 1988), burnout and painful stalemates (Pines, 1988; Driscoll, 1991), an overweight partner (Stuart & Jacobson, 1987), and other crises (Ruben, 1986; Viscott, 1989).

You must keep in mind that you are an individual as well as part of a couple. Duncan and Rock (1991) offer advice when your spouse won't seek counseling. Also use the references mentioned before for maintaining your own independence while becoming intimate with another, such as Lerner (1988) and Horner (1990).

Videotapes are becoming available, such as "Getting Back Together" and "Falling in Love Again" from SyberVision (1-800-678-0887). Gary Smalley (800-592-3200) is well known for his workshops and video tapes, "Hidden Keys to Loving Relationships." And, recently McKay, Fanning, & Paleg (1995) have marketed (1-800-748-6273) a skills oriented book which is supplemented by a video tape and several audiotapes illustrating specific marriage communication skills.

As you read about marriage problems and solutions, set aside time to talk with your spouse (the average couple talk only 4 minutes per day). If you have trouble starting to talk about a sensitive topic, a book by Chesanow and Esersky (1988) could help. Keep a problem-solving attitude; avoid excessive crying (as a form of pressure), begging, nagging, accusations, demands, personal putdowns, and endless analysis of what's wrong with your marriage. O'Hanlon and Hudson (1995) recommend actions in place of psychological speculation. See chapter 13 for useful communication skills.

## **Marriage enrichment groups: Marriage encounter, marriage skills courses, and support groups**

Some mental health centers and a few marriage counselors offer small classes for persons wanting to work on marital problems. Most of these courses describe different kinds of marital problems and teach various skills, such as listening, empathy, assertiveness, negotiation, etc., that will help with relationship problems. Ordinarily, these classes are for couples who do not have serious psychiatric problems and who are motivated to improve their relationships on their own. The cost is less than couple's therapy. There are some advantages of groups, including hearing the problems others have--and the solutions that work for them. Also, support groups for marital concerns exist in a few communities. Call your Mental Health Center to find out what groups and classes are available.

Marriage Encounter weekend programs are designed for couples who do not have serious problems but want to enrich and revitalize their love. There will be some group discussion of marriage and some experience for the couple that will facilitate closeness, warmth, and affection. Churches often sponsor these programs, but you do not need to be religious to attend. They are not expensive. Call 1-800-795-LOVE to find out about these worthwhile activities.

## **Couples or marital therapy**

When the friction heats up in marriages, more people (maybe 10-20%) than ever before are considering getting professional help. That is very wise. We may be making progress. But I am still disturbed that most do not seek help. What is wrong with the other 80%? Getting therapy seems so reasonable to me; it seems that every friend, every parent, every child, every relative, and every professional person in contact with the unhappy couple should recommend counseling. Why don't they? Divorce is such an emotionally laden decision (perhaps more so than who to marry), we need help seeing the situation realistically, trying to resolve the problems, deciding what other alternatives exist, considering the consequences to others, making reasonable plans for our future, etc. Anyone going through marital hell or a divorce needs a friend to talk to and vent with, no doubt, but he/she needs much more than that--a wise, experienced, unemotional but empathic and caring counselor (the earlier the better).

As soon as there is continuing conflict in a marriage, both partners should openly acknowledge the situation to themselves and each other. They both should show their concern by immediately trying to rectify the situation using self-help methods. Read if you don't have any ideas. If the couple can not make any progress within a month or so (or if it seems like an overwhelming problem and emotions are intense), they should immediately go together to a qualified counselor.

THIS IS CRITICALLY IMPORTANT. But, there are some things you should know about marriage counseling.

Family and marriage counselors have no magic. The partners themselves must work to understand the conflicts (with the therapist's help), devise possible solutions, try out the solutions, see what works, etc. Relationship problems are hard to resolve, partly because most people seeking professional help have waited much too long. Do not expect the counselor to take sides, tell you what to do, or to make your decisions for you. The clients who expect to patch up their troubles in a session or two, say for \$60 to \$200, are expecting magic and will be disappointed. It will, at least, take several sessions (plus reading and practicing on your own) and probably months.

In counseling, the problems must be described (from both viewpoints), goals set, treatment plan developed, some understanding acquired, new communication skills learned, new attitudes utilized, compromises negotiated, and love rekindled. It is not possible to know in advance what a "successful" outcome will be, it isn't always a happy marriage forever; divorce may be the wise or only choice; staying together merely to be close to the children may be the best outcome possible; a trial separation may be wise. Most marriage therapists believe that both people must be genuinely committed to improving the marriage via talking therapy in order to benefit from it. So a couple, still hoping to save the marriage, should see a therapist together (unless it is the opinion of a qualified therapist that only one partner has serious psychiatric or personality problems).

The qualifications of marital counselors vary greatly. Almost anyone can legally call him/herself a marriage counselor, so don't just look up a counselor in the Yellow Pages (although a qualified counselor is likely to be listed there if he/she is primarily in private practice). McCary (1975) says half the marriage counselors may be incompetent. Many MA-level counselors, especially those from one-year graduate programs, have little or no specific training in couple's therapy. I recommend you check to see if your health insurance covers private therapy for marital problems (usually it won't) and/or some associated anxiety-depression diagnosis (it always will). If your insurance will pay 50% or more of the expense or if you have the money, search out the most experienced and most highly recommended (by several people) marriage therapist in your area. Most insurance will *not* pay for a MA-level counselor. The therapy available in Community Mental Health Centers is usually adequate, *if* you ask for and get an *experienced* MA-level or doctoral level therapist. State supported Mental Health Centers are low cost if you are poor and charge less than half the price of private practitioners even if you have a good income.

The discipline of your therapist is important. Most Ph. D. psychologists can handle marital problems, but, if at all possible, search for one who is a marriage specialist. Many MD's and psychiatrists have little or no training with marital problems (if they are drug-oriented, they can't do you much good). Some psychiatrists,

who are talking therapists, are excellent. In many clinics, the MA-level social workers are assigned most of the marriage counseling cases, so they sometimes (but not always) have lots of experience. Discipline is important but not as important as experience and reputation.

There is an old but still relevant book focusing specifically on helping couples find professional help (Koch & Koch, 1976). Get recommendations of therapists from several people--your family physician (tactfully letting him/her know you don't need a MD), your minister, your lawyer, a local Mental Health Center, Psychology Department, or from other people with experience. Select one who is well recommended and try out the therapist for a session or two. If either you or your spouse has doubts, try another therapist until you both are satisfied. At the first session, find out about the counselor's training and level of experience with your kind of problem. Don't hesitate to ask all the questions you want. In a later stage of counseling when you are deeply involved in telling your stories and, hopefully, starting to gain some understanding, it is very inefficient to switch to another therapist. In fact, if you become very dissatisfied with the therapy after 4 or 5 sessions, don't just drop out. Instead, matter-of-factly confront the therapist with your concern or complaint, e.g. that he/she seems biased in favor of your spouse, that there seems to be no progress and the therapist doesn't seem to be doing much, that the focus isn't on the main problems as you see it, that you have negative feelings towards the counselor, etc. These are not uncommon feelings in marital therapy (even when progress is being made) and it is often to your advantage to work them out rather than leave therapy prematurely. Important topics often offend or upset us but must be faced. Of course, if you are wasting your time, get another therapist.

## Coping with Divorce



For hundreds of years in Europe, marriage and divorce were religious matters, not civil matters. This meant, as it does today in the Catholic Church, that there was almost no way to get a divorce. Only 130 years ago, divorce became a civil matter to be handled by the courts in England and the U.S. Very few divorces were granted initially by the courts; a spouse had to be proven to be "at fault," i.e. guilty of adultery or extreme cruelty. Gradually, more grounds for divorce were added, but someone still had to be at fault. In the 1920's, there was one divorce granted for every 7 marriages; recently, there has been one divorce granted for every two marriages. Starting in 1970 in California, several states have adopted "no fault" divorce laws permitting anyone to get a divorce who wants one (if they pay the court and lawyer's fees). Thus, only in the last 25 years have there

been remarkable changes in the law as well as in peoples' attitudes toward divorce.

When two people are under the influence of the most violent, most insane, most delusive and most transient of passions, they are required to swear that they will remain in that excited, abnormal and exhausting condition continuously until death do them part.  
-George Bernard Shaw, 1963

We are freer than we have been for centuries to dissolve an unhappy marriage. There are other factors associated with the increasing divorce rate. Many of these social-economic factors would be considered good, e.g. more equal education and job opportunities for women, higher incomes, fewer children, fewer religious restrictions, and general social acceptance of divorce and of women living alone. Yet, as we will see, there are terrible consequences frequently associated with divorce (and with continuing a bad marriage). Over 75% of Americans accept divorce as a solution when a couple can't get along, even if they have children. But there is concern by some that divorce may have become too easy (few people who have personally gone through a divorce consider it easy).

## Reasons for divorce; divorce rate

What are the reasons given for divorce by the spouses? In order of importance, women say (1) incompatibility and unhappiness, (2) husband's alcohol, physical and verbal abuse, (3) husband's infidelity, (4) disagreements about religion and children, (5) their own alcohol abuse, (6) their own infidelity, and (7) their needs for independence. Men say (1) drug abuse (wife's or his) and mental illness, (2) many differences (religion, communication, in-laws), (3) his alcohol and physical abuse, (4) wife's independence and infidelity, (5) incompatibility and unhappiness, (6) wife's alcohol abuse, and (7) his infidelity (Cleek and Pearson, 1985). In general, "emotional problems" are the most common cause of divorce; men cite "sexual problems" three times more often than women and women cite an "affair" twice as often as men (Janus & Janus, 1993). Quite often, people say they do not really know why their spouse filed for divorce.

Helen Fisher, an anthropologist, has found that divorce worldwide occurs most common in the fourth year of marriage or between ages 25 and 29. She speculates that 4 years have been needed in human history to attract a mate, establish a home, produce a child, and raise it until it was weaned. Humans may have survived a few million years

by changing partners with each new child or every 4 or 5 years. She suggests it could be our genetic inheritance.

More than a million people a year get a divorce. Who divorces? What is the divorce rate? Divorce is most common among couples who have been married only two or three years. 40% of men and 50% of women getting a divorce are less than 30 (this will change as we marry later). Between 10% and 15% of people aged 35 to 55 are currently divorced. About 20% of marriages last less than 5 years, 33% last less than 10 years, and 40% last less than 15 years. For three decades the most common estimate has been that one out of every two marriages will end in divorce. The US divorce rate, highest by far in the world, was thought by some to have stopped rising in the 1980's but that was misinformation. Recent estimates are that 65% to 70% of all new marriages will fail. There are many complex factors involved in divorce. Examples: about 60% of teenage marriages last less than 5 years. Being pregnant when married increases the chance of divorce. Children of divorced parents are more divorce-prone.

Besides those who get a divorce, 80% of those who nevertheless stay married have *considered divorce* sometime during their marriage. So, if we are realistic, most of us can expect to have serious trouble sometime in our marriages. Remember also that many marriages that last are pretty unhappy or an "empty shell." Yet, marital troubles do not deter us from trying again, 80% of all divorced people get remarried, usually 3 or 4 years after their divorce. Thus, about one-third of all married people today have been married before. The risk of divorce is even slightly greater in the second marriage; about 50-60% of remarriages end in divorce (Goetting, 1982). For unknown reasons, third marriages seem to do better. Maybe we get wiser, older, or tired of playing musical chairs.

### Most are not prepared for marriage

In our culture, we have very unrealistic ideas about marriage. We may falsely believe that marriage will bring us great joy (true) all the time (not true). After a few years, marriage gives big thrills only rarely. If your marriage is a good one, it gives mostly comfort, closeness, satisfaction with our lives, fun with the kids, and deep gratitude in quiet moments for the companionship and life together. We falsely assume that marriage is maintenance-free, which is absolute non-sense. Marriage takes attention, effort, and knowledge. We are not given an instruction manual or the tools for maintenance and repair of loving relationships. When "things go wrong," we don't know what is wrong or what to say or who to talk to or how to change our or our partner's feelings or behavior. Given our impossible expectations of marriage and the fact that we were never encouraged to face our naivete and ignorance about it, is it any wonder that we

walk away when the marriage starts to break down and our anger flares?

To the inexperienced and uninformed (that's most of us), it seems so much easier and even exciting to fantasize about finding "the right person" for you--someone who will truly appreciate you just as you are. Besides, we don't love each other any more! Clearly, it is my partner who has a serious problem. How could I possibly fix him/her, he/she is so messed up and I'm no shrink! I want a divorce! It is so difficult to see the problems that will occur in the next marriage, but they are inevitable.

## The pain of divorce

When the love we had hoped and expected would last forever fails, our world falls apart. Unless you have already found another lover, divorce is a very painful experience. The hardest divorces are when you are being rejected by your partner, you thought the marriage was okay, and your parents and friends disapprove of the divorce (Thompson & Spanier, 1983). Very few divorcees end up having a wonderful, creative growth experience with lots of sex, although that is a common fantasy. We lose our most important relationship (or had lost it years before). It can crush us with depression (see chapter 6 for the stages of divorce). It can flood us with anger. It can overwhelm us with scary changes and decisions, new responsibilities, economic hardships, questions about "What do I want to do?" and on and on. The "leaver" or rejector is sometimes less stressed than the "leavee" but that isn't always true. Baumeister & Wotman (1992) say many rejectors are profoundly guilty, in turmoil, and feel helpless or embarrassed. The "leavee" isn't guilty but is hurt and shamed by failure and abandonment. The marital conflicts may have lasted for months or years before the divorce and then emotional distress often lasts for months afterwards. In fact, although people expect to feel better soon after the divorce, in some cases the worst time is about one year after the divorce. During the first year after separating, 73% of the women and 60% of the men think the divorce might have been a mistake (Hetherington, Cox and Cox, 1985). Yet, half of the men and two-thirds of the women said that overall they were "more content with life" five years after a divorce than they had been before.

Supposedly, time heals all wounds, but the pain of divorce lasts and lasts. Ten years later 40-50% of women and 30-40% of men remained very angry at the former spouse and felt rejected and exploited (Wallerstein, 1986). Females over 40 have an especially hard time. They have less chance of remarrying (28%), inadequate income (50%), and loneliness or clinical depression (50%). After 10 years, in only 10% of divorces was life better for *both* partners, in 27% of the cases both had a poorer quality of life, and 63% of the time one partner was better off but the other was unchanged or got worse. In the latter situation, the upbeat spouse is more likely to be the woman



(55%), usually in her 20's or 30's. Some researchers have found that women more often report joy as they experience independence and new competencies (Riessman, 1990). But for the majority of us, losing love inflicts deep and remarkably lasting wounds.

Divorced women, who get custody of the children, also suffer a 33% decline in their standard of living. Men are considered "better off" (except they frequently become responsible for another family). Only about 50% of divorced fathers pay child support regularly; 25% pay some and 25% pay little or nothing at all. Non-custodial parents (75% are men) are often depressed and anxious because they feel alienated from their children. Of the 18 million poor children in this country, over 50% live in a single-parent home caused by divorce. The emotional and financial neglect of children is appalling (see next section). This harsh reality underscores the necessity for each parent to be prepared by him/herself to financially care for the children.

## Ideas and books for coping with divorce

Cox (1979) and others have described several pitfalls for recently broken-up or divorced people: (1) *Retreat* back into a lonely state of self-pity and depression. The pain is so great that serious thoughts of suicide may occur. If so, immediate professional help is necessary. For many the worst time is several months after the divorce. It is important to stay socially active and seek out friends. (2) *Rebound* back into another love situation too rapidly. An obsession with sex or with finding the perfect man/woman often interferes with making wise choices. (3) *Escaping through excess*, such as alcohol, drugs, sex, work, food, shopping, etc. (4) *Return* to the former spouse. This is tempting but usually foolish and unrealistic because it frequently doesn't work out, it just prolongs the pain. As mentioned above, within one year after the divorce, 73% of women and 60% of men wonder if they have made a mistake. It is usually better to get on with building a new life. (5) *Resentment* of the former spouse may rage for years. Furthermore, this seething anger can harm your children and their relationship with the ex, your physical and emotional health, and your interpersonal relations--you can be so unpleasant that others will avoid you. Divorce is an uncertain, gut-wrenching, destructive, lonely experience (not for everyone, of course).

If divorce is so awful, then why do we choose that alternative so often? We may not realize the problems we face alone or with a new partner. Besides, loud marital conflicts and/or the silence of a dead marriage are awful too. Many people have little hope of improving the relationship. It would be hard to choose to continue living with an unloving, hateful, uninterested partner for another 40 or 50 years. In our fantasy, as we saw above, it is so easy to find a new exciting infatuation, so easy to dream of a wonderful future with an ideal partner. But how many ideal partners are there?

Medved (1990) and Weiner-Davis (1992) oppose divorce, questioning the common notions supporting divorce, such as "we don't love each other any more," "we are incompatible," "he/she had an affair," etc. I don't agree with them that divorce is "almost never worth it," but I'd urge everyone to consider several factors before giving up on marriage counseling and seeking a divorce. (1) Are you sure the awfulness of your marriage is not a product of your own thinking and attitudes? or a justification for your anger and urge to leave? If so, the same process is likely to reoccur in 4-7 years with another spouse. (2) Are you pretty sure you can and will select a better partner for you next time? Might you be attracted to a person with the same traits? Might you need new communication skills (with your old partner or a new one)? (3) What are the consequences to others, especially the children? See the next section. (4) Are you staying in the marriage because you are dependent (Horn, 1976) and afraid to change? Vedral (1993) contends that women usually wait far too long to "get rid of him." It is so hard to know ourselves, especially when we are in an emotional turmoil.

If divorce is being considered, I have five more recommendations:

1. Most of us by ourselves can not rationally handle the complex and emotional questions involved in divorce. Even friends are often supportive of whatever they think we want to hear. We need to be told things we don't want to hear. As I emphasized above, most people considering or going through divorce should *get counseling*.
2. There are many helpful books about divorce. A very rare (it is one of the first) study compared the effectiveness of four self-help books about coping with divorce or breaking up (Ogles, Lambert, and Craig, 1991). All four (Fisher, 1981; Kingma, 1987; Wanderer & Cabot, 1978; Stearns, 1984) appeared to be about equally helpful in reducing the misery of losing love, although no matched control group was available. Your expectations seem to determine how much help you get from the books, i.e. if you think "it won't do any good," it won't. *However, the books were second only to "friends" as a good source of help.* The better recent books encourage you to try for a healthy divorce which reduces the harm to the children (Ahrons, 1994; Benedek, 1995; Everett & Everett, 1994).

Although dealing with the pain and anger is important, there are many other issues to confront, e.g. *how to understand and cope with the divorce process* (Lubetkin & Oumano, 1991; Kingma, 1987; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989; Vaughan, 1986; Rice & Rice, 1986; Kaslow & Schwartz, 1987; Gettleman & Markowitz, 1972; Weiss, 1975), *how to survive divorce* ("Surviving Divorce" tapes by John Bradshaw [1-800-733-2232]; Kranitz, 1987; Triere, 1993; Bloomfield, Colgrove & McWilliams, 1977; Friedman, 1982; Krantzler, 1973; McKay, Rogers, Blades, & Gosse, 1984; Women in Transition, 1975), and *how to rebuild a life after divorce* (Hayes, Anderson & Blau, 1993; Napolitane, 1978, 1993--see for

support groups; Kahn, 1990; Gullo & Church, 1988; Krantzler, 1977; Golabuk, 1990; Fisher, 1981, 1992). More information and the location of support groups can be gotten from Divorce Anonymous, 2600 Colorado Ave., Suite 270, Santa Monica, CA 90404 (phone: 213-315-6538). Books for helping children cope with divorce are in the next section.

3. If the divorce involves emotional conflicts over marital property or children, consider using mediation (Emery, 1994; Wiseman, 1990; Kranitz, 1987; Neumann, 1989; Johnson & Campbell, 1988, for highly revengeful couples; Blades, 1985; Everett, 1985) rather than lawyers in court. Margulies (1992) and Berry (1995) emphasize the legal-financial aspects of divorce as well as mediation. The procedure of "letting the lawyers fight it out" is often unfair, very traumatic, and results in increased, lasting hostility (Kressel, 1986). Besides, lawyers are costly and courts aren't always thorough. Most couples, who aren't crazy with rage, can *find a good mediator* and together work out a fair, considerate agreement (acceptable to any court) within five to eight hours, say for \$500 to \$1000 or considerably less than going through a nasty divorce. (Mediators are trained professionals, not your Aunt Alice. Your marriage counselor can help you find a mediator.)

4. *Children should have equal representation* in a divorce (in an ideal world). The children must be reassured that *they* aren't being divorced. They have a birthright to two parents, their time, love, and resources. The children will remain "sons" and "daughters" forever with the parents, even though the divorced parents will have no relationship with each other. The most vital decisions in a divorce are about how to continue and enrich each parent-child relationship, not who gets the house and pays the bills. Child custody is an enormous problem. Some of the children's stresses might be lessened if the children were equally cared for by both parents even though the parents are divorced (Galper, 1978). Yet, not all joint custody arrangements have worked out well. Recent data suggests that father custody or joint custody can benefit certain children, especially boys (Warshak, 1992). The decision must be based on what is best for the children, not on a parent's emotional needs. We need more study of these matters. Another point here is that during a divorce, the mother and father frequently get lots of attention and support from family and friends, but the children are often neglected. As a society, we must find ways to keep the parent-child relationships strong, in spite of the animosity between the parents. Thus far, we are doing a very poor job caring for our divorced children (see next section). But extensive efforts are being made in the 1990's by courts around the country to get divorcing parents to learn to cooperate effectively in providing two loving homes--Dad's house and Mom's house--to their children.

5. *Use self-help methods* to reduce your emotionality and irrationality. Try to relax (chapter 12) and reduce the sense of loss (chapter 6), stop your crazy-making and angry or self-critical thoughts (chapters 7 & 14), pore yourself into something--work, school, exercise, friends, helping others, etc. (chapter 4), build your communication skills and

self-esteem (chapters 13 and 14), work on being independent (chapter 8) and tough, vent your feelings openly--but not repeatedly--to a trusted friend (chapter 12), avoid subtly smearing or openly berating your "ex" in front of the children, recognize when you are "reliving" old hurts over and over which only magnifies the current stress (chapter 15), and start planning, after learning from your mistakes, how to slowly, carefully find a new and better partner. Remember each day in the former relationship had its own rewards; no relationship is guaranteed to last forever. Get support from friends, stay socially active. If possible, forgive your former lover and yourself (chapter 7). Get on with life.

### **The negative effects of divorce (abandonment, hostility and over-burdening) on children**

Divorce combines with other factors, such as never marrying, so that *70% of all children (94% of black children)* will experience living with a single-parent by the time they are 17. About 15 years ago, research (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980) documented that going through a divorce can be very traumatic for children too. There are frequently (but not always) loud arguments and accusations, 25% of the time there is physical violence, and eventually one parent, usually the father, leaves home. The child may have to move away from friends and into a new school. About 75% of the children oppose their parents' divorce. To some children life before the divorce had not seemed so bad because both parents had concealed their fights and tried to maintain the appearance of a good relationship in front of the children.

In general, many children, no matter what age, have an intense traumatic response to their parents' conflicts: they fear the fighting and worry about possible abandonment; they often *feel they are responsible* for the arguments and for one parent leaving home. What a terrible load for a child to carry. The children long for the missing parent. During and long after the divorce, the children, especially those going through a custody battle, suffer a variety of psychological problems--shock, denial, physical problems, anger, panic, depression, guilt and self-criticism, low self-esteem, and misbehavior. We hoped the children "could be protected," but half to 2/3rds suffer a long time. Two excellent recent reviews (Wallerstein, 1991; Amato & Keith, 1991) confirm the findings summarized below.

At the time of the divorce, boys aged 6 to 12 seem to have the hardest time; many become aggressive, rebellious with mother, needy of attention, and socially insecure. Boys have trouble in school and socially. It is not known why boys, at this time, have more difficulty than girls, perhaps because males are more belligerent and aggressive anyway. Perhaps because boys around 5 or 6 are struggling to identify with dad and pull away from mom. However, 90% of the time, custody is given to mothers and, after three years, *about 52% of all divorced fathers hardly see their children at all* (Francke, 1983). Divorced non-

custodial fathers, who maintain some contact, socialize but almost never teach or discipline the children. This is a critical time for boys to be abandoned by their role models! Nevertheless, boys' and girls' adjustment seems to get better two or three years later, depending on (1) how well they are getting along with the custodial parent and (2) how well that parent is adjusting (Pett, 1982). However, *even 5 years later*, one third still had a wide range of school and behavior problems and they weren't getting any better. Another third had some lingering problems. The remaining third seemed to be doing well.

## **Bitter parents (married or not) are very destructive**

Research has shown just as clearly that *serious open parental conflict within the home causes harm*, probably more harm than a divorce if it goes on and on. So, a loving single-parent home is probably better than two fighting parents, although children need close contact with both parents. It may be easier if the parents are separated, but it is also hard for bitterly angry people to work together to provide wise, coordinated post-divorce co-parenting. Consider this: the children are having the emotional reactions mentioned above; they are also probably critical of the divorce; they may hide their feelings but often show disapproval of mom and dad dating other people; they may feel guilty and "in the middle" of their parents' continuing battles, especially if one parent says he/she is "fighting for the benefit of the children" (implying the other parent is shortchanging the children). In short, children suffer either way, i.e. in a crippled marriage with parents fighting or in a divorce situation with parents still fighting at a distance. Because fighting is harmful in all situations, some researchers (e.g. Brehm, 1985) conclude that divorce should be decided "for the parents," not "for the children." I disagree. The children's interests and needs must be considered as much as the adults' preferences because they are unfairly harmed *more* than anyone else by the fighting. The kids didn't cause the divorce. Their emotional health is too important to be neglected. Since neither parent can quit the job of parenting, an important question is: Can the parents do a better job co-parenting married or divorced?

There is ample evidence that the traditional bitter divorce leading to the alienation of one parent is a potential disaster for the children. An important study has found that ~~if~~ the divorced-and-removed-from-the-home parent (usually father) seldom visits (less than once a month), the effects on the child can be devastating--learning deficits, misbehavior, low self-esteem and depression (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Therefore, I think the rights and desires of the children (along with society who "picks up the pieces") should have equal representation along with mom and dad in divorce hearings. Likewise, one might think the courts should insist that custody and child care responsibilities be shared by mom and dad, assuring the continued intimate involvement of both. However, it is more complicated than that if continuous anger is involved.

Children who have frequent contact with their divorced-but-still-fighting parents are at very serious risk too. Indeed, the more contact they have and the more switches between mom and dad's home, *if they are still warring over custody and visitation*, the more behaviorally and emotionally disturbed the children become (Johnson, Kline, & Tschann, 1989). Thus, not only must both parents stay involved with the children, *they must co-parent without rancor*. If the hostility of either parent is uncontrollable, psychotherapy is necessary immediately and until the anger subsides. We can no longer consider bitter ex-spouses as benign; they are dangerous to their children. Yet, healed or calmed or silenced, they are necessary to their children. Society (courts) must serve the children, not just warring parents.

Not every child needs two *live-in* parents, but almost every child needs a highly involved, loving mother and father, not just an every-other-weekend visit to eat out. Both parents must talk to the children about their lives, discipline the children, be there in good times and bad, involve the child in decision-making and serious discussions, hold them when they hurt, etc., etc. Researchers (Hetherington, Cox & Cox, 1985) have found that girls without a father in the home, like boys, suffer *long-range* consequences; they tend to be negative towards their fathers. Such girls feel more uncomfortable with male adults and peers but act more sexually provocative and promiscuous than girls with fathers at home; therefore, they have more unwanted pregnancies. On the other hand, girls fought over in highly contested custody battles, tend to form close, dependent relationships with their fathers and become hostile towards their mothers. Being fought over doesn't seem to affect boys in the same way. Recent research findings have suggested that boys without fathers in the home tend to become "hypermasculine," i.e. more tough, more drug-using, more violent, more criminal.

Social analysts (Blankenhorn, 1995; Popenoe, 1996) contend that many of our major social problems, such as crime, violent gangs, alcohol and drug use, poverty, low achievement, and marital instability, are attributable to parents splitting and fathers deserting their children. 40% of all children today live in a home without a father. Fathers are not expendable. Involved and responsible fathers bring traits and attitudes to a family--alternate ways of coping--that appear to be very important to the child and society. Moreover, a parent who isn't involved sends a message to his/her child: "you aren't interesting or important!" That surely hurts the child's self-esteem. There is building public pressure for society to make divorce harder to get or, at least, to make it mandatory that both parents pay their fair share and stay involved as a parent. Finding solutions by passing laws, however, seems much more difficult than teaching young people to avoid pregnancy until they have found a partner who will make a commitment to any child until he/she is 18, including seeking counseling as soon as problems arise. Marriage can be temporary but parenting must be forever.

Important research has also documented that the consequences of divorce are much longer lasting for children than we originally thought (A myth: "Oh, they'll get over it in a couple of years"). *The long-term effects* include feeling the world and relationships are unsafe and unreliable, fear of intimacy, poorly controlled anger, depression and grief, and sexual problems. There are often heretofore unseen "sleeper" effects, affecting girls more than boys, perhaps, when they get into early adulthood. *Even 10 years or more after the divorce*, Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1989) estimated that *41% of the children of divorce in their study were still doing poorly*--underachieving, tense, insecure, self-critical, and/or angry. Thus, children of divorce may be so anxious about love relationships that they will find it hard to create a lasting family. Although no major problems may have occurred at the time of the parents' divorce, over ten years later, *66% of young women*, 19 to 23-years-old, became afraid of intimacy with a male, afraid of betrayal, and/or afraid of losing love. As adults, women suffered more negative effects from their parents' divorce than men did. For instance, the *divorce rate for children of divorce is 60% higher for women* than for women from intact families! For men it's 35% higher. This is serious. It seems that divorces often lead to children with low self-esteem and a high need for love; that combination frequently results in unwise sex, ill-selected partners, and poor marriages.

Young men with divorced parents also feared their girlfriends wouldn't stay with them if they really got to know them. Moreover, *40% of males*, 19 to 23-years-old, ten years after a divorce, had set no life goals, were drifting in school, and generally lacked self-direction. This lack of enthusiasm for life is understandable in light of their family history: 30 to 50% of their parents were still bitter 10 years later, only 14% considered both their parents happily remarried, 60% felt rejected by one parent, and 80% had to deal with a step-parent. Science is just recognizing that certain problems in adult children of divorce take years to show up.

Another "sleeper" effect of divorce occurs in the *15% of children* who become the "caretaker" of a parent during and after the divorce. Some parents, overwhelmed by depression, bitterness, or mental illness, turn to their own child for support. The child tries to hold the parent together and becomes what Wallerstein and Blakeslee call an "overburdened child." Some eventually become angry because they are treated unfairly and neglected; some "never had a childhood;" some feel guilty and a failure. In any case, the burden of excessive caretaking often increases the child's problems.

One child out of every three has gone through a divorce. An astonishing study has found evidence that going through a divorce as a child may shorten your life by approximately four years (Friedman, et al., 1994). Another indication of the devastation following the break up of a family is the fact that 60% of all children getting psychological treatment are from a divorced family, and 80% of children in a mental hospital are (of course, psychological-emotional problems, which are

passed on to the children, may increase the risk of divorce). Divorce is serious business (especially in light of the fact the divorced parents often aren't any happier either). Stevenson and Black (1996) have recently summarized the short-term and long-term effects of divorce.

Perhaps the capstone study of 30 years of impressive research has just been done by the outstanding researchers in this area, Wallerstein, Lewis & Blakeslee (2000). They followed 93 children of divorce well into adulthood and compared them to similar children who had not experienced divorce (but some had lived with their parents' bad marriage). The conclusion: in spite of trauma for the child at the time of divorce, the *strongest impact of divorce* is during the child's twenties and thirties! Having parents who have divorced arouses fears of relationships failing, fears of change, fears of disloyalty and abandonment. These fears, plus the lack of successful models of handling marital problems, disrupt the establishment of comfortable, lasting intimacy. By age 25, only 1/2 of the women and 1/3 of the men who were children of divorce had a successful personal life. One third had been in therapy, and they had experienced many failed relationships. Only 60% of these children of divorce, now into their 30's or older, had ever married (compared to 80% of their peers who had not been through a divorce).

(Note: critics have observed that Wallerstein's original description of the divorced parents included "moderately disturbed [mental illness, bizarre behavior, bipolar, paranoid] or frequently incapacitated by disabling neuroses or addictions." This is hardly typical divorcing Americans; therefore, some of the problems observed in the children of divorce studied may be due to family pathology and genes, not just the divorce experience. However, there is no doubt that the problems following the divorce of one's parents can be prolonged and difficult, and that the parents' divorce probably caused or contributed to some of those problems.)

Thus far, we don't know much for sure about how to avoid these negative consequences of growing up in a divorced or unhappy family. Wallerstein suggests that, as much as practical, the causes of the friction be discussed by the parents with the intention of teaching the children how to cope with conflicts themselves...and to reduce their fears and skepticism of marriage. Her research group also suggests that schools offer support groups for children going through divorce. Some children may need therapy as well. Every divorce court should certainly require every parent seeking a divorce to take a course describing the common problems of children and encouraging cooperative, civil, effective parenting-attitudes and methods after divorce.

Wallerstein, Lewis & Blakeslee (2000) make it clear that they fear our society has put too much emphasis on enabling parents to be happy...and free...while being unaware of the serious consequences of unhappy marriages to the children of divorce. We had the illusion that: "if parents are happier, the children will be happier too." Marriages,



suffering hurts and feeling angry, have been abandoned too easily, at least in terms of the needs and preferences of the children. Many unhappy, resentful parents opted for escape via divorce instead of acquiring coping skills. The children paid a price. The researchers' latest book, *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*, offer some how-to suggestions and stresses the importance of parents trying to repair their marriages before filling for divorce. And there is a good chapter for couples who are wondering whether to stay in an unhappy marriage or to divorce. Obviously, some children of divorce do overcome their fears and sorrows to become secure lovers and partners but, as we have seen above, the data is not comforting.

In summary, most children can probably handle a divorce //both mom and dad continue being a close, supportive parent and //both parents put their animosity and differences aside without involving the children. It is important that the children get loving attention and support from both parents, whether they are divorced or not. It is best if the divorced parents can be fair and kind to each other. They can even help the children see the many adjustment problems in relationships and marriage, especially if the parents also reassure and teach the children that there are successful coping techniques. It is especially helpful, although often hard, if each partner can point out to his/her children that their other parent has many good traits. Lastly, remember, your children feel that half of them comes from your "ex," so badmouthing the "ex" is usually an insult or threat to your child's self-esteem.

## Helpful books for children of divorce

We are just beginning to learn the complex consequences of a long sequence of stressful events: marital problems, separation, divorce, single-parenting, loss of the non-custodial parent, and remarriage. It is knowledge we need to help the innocent victims of divorce--the children--adjust to major losses. Because bitter divorces and, essentially, abandonment of the child by a parent are so harmful, many divorce courts require parents to take a parenting class. I think it is a good idea. Both parents are urged to maintain close, meaningful contact with the child (not just going to a show and McDonalds on Saturday afternoon); ideally, both parents should provide extended and coordinated child care, i.e. total parenting. The parents must learn to be civil to each other; they should encourage the children to love and be with the other parent. All this means that divorced parents can't just avoid each other. They must talk, plan, decide, and work together for the good of their children, just like one does with a good babysitter. Society should expect nothing less from every parent, divorced or not. If you can't control your emotions (by separating your marital conflicts from your parenting role) to the degree necessary to co-parent your children with your ex, get therapy--you have serious emotional problems.

Mental health professionals recommend for 10-year-olds or older, *The Boys and Girls Book about Divorce* (Gardner, 1983), for younger children, *Dinosaurs Divorce: A Guide for Changing Families* (Brown & Brown, 1986), for older children and adolescents, *How it Feels When Parents Divorce* (Krementz, 1984). For kids 4 to 9 missing their dad, try Weninger (1992). For children 5 to 12 upset by divorce, try Blakeslee, Fassler & Lash (1993). Also, it is recommended that divorcing parents try to help their children avoid the school, behavioral, social, and emotional problems that tend to follow a divorce; a good source of this advice is by a respected psychologist, Neil Kalter (1989), in his book, *Growing Up with Divorce* (Santrock, Minnett & Campbell, 1994). In the mid-1990's there are several new books (for parents) dealing with this current "hot topic," such as Ahrons (1994), Benedek (1995), and Stahl (2000). I recommend all three but especially the latter one because it focused more explicitly on resolving conflicts *after* the divorce. Other helpful books include Banks (1990b), Francke (1983), Gardner (1971, 1977, 1991, 1992), Teyber (1991) and Jewett (1982). Adult children of divorce with problems should see Beal and Hochman (1991). A catalog of books and material for children in many troublesome situations is available from 1-215-277-4177. Two therapists have written a book for protecting the interests of children undergoing nasty divorces (Garrity & Baris, 1994); it is for therapists and judges and bitter ex's.

To keep things in perspective, we have to realize that many children, say a third or so, within a few months are able to cope with divorce very well. Therefore, divorcing parents should take heart and realize that if they learn about the children's problems and develop their own skills and self-control, they can help their children through this crisis without serious harm. Some children (maybe 10%) are much relieved when their parents get divorced; a few are delighted and thrive.

## Remarriage and Step-Parenting

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About 75% of divorced women and 85% of divorced men get remarried. Half are remarried within three years (some got a "head start"). As a result, only 4 out of 10 adults in America are married to their first spouse. The remaining 6 out of 10 are remarried, cohabiting, or single. Second marriages have an even higher divorce rate--perhaps 60%. Of course, *none* of these peoples' first marriages lasted, so it isn't surprising that 88% say (while still in their second marriage) that it is better than their first one (Albrecht, 1979). As we will see, second (and later) marriages are much stronger, happier, more beneficial, and richer than the myths about step-parents imply. Step-families usually (70%) have a step-father, 20% of the time a step-

mother, and only 10% of the time do both parents bring children into a blended family.

People remarry for the same complex reasons they marry. It is our second chance for happiness. We have more life experience and tend to select better partners the second time. Yet, less than half of remarrieds make it through the early years and find lasting happiness there; they may need a third or a fourth marriage, which seems to work out better. Many second marriages are highly stressful during the first couple of years in which parents' love has to be shared and new relationships are being worked out: the new spouse's family of origin, the step-children and step-parents, the step-siblings, etc. Moreover, financial problems are common, especially if there are step-children and/or biological children with a former spouse to support. Remarriage may also involve relocating and dealing with one or two troublesome ex-spouses. Equally important, it may involve losing contact with your own children and intense, bewildering animosity from your new step-children, particularly if the step-parent attempts to discipline.

Some research shows that early in the second marriage *step-children are two times more likely to have school problems and four times more likely to have psychological problems* than children living with both biological parents. Children living with a step-parent even have more problems with conduct and adjustment than children living with a single parent. But, are the problems of step-children the result of divorce or remarriage or both? We don't know for sure yet; however, new research suggests that *bitter divorces and continued fighting between biological parents cause more problems* for the children than step-parents do. In any case, the leftover problems from the old marriage plus the integration of additional people into the new "family" put blended marriage to a severe test (Levine, 1990; Goetting, 1982).

Psychology Today (May, 1994) summarized the information we have about step-families. They find hopeful signs for the one in three children with a step-parent (by 2000 there will be *more* children with a step-parent than there are children living with both biological parents), for example:

- Once the blended family has adjusted to new members and roles, it is more satisfying, more supportive, more complex, and a better learning-to-cope environment than traditional families. Therefore, don't strive for a totally happy family immediately. These complex emotional adjustments take three to five years involving lots of family discussions about how to accommodate each other.
- After the first five years, step-families are more likely to last than first marriages. People can find the love and care they need there; the children see happy, loving parents.
- 80% of the children raised in a step-family are well adjusted; they are tough, flexible, sensitive to and willing to accommodate other's emotional needs, and prepared to face

the external world. It is parental conflict that causes problems for the remaining 20% of kids, not divorce or remarriage. The ongoing fighting and/or the loss of contact with one biological parent are the major sources of problems. The *biological* parents must continue to cooperate closely with each other (in a civil, uncritical manner) in the parenting of *their* children. The custodial parent can't just take over all the child care and discipline (and neither should the step-parent try to do this). In particular, *the step-parent must, for several years, stay out of discipline* and thoroughly support the continued parenting by *both* biological parents of the child; the child needs one-on-one time with both parents. Divided loyalty between warring parents (who are sharing their love with newcomers) is usually hell for children.

Some therapists have suggested that girls, especially adolescent daughters, have more problems being a step-child than boys do. Often girls have played a central role in running the household before the addition of a new step-parent; the addition of another adult into the family creates role and status conflicts and confusion. When mother acquires a new husband, who often gets a lot of attention, the daughter may resent the intruder and have a lot of conflicts with the mother for at least a couple of years. If the new male will play basketball with the son, things may be okay. When father brings home a new lover, this too may be a more stressful situation for a daughter than for a son. Any open display of affection and hints of sexuality between a parent and step-parent seems to create more discomfort for daughters than sons. A boy may, of course, have a difficult time at first with a step-parent, but he soon settles in and has no more aggression problems than boys in intact families. The family dynamics can become very complex and may require therapy. Certainly, parents and step-parents should be ever watchful for difficulties and quick to address problems in "family conferences."

Because it is such a common and difficult problem, more and more is being written about remarrying and step-parenting. A Web site is offered by the [Stepfamily Foundation](http://www.stepfamily.org/) ( <http://www.stepfamily.org/>) which features the writings and audiotapes of Dr. Jeannette Lofas. Likewise, the Vishers (Visser & Visser, 1982), founders of the Stepfamily Association of America, have written a guide to step-parenting primarily for counselors but self-helpers could profit from it. Other texts recommended by professional counselors (Santrock, Minnett & Campbell, 1994) are about the general pitfalls in second marriages (Janda & MacCormack, 1991; Einstein & Albert, 1986). Good general discussions of step-parenting are in Booth & Dunn (1994), Newman (1994), Dinkmeyer, McKay & McKay (1988), Martin & Martin (1985), Krantzler (1977), and Nobel & Nobel (1977). Specifically, blended families are the focus in Bernstein (1990) and Eckler (1988), step-mothering in Prilik (1988) and Clubb (1991), and step-fathering in Rosin (1987). A couple of books are for children in a step-family (Blakeslee, Fassler & Lash, 1993; Fassler, Lash, & Ives, 1989; Evans, 1988). I suggest you contact the Stepfamily Association

of America (1-800-735-0329) for support group information and many books on all phases of divorce and remarriage.

Living together is not easy under any circumstances, but being a step-parent and/or having a blended family are special challenges. Yet, it can be a very gratifying and enriching experience. Many step-parents and step-children are loved deeply and relate warmly. The alternative--living alone--is not easy either. It's about a tie, i.e. people who remarry are no happier (nor less) than those who do not remarry (Spanier & Fustenberg, 1982). We can find lots of ways to be happy.

## Sex and Cultural Taboos

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Sex is an important part of life. It gives us physical pleasure *and* babies. It sometimes expresses love beautifully. Sex leading to children is the only way for the species to survive and for most of us to achieve a form of immortality--of living beyond our death. Although simple, fun, and necessary, sex is restricted by a complex set of morals, social customs, and taboos. Any drive that is so strong and valued, yet so controlled and prohibited, is going to generate stressful, ambivalent, confusing feelings.

Part of the confusion about sex comes from the church. It may surprise you, but for centuries until the 1800's, the church fathers thought and taught that *women were over-sexed* and had poor impulse control, i.e. were easily seduced and prone to act out (wow, is that projection or what?). As women gained more power in the church, an implicit agreement evolved: women would be viewed more favorably by the church *if* women would deny their sexual interests and become the moral caretakers of the flock (Baumeister, 1991). That is still our "understanding" of gender roles today, but we must remember that women in our Western culture were seen as very sexual (and inferior) creatures only 150 years ago. It was men's fantasies about women having sex with Satan that lead to witch hunts (in the 17th and 18th centuries 500, 000 women were burned at the stake, not just a few). We are still sorting out sexual myth from reality. For example, to what degree are current women's sexual "gate keeping" and insisting on love before sex a reaction to centuries of life-threatening sexual accusations by religious males? Or, are women's sexual inhibitions based on practical interpersonal politics (males say "why buy the cow if you are already getting the milk?")? Or, have women learned and/or evolved over eons to be more interested in love, intimacy, and security than in carnal sex?

## Acceptance of our sexual selves and feelings

We are sexual beings; there is no escaping it. Infant boys get erections. Little boys and girls like to rub themselves "down there." One of the great mysteries for most of us as a small child is, "How are babies made?" Another is "What do girls/boys look like?" There are good books to read to little folks and books for maturing teenagers (Madaras, 1988a, 1988b).

If you ask a college class to anonymously write down a secret, something they are ashamed of, the response is frequently about sex. Things like, "I had an abortion," "I masturbate," "I went out with a married man/woman," "I had sex with someone I didn't love," "I had oral sex with my boyfriend," "I'm attracted to my own sex," "I've had sex with a black," "I'm attracted to large penises/breasts" and so on. For a culture that thinks of itself as sexually liberal, we have a lot of hang-ups, a lot of guilt.

On the other hand, since 1960 there has been an explosion of sexual activity, some of it foolishly impulsive and inconsiderate of one's partner. Many teenagers get pregnant (see later discussion). In fact, some studies find that 60% to 90% do not use a contraceptive during intercourse the first time. Other reports say 2/3's of teens use contraceptives the first time but only 17% use condoms all the time. Many college women forget to take their pill 3 or 4 times a month. In any case, more than one-third of all sexually active teenaged women become pregnant before they are nineteen (Maier, 1984). In the late 1980's, college students were becoming more sexually active but using contraceptives less. This helps explain the large number of abortions in this country. It seems as though guilt and personal shame about sex doesn't prevent intercourse but does prevent the advanced planning necessary for the prevention of pregnancy. Also, our general emotional discomfort with sex may reduce the use of condoms and increase AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.



The sex taboo is the notion that sex and love are so important that we must pretend that they are unimportant and so emotionally loaded that they are dangerous to think about.

-James Weinrich (1987)



### Teaching that sex is taboo

In our society, sex is taboo from birth to the mid-teens--don't play with yourself, don't use "dirty" (sexual) words, don't read "filthy" (sexual) books or see R-rated movies, don't have sex until you are older and in love. But when you decide to have sex, you are supposed to immediately function perfectly, i.e. the virginal male is supposed to

instantly be a wonderful, considerate lover and the virginal female immediately aware of what to do and how to be orgasmic. What foolish expectations (under those conditions). Everyone knows it can't work that way if young people aren't taught about sex *or* are taught that sex is bad. Yet, starting with infants, hands are removed from the genitalia. At age 4 or 5 we are still being told not to touch ourselves "down there." Weinrich (1987) gives a delightful example of this prolonged early sex training:

1. Mother sees her 4-year-old rubbing his penis through his pants and asks, "What are you doing?" (She *knows* what he is doing! But, yet, she asks.)
2. The boy replies, "Nothing." (He *knows* what he was doing! But even at four, he knows to deny his actions.)
3. Mother totally ignores his lie and denial, saying, "Well, stop it!"
4. The boy indirectly admits the truth by responding, "Okay" and, with little apparent reaction, goes back to his play.

This interaction might occur in any home but notice the lack of frank, overt, explicit communication here. The boy has already learned and is over-learning that rubbing his penis in front of mom is so awful, at least in mom's eyes, that it is unspeakable. They totally avoid discussing why he is touching his penis or how good it feels. Mom doesn't admit she has done it privately. Mother doesn't make it clear that other people--including her--might be upset by his openly pleasuring himself in front of them and, thus, he shouldn't do it publicly, but it is fine to do it alone. Instead, this little 4-year-old boy is forced to figure out on his own these subtle, confused or mixed messages from mom (or dad). Actually, even though he stops rubbing himself, we can't be sure what his interpretation of the interaction really will be. Perhaps he will think: rubbing my penis is a bad thing to do. Or he may say to himself: it's okay, if I don't let anyone see me. Or, perhaps: mom (and other women) thinks my penis is disgusting. Or, maybe: I'm bad and do nasty, weird things that other boys don't do. Taboos and silence create secrets--sometimes delightful secrets, sometimes disturbing secrets. A little honest talk would be helpful.

## Masturbation

It is easy to see how silence becomes a powerful but unguided form of "sex education." Consider how we deal with little girls. They have a vagina and a clitoris, both of which produce feelings. Yet, many women are never told anything about their vagina--not its location, not its functions, and not how it feels--until blood starts coming out of "their bottom." We parents are even more secretive about the clitoris. Since its only purpose is to feel good, we seem to be especially careful to say nothing. Are we afraid? ashamed? unsure of what to say? But by saying nothing, we only add confusion and fears to their wondering about where babies come from, what do other people look like, how do people make babies, is it all right to touch myself and tingle "down

there" where my pee comes from, etc. Thank goodness for the explicit children's books about sex (Madaras, 1988a, 1988b).

If the young person going through puberty has never been told "it's okay or even healthy to masturbate," the implication is that such acts are too naughty for mom or dad to talk about. Indeed, many people still think masturbation is bad. For centuries the Catholic church has condemned masturbation as sinful; this church still calls it a "seriously disordered act" (sounds like a mental illness!). Twenty years ago about 50% of Americans actually said "masturbation is always wrong" (Levitt & Klassen, 1973). That's amazing! But that percentage may not have changed much. Surgeon-General Joyce Elders was fired, in part, because she advocated including information about masturbation in sex education courses. We must remember that only 60 years ago our society still believed the medical "science" of the mid-1800's, namely, that masturbation caused insanity, mental retardation, apathy, fatigue, poor memory, blindness, headaches, etc. No kidding! This negative attitude towards a wonderful aspect of the human body is a major problem. An innocent, harmless act which relieves sexual tension, helps control sexual impulses, increases sexual self-confidence, and provides great pleasure somehow becomes seen as negative or bad by 57% of female adolescents and 45% of male adolescents (Masters, Johnson & Kolodny, 1985). We are doing something wrong.



Don't knock masturbation. It's having sex with someone I deeply love.  
-Woody Allen



A *Playboy* (1976) survey showed that 75% of college males masturbate at least once a month (in addition to 72% having intercourse), 80% say they like to masturbate, and only 10% say they refrain altogether. Other surveys show the average 16-year-old male masturbates about *three times a week*. College females are less enthusiastic about it, about 54% have masturbated sometime and liked it, 13% have tried it and didn't like it, 8% haven't but would try it, and 25% have never masturbated and don't want to. More recent surveys found about the same results, namely, 60% to 80% of females have masturbated at least once sometime in their lives. Masters, Johnson & Kolodny (1985, p. 366) say men masturbate about twice (other researchers say three times) as often as women both before and after marriage (about 70% of husbands and wives masturbate some). Masturbation and intercourse do not necessarily replace each other.

People who enjoy masturbating are more likely to have climaxes later in life (Kinsey, et al., 1953) while making love. Men usually



ejaculate easily but women frequently have trouble climaxing. One reason for this is that men masturbate by grasping and stroking the penis with one hand. This is similar to the movements and sensations during intercourse, so for men masturbation is good training for intercourse. Women often masturbate in ways that are unlike intercourse: light strokes on or near the clitoris (48%), vibrator on or near clitoris (26%), squeezing the legs together (4%), running water on the genitals (4%), stroking the breasts, having sexual fantasies, and so on (Masters, Johnson & Kolodny, 1985). (They rarely masturbate in ways similar to intercourse, i.e. inserting something in and out the vagina.) If one learns to have a climax in only one way and if that way is incompatible with intercourse, e.g. by squeezing the legs together, it may be difficult to achieve an orgasm when having intercourse with a partner. Thus, many women have to deal with two problems: (1) having little or no past experience with climaxing via masturbation and/or (2) having masturbatory experience that doesn't transfer well to intercourse. Women need to research these matters. It seems like it would be best for women to learn to enjoy masturbating by stimulating the clitoris in several ways (unless their religious or moral beliefs prohibit it).

There is another aspect of masturbation worth noting. If you marry a 22-year-old person, who has been a moderately active masturbator, even though he/she may be a virgin, he/she has already probably had over 1500 orgasms, each probably with an imaginary sexual partner. That is quite a sex life (for a "virgin") already. My point is: this sexual experience may be good--it may reflect a healthy drive and a positive attitude towards sex. Contrast this "history" with an inexperienced person who doesn't like to masturbate at all or with another person who masturbates two or three times a day fantasizing only about prostitutes. Which of these three "histories" sounds healthiest to you? It is amazing that researchers and we as a society know very little about the implications of our past masturbatory-fantasy sex life for love-making with our marriage partner. This ignorance is another result of our avoidance of sex, of our moral inhibitions--our sexual taboos.

A *Forum* (1973) advisor claimed that 90% of non-orgasmic women did not masturbate regularly when younger. For this reason and others (e.g. fun, healthy, normal, creates a more positive attitude towards sex in general), several highly respected authors have prescribed masturbation and even given detailed how-to instructions. If you are just learning, try Blank (1996) or Heiman, Lo Piccolo, & Lo Piccolo (1976). If you are a female, try Barbach (1975) or Blank (2000). If you are a seasoned practitioner, try Litten (1996). Older but still good references are Comfort (1972), Dodson (1974), Seaman (1972), Ellis (1974, 1988), and Smith, Ayres & Rubinstein (1973).

## Turn-ons for men and women

There are other differences between males and females in addition to attitudes about masturbation. Even though girls mature earlier, boys think about sex more, enjoy X-rated movies more, and start having sex earlier. Men "turn on" to almost any nice body; women "turn on" to charming, successful men in romantic situations. That's an overgeneralization, but, in general, most single men would welcome sex without love, while women want love and commitment first before having sex. Women more often than men feel sex without love is vulgar and animalistic. Men say (50%) they would use the services of a prostitute if it were legalized; only a few women (5%) say they would use such services (Easter, 1975). The centerfold of *Playboy* is much more popular to men than the centerfold of *Playgirl* is to women (*Psychology Today*, 1976). After reading an erotic story, women report avoiding men, while men report seeking out women (Byrne, 1976).

Males in our culture are titillated by women's bodies. By nature or by social conditioning males come to crave sexy body parts (of course, in the right circumstances, women like this attention). Idealized female body parts become erotically tantalizing even as objects, even as pictures on a page or on a TV screen. Objects become sexually arousing, e.g. pages in *Playboy* produce erections. And, in turn, actual, live, whole women are responded to by men as if they were only erotic objects, not complete physical, mental, and spiritual beings. Women have and control these precious sexual objects (breasts, butt, vagina, etc.) that men want; thus, men may feel vulnerably dependent on women for sexual favors and fearful of the power women have over them. Brooks (1995) says this woman-as-sex-object situation poses serious interpersonal problems between men and women, especially because men idolize perfect female body parts to such an extent that it interferes with emotional intimacy between men and women. He recommends ways for men to, first, recognize and stop this "turning women into objects" and, second, learn how to establish deeply intimate relations with a woman. As a culture, we need to deal more effectively with men's depersonalization of women, called "the centerfold syndrome " by Brooks.

This lusting for women's body parts by men causes many problems for both men and women: (1) men feel compelled to look at women but see them as only highly erotic sexual parts, not real whole persons. (2) Men believe they must "turn on" women in order to feel like "a man;" thus, women wield enormous power over men. (3) Likewise, men feel that attracting beautiful women, as if they were great trophies, proves their sexual powers and personal worth. (4) Once men are trained to crave sexual gratification and, at the same time, taught to avoid softness, emotionality, and intimacy, men may sexualize their relationships as a way of avoiding the dangers of a deeper involvement, such as emotional domination by women, commitment to women, and love. Recognizing and rejecting the "centerfold syndrome" is necessary before we, as men, can mature, like ourselves, become a compassionate caretaker, and become close

friends with women. Brooks (1995) says men can consciously suppress their voyeurism and sexual thoughts (as they do towards a daughter), learn to love women for their abilities and personal traits, and enjoy the nurturing of others as much as women do. But as long as males are exclusively obsessed with the sexual build of any attractive woman that comes along, we have a serious social problem.

Some think men are by nature more sexual or "hornier" than women. Probably not true (remember, not long ago, the church thought women were over-sexed). Indeed, Masters, Johnson & Kolodny (1985) found the sex response--orgasm--is very similar in men and women. Women can climax as fast as men; they can have more orgasms. College males and females are about equally (75%) active sexually (*Playboy*, 1976); college communities don't need prostitutes any more. The same percent of first year college men and women (80%) have had their genitals stimulated by a partner; 40% of women and 50% of men have climaxed this way (Kolodny, 1980). When viewing erotic films, women actually became just as sexually aroused physically as men. Yet, when asked, many of these women denied (or were unaware of) their sexual responses (Heiman, et al., 1976). Women tend to underestimate their own sexual arousal while overestimating males' sexual arousal (Byrne, 1976). It appears that the social-sexual indoctrinations given women--the sexual taboos--take time to wear off. As a woman gets more sexual experience, she responds more freely to sexual stimuli. That may be why males hit their sexual peaks early (late teens) while women peak much later. More and more women are escaping this oppression of sexual sensitivity and are learning to "turn on" easily (like men do). Unfortunately, a few women conclude that they are abnormal--"nymphos." That is seldom the case; they are just healthy and uninhibited. (Nymphomania is when a high sex drive is combined with emotional and interpersonal problems producing inappropriate or self-destructive sexual behavior resulting in repeated rejection, unwanted pregnancy, sexual disease, social censure, and other difficulties.)

The sexual information one needs is available--how to avoid pregnancy, how to overcome disgust towards sexual body parts, how to make your own decisions, how to be a good lover, how to have an orgasm and so on. One has to learn these things mostly on one's own, not from parents, teachers, friends, priests, or doctors. Where is accurate information available? In books, mainly.

Men have historically had more sexual freedom than women. But women are rapidly gaining freedom both in society's acceptance and in their own minds. By age 13, about 20% of girls have let a guy touch their breasts. By age 15, about 50% of girls have had intercourse (in 1960 it was 10%). One reason may be our entertainment; only 15% of sexual acts on prime-time TV in 1984 were between married partners (*Harper's Magazine*, Feb., 1985). Also, women now have more sexual opportunities when working. Reportedly, over half of all *single* professional women had an affair with a co-worker or a client during the last year.

A serious worry many people have is: if we--men and women--overcome our sexual inhibitions, will we go wild? Parents and religions have worried about this forever. If we get comfortable with sex, i.e. able to openly discuss it, approach and touch others, initiate sex, masturbate ourselves and our lover freely, enjoy mouth-genital and many other activities, and so on, will we become more promiscuous or unfaithful to our lover? Maybe but I don't think so. In the grand scheme of things, sex outside a love relationship isn't very important. Our sexual drive doesn't overpower us. Many people have had a wild sex life and then became totally faithful to a spouse or lover. Besides, in fantasy, a wild sex life may sound very exciting, but research shows that faithful married couples have the most emotionally and physically satisfying sex (Laumann, Gagnon, Michael & Michaels, 1994). Most of us aren't faithful because our inhibitions prohibit sex with someone else other than our partner. We are faithful because it is the considerate, satisfying thing to do. However, in a totally sexually free society, where a spouse wouldn't mind if his/her partner had sex with someone else (presumably sex would no longer mean "I love you"), we don't honestly know what the marital or societal consequences would be. Separating sex from love and intimacy, as in the centerfold syndrome, may be impossible for many of us. Such a separation may also diminish the meaning of both sex and love, a high price to pay. At least, in the current culture in contrast with the 1960's, a free love movement seems unlikely soon. Considering the difficulties we are having staying married already, I suspect most marriages would not withstand the temptations of free love. Time may tell. In the meantime, each of us has to make our own decisions. In a later section of this chapter, we will consider the pros and cons for different sexual alternatives.

## **Acceptance of our bodies, sex play, fantasy, etc.**

Although a majority of young people have accepted premarital sex, we still have difficulty accepting the sexual parts of our body. Partly because these parts are associated the "going to the bathroom," our penises and vulvas are considered "dirty." As we have discussed, when young, we are scolded for touching or showing our sexual parts. We don't talk about these parts, not even if we are worried that they are abnormal (e.g. if our penis seems too short or if one breast is smaller than the other) or not working properly. We see pictures of super-sexy women and men that we know we can never match; we feel inadequate and wish we were different. We all learn "dirty" words for our sexual parts and acts that we can never use publicly. We hear hostile, disdainful, crude expressions, such as "screw you" or "f\_\_\_ you!" We insult people by using "dirty words," such as "dick head," "prick," "cunt," "asshole," etc. Besides, women have "the curse." Is it any wonder that we think our sexual parts are dirty?

One of the first things we are taught is "Where is your nose?", "What is this (ear)?", etc. but even as adults we still don't know where

our clitoris is or if the head of the penis is supposed to be connected underneath to the shaft or if one testicle is supposed to be lower than the other. Besides ignorance, we are filled with misconceptions: one shouldn't have sex during menstruation, that a large clitoris means one is over-sexed, that men can have more climaxes than women, etc. Why are we so uninformed? Taboos, even about physiology.

Our body image has been studied (Cash, Winstead & Janda, 1986) yielding several interesting findings. Even though the exercise craze may have helped some of us become fitter, we are, at the same time, as a society becoming more dissatisfied with our appearance. About 35% of American men and women don't like their looks, so much so that 45% of these unhappy women and 30% of these dissatisfied men would consider cosmetic surgery. Only 50% of those who see themselves as overweight liked how they looked. Young people are getting more and more "out of shape." From 25% to 50% of the people who feel negative about their appearance, fitness, health, or sexuality also judge their psychological health to be poor (depression, loneliness, feeling worthless). Surely, feeling unattractive, e.g. flabby, would interfere with the free and full enjoyment of sex (women reportedly more so than men).

If one is not attractive, the choice is to change it or accept it. Some things can usually be changed: thinness, fatness, poor complexion, make up, and hair. Many things can not be changed: facial features, height, and many specific features, like narrow shoulders, fat deposits, flat butt, bust and penis size, etc. Surgery can, of course, change some of these parts but there may be serious contraindications to surgery besides cost. For example, breasts can be made smaller or larger but the surgery frequently results in a loss of sensation in the breasts. That is a high price to pay.

One's body image remains long after the body has changed. The most common example is an attractive young person 18 to 25-years-old who thinks he/she is unattractive. Strikingly often such a person reports that as a teenager he/she was skinny or fat or pimply. To correct this, the person has to give up the idea that he/she is entirely unattractive, and then an honest positive self-evaluation ("I have a nice figure", "I have a strong-looking, masculine body") has to be repeated over and over until it is believed. Reinforcement from others helps too.

Unfortunately, in our culture it is commonly believed that "bigger is better" in regard to breasts and penises. Masters, Johnson, & Kolodny (1985) say large breasts are no more sensitive than smaller breasts. Indeed, some sexologists claim that small-breasted women respond more to touch and enjoy it more. But, because some men are brainwashed and conditioned, large breasts are considered by some as especially desirable. Consequently, many women are dissatisfied with their breasts, even though size has little or nothing to do with experiencing sexual feelings or attractiveness over the years. While no research addresses this issue, so far as I know, I'll bet that a sexually

enthusiastic, active, and highly responsive small breasted woman is far more exciting to most males (considered over a period of months) than a less responsive, big bosomed woman. It's what you do with what you've got that counts.

The same is true for men's penises. Most penises are about 6 inches long when erect (Purvis, 1992). Size doesn't make much difference, either in terms of appearance to most women (Fisher, Branscombe & Lemery, 1983) or in terms of sensation inside the vagina (Masters, Johnson & Kolodny, 1985). In fact, bisexual women frequently find sex just as good (often better) with a woman; thus, a penis is not necessary at all. A 4 or 5 inch penis would do just fine. Yet, many men are worried about being small. Some misjudge their own size (penises get more alike as they get erect). But, regardless of actual size, it is almost always an unnecessary concern. Sexually sophisticated people know that sexual know how and a loving nature are much more important than the size of the penis. Unlike men, few women have been brainwashed into believing that a big penis is fantastic. Men's emphasis should be shifted from the size of some sexual part to behaving in a loving, caring, tender way.

### Acceptance of sex play

Almost all of us participated in some sex play as children. Only about 45% to 55% of us say we remember any sex play. Yet, mothers of 6 and 7-year-olds say 76% of their daughters and 83% of their sons engaged in sex play, more than half with siblings. But, only 13% of college students admit any sexual activity with siblings. So why do we forget these events? Maybe we feel guilty. Maybe we are very young. Maybe it isn't worth remembering. Sex play among playmates doesn't ordinarily hurt us. Harsh punishment or criticism--"You are a bad girl to do something dirty and disgusting like that"--can do harm. Distinguished from mutual experimentation, about 25% of the time it is not just sex "play" because force is used, and another 25% of the time one sibling or playmate is five years or more older than the other one (Finkelhor, 1981). These incidents become more like sexual abuse; they certainly can do harm but may not. Homosexual sex play is also common in children. It doesn't cause us to be homosexuals as adults but we are likely to feel unnecessarily guilty about it.

These taboos against masturbation, sex talk, and sex play may cause problems for adults. Examples: Most men, I predict, would like to have their penis fondled and aroused every day (outside the usual setting and time for intercourse), but this is seldom done. Most women would appreciate more affectionate attention to their bodies (outside the setting for intercourse). Why are these behaviors lacking? After passing through the infatuation phase, when our hormones drive us to be highly sexual all the time, we gradually revert back to our early teachings of taboos and inhibitions (or we just "get used to" our partner's body). The inhibitions and taboos, both of the fonder and the fondlee, could surely be unlearned or overcome with a little practice.

## Acceptance of sexual fantasies

For 75% of us, sexual fantasies are simply a pleasurable and exciting escape. Over half of all men think about sex once or more during the day, 20% of women do (Doskoch, 1995). Male college students have sexual thoughts over 7 times a day, college women over 4 times a day. Over half of these thoughts are externally triggered. About 85% of men and 70% of women fantasize when they masturbate. The most common fantasies are about ordinary intercourse with current or past lovers or with people we know, have met recently, or have seen on TV or film. Yet, our sexual fantasies are rarely revealed, not even to our closest friends. Perhaps this is because some fantasies suddenly appear that are shocking to the daydreamer, e.g. a religious person imagines having group sex or a straight person thinks of an exciting homosexual encounter. About 25% of us feel quite guilty about some of our sexual thoughts. A few people have no sexual fantasies, possibly because they consider the thought equivalent to the deed, e.g. thinking of having sex with a movie star could be the moral equivalent of premarital sex or adultery. Also, a few people think sexual fantasies indicate poor mental health or abnormal sexual desires. Rarely is that the case, although some persons with psychological problems have fantasies of punishment which disrupt their sexual acts or have repeated sadistic fantasies which they feel pushed to act out. For most of us, however, fantasies are beneficial--they increase our sex drive, make masturbation more exciting, boost our confidence, permit the impossible or impermissible (in fantasy a teenaged girl can touch the penis of a *Playgirl* center fold or a teenaged boy can seduce his friend's mother), release tensions, help us overcome sexual fears, and provide a rehearsal for a real encounter. Most of us do not consider the thought as morally equivalent to the deed (see discussion in chapter 6). People who fantasize more have more sex and more fun doing it. Professionals often consider having no fantasies as an unhealthy sign.

Masters, Johnson & Kolodny (1985, p.344) say having kinky sexual fantasies does *not* necessarily mean you want to actually engage in the same sexual acts (e.g. no one wants to be raped). Of course, some daydreams *are* about actions one would like to experience, some are not. The common sexual fantasies of men and women are quite similar, except women may imagine being in more romantic situations (and the personal-emotional aspects of the man) while men focus on body parts. Also, men are more prone to imagine themselves doing something to the woman (dominating), while women imagine being done to (submitting). It is common for men and women to imagine doing something different from the ordinary: meeting an attractive stranger on a moonlit beach, being the star of a porno film, being a prostitute, having sex in the middle of the football field, watching animals having sex, etc. We like to imagine being desirable. We seek novelty. Especially during masturbation but also during intercourse, it is common to imagine having sex with someone else other than our real life partner: a previous lover, a neighbor, a teacher, a celebrity or star, etc. (This is the most common source of guilt and it may not be a good idea to disclose those fantasies.)

Of course, our fantasies are often unrealistic. Masters, Johnson & Kolodny (p. 348) tell an interesting story of a "groupie" who always fantasized about Mick Jagger while having sex with other musicians. Eventually she had a chance to go to bed with Mick Jagger himself. To her surprise she had to use her fantasy because he wasn't nearly as good as she had imagined. Two other kinds of "forbidden" fantasies are fairly frequent--watching others have sex (perhaps a group orgy) and having sex with someone of the same sex. It comes as a surprise to some people that rape fantasies occur to about 24% of men and 36% of women (Knox, 1984, p. 283). Over 10% of women report that being forced to have sex is their favorite sexual fantasy (Doskoch, 1995). Remember, fantasies are *not* wishes! The rape fantasies of women may reflect a desire, not to be hurt, but to be attractive, to be passive, and to avoid the responsibility for the sexual act. For unclear reasons, a few men and women find it sexy to inflict pain or to experience it. Conquest and/or humiliation fantasies are also common, i.e. to control a subordinate, to force someone, to be forced, to be seduced to have sex. Power, denial of responsibility, and anger get all mixed up with sex in fantasy--and maybe in real life.

Casual, passing sexual thoughts hurt no one and probably are important in maintaining year after year a healthy, loving interest in sex play with our lover. If hurtful, inconsiderate, or violent thoughts become obsessions which could influence your behavior, that is potentially dangerous (seek treatment). But, having sexual fantasies (or dreams) you would never act out is not abnormal.

## Choosing Your Sexual Lifestyle

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### **Avoiding being forced or pressured by anyone**

For 3,000 years, at least, sexual attitudes have shifted back and forth from permissive to restrictive. In spite of all this experience, debate, and moralizing, we still have very little scientific knowledge about the outcome--the results or the pros and cons--of different sexual attitudes and actions. Man would rather preach (pontificate) to others about how to live than to scientifically investigate the consequences of specific actions in real life.

#### Being pressured or persuaded

Many of us ruminate indecisively for months or years about whether or not to have sex. Others of us decide in a matter of seconds to have sex. Others are absolutely certain they shouldn't and won't have sex, and never entertain any other thoughts. In any case, the decision is not simple. We are influenced by many people: our parents,



our lover, our friends, our religion, our teachers, our entertainment, our role models and so on. Our own thoughts and fantasies influence us. Friends are an especially powerful influence on us--and we tend to choose friends who support our sexual life style. When we are "different," peer pressure can be heavy. I have had college students come to me and say, "My problem is I'm 21-years-old and never had sex." One such student had sexually active room mates who cruelly called her "neurotic," "prude," and "frigid." Billy & Udry (1985) found that virgins in junior high school, whose best friends were sexually active, were 12 times more likely to have sex in the next two years than virgins whose best friends remained virgins. When deciding what to do sexually, it's important to listen to people with different views, talk with your potential sex partner, talk with a counselor, read some books, you don't have to decide today, take a couple of weeks and talk to friends with different views, and maybe even talk with an open-minded parent or relative. Deciding to have sex deserves careful thought... with whom, when, where, under what conditions are all important. These are your decisions, don't be pressured.

**Make it clear what you want to do sexually; you have every right to make the decision**

The person we currently have a crush on may have an especially powerful influence over us. The most common problem for women on dates is the male making unwanted sexual advances (Knox, 1984). Being "forced" or pressured into some unwanted sex activity is a serious problem. It isn't just a minor difference of opinion (75% of women want to delay petting until after the 4th or 5th date, while one-third of men want to pet on the first date), the fact is that *25% to 35% of college males admit "forcing themselves" on women.* Furthermore, *35% say they might rape a woman if they knew they wouldn't get caught.* Women should note this statistic carefully. Indeed, over 50% of college women have had experience with "offensive" dates, and 23% have been "forced" to have sex on a date or at a party (Masters, Johnson & Kolodny, 1985, pp. 467-472). If your lover respects your preferences and totally accepts that sex is a mutual decision, be grateful. If not, teach him or leave him.

Society has made women the gatekeepers to sexual activities. This decision-making process is especially hard for the woman if she is needy or scared and/or really likes or wants to please the guy. Males "go for it" and expect the female to stop them. Young women must learn how to stop the male; who teaches them? Women must also learn to avoid unsafe situations with men they don't really know; who teaches that? *Women must be free and know how to say "NO" very clearly.* This isn't easy. Males hear "not now" to mean "definitely yes (later)" and "don't do that" as "try some other approach" and "stop that" as "maybe, if you try something else." It isn't that all men who don't hear "no" are stupid or woman-hating rapists or doggedly determined to get what they want. A small part of the problem is that more than 1/3 of college women admit they have (*but only occasionally*) said "no" to sex when they really meant "yes"

(Muehlenhard & Hollabaugh, 1988). What were their reasons for the token resistance? (1) To look like a nice girl and not "loose." (2) To convey a fear they have, e.g. "My parents might come home." (3) To underscore some hesitancy, e.g. "It's against my religion." (4) To psychologically manipulate the man, e.g. "I'm mad at you" or "I want you to beg." Here we have another consequence of sexual taboos: indirect, incomplete, or dishonest communication! Every woman must *know how to say what they want* and rehearse in advance communicating exactly what she really wants... yes to this point, no to anything beyond that, and no arguments!

Women *don't have to decide hours in advance* exactly what they want or how far they want to go (they may not know in advance), but they should avoid, if at all possible, being deceptive or manipulative. Pretended interest in sex (when you don't want it) is unfair, inappropriate, and even dangerous. Pretended or partial resistance to sex (when you really want to have intercourse) may encourage men to ignore all women's words. On the other hand, just because some woman may have said "no" while acting out "yes" is no excuse for men to press on. Males must keep in mind that only rarely do women say "no" when they mean "yes," so *men must always take the first, faint "no" to mean strictly, loudly, and definitely "no."* If she wants to change her mind, she'll have to let the male know in no uncertain terms. A man's job is not to see how far he can get. His job is to totally respect her wishes--being considerate is truly "making love." The woman's and the man's responsibility is to guide or tell the partner clearly what he/she wants to do and doesn't want to do. When either one wants to stop, that must be respected. That usually means that the female is fully in control (but it works the same way if the female is more pushy). Once told "don't do that," the male no longer needs to approach the breasts or the crotch repeatedly to see if the answer is still "no." Learning to explicitly relax the limits she has set will be something new for many women; after saying "no" she has to take the initiative.

When deciding your sexual life style, remember it is your life; you have every right to do only what you want to on a date; you must take the consequences of your actions; don't give in to pressure; make your preferences clear and insist they be respected. If you want your first sexual experience to be with a special person in a committed relationship and in a safe, comfortable and highly romantic situation (and who wouldn't?), then insist that it be that way... wait until those conditions exist in your life. If a "date" or "friend" continues to be too sexually aggressive after you have said "no" firmly, you should insist that he/she stop or you will leave. If a "friend" becomes physically aggressive, raise hell: scream, kick, hit, bite and run (Adams, Fay & Loreen-Martin, 1984). See chapter 7 for a discussion of the difficult task of handling a rapist and sexual abuse. The advice--don't be pushed into anything--goes for males too; 16% of college males report being psychologically pressured by a woman to have sex (Stuckman-Johnson, 1986).

### Parents want to help but are confused

Today's parents want to talk to their teenagers about sex. But we parents are baffled by the situation and caught between Puritan prohibition of premarital sex and modern sexual liberalism. That's understandable; there is no one correct position. Should we parents say sex is bad or that sex can be fantastic? If we were to say sex is great, doesn't that encourage young people to have sex? If we emphasize the potential problems associated with having sex (pregnancy, hurtful rejection, AIDS and STD, reputation, etc.), doesn't that imply sex is all trouble and no pleasure? Since we aren't sure what to say to our teenaged sons and daughters (even Hugh Hefner didn't advocate free love to his daughter), we parents aren't saying much at all about sex to our children. We don't know if we should restrict our children or let them go free; we want to protect them either way. We don't know whether to say, "Don't do it" or "Use some protection."

Sex education classes (taught in only 35% of our high schools) offer mostly plumbing facts and almost no psychological-interpersonal reasons for and against sex in different circumstances. How can we persuade a 13 or 15-year-old to not have sex if we believe that sex is fine for college students *if* they are caring, responsible, in love, and use birth control? The argument "you're too young" may not be good enough. If we, as parents, avoid discussing with our 16-year-old son or daughter the possibility of having sex, there is little possibility of helping him/her consider the ramifications of unprotected sex and little chance to prepare to use contraceptives. Where else can a 16-year-old get sound, detailed advice about when, how, and with whom to have sex, except from Mom and Dad? Telling them to wait until they're older might work up to 16 or 17, but not beyond that. Telling them "it's a sin," may be both ineffective and unwise. Telling them to wait until they are married (when many don't expect to get married until they are 30), just isn't "going to fly." Better "*get real*" and get *detailed* with them in the early teens.

### A young woman's lonely decision in a supposedly intimate situation

Since deciding about sex is, supposedly, left up to the female, the young teenaged woman is burdened with an awesome responsibility. Without intimate discussions with her parents or a friend, she makes this decision alone. She has frequently lost touch with the traditional religious arguments against premarital sex. Most young people have no access to written material that could help them make careful decisions about sex. The potential male partner is usually more of a problem (always pushing the limits) than a helper. It seems grossly unfair. She is not helped by parents, schools, friends, counselors, self-help books, and certainly not by the boyfriend or the media (remember 85% of TV sex is illicit) to make these decisions: how to select a boyfriend and friends? how to argue with and sexually resist

her boyfriend and still keep him interested? when to have sex? how to have sex in the most comfortable and satisfying way? how to avoid pregnancy? how to deal with her own doubts, fears and guilt? how to handle her parents and their disapproval? No wonder the young woman feels "I'm in this all by myself. I don't have any help." No wonder there is an epidemic of teenage pregnancies.

To make matters worse, if the young women decide to have ("permit" may be a better word) unprotected sex, many of these teenagers will not even enjoy the sex. People who work with teenaged mothers say they commonly had intercourse only a few times, and it was after school with their clothes on, while they were rushed or "scared to death" they would be caught, and they did it "just for the boy" (Goodman, 1983). Then, the "boy" abandons them! And, they fear pregnancy! This is ridiculous. What a thoughtless act. What a terrible waste of one of life's most precious and glorious moments. What a crushing blow to a fragile ego and to an aching heart. We adults *and friends* don't have all the answers, but we can surely help our children avoid such stupid, regretful situations. We can help young people--girls *and boys*--make better decisions, have better self-control and birth-control, relate more considerately with each other, handle their feelings more wisely, etc.

When deciding about sex, we are also pushed and pulled by our own strong emotions and feelings. We may desperately want the other person to love us, our love and sexual needs drive us constantly and distort our thinking, the threat of loneliness haunts us, fears of intimacy (of moving too rapidly) and possible rejection lurk in the background, concerns about parents' reactions and religious condemnation may be felt, worries about pregnancy and our financial future concern us, and we fear our sexual performance will be totally inadequate. This situation is hardly conducive to rational decision-making. In such an intense and complex situation, one can see that the old trite advice "do what you feel like doing" is rather foolish. We all surely know we must use our brain before using our genitals.

### Beware of soothsayers

With a dearth of scientific information, limited unrealistic guidance from religion, little help from sex education, and mixed messages from the media, we may rely too heavily on one or two others' opinions about sexual choices. Everyone seems to know what should be done. Some people think that *whatever they have done sexually is the best choice for everyone*. This attitude obviously serves their psychological needs but this doesn't help the young decision-maker very much, since his/her situation is different from all others. For other advice-givers, their thinking is "*don't do what I did*." A third kind of sexual advice-giver doesn't reveal his/her history but knows with certainty there is *only one right way* to live, all the rest are foolish, neurotic, or immoral. So, in short, some opinions should be taken "with a grain of salt;" however, there is one opinion, as I see it, that should be taken very seriously, namely, *your own religious or moral beliefs*. Not your

minister's opinion or your church's views (unless they are your own) but your own considered judgment. If you are convinced it is a sin to masturbate, don't masturbate. If you believe with certainty it is immoral to have premarital sex or an abortion, then do your very best to avoid these actions. Strong religious convictions, backed by intense personal feelings of guilt and shame, must be followed... or changed. If your religious beliefs are not that strong, however, then you have the responsibility for making a wise decision on other grounds.

## What are people's reasons for having sex?

Are teenagers doing it for love? They are probably hoping so... but no. For physical thrills? Again, they are surely hoping so... but, as we've seen, it doesn't work out that way. Polls by Children's Defense Fund and Planned Parenthood have shown that teenaged girls have intercourse for these reasons: peer pressure (34%), pressure from the boy (17%), others are doing it (14%), curiosity (14%), love (11%), and physical gratification (5%). Boys have sex for these reasons: peer pressure (26%), curiosity (16%), others are doing it (14%), curiosity (14%), physical gratification (10%), and love (6%). In short, teenage sex doesn't have much to do with love or with passionate physical gratification! So, be warned. I find these statistics about teenagers astonishingly different from young people 22 to 35, as described in the next paragraph.

Well, what about adults? Do they do it for love? Or, do all men have sex for pleasure and women for love? No, it isn't exactly the way we think. *Psychology Today* (Dec., 1989, p.12) cites David Quadagno and Joey Sprague who say 41% of younger men, aged 22-35, have sex for physical pleasure and 31% say for love. However, only 36% of older men, 35 and older, have sex for physical pleasure and 50% do it for love. Only 22% of younger women have sex for physical gratification and 61% for love, but almost twice as many older women (43%) seek physical pleasure while 38% primarily express and/or receive love through sex. Given time, women learn to enjoy sex and men learn to express love. That's nice.

The major point is that while most people, especially women, would say "sex should be an expression of love," in reality it appears that intercourse is done *primarily* for love only among younger women (22-35) and older men (over 35). In very general terms, the majority of teenagers, younger men, and older women have intercourse for other powerful reasons, not primarily for love. It begins to look like we, as a society, are a little hypocritical, i.e. we say "have sex to express love" but actually have intercourse mostly to "feel good." Like most human behaviors, there are a lot of complex reasons for having sex and different ideas about what sex means.

## Deciding what sex means to you: What feeling does intercourse symbolize for you?

It might be helpful to think of making your sexual life style decisions by considering four alternatives. Each of the following alternatives reflects a way of viewing sexual intercourse, in terms of the *meaning it has for you*. Others can try to influence you, but in your own heart only you can decide what meaning your sex acts will have to you. Each alternative is an acceptable way to live; each has a number of pros and cons, i.e. psychological reasons for and against each way of thinking about sexual intercourse:

In the first alternative, *sex is fun and has no special meaning beyond that*. Sexual intercourse is for adventure, physical gratification, and enriching the interaction between two people. When sex is accepted merely as pleasurable passion, sex need not be taken to mean anything more, i.e. not a sign of commitment, not a show of love, and not an indication of any continuing emotional involvement with the partner. This is typical of a "free spirit" who favors short relationships or "one night stands." It would also include people who realize they are primarily meeting each other's physical, erotic needs, such as the "pick up" at a bar, cruising homosexuals, married "swingers," persons seeking prostitutes, and continuing but sexually oriented relationships. This is the mutual enjoyment of physical sex.

**Pros:** It is potentially an adventurous, exciting, enjoyable life style, if one can be honest with others and still find interested sexual partners. This attitude about sex clearly separates lust from love, and since both emotions are acceptable (as long as both people are honest), the two people don't have to rush into or fake love in order to have sex. This attitude may reduce the risk of lust leading to bonding with a person who is a poor choice as a long-term partner. With about 70% of females and 80% of males sexually active by age 19 and with marriage commonly being postponed until the late 20's, there may be 10 or 15 years of sexual experience before marriage. Between high school and marriage, many people will have 2-4 serious relationships with several brief, uncommitted experiences between the serious affairs. Over several years, would you prefer to meet and go to dinner or a show with 100 interesting people or would you rather meet the same 100 people and have sex with 50 of them who are interested in having sex with you? It is your choice; both are good choices.

**Cons:** Even among college students, men having intercourse with a great many women are considered "immoral" by 25-30% of males and 40-45% of women (some states still have laws against "fornication," i.e. premarital intercourse). Likewise, very sexually active women are regarded as immoral by somewhat higher percentages of men and women (the old double standard). It is lust without love that is really condemned in our culture. Only 1% of college women *say* they

approve of sex without affection, about 10% of men *say* they approve (Duvall & Miller, 1985). Another argument is that the sex-is-fun advocate is likely to consider the opposite sex as mere sex objects ("if they look good, take them to bed"), not genuine feeling, caring people (see the centerfold syndrome discussion above). Thus, social disapproval, possible guilt, "getting a bad reputation," and "being used" are the major drawbacks of this alternative. Of course, disease and pregnancy are grave dangers too, if not protected.

While one person may have healthy, reasonable reasons for freely engaging in sexual intercourse, another person might have unhealthy, unconscious motives for seeking sex (and not love primarily), e.g. emotional coldness or a fear of intimacy (Brooks, 1995; Berman, 1984; Cassell, 1984), using conquests to boost ego, too much self-love, poor self-control or inability to say "no," need to control or put-down others, rebellion against current sexual prudishness, and others. The possibility of these motives underscores the risk that a person with a liberal sexual outlook might be unfaithful //the relationship developed into love. Lots of sexual partners before marriage is correlated with more extra-marital affairs (Sex, before and after, 1975). On the other hand, if you are having sex simply for fun, it may not make much difference if your partner's motives are just as self-centered and demeaning as yours are..

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**Note:** there seems to be a contradiction between college student *morals* (no sex without love; sex with many people is immoral) and their *behavior* (petting and sex early in relationships; postponing marriage but having intercourse with several premarital partners). It is not unusual for behaviors to differ from stated attitudes, especially where the issue is emotional and confusing. Usually attitudes are changed over time (years) to catch up with behavior. I suspect the "sex is great wherever you can get it" view is common among uncommitted men. But, considering this attitude is so disdained by women, it is a closely guarded male secret.

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**General findings:** Among college freshmen, 2/3rds of the males and only 1/3rd of the females agree that "sex is OK if people *like* each other." Therefore, among college women, 1/2 have sex while "just dating," 2/3rds have intercourse while "going steady," and 3/4ths have sex when engaged (Duvall & Miller, 1985). Recent evidence suggests that in 1990 college students are waiting longer to have sex and sex is more often with a "steady" than in 1980 (pre-AIDS). Among all adults, about 25% think premarital sex is always wrong.

In the second alternative, *intercourse is fun and means "I like you"* as a person and enjoy being with you but having intercourse does not mean I am making any commitment to you in the future. This is casual sex. Casual sex doesn't mean being totally without care and concern for the other person, but the promise of involvement in the future is not there. When you suggest having sex, in this case, it simply means you find the other person attractive and interesting, someone you think you would enjoy being with and having sex. In order to avoid misunderstandings and hurt feelings, it is necessary to be totally honest about your limited interests, emotions, and future intentions. Of course, this honesty will turn off many people who want love and the intent to remain involved before having sex. Having your offer of a good time sexually turned down is the "cost" of being a decent, honest person (no decent person would lie about his/her commitment). There is, of course, a possibility of a serious friendship developing and even for love to develop, but there are no such promises asked for or made, and such possibilities should be seen as slim.

**Pros:** Most of the pleasurable aspects of physical sex (#1) are true of casual sex too. Since the sexual partner is someone you know or could call a "friend," you are somewhat less likely to be considered immoral or "loose." Since you know the person and there is a chance of additional contacts later on, you should feel more comfortable and there is less risk of violence and abuse. The intimacy of sex permits you to find out more about the person's personality and attitudes than might otherwise be the case. If there are no future contacts, the implied "rejection" should be less painful, especially if the person remains a friend. Roughly half (more men, less women) approve of casual sex and engage in it while dating in college. The "friendships" made should be more exciting, more meaningful, and more memorable than would otherwise be the case.

**Cons:** Same as in physical sex (#1). Some people will consider you immoral. The explicit lack of commitment may lead to fears of being rejected (not as a lover necessarily, but as a friend *and* sex partner). Likewise, few people can be sexually intimate with one person for any length of time without starting to want some commitment. And, without some hint of deeper involvement, one might just leave the relationship as soon as a problem arose, rather than working it out. Having sex with a friend increases the chances of losing the friendship and making the breaking up more stressful. If the friend is not a good choice as a friend, why would you spend much time in such a relationship rather than looking for a person who could meet more of your needs?



After sleeping with a new partner, 14% wonder if it is now a committed relationship and 62% wonder if it gave them a disease.





In this alternative, which has become the American standard, *having intercourse means "I love you" and want to have an exclusive relationship with you* for a while but I'm not sure for how long--forever is a long time. This is "going steady" or being engaged or living together in a "temporary arrangement." It isn't just love that makes sex socially acceptable; the more emotional involvement *and commitment* involved, the more socially acceptable sex is (if you are 18 or older). For instance, having sex with someone you love and are strongly attracted to is not fully approved socially if one person is unwilling to commit to the other.

**Pros:** There is comfort--security--in a somewhat committed relationship, and comfort makes the love and the sex better. Over 90% of engaged couples say sex helped improve their relationship; 75% of women have no regrets about premarital sex. If an accidental pregnancy occurs, you are not as likely to be left all alone. Sex with affection and commitment is accepted (if you aren't too young, e.g. still in high school) by the majority; this tolerance reduces our guilt. Couples who have good premarital sex have better post-marital sex; however, having premarital sex does not reduce the divorce rate (Knox, 1984, p.204). Good safe sex and love are great self-esteem builders.

**Cons:** Insisting that you must love and commit to me before we "make love" may result in premature (pretended?) commitments--and poor choices of a mate. Certainly many people have been seduced into a long-term relationship by the thrill of sex. Perhaps better choices would have been made if sex were available before a commitment or not available at all until after marriage. Having sex makes breaking up harder to do and more painful. Poor sex and unwanted pregnancies are serious problems and jeopardize love. Besides, as many have speculated, having ready access to sex may reduce the desire to get married.

Most people would consider this alternative psychologically sound and emotionally healthy. But, sex and love can, of course, result from many unhealthy motives: to reassure yourself you are attractive and lovable, to be taken care of and protected, to avoid working or a bad home life, to "hook a man/women," to get pregnant, to do what your friends are doing, etc. These unhealthy possible motives, however, are in no way valid arguments against wholesome, healthy, reasonable love and sex. It's just that none of us can be certain that our motives to love and have sex are entirely healthy.

Fourthly, *sexual intercourse is considered almost a sacred act symbolizing total commitment forever*, regardless of the difficulties that arise. In this case, sex might reasonably occur at the same time the couple are legally and spiritually united in marriage. This is the traditional Christian and Jewish view. People who endorse this attitude tend to be older and more religious.

**Pros:** In some respects, this sounds ideal: everyone approves, no risk of children before total commitment, no guilt about sex, comfortable and well planned conditions for sex, and the sex act is made special--saved for years for this one special person and symbolizing the highest degree of respect, almost a reverence, for each other. One can be proud of the self-control and religious commitment involved. And, one can be pretty sure you weren't selected just because of your great body or sexual virility. Your partner's permanent commitment to you and to God gives some reassurance that marital problems will be taken seriously.



It is as absurd to pretend that one cannot love the same person always as to pretend that a great artist needs several violins to play a piece of music.



**Cons:** One has, in this alternative, to give up sexual intercourse with all other people except with the person you are going to marry. If, in fact, one has avoided sexual intimacy with all others prior to marriage, eventually one might feel cheated (especially if the partner has had or seeks sex or love from others). This view of the meaning of intercourse may be confounded with unhealthy attitudes towards sex: fears or negative feelings about sex or genitals, difficulty communicating, little interest in sex, etc. In short, one can have sex or avoid sex for unhealthy reasons. If one abstains from sex, the relationship may become "traditional" in many other ways besides sex: the man is the boss; the wife stays home, subordinates herself, and loses her identity. Too much may be expected from the marriage or from romantic love, leading to disappointments. If the couple believes divorce is impossible or horrible, they may be miserable either way, i.e. trapped in an unhappy marriage or breaking the vows and getting an immoral divorce.

### Sex can be given many meanings

Sex may, for some people, have different meanings at different times; at first, intercourse may just be fun, then later it may mean "I like you," later "I love you," and finally eternal commitment. However,

the meaning of sex, for others, may not be defined in the heart, but explained differently as it becomes convenient to do so (i.e. people lie: "I love you, now let's do it"). Likewise, intercourse doesn't, for some people, necessarily have the same meaning with different partners. With one person sex may honestly mean "I love you," with another person it may mean "I find you attractive and fun." Furthermore, while you are usually clear about what meaning having intercourse with a particular person has for you, the sex partner may have a different notion or be uncertain about your meaning. One of the more inconsiderate, immoral, despicable human acts is to whisper "I love you" to someone and really mean "I want sex but I don't care about you as a person." The immoral aspect is not the sex but the lying, i.e. the person is not going to carry through the next day, week, or month with the actions implied by "I love you."

If you can decide what you want sexual intercourse to mean to you and if you can clearly and honestly convey this meaning and its implications to your partner, you are well on your way to establishing a considerate, non-hurtful relationship.

## About Premarital Sex

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### Premarital sex in our time

Women's premarital sexual behavior has changed markedly in the last 50 years. During the 1940's, Kinsey, et al. (1948, 1953) found that about 10% of 17-year-old unmarried women and one-third of 25-year-old unmarried women had had intercourse. In the 1970's one-third of 13 to 15-year-olds and 50% of 17-year-old unmarried women and three-fourths of single college women had had intercourse and, moreover, 85% to 90% approve of premarital sex for themselves or others (Hunt, 1973, 1975; Hass, 1979, *Playboy*, 1976). A review of the 1988-90 General Social Survey also shows that a majority of American males have intercourse by 16-17, females by 17-18. Over 60% of 18 to 21-year-olds have had sex with more than one person. Premarital sex is increasingly common. Women who are better educated have more premarital sex, more sexual partners, masturbate more, and find oral sex more acceptable (Janus & Janus, 1993). Without doubt, we are getting sexually freer.

In 1963, 75% of young unmarried women and 40% of young unmarried males were virgins; in 1984, 43% of such women and 28% of such males were virgins. During the 1980's, virginity became less common. Women have changed sexually far more than men in the last 40 years. It used to be important to "save yourself," today 75% of single women are having sex. Consequently, 22% of white mothers

are unmarried when the child is born. For 85% of recent college students it wasn't considered important to marry a virgin. Today's young wives are also more unfaithful than their mothers or grandmothers were, almost as unfaithful as today's young husbands (Sex, before and after, 1975). The sexual revolution has brought many other changes: fewer prostitutes, earlier intercourse (average age=16), more experimentation (different positions, oral-genital activity, sex with drugs), more partners, higher frequency of sex, more orgasms for women, and more living together.

The sexual activities of teenagers has also changed significantly over the last half of the 20th century. [Focus Adolescent Services](http://www.focusas.com/SexualBehavior.html) ( <http://www.focusas.com/SexualBehavior.html>) provides several articles, general information, and advice to parents and teenagers about teen sexual behavior. It is a conservative site but not overly-moralistic. It attempts to clarify the difference between "normal" sexual activities and "dangerous" or risky behaviors; thus, avoiding the unrealistic "just save yourself until marriage" message. The same site also has a section about teenage emotional health. Other very explicit and liberal (parents may want to check it out first) Websites are: URL ( <http://www.gurl.com/topics/sex>), Positive Sexuality ( <http://www.positive.org/>), Condomania ( <http://www.condomania.com/>), and Go Ask Alice (= <http://www.goaskalice.columbia.edu/>). Websites give detailed suggestions about many topics, such as "Abstaining," "Sex by Yourself," "The First Intercourse," "Waiting till Thirty," etc. These sites are also good places to see what kind of questions today's teens have and the advice they get and give on many topics (see discussion groups).

The AIDS revolution is also having some impact on sexual behavior: surveys of *high school students* in grades 9 through 12 show that slightly fewer (55% rather than 60%) have had sex in the early 1990's than in the late 1980's. Also, fewer high schoolers (20% rather than 25%) have had four or more partners. The fear of AIDS and sex education may be having some effect, but still only *somewhere between 17% and 40% of the sexually active high schoolers use condoms regularly*. Unfortunately, the teens with the most partners are the least likely to use condoms--and the most likely to shoot up drugs. In short, if you have sex in high school, the probability is about 50-50 that your partner has already had sex with someone else or shot up drugs (don't trust what they tell you) and, thus, could be HIV positive. Moreover, one out of every 25 high schoolers has a sexually transmitted disease (and the person "coming on" to you is even more likely to be diseased). Therefore, even at a very young age, if you are going to have intercourse (even with a supposed virgin), use a condom. It may save your life (not to mention pregnancy and disease).

The first sexual experience comes early: 40% of 9th graders have had intercourse, 48% of 10th graders, 57% of 11th graders, and 72% of seniors. The first experience is memorable for everyone but for young teenagers *it frequently is not fun*, particularly not for the female. For one thing, most of the time (78%) intercourse is not

planned, it "just happens." Only 25% of the women found it pleasurable at all, for 40% it was painful, for 22% it was frightening and for 40-50% it caused guilt even though 60% felt they were in love (Huk, 1979). Less than 10% had an orgasm. About a third used no birth control! For men having sex for the first time, they were surprised the woman said "yes," relieved they could perform, and found it pleasurable, both in terms of physical feelings and psychologically-- "Today I became a man." The old double standard is still psychologically affecting males and females very differently.

When a couple engages in sex regularly, as you would expect, they generally (90% of teenaged males and 70% of teenaged females) say they like it (Hass, 1979). However, an estimated 30% of adolescents are "unhappy non-virgins" and are avoiding sex until they meet the right person; some were dumped, some felt like sexual failures, some were disappointed, some felt used (Kolodny, 1981). At a later age, about 90% of engaged couples, while sexually involved, say sex strengthens their relationship (Beach, 1973; Macklin, 1974). On the other hand, couples who do not have sex before marriage are just as likely to stay together as couples having sex (Knox, 1984). About 75% of women who have had premarital sex (not necessarily with the man they married) say they have no regrets and would do it again. Presumably, 25% had some regrets. Premarital sex may not improve post-marital sex (Frank & Anderson, 1980). Indeed, one large study found that people with many premarital relations often have many extra-marital affairs and unhappy marriages (Athanasίου & Sarkin, 1974). Masters, Johnson and Kolodny (1985) acknowledge the Athanasίου and Sarkin results but contend that premarital sex also yields some positive results, such as fewer sexual inhibitions, better sexual communication, and earlier (before marriage) breakup of incompatible couples. In short, the consequences of premarital sex are not predictable, i.e. positive for some and negative for others.

One study showed that women tend to save their virginity until they are going steady (58%) or at least "dating" (22%) or perhaps engaged (10%) and only 10% lose it with friends or casual acquaintances. Men are less likely to save their virginity until going steady (39%) or engaged (1%) or dating (20%) and 40% have their first experience with friends or acquaintances (Zelnik & Shah, 1983). In another study, a *Playboy* survey (1976) asked college students (most of whom had lost their virginity long before) how well they needed to know someone before they would have sex with them. Remember the source, but Table 10.2 indicates the percentage saying "this is the least known person I'd have sex with":

Table 10. 2: Least well known acceptable partner for sex.

	Casual Acquaintance	& Friend	& Lover	& Fiance	& Spouse
Males	27%	39%	24%	2%	8%

Females	7%	29%	45%	5%	14%
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In other words, 27% of college males say they would have sex with a casual acquaintance *and all the other categories*; 39% say they would have sex with a friend (and the others in the Table to the right), and, thus, a total of 66% would *not* consider sex to mean "I love you." About half as many (36%) females say they would have sex with a friend (or acquaintance) but 64% (80% of teenaged women) say they would wait until love and perhaps some commitment was present. Yet, 42% of teenaged females want the male to touch their breasts within the first two weeks of dating. Being very willing to cooperate, one-third of teenaged males say they want intercourse within the first two weeks, 50% within a month and 80+% want sex if "in love" (Hass, 1979). Obviously, "friends" develop very rapidly under these conditions.

You might be asking yourself, "So what?" This research data may merely tell us what men have always known, namely, to "score" you have to become friends first and maybe, if she's really conservative, convince her that you love her. On the other hand, the data may reflect the current status of the old conflicting traditions, namely, casual sex is wonderful (old male role) and intercourse should only be with someone you love (old and current female role). It is unknown how these conflicting sexual attitudes will be resolved in the future. How many women in 2010 will accept casual sex? How many men will chose to save sex for loving relationships? We don't know. Perhaps it doesn't matter.

Frankly, I suspect that many young people are not living according to their morals. For instance, I wonder how many junior high students, who haven't had sex, believe premarital sex during high school is immoral, but yet have sex before they are out of school? In the Janus and Janus (1993) surveys, 70+% of "very religious" adults admit they had premarital sex (30% have had extramarital affairs too). Do we pay a price for disregarding our morals *or* do our morals change as we "fall in love" *or* do we easily dismiss our morals after losing them? Actually, 35% to 45% of religious people believe women should have sexual experience before marriage. We don't factually know the probable consequences of many actions... but we need to know. My advice: *if* your morals are strong, do not break them without careful consideration.

In any case, regardless of the sexual decisions your peers make, your sexual activity is *your own personal decision* and a very important one. Your sexual decisions *may* influence your self-esteem, your reputation, who your friends are, who you marry and how good the marriage is, when you become a parent, your career, how you get along with your parents, how many marriages you have, and many other things.

Knowing these kinds of things--with whom and when other people lose their virginity, how many people (about 75%) have premarital sex with how many (1 to 5) partners, the more active 40% of women have 10 sexual partners or more (Knox, 1984), how often promiscuity before marriage continues afterwards, etc.--may not be highly helpful in making decisions about your sex life. Yet, an informed person knows the facts about other people without feeling the need to follow the herd. A knowledgeable person considers the pros and cons of many alternative courses of action, such as the different sexual life styles discussed above. An example: any observer of young people has seen 7th and 8th graders (not all) fall in and out of "love" quickly; many 13-year-olds have a new heartthrob every week or two. Some 18 or 19-year-olds (not all) become so infatuated so quickly that they can not possibly foresee potential problems. If young people become aware of the many emotional roller-coasters and sexual pitfalls, like these, they would, hopefully, develop more self-control and, at least, reduce their emotional pain and avoid unplanned pregnancies. That is what self-help and being informed should be all about.

## Guard against unwanted pregnancy

Unfortunately, sexual intercourse produces babies. (Think of the advantages of sex just being for fun and love, then, when ready, going to Wal-Mart to get a new baby for \$999.98.) 57% of all U.S. pregnancies are unplanned or unwanted. About one third of all U. S. babies are born "out of wed lock." 80% of teenaged mothers are unwed, 80% didn't want or plan their pregnancy, and 80% go on welfare. European teenagers have as much sex as we do, but our pregnancy rate is 2 to 6 times higher than theirs. Why? Because we don't educate and train our teenagers in sexual matters.

Unwanted pregnancy is a terrible problem *for* the terrified, embarrassed, confused teenage girl, *for* the panicked college coed who dreads the disruption of her life, of her relationship with the guy, and of having an abortion or a baby, *for* the married woman who says, "Oh God! I don't want a child now--I can't handle it," and *for* society that pays billions for aid to unwanted-at-this-time children. Consider this: the approximately 4-6 million sexually active American teenage girls have over one million pregnancies and 400,000 abortions each year. About *40% of all American teenage females* get pregnant in their teens. That's at least double the percentage in any other educated, developed country. What's wrong with us? We can't blame all teenage pregnancies on innocence because 1 in 5 teenage mothers get pregnant again within two years. Two-thirds of teen mothers are impregnated by 20-year-old men or older; many are "predators," fathering several children with several women.

As we saw earlier, about one-fourth of U.S. 15-year-olds have had sex and by 18 two-thirds have had. Only 7 out of 10 use a contraceptive the first time but if they become "sexually active" 9 out

of 10 use protection. The most used methods with teenaged women are the pill (44%) and condoms (38%). Please note: Condom use is strongly influenced by talking openly about it. If you don't talk to your partner about using a condom or contraceptive, you are 50% less likely to actually use one. Likewise, in turn, the teens who never or only rarely talk to their parents about sexual issues are *four times less likely* to talk to their sexual partners about condom use (study done by Richard A. Crosby (rcrosby@sph.emory.edu) in the March issue of *Health Education and Behavior*). This underscores the importance of parents talking frankly and in some detail with their teenager, especially daughters--teens need practice talking about sex, condoms, the pill, and such. Only 1 in 6 teenaged women used two methods, such as both the pill *and* a condom; even that doesn't provide certain protection against STD. Every year 15%-20% of sexually active teens get pregnant (85% unintended). When they get pregnant, about 14% miscarriage (1/3 do not get adequate care), 30% to 35% have an abortion, and 55% have a baby.

It is really tough to have a baby as a teenager (much harder than many of them believe). Most drop out of school; 90% will be abandoned by the teenaged father of the child. It is almost impossible to hold a full-time job and care for a new baby too, even if the father and the family help out. If these teenagers get married (only 10% marry the real father), it often doesn't last. Many are miserable; they wanted love but a baby takes love, not gives it. The suicide rate is high among teenage mothers (Masters, Johnson & Kolodny, 1985). The U.S. Center of Disease Control recently (2002) disclosed an appalling fact: your chance of being murdered on the first day of your life is 10 times greater than on any other day! And on that day, your murderer is likely to be your mother! The risk of infanticide on day 1 goes up if Mom is a teenager, has had mental illness, and delivers you outside of a hospital. Teenage pregnancy is a horrendous social and personal problem, in contrast to the sentimental anti-abortion TV ads that explicitly say unplanned pregnancies are wonderful. Get real!

About 25% to 30% of all adult women in this country--single, married or divorced--have had an abortion (Janus & Janus, 1993). It is a preventable trauma. But, did you know that both the *anti-abortion* movement and the *pro-choice* movement have avoided encouraging birth control? Wouldn't birth control solve the abortion problem? Of course, but the two major movements have gotten so absorbed in a futile argument over whether abortion is murder or a woman's right, *the run-away accidental production of unwanted children is neglected*. Why do I say it is a *futile* argument? Because it is based entirely on religious definitions and beliefs--on ideas that can not be proven right or wrong, just opinions. (It is good to have your own beliefs and to live by them, but don't try to *force* others to follow your arbitrary beliefs.) While closed-minded zealots preach their self-righteous religious doctrine, elected government, health, and school officials timidly placate the over-emotional religious pontificators. People are politically afraid to advocate birth control. The result: millions of American women have unwanted pregnancies. It may surprise you but about 30% of all Protestant and Catholic women have had at least one



abortion, but only 11% of Jewish and 22% of unreligious women have had an abortion (Janus & Janus, 1993). The number of abortions is ridiculous because there has been a "morning-after pill" available in Europe for some years. Why not in the US? Because of opposition from religious conservatives. To be effective in preventing pregnancy, these pills must be taken within 72 hours of having intercourse. That means you and the physician must act quickly. Consider using your physician but not all physicians will prescribe the drug, so if you need to find a cooperative local doctor you may go to the Web site or call the national [Emergency Contraception Hotline](http://ec.princeton.edu/) ( <http://ec.princeton.edu/>) at 1-888-NOT-2-LATE. Remember, act within a day or two of the "accident" because the doctor may need some time for tests, etc. before prescribing the pills. Note: Contraception will be discussed in more detail in the next page below. Also, there are new abortion pills and procedures becoming available in 2004. I'll include the new information as soon as I can, but check with your physician or with Planned Parenthood.

Americans close their eyes to the fact that 57% of *a//* children born in the US are unplanned (which usually means unwanted at that time)! In addition, in 1970 about 20% of unmarried pregnant women gave up their child for adoption, today it is only 3%. Moreover, as young women today wait until they are 28 or 30 to get married and have several sexual partners between puberty and marriage, more go on the pill and, consequently, are less likely to use condoms. The result is *sexually transmitted diseases (STD) running rampant*. 12 million of us are infected by a STD every year. As mentioned before, one out of every 25 high school students has a STD.

## **Guard against sexually transmitted diseases**

We, as a society, are not controlling pregnancies and we are not controlling sexually transmitted diseases. Partly because we deny or underestimate the risks involved, e.g. about 70% of sexually active teens think they are not at risk (Kaiser Family Foundation survey, 1999). I want to show you that this is a foolish idea. By age 25, about one-third of us Americans actually have or have had a STD. Many of that one-third didn't realize the risks they were running. I want to remind you of several risks we tend to overlook when the urge to have sex takes over. First of all, we are prone to forget that having sex with any one person exposes us to sexual diseases he/she may have gotten from any of their previous partners...and from their partner's previous partners...etc. Thus, by the time you have 3 or 4 lovers, especially if some of them have been rather "active," you have potentially exposed your genitals to various dangerous little organisms coming from a fairly wide range of strangers. And it only takes one diseased source within this chain of contacts to infect you for a life-time, e.g. with HIV, HPV or Herpes. Not a pleasant thought--if you focus on the diseases. Yet, I don't wish to turn off any of your hot passion. But this is reality. Moreover, as mentioned above, there is often 10 to 15 years between

the first sexual experience and marriage. That is a long time and lots of sex. One implication is that we need to carefully protect ourselves from STD; thereby, reducing our risks, lessening our anxiety, and freeing our passions.

Warning a major risk: An astonishing number of deadly HIV-positive young people do not protect their sexual partners (or their unborn children). A recent survey found that 66% of HIV-infected women under age 22 have unprotected sex! 46% of infected women over 22 have gone unprotected (and, one might assume, many don't tell their sexual partner). (These figures include getting pregnant and exposing the fetus to infection.) It is apparently true that only 3% or less of babies born to HIV+ mothers become HIV+ and one can understand the longing for a child a HIV+ woman or man might have, but the certainty and severity of the AIDS death in that 1-3% makes pregnancy a very inconsiderate choice. Among HIV-infected males under 22, 28% did not protect their partners. 16% of infected males over 22 went unprotected (Diamond & Buskin, American Journal of Public Health, 2000, 90, 115-118). Almost 50% of young HIV-infected homosexual males are now having unprotected anal sex (Web MD Medical News, Aug 20, 2001)... and 20% are having unprotected sex with women too. This is all very dangerous behavior, maybe even murderous. No one has been cured of AIDS yet. Be very careful, you are risking your life if you don't know your partner's history very well (and often you can't know it).

Of course, AIDS is a real horror story in certain African, Asian, and South American countries. (See <http://www.unaids.org/>) Most appalling is the ignorance in some places, such as denying that AIDS is caused by the sexually transmitted HIV virus or believing that having sex with a virgin will cure AIDS or seeking to avoid AIDS by having sex with very young girls. Accurate information is badly needed world-wide.

Why aren't we better educated sexually? (I don't have the answer...ask your politician.) The degree of denial and ignorance about STD everywhere is disconcerting. I will give several important examples of dangerous blind spots. Many kinds of serious risks are denied: 50% of low-income women have sex with men without using condoms, and 70% who have unprotected sex believe they "aren't running much risk." Many people who have a STD have no symptoms and, thus, mistakenly believe they are "disease free." Of course, they tell their sexual partners they "don't have anything." (Then there are others who just simply lie about it). This lack of awareness of STD was seen by researchers testing a random sample of teenagers; only 5% initially said they had a sexual disease but 25% actually had a STD, according to reliable tests. This is 25% of teenagers just starting their sexual life!

Did you know that if you are "sexually active" you should be tested every 6 months? The U.S. Center of Disease Control reported (3/6/2002) that 25% of the 1 million Americans with HIV do not

know they have it! Like with HIV, which may lay dormant for 10 years, many of the other STDs are also quiet and perhaps unknown for a while but lead to serious problems later. For example, 85% of women and 40% of men with Chlamydia have no symptoms. Likewise, 80% of women and 10% of men with Gonorrhea have no symptoms. Many carriers of Herpes have no symptoms. CMV often has no symptoms but causes permanent disabilities to babies. Testing could catch many of these infections early. See your physician.

If you observe a new infection or get positive results on a STD test, who should you notify? Some experts say you should, if you test positive, tell everyone you have had sex with during the last 60 days or tell your last partner if it has been longer than 60 days. (Since so many people do not have symptoms, I wonder if every previous partner shouldn't be notified.) Who *do* people tell? A little over 90% of adults (more women than men), who find out they have a STD, tell their current partner, but only about 25% tell previous partners. Actually 32% to 40% of teenagers do NOT even tell their current partner when they find out they have a STD. It's a scary world.

There are other risks: many people may be switching to oral sex because they think it is safer than intercourse. It is true that oral sex eliminates the risk of pregnancy and reduces the risk of HIV but you still run many risks--herpes, gonorrhea, Chlamydia, HPV, and several other sexual diseases. So, oral sex is not a good easy solution. By the way, about 20% of young people believe that oral sex is not sex; therefore, they could tell you "I've never had sex" but still pass on STDs to you. From the standpoint of "sexual disease," oral sex really IS sex!

Another risk is very well known by everyone but often overlooked at the critical moment. Alcohol and drugs reduce our self-control, including sexual inhibitions (study released by Kaiser Family Foundation, Feb 12, 2002). Between 25% and 35% of 15 to 24-year-olds say substance use influenced their sexual behavior, mainly doing more than they planned to do. Drug & alcohol-using teens are twice as likely to have sex with four or more partners as non-using teens. One in four young people say they have failed to have protected sex because of drinking or drug use. Mixing alcohol and drugs with sex is popular but keep in mind that a clear, well functioning brain is an important part of good, smart sex. Don't get pushed by your own unclear brain or by anyone else into something you don't want, like pregnancy or a STD.

There are serious misunderstandings about Herpes. That STD is growing rapidly. It is estimated that almost 30% of Americans over 12 have genital Herpes (drkoop.com, Nov 27, 2001). Part of the problem is that a person can have and pass on Herpes without having significant symptoms. For some people, Herpes sores or outbreaks are quite painful for a few days and then repeatedly reappear every week or two for a life-time (especially when stressed). The people, who carry the Herpes virus but do not have many or any genital outbreaks,

may believe they don't have the disease. About 75% of the people with Herpes do not have obvious outbreaks. Thus, it spreads with astonishing speed! Also, it is commonly believed--falsely--that Herpes is not contagious unless there is an outbreak (blisters, skin lesions) at the time one has sex. So, how do you protect yourself? Avoid contact with infected genitals when there is an outbreak. Even when there is no active outbreak, use a condom. It is not perfect protection because the lesions or any fluid near them may contact skin not covered by the condom (often lesions are not on the penis or in the vagina). Please note that the number and severity of Herpes outbreaks can be reduced by prescribed medication. In the last few months, reliable blood tests for Herpes have been developed (Find out about a Herpes test at <http://www.herples.org/herpesinfo/diagnostictesting.shtml>.) Herpes will not kill you, but you certainly don't want it. There is no cure. Be careful.

There are other STD's that you can't protect yourself against by using condoms because they can spread by skin contact, such as Herpes (just discussed), HPV (discussed next), and all of the bacterial sexual diseases. Chlamydia (now the most common bacterial STD) can be cured easily with antibiotics but if untreated it can make you sterile and infertile. Untreated gonorrhea (bacteria) can produce the similar results. Syphilis (bacterial) goes through a series of symptoms which clear up on their own but the internal infection remains active, eventually, if untreated, it can cause serious damage to the heart, brain and other parts of the body. The bacterial infections are treatable if detected.

Another very common STD that most of us know little about is HPV, human papillomavirus. Apparently, more than 70% of us have contact with some of the 100+ strains of HPV sometime during our lifetime. Our immune system handles most of the virus in time, but a few strains cause genital warts and a few other strains are connected with different cancers, especially cervical cancer. Only 10% of women with HPV develop cancer but that outcome is very serious... and you can do something about it. There is no cure for HPV or genital warts (they can, of course, be avoided). The virus may incubate for months or years before any abnormality shows up on the Pap smears. New screening procedures are being developed for women; there is no lab test for HPV in men. New medical treatment is evolving but for now HPV is a scary, hard-to-treat disorder.

You need to think about sex in advance and discuss with each new lover the impact that having sex might have on your relationship, what having sex means to you, and how it fits with your long-range life plans. Of course, there should also be blunt talk about every possibility of getting a sexually transmitted disease (and pregnancy too, of course). If you are tempted to think "just this one time, nothing will happen," think again. What are your risks if you have unprotected sex just once with a person infected with HIV? 1% risk of getting a deadly disease!...with a person with Herpes? 30% chance of having Herpes all your life!...with a person with gonorrhea? 50% chance of getting it!

Discuss what both of you will do to prevent pregnancy and disease. Your thinking must include the possibility that the partner (or you) has a STD and doesn't know it. Much less than half of sexually experienced teens have this kind of serious discussion before having sex; it is hard to do but when the consequences are so grave, there is no excuse. Note: 25% of the sexually active get a STD in one year. Yet, you can protect yourself, perhaps not perfectly but pretty well.

## U.S. youth make more sexual mistakes

The self-control of sexual behaviors in this country is terrible compared to other countries. We are the only country listed below with an official national one-rule-fits-all policy of "Abstinence until Marriage." Something is wrong...and it isn't that our young people are irresponsible and uncaring. Our adults--parents, schools, politicians, and churches--have been uninvolved, aloof, naive, too preachy, and too insecure to deal with sex education realistically. We adults *can learn* much more about helping/teaching young people the details of abstaining or protecting themselves from unwanted diseases and babies. Consider a few facts from Advocates for Youth: (See their URL below)

Average Age at First Intercourse:

United States - 16.3 ...France - 16.6 ...Germany - 17.4 ...Netherlands - 17.7

1997 Teen Birth Rate (per 1,000 women, ages 15 to 19):

United States - 52 ...Germany - 14 ...France - 9 ...Netherlands - 4

Teen Abortion Rate (per 1,000 women under age 20):

United States - 26.8 ...France - 8.9 ...Netherlands - 4.2 ...Germany - 3.1

1997 AIDS Case Rates in the General Population (per 100,000 population):

United States - 21.7 ...France - 4.8 ...Netherlands - 2.2 ...Germany - 1.7

How can we do better? See these sites:

Society is at fault:  
[http://www.sxetc.org/library/genLibArticle.asp?CategoryID=1290&ArticleID=art\\_1293](http://www.sxetc.org/library/genLibArticle.asp?CategoryID=1290&ArticleID=art_1293)

North Carolina agrees :-)  
<http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/rrr/video.htm>

Advocates for Youth:  
<http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/news/press/100198.htm>

I have not discussed all STDs. There is much more to learn about:  
 STD: [CDC-STD Prevention](#)  
 ( <http://www.ashastd.org/NSTD/index.html>), [Planned Parenthood-STI](#)  
 ( <http://www.plannedparenthood.org/sti/>), [Dr. Koop.com](#)  
 ( <http://www.drkoop.com/conditions/template.asp>), and [Herpes Zone](#)  
 ( <http://www.personalhealthzone.com/herpes2.html>). For more  
 information about STD's call Kaiser Foundation Hotline at 1-888-BE-  
 SAFE-1 or the National STD Hotline at 1-800-227-8922. For people  
 with herpes, there is a good book by Ebel & Dulude (1998), *Managing  
 Herpes: How to Live and Love with a Chronic STD*.

## **Be responsible: Don't do it or use contraceptives...abortion**

### **Both parties are responsible for avoiding pregnancy**

Obviously, the solution to unwanted pregnancies is to avoid sex or use contraceptives. With our sex laden culture and media, the genie is out of the bottle. Sex between 13 and 30 is just too appealing for many of us to resist until we marry at age 30. The old line "save yourself for marriage" just ain't going to work any more. The "have sex" message, however, has overshadowed the "protect yourself" message. TV has prohibited birth control ads. We are real retarded in learning how to use contraceptives. Science has provided us with many highly effective birth control methods but we don't use them. But religion keeps telling us that premarital sex is a sin. 20% to 25% of singles in their twenties use no contraception. 40% of divorced men use none. How can we take control of our reproductive lives? The concept of the family--a monogamous union with one or two well cared for, very loved, *carefully planned* children--is a cherished, commendable ideal. What do we need to learn to achieve it? A lot.

First, many attitudes need to change. *Males must stop believing that women are responsible for avoiding pregnancy... and for the pregnancy*, if it occurs. As a society, we must hold males, even 12 or 13-year-olds, partly responsible for *their* impregnations. As a teenage male, you must think of the problems and pain inflicted on the girl if she gets pregnant. If she chooses to have the baby, you may be morally obliged to partly support that child for the rest of your life beginning at conception. As the father of a child, that has many implications for your relationship with your parents, for your education and career, for your relationships with all other women if you don't stay with the mother of your child, etc. Fatherhood is an awesome

responsibility time-wise, money-wise, and emotionally, not just until the child is out of college, but forever. The woman--your child's mother--is responsible for your child forever, so why shouldn't you be? She and the child need you for more than four hours every other weekend. I urge every unmarried person, male and female, to read the section about [the effects of divorce on children](#). The harm of bitter break-ups and fatherlessness affects the children of divorce seriously for decades. Think deeply about the consequences to you, your partner, and the possible child before "going all the way." This is no time to be entirely emotional and impulsive.

## Men aren't the sexual experts

Second, similarly but even more importantly, *young girls must never think* that young boys and men are the "sexual experts" who will "know what they are doing" and take precautions against pregnancy. Every female must become *an expert* in birth control and sex, equal to any man, and far superior to any man in terms of knowing *her* body, *her* preferences, *her* morals, *her* sexual plan-for-life, etc. Every female must constantly realize that she is responsible and in charge of her body at all times. Every female must be familiar with the ignorant, irresponsible, selfish, inconsiderate kind of male who often objects to using a condom. Even an anxious, excited 13-year-old girl with a crush on a hunk of a guy must be strong enough to say in advance, "I must be protected or we aren't doing it" or better "*we must both be responsible and use some protection* (from pregnancy and disease). I will use a diaphragm with spermicide and you must use a condom!" She must know what she is doing; she must know that petroleum jelly (not KY jelly) deteriorates rubber (not latex) in 60 seconds, that her placement of her diaphragm must be checked by a doctor, and much more. She must practice handling this I-demand-protection scene over and over in her mind (or with friends) long before getting sexual with any guy. Our lives don't work out well if we don't plan and prepare.

## Are you mature enough to have sex?

Every human being, male and female, who isn't ready right now for marriage and children, must learn to say, "I must stop the baby before I start the sex." If the male's hands have gotten to the woman's breasts or on her panties *before* birth control is on hand, they are both sexually irresponsible, inconsiderate of their partner, and a menace to each other's well being. We must learn to control ourselves. People uncomfortable with sex are not good at birth control. So, learn about and practice birth control methods until you are comfortable.

Ask yourself: "Am I mature enough to have sex?" //you are too shy to buy a condom and some spermicide, too poor to get a diaphragm or cervical cap, too embarrassed to get on the pill or have an IUD inserted, too uninformed to know about DEPO-PROVERA or when pregnancy can occur, or too irresponsible to do anything to avoid pregnancy, *you should never (or let anyone) get close to a breast, let*

*alone touch panties.* There are so many reliable and convenient contraceptives available for about \$30 a month that there should be very few unwanted pregnancies. If you have trouble remembering to use a contraceptive every time, consider Norplant ("the implants") or Depo-Provera ("the shot"--there are some reports of bad side-effects). Both deliver hormones that effectively prevent pregnancy for a few or several weeks. Or, consider a reliable IUD. See Web sites below for information about the risks of failure with each method.

As stated above, a good rule would be for *both* sexual partners to each assume responsibility for one contraceptive, so that two birth control methods are always used, say a condom (with spermicide) and the pill. I recognize this advice will not be taken by many but it should be. About 60% of sexually active college students do not use birth control at all or only occasionally. How stupid and inconsiderate! Remember, college students with negative attitudes towards sex (and the opposite sex?) use birth control even *less* than those with positive attitudes. Conversely, a sexually responsible partner is more likely to have a healthy, positive, thoughtful attitude towards sex. The failure to use condoms is not due to intellectual ignorance, it is due to psychological and sexual hang-ups (guilt and denial of reality and/or responsibility) and a lack of consideration for others. Having unprotected sex is very mean to the person with whom you are gratifying yourself.

Several Web sites provide information about birth control methods. See [How to Use a Condom](http://www.avert.org/usecond.htm) ( <http://www.avert.org/usecond.htm>) or [Using Condoms](http://www.rubbertree.org/condom.html) ( <http://www.rubbertree.org/condom.html>) or [Health Central](http://www.healthcentral.com/mhc/top/004001.cfm) ( <http://www.healthcentral.com/mhc/top/004001.cfm>). For more complete information about birth control go to [Planned Parenthood](http://www.plannedparenthood.org/bc/) ( <http://www.plannedparenthood.org/bc/>) or to National Women's Health Center ( <http://www.4woman.gov/faq/birthcont.htm>).

Women assume men's sexual response is much greater than it is and they minimize their own response. In women, sexual guilt (resulting from taboos and religion), inhibitions, and morals seem to be associated with a denial of one's own sexual arousal, e.g. when watching erotic films or when petting. For guilt prone people, their erotic arousal is greater than they realize. Thus, there may be some truth in the old joke, "Religion doesn't stop you from sinning, but it sure keeps you from enjoying it!" Guilt may also keep you from being safe too. Don't let fear and shame (or uncontrolled horniness) dominate your good sense about birth control.

## **We are uninformed about sex**

Beyond guilt, denial of sexual intentions, and avoidance of contraceptives, *we are astonishingly misinformed about sex* as well. Only one third of young mothers knew when during their menstrual cycle they could get pregnant. Almost 10% of 15 to 19-year-old women think they are too young or have sex too infrequently to get pregnant. Wow! Some people believe they can't get pregnant if the



female doesn't have a climax or douches with pickle juice or if sex is done standing up. Wow! People try to make condoms out of Saran wrap. Men have told women, "I have fantastic control, so don't worry I won't come inside you." And the ignorance goes on and on. It is sad that we (parents, schools, and media) have ignored these uninformed young people. The social-religious taboos keep us from being honest and teach teenagers exactly how to wisely undertake their sexual activity (if and when they decide to have sex). The result is they are unprepared for this critical aspect of life. And, we--the older folks--are largely to blame. Sex is a very important part of life. Important enough for young people to learn to take charge of their own lives and use the knowledge they need for a good life.

This avoidance of explicit sexual guidance by almost everyone--this burying our heads in the sand--results in young people feeling that it is more acceptable if they have sex by "falling in love" and getting unexpectedly "swept away" by overwhelmingly intense sexual urges. (This way they can keep their minds pure and innocent--"like good girls"--as long as possible *and* avoid the responsibility for what happens.) But, if they plan for sex (by getting and using a contraceptive), then intercourse might be considered less romantic and spontaneous or more sinful. They might even feel "planned" sex is less loving and more unnatural, cheap, or immoral, sort of like "using someone for self-gratification." In truth, *the most loving sex is when you avoid unwanted stresses of all kinds, including pregnancies, and make sex play comfortable, safe, meaningful, and satisfying*--one of life's great moments. These things don't happen without planning and preparation.

The most common reasons for not using a contraceptive are "I didn't expect to have intercourse" (20%) and "I wanted to use something but couldn't" (8%), according to Zelnik and Kantner (1979). The same authors report that only 36% of whites and 22% of blacks had been using contraceptives (obviously only part-time) before their unwanted pregnancy occurred. Furthermore, while teenagers and college students are having more sex, they are, in recent years, *using more unreliable contraceptive methods*. Fewer are using the pill (37% of blacks, 15% of whites), about the same use condoms sometimes (35%) but many more than previously are attempting to withdraw (13% of blacks, 42% of whites). No wonder there are so many unwanted pregnancies. Single mothers produce about half of all babies born in Chicago.

There are many more situational factors and attitudes that interfere with good birth control practices. Examples: getting state aid for having a child, escaping a dysfunctional family of origin by getting pregnant, trying to find someone to love by having a baby, knowing a happily married teenager but knowing little about the difficult experiences of an unwanted pregnancy, believing birth control is racial genocide, assuming that all a woman can do is raise babies, assuming your buddies can tell you everything you need to know about sex and contraception, having intercourse for months before going to a birth

control clinic, being unable to talk with our partner about sex and birth control, having little interaction with our parents about sex, assuming wrongly that you aren't going to have sex so there is no need to prepare, having low self-esteem and low self-control, overlooking the pleasures and gratitude of your partner when you use contraceptives, etc.

Another crazy aspect of the sex scene is the single-minded focus on intercourse, even when birth control is not available. Our anti-masturbation attitudes seem to permeate all our sexual behavior. If a wonderful sexual opportunity unexpectedly occurs and no contraceptive is available, why not have "outercourse" (mutual masturbation) rather than intercourse? It would be much more considerate and loving (and even more likely to produce intense pleasure *for both*). Outercourse doesn't produce babies but certain STD's are still possible, especially if one has oral sex. Can you imagine our supposedly sexually liberated society discussing these matters openly?

Beyond changing our attitudes towards birth control, every young person must learn to do very specific acts: (1) read at length about contraceptives, (2) visit a drug store and look carefully at the birth control methods and supplies, (3) role-play important situations (should we have sex? how will we prevent pregnancy? what if a pregnancy occurs? what will I say to Mom and Dad if I get pregnant?) with a friend before the actual problem arises (see method #1 in chapter 14), (4) learn about and actually practice, when appropriate, using several birth control devices, such as condoms, diaphragms, cervical caps, vaginal suppositories, sponges, Norplant, and an IUD, and (5) discuss with a counselor which birth control methods you think you would prefer for both preventing pregnancy and STD, and why. Preventing unwanted pregnancies is one of our major responsibilities in life. Don't sell it short; don't laugh it off.



If we don't change, we will keep on having millions of unwanted pregnancies and abortions, and we will continue the cycle of poverty and "poor babies having babies."



We need to improve our sex education in schools, in the home, and in the media. An excellent reference for this is Byrne, Kelley, & Fisher (1993). Research shows that the right kind of practical, realistic sex education course *can reduce unwanted pregnancies* and does *not* promote sexual activity (Fisher, 1990). It is foolish to believe that realistically planning how to prevent babies and disease causes you to have sexual intercourse. Rather, it is love, needs, and sexual attraction that lead to sex (with or without protection). Hopefully, you will have enough common sense to plan your sexual activities when your needs

and your head tell you that having sex is a wise, desirable course of action. Actually, well informed sexual planning does *not* promote sexual activity; it does, however, help you skillfully *avoid* unwanted sexual behavior. There is also evidence that the simple "*don't-do-it programs*" *don't work* (Scales, 1987).

The sexual attitudes of young people about contraceptives need to become more positive, so there is increased self-awareness and self-control by every young person. Research has shown that teenagers with close relationships with their parents, especially if they communicate well with mother, have intercourse later than those with poor relationships. Books dealing with avoiding pregnancy include Calderone & Johnson (1990), Watkins-Ferrell & Robinson (1990), Foster (1986), and Howard (1991). Planned Parenthood Web site and Hotline is a good source of information, call 800-230-PLAN.

### The morning-after pill and abortion

While it is so much better to prevent the pregnancy than to abort it, the TV propaganda by anti-abortion zealots must be corrected. They, in effect, threaten pregnant women with guilt, shame, and depression for years after an abortion. That is a lie, as shown by careful research. Brend Major recently published (August, 2000, *Archives of General Psychiatry*) a 2-year follow-up of 442 abortions; she found no increase in depression. Most women were satisfied with their decision to abort. Earlier research also showed that women's overwhelming psychological reaction to having an abortion was relief, not guilt. There is less anxiety, depression, and distress after an abortion than before. Of course, occasionally a person does have serious psychological problems after an abortion (just like after a birth), but this occurs more often when there was a history of depression or emotional problems and/or when the abortion was long delayed by doubts or denial. Also, having opposition, criticism, and neglect, instead of sympathy and support, from your relatives, your religion, and/or your male partner make the abortion situation much more traumatic and depression more likely (Adler, David, Major, Roth, Russo, & Wyatt, 1990).

Birth control should, as I've said ad nauseam, be planned in advance. But, in an emergency, as mentioned above, a "morning after pill" has finally become available in this country after being available for several years in Europe. If you aren't educated or told about all the before and after pregnancy options, how are you going to know what to do? A recent study of 14 and 15-year-old girls found that perhaps 75% of their unplanned pregnancies could be avoided by a single lesson in emergency contraception (BTW the lesson did NOT make them more likely to have sex). Physicians refer to these pills as PREVEN--the Emergency Contraceptive Kit. See your physician if he/she is acceptable to you and if he/she will prescribe these drugs, some won't do it. (I am told--don't take my word for it--the pills are

fairly convenient, usually effective, and have few side effects). PREVEN must be taken within 3 days after having sex (so the "morning after" is a bit misleading). If you don't know where or how to get the emergency contraceptive pills, link to or call (1-888-NOT-2-LATE) the national [Emergency Contraception Hotline](http://ec.princeton.edu/) ( <http://ec.princeton.edu/>) for local physicians who will prescribe the pill. Please contact the physician within two days, giving him/her another day to act.

About November, 2000, chemical or medical abortion pills, RU-486 or MIFEPREX, became available in this country (about 10 years later than it should have been available). To be effective, this series of pills must be taken within 7 weeks of the beginning of the woman's last menstrual period. So, you can miss only one period. The way the pills are used is strictly controlled, so only selected doctors will prescribe Mifeprex. Three visits to the doctor's office are required. RU-486 (called Mifeprex in this country) has been 92% to 95% effective. It can be painful, causing bleeding and nausea, but it is quite safe. Like the morning-after pills, Mifeprex may not be available from your doctor. One way to find a prescribing doctor in your area would be to contact [Planned Parenthood](http://www.plannedparenthood.org/) ( <http://www.plannedparenthood.org/>) . The cost will be almost the same as a surgical abortion, about \$300 to \$500. The Planned Parenthood site has a good but brief description of both the chemical and surgical abortion procedures. It also describes STD and how to prevent disease.

Sex education books also describe sexually transmitted diseases, something else that should be high on every sexually responsible person's priority list. In addition, there are hotlines: National AIDS Hotline, 800-342-2437; National STD Hotline, 800-227-8922; National Herpes Hotline, 919-361-8488. Always protect yourself and your partner.

## **Guard against date rape—several websites**

About 25% of college women have experienced a rape or an attempted rape since they were 14. Half of rape victims are under 18. Almost 85% of rapes are by people the victim knows; 60% occur in a dating situation. Mary Koss of the University of Arizona says many women are raped but then deny it, saying "I'm not sure what happened" or "he lost control" or "things got out of hand" but not "he raped me." In fact, only 24% of women actually raped called it rape. Only 5% of rapes are reported. Even more astonishing, Professor Koss reports that 1 in 12 men admit they have raped someone (see discussion of rape and abuse in chapter 7). In addition, males and females look at the seduction situation differently: the man is marching forward, checking off the steps as he progresses--deep kissing, touching breast, unbutton blouse, feel up legs, massage crotch, etc., etc. The woman is trying to decide how far to go and resisting at some point the fondling hands. He expects the woman to put up some resistance, even if she "wants it." If, in the end, he forces

her to go "all the way," he calls it a successful seduction; she considers it a rape or wonders if it was (Warshaw, 1988).

What can be done to avoid date rape? Know the person you go out with. Ask others what they think of him/her and listen for clues, such as "he is all hands" or "watch out when she gets drunk." Ask about and observe his/her drinking habits; 75% of date rape offenders and 55% of victims have been drinking. So, watch how much you drink too. If you do not want to have intercourse, be cautious about going to isolated places, do not "lead him/her on" or imply that you are "wild" or joke about being raunchy or sexually aroused. If you are certain that you don't want (or that it would be unwise) to have intercourse, stop the sexual activity early in the process. For instance, while either person-- male or female-- *has every right to stop the sexual seduction at any point*, it does not make sense to let the male expose your breasts, take off your panties, and stroke your clitoris, without indicating clearly from the start that you are *not* going to have intercourse. Under the circumstances I just described, it looks to the male like you, the female, are approving "going all the way." Without an explanation of why you are stopping at this point and without an understanding that you will masturbate him or have intercourse with him later when birth control is available, the male may feel so frustrated, angry, and confused that a date rape is more likely to occur. Of course, no rape is ever justified under any circumstances, but we shouldn't put ourselves into dangerous situations. Even in these very emotional "hot" situations, we still have to use our brain and common sense. Of course, many rapes occur even when the victim has been very cautious. You can lower the risks, however.

If you are ever raped, report it and get medically examined immediately (see chapter 7-- [Rape](#) for handling any sexual assault).

Based on a major study involving 150 interviews of women victims, Warshaw (1994) offers the best self-help information about how to prevent date rape and how to recover after being assaulted. Males, too, should benefit from realizing the serious aftereffects of acquaintance rape; it is not a conquest, date rape is a cruel crime. Books by Rue (1989) and Jackson (1996) suggest ways of coping with dating violence and acquaintance rape.

Several Web sites provide good coverage of acquaintance rape and recovering from rape: [Friends Raping Friends](#) ( <http://danenet.wicip.org/dccrsa/saissues/daterape.html>) is an excellent site; [Acquaintance Rape](#) ( <http://www.aaets.org/arts/art13.htm>) is a serious academic, research-based article; [Trust Betrayed](#) ( <http://meb.marshall.edu/trust/trust-toc.htm>) is a good site for people in a controlling, abusive relationships; [When Love Hurts](#) ( <http://www.dvirc.org.au/whenlove/>) focuses on dealing with abusive, disrespectful partners; [Violence against Women](#) ( <http://womenshealth.about.com/cs/domesticviolence/>) may also help women gain some understanding of men's ways of getting their way; [Surviving Rape](#) ( <http://pages.ivillage.com/mellstew/id9.html>) deals with a

variety of rape related problems, including one's recovery, which is also the focus of [Becoming Whole Again](#) ( <http://www.utexas.edu/student/cmhc/booklets/rape/rape.html>). Lastly, there is a site that addresses how loved ones might interact with a rape victim, [If Someone You Love is Sexually Assaulted](#) ( <http://www.sacasa.org/helpsomeone.htm>).

## Sex in a Committed Relationship

Remember, we are marrying later. In 1975, 65% of women had married by age 25 and 93% by their early 30's. In 1990, only 40% of women have married by age 25 and only 82% are married by their early 30's. But we aren't postponing sex until marriage. Between 18 and the middle or late 20's, before marriage we are often involved with a series of sexual partners in more prolonged and "committed" relationships. In their lifetime, 55% of men and 30% of women have had 5 or more sex partners (20% of men and 30% of women have had only one partner). The sexually active singles are not unhappy with their lot, only one in three would prefer being married. Indeed, as long as there are no children, these serious premarital relationships are something like the early part of a marriage.

Once started, sex is usually frequent during the first few months of a sexual relationship. After the intensely sexual beginning, intercourse gradually declines over the next 2 to 4 years, so that at age 25 or 30, the average couple, who have been married 5 years or so, make love maybe twice a week, at 40 it's about 1 1/2 times a week. In a recent survey, 45% of married couples said they had sex "a few times a month" and 35% said "2-3 times a week." Yet, the average frequency of 1 to 3 times per week (for 25 to 59-year-olds) hides big differences among us. For example, about 12% have sex only "a few times a year." Even some young couples have sex only once every 2 or 3 weeks. On the other hand, 7% have sex four or more times a week; rarely is it once or twice a day (Michael, Gagnon, Laumann & Kolata, 1994). Whatever pleases each couple is okay. Quality is what counts, not quantity. However, for a variety of reasons, men seem to want it more than women. About 55% of men think about sex every day, only 20% of women do.

Excluding the extremes, frequency of intercourse tends to roughly reflect how satisfied the partners are with their sex life (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983). For example, 89% of couples having sex 3 or more times per week are satisfied with their sex life. Among couples who have sex 1 to 4 times a month, only about 53% are satisfied. Don't conclude, however, that the way to achieve a better sex life is to double or triple the frequency. It's more complicated than that. Overall, about 70% of married couples rate their sex life as being okay (meaning almost 1/3rd are dissatisfied). If your sex life is very good,

regardless of frequency, your marriage is more likely to be close. Both men and women occasionally have difficulty coming to a climax, only about 5% to 10% of men but 30% of married women only occasionally or never climax--another 30% of women consistently have orgasms (Michael, Gagnon, Laumann & Kolata, 1994). Women who are very happy with their marriages are much more likely to be orgasmic (but being non-orgasmic doesn't necessarily mean you have a serious, unconscious dissatisfaction with your relationship).

There are remarkable variations in researchers' estimates of how many husbands and wives are unfaithful, ranging from 20% to 70%. Knox (1984) suggested that 50% of men and 20-40% of women have had an affair at some time. A more scientific survey found that 75% of married men and 85% of married women had been faithful (Michael, Gagnon, Laumann & Kolata, 1994) but these surveys include the newly married. In recent years, extramarital sex reportedly occurs about as often among women as men. Working outside the home increases the chances of an affair for women (Levin, 1975), about 50% of these women supposedly have had extramarital sex. Men seek casual sex and have more outside partners; women seek emotional attachment and have fewer outside partners (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983). Some research suggests, as you would expect, that a poor marriage or unsatisfactory sex is often associated with unfaithfulness (Thompson, 1983). According to Grosskopf (1983), from 50% to 70% of unfaithful women said they did it because they were emotionally and sexually dissatisfied with their husbands (35% had found out *he* had an affair). On the other hand, Blumstein and Schwartz say that many couples who have had an affair are just as happy with their marriages as faithful spouses. They also say having one affair doesn't necessarily lead to another and church goers are just as likely to be unfaithful as non-goers. Unfaithfulness has been discussed above.

## **Sexual intercourse: It is making love**

Sex, if done well, generates positive feelings towards the partner, i.e. it "makes love." "Making love" is usually a natural, emotional experience, a part of a relationship, rarely just a physiologically pleasurable act. We are ordinarily very careful who we have sex with; it is a consciously planned and orchestrated act. Yet, interestingly enough, human sexual arousal is a primitive physiological response that can't be consciously willed, e.g. men can't just will an immediate erection, women can't will lubrication. One needs to generate sexy thoughts or physical stimulation; one needs to be relaxed and "in the mood," then penises harden and vaginas moisten automatically.

It is tempting to say that making love is just doing what comes naturally, but that isn't at all true either. There are many things about intercourse we don't know automatically. For instance, we don't naturally take lots of time but good sex can't be rushed. We don't know what feels good to our partner, he/she has to tell us. In the

beginning of a relationship, the male doesn't know how to locate a particular woman's clitoris or how she likes it to be stimulated. Females often don't know how to hold and stroke a penis. Both sexes have to learn by being shown or told. Every partner is different and even the same partner has different preferences from time to time, so communication is vital. And, open communication about our feelings and sexual needs is hampered by emotional hang-ups we have to learn to overcome.

There are also many other learned sexual inhibitions and negative emotions we need to unlearn, e.g. it may be uncomfortable at first but eventually 90% of married couples have oral-genital sex often or occasionally. We may be embarrassed about moving or thrusting and making noises (expressing our pleasure), but an active, "excited" partner is the sexiest experience we can possibly have. It may be very hard to openly communicate about our bodies and what makes us feel good, but we must if we are going to get maximum pleasure. Sometimes, it is easier and better to show (guide his/her hands) than to try to verbally tell him/her what feels good. Your partner can't read your mind, don't expect it. A section below deals with communication. We may be acutely aware of our ignorance about sex and it may be very difficult to say, "I'm ashamed to admit it but I don't know about ....," but it is important to be realistic and honest.

We must realize that both we and our partner bring a long sexual history into even our *first* sexual experience. Our histories differ greatly: one partner may have masturbated almost daily since 12 or 13 and had fantasies of having intercourse with thousands of different people; the other partner may have stroked him/herself only a few times ever and had no sexual fantasies. We have all been sexually aroused in our sleep 5 to 7 times every night since childhood; some have enjoyed it, others were mystified and disturbed by their sexual responses during sleep, some denied or tried to ignore it. Your partners' fantasies of foreplay, of the sex acts involved in intercourse, of what he/she might feel, and of what should be done after intercourse may be radically different from your expectations. Each of us has heard different things about sex from friends, movies, parents, teachers, books, and so on. Males and females may bring different instincts into the sexual act. It is important that every lover be aware of and tolerant of the unique differences his/her partner brings to this vital moment. However, that doesn't mean that sex can't be improved over time, providing you receive good instruction.

Most inexperienced males imagine that really good sex consists of getting the woman partly undressed and then shoving an enormous penis in and out of her vagina until they both explode simultaneously with a fantastic orgasm. For men, the fantasy ends there. What terribly misguided notions we have about good sex.

Few women have the same conception of good sex. Instead, she imagines going out to a romantic setting, having a wonderful time, holding hands, talking, laughing, dancing, etc. Later in her fantasy, a



nice looking, smooth-talking, confident lover tells her about his feelings for her, their future, her attractiveness, his needs for love, etc. She imagines being held tightly and kissed over and over. Her fantasy may include his slowly and gently touching her breasts and later her sexual parts, eventually undressing her and having intercourse, but this isn't the total focus of her fantasy. After "love making" she imagines being held, comforted, and told that sex has made the closeness and love between them much greater. She wants reassurance that she was an exciting sex partner and that the male wants to do many other things (nonsexual) with her soon.

Early in the love making process, the typical male is worried that he will do something wrong or that she will stop him. He is progressing as rapidly as he can towards intercourse so he won't lose his chance; meanwhile, she is hoping for romantic affection and tries to encourage this by slowing his progress. If she expects and wants to have intercourse, she may realize that time and stroking are needed to start her lubricating. He may have trouble finding her sensitive spot (clitoris) and she hesitates to show him (if she knows). She isn't very turned on by his penis; indeed, she may be scared of touching it or repulsed by it (he thinks it is the most wonderful thing in the world and wishes she would love it as he does). In the end, neither may experience much of what they wanted or imagined it would be like. If they are smart and lucky, both start to realize that this is a complex situation involving actions, emotions, expectations, communication, knowledge, and consideration of others, which will take a long time to truly master.

Good sex involves finding out what the partner wants to happen before, during, and after love making. Then each partner attempts to meet as many of the partner's desires as possible. Compromises will be needed.

There are hundreds of books, some 1000's of years old, about improving sex. I will cite several good ones below, but in my opinion the most important secrets are:

1. Love making should focus on loving each other by verbal expression and touching. Consider the orgasm as only the wonderful "climax" of a long love session (if you can afford the time). Certainly give up the foolish notion that both people must come to a climax at the same time (25% of men and 14% of women believe this). A book on sensual massage may give you ideas (Inkeles, 1992). Note: years later in a relationship, less attention may be given to the expressions of love because the goal of both partners may primarily be physical pleasure. Nothing wrong with that.
2. Remember the male usually appreciates attention to and stimulation of his penis. Do this often during love making and in other situations as well.
3. After lots of skin contact, most women need to have their clitoris stimulated in order to become aroused and lubricated,

and to achieve an orgasm. This is why 20% of women prefer oral sex to produce an orgasm. The clitoris is located about an inch in front of the opening to the vagina. Talk to each other about what the clitoris needs to feel good. After some experience, a vibrator frequently provides the best stimulation to the clitoris.

4. Remember: love making is not a test or contest, not a time to measure or count any thing. It's a time for care-free play, a focus on love, and a time to have fun.

In long-term relationships, love, liking, and sex are closely tied together. Throbbing sexual arousal isn't likely to occur if the lovers have been bickering all day (although 25% to 35% of couples "make up" by making love). But good sex increases the love ("makes love") and reduces the tension (McCarthy, 1982). In general, couples who have an egalitarian relationship have the best sexual adjustment (Hatfield, et al, 1982). If sexual intercourse is done with tenderness and enthusiasm, if it occurs in a comfortable setting, if both parties are without guilt and concern about pregnancy, it can be one of life's greatest joys, a wondrous event, a cherished memory, a fantastic way to bond with another human being. While all this is true, there are some couples who love each other deeply and enjoy each other's companionship without having much interest in sex.



You mustn't force sex to do the work of love or love to do the work of sex.  
-Mary McCarthy



Needless to say, if sex is done roughly and selfishly, if one person is deceived or hurt, if it results in an unwanted pregnancy, intercourse can be a horrible experience. Also, like all good experiences, sex can be diminished by expecting too much. Sex with the same person, in time, inevitably loses some of its wild excitement; this should be expected and accepted, not taken as a sign of a loss of love. Intense excitement is replaced by comfort and security. Also, if we get "performance anxiety" and push ourselves to achieve 2 or 3 climaxes or to reach simultaneous orgasms (see Knox, 1984, p. 302), we have to work too hard and set the stage for being disappointed. Once we become a full-time "spectator" observing, coaching, and criticizing our own sexual performance or our partner's, rather than flowing with the feelings, we are in trouble. Worry and anxiety are not a part of good sex.

## Books for improving sex

There are many good books for learning about sex. For an excellent, up-to-date, informative general text about sex and love, look up Masters, Johnson, and Kolodny (1994). Although somewhat dated, mental health professionals consider Barbach's (1975, 1980, 1982, 1992) books to be the best guides to female sexuality (Santrock, Minett & Campbell, 1994). The therapists also judged Zilbergeld's (1978, 1992) books to be the best guides to male sexuality, especially the more recent publication is solid, sensitive, comprehensive, and thoughtful. For an explicit "gourmet guide to lovemaking" it would be hard to beat Comfort's books (1972, 1983, 1991) but expect the pictures to be mildly pornographic.

Other books focus on improving sex. Among the best are Stoppard (1992); Belliveau and Richter (1970), Gray (1995), Heiman, LoPiccolo & LoPiccolo (1976, 1987), Kaplan (1975, 1979, 1987), Kelly (1979), Leiblum and Rosen (1989), McCarthy (1977), McCarthy & McCarthy (1993), Morgenstern (1982), Nowinski (1988), Pearsall (1987), Penney (1981), Pietropinto and Simenauer (1990). Dr. Ruth's books are not recommended by mental health professionals; they view her as unnecessarily provocative or earthy and rather superficial or disorganized.

Videotapes are being sold for improving your sex life (call 1-800-367-7765). See the next section for specific information about sexual problems, such as reduced sexual desires, impotence, lack of orgasm, etc.

## Dealing with Specific Sexual Problems

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There is a tendency to think "I'm the only one who has this sexual problem or thought." In a society where youth and beauty are worshiped, one may also think "young people are great in bed; old people have sexual problems (or no sex at all)." In reality, about 30% of all males and 40% of all females sometimes lack sexual desire, 37% of college students have trouble occasionally getting an erection or getting lubricated, 30% or more of sexually active college women don't orgasm regularly, 23% of college men ejaculate too soon, and 20% or more of both sexes have doubts about their sexual adequacy (Koch, 1982; Rubenstein, 1983). So our sexually liberated society hasn't freed us from sexual worries, it may multiply them. But, there's hope, 75% of the elderly, who are still sexually active, say lovemaking gets better with the years (Starr & Weiner, 1982).

It is no wonder we have sexual problems. Sexual activities by children and young people, even private masturbation, is described negatively and forbidden -- even considered a serious sin. It is

estimated that 11% of men and 23% of women are sexually molested as children. 22% of women have been forced by a lover to do some sexual act they didn't want to do. Sexual experimentation may give little pleasure and lots of distress, including rejection, guilt, and unwanted pregnancy. In short, our sex drives are a testimony to our physiology and raging hormones (and to the emphasis on sexual seduction in our entertainment), *not* to our wholesome child rearing, our enlightened sex education, or to our psychosexual history.

Of course, everyone has heard of the "mid-life crisis." Sometimes, about age 40, "sexual burnout" occurs. This is when sex with a long-term partner becomes boring, the relationship seems emotionally empty, and both may feel tired and sexually hopeless or inadequate. Barry McCarthy (1982), a psychotherapist, reports that many couples seeking counseling have devoted very little time to improving their sex life or their relationship. Yet, many seeking therapy (80%) have found the time to have affairs, hoping to spice up their sagging sex lives or to stimulate their flagging sexual energy. Also, keep in mind that when a sexually burned out couple gets a divorce, both will frequently go through a torrid love affair with a new lover (so it's psychological, not physical) and then find that the same sexual problems are gradually reappearing with the second partner (Kolodny, 1983). So, we aren't just animals operating on instincts either; "our mind is our biggest sex organ."

There are some excellent comprehensive self-help books which address a variety of sexual problems (Masters, Johnson & Kolodny, 1994; Kaplan, 1987; Yaffe & Fenwick, 1988). Margolies (1994) has written for the wives of men with sexual problems. Reinisch (1990), from the Kinsey Institute, tells us a variety of facts we need to know to be sexually informed. Weinrich (1987) sheds research light on several sexual puzzles, including homosexuality. We will briefly survey only the more common sexual problems and how to treat them.



We tolerate a popular culture drenched in eroticism and a scientific literature bereft of facts (the federal government has opposed several surveys of sexual behavior).

**-Beryl Benderly**



## Lack of sexual interest and solutions

A few people experience very little sexual drive, even in new romantic relationships. But most of us are obsessed with sex in the early infatuation stages of a relationship. We eagerly spend hours every day touching, kissing, holding, fondling, and sexually arousing our new love. Yet, after a few years, the burning interest wanes. Sex becomes routine. Why? We don't understand it, but it happens to all of us to some extent, e.g. the frequency of intercourse declines from once a day (for a short while) to once a week years later. It is an expected transformation. The change is so gradual we hardly notice it. Suddenly we realize that the person who once drove us crazy can undress in front of us and we hardly notice. Some people go for weeks without wanting sex, some reject their partner's advances.

Part of the problem is that many of us think everyone else (except our parents and the other "old folks") is having hot sex every night, and probably "getting some" on the side as well. Thinking that way, we may feel we are not as sexual as others. However, a recent objective survey (Michael, Gagnon, Laumann & Kolata, 1994) found that less than 8% of us are having sex more than four times a week. Two thirds of us have sex "a few times" per month or less. The remaining 30% of us have sex only a few times a year or less. So, Americans aren't as sexually obsessed as we may think.

Inhibited sexual desire is *the most common* sexual problem, about 50% of all long-term relationships have a partner who lacks interest. In 15-20% of the cases of serious loss of interest there are physical causes, so check this out with a medical specialist. For instance, in menopausal women the lack of androgens frequently causes a loss of sex drive, so estrogen-androgen therapy, which includes testosterone, is needed. The key to horniness in females as well as males seems to be testosterone. For instance, women, who have had their ovaries removed, have improved their sex life by using 300 microgram testosterone patches (Dr. Jan Shifren, Sept 7, 2000, *New England Journal of Medicine*). This is promising. Recently, women have also tried Viagra, thinking it would turn them on like it does men. Early reports were that Viagra doesn't increase libido in women but some experts think that was because the tests were done with post-menopausal women who were taking estrogen but getting no testosterone. If the woman's testosterone level is optimal, some researchers believe Viagra would work. There have also been reports that women taking antidepressant medication can benefit from Viagra. Finally, a variety of promising research (including a tiny clitoris stimulator) is being done in this neglected area.

When men have trouble getting or keeping an erection (see later section), which could certainly cause a lack of interest, almost half the time there is a physical health factor or cause. If sex is not enjoyable because a climax can not be reached (see later discussion), intercourse may be avoided. Much of the time, however, men and women's lack of interest is caused by psychological factors:

depression, feeling up tight, fear of pregnancy, stress at work, feeling unattractive, fear of intimacy, anger towards the partner, a power struggle with the partner, old beliefs about sex being dirty, traumatic experiences, guilt about extramarital interests, a fear of not being able to perform sexually or, most commonly, "feeling tired" (Knox, 1984; Masters, Johnson & Kolodny, 1985). Several sex therapists have described ways of solving the problem of low sex drive or "inhibited sexual desire" (Kaplan, 1995--rather clinical and treatment oriented; Covington, 1992; Knopf & Seiler, 1991; Williams, 1988). Here is a summary of the suggestions.

If sex has just become boring, spice it up and make a production out of it. Once a week go out to dinner, go dancing, go to a comedy club, with the clearly stated intention of being seductively romantic and then coming home with plenty of time to make love. At other times when you are just at home, get showered and dressed in sexy outfits before going to bed--and spend some time smooching before intercourse. Try having sex in different places or at different times, perhaps in the morning or right after exercising. Give each other a bath and/or full body massages. Read together a book about sexual techniques, then talk, as needed, about how your sexual enjoyment can be increased. Look at each other during sex play and tell your partner how wonderful it feels and looks as you are making love and climaxing. Talk, talk, talk, until someone says "let's not talk so much" and kisses you. Learn to enjoy this fantastic "gift" of life.

Obviously, some of the time, a personal-interpersonal problem will have to be solved before the sexual juices can flow naturally. If there is friction between two people, usually the sex drive immediately drops but it will automatically reappear as soon as the conflicts are resolved. Talk to each other about minor irritations as well as major problems. It has been shown that relationship therapy can improve a couple's sex life and sex therapy can improve their relationship. See the discussion above for improving the marriage.

When a couple are miffed at each other, males and females often have differing notions about how to get emotionally back together (Bergner & Bergner, 1990). 35% of males think making love is the best way to make up (65% of women strongly disagree). This disagreement reflects, in part, how the sexes view intercourse. Males see *sex as a way to establish a positive love relationship*, e.g. early in a courtship the male will say, "Don't just tell me you love me, show me by having sex!" Sex proves to him that she likes him. A female knows sex doesn't prove he loves her, so she wants to be chosen, valued, wooed, and loved first, usually by talking, touching, and doing things together, before having sex which to her *only confirms an already established love*. Otherwise, she may feel sexually "used" ("he's only interested in sex"). So, after being miffed, the wife may reject her husband's sexual advances (his way of making up), resulting in his seeing her as asexual, cold, and sexually manipulative ("you have to be nice to me first"). They are at an impasse unless they see what is going on and both give in, namely, he should verbally and

in non-sexual ways express his affection and willingness to "straighten things out." She should try to understand and accept his interest in sex as a sign that he wants to re-establish a warm, loving relationship.

Hajcak and Garwood (1987) believe that sex is frequently undertaken (without conscious awareness) to satisfy some other need, such as loneliness ("no matter how many people I go to bed with, I still feel lonely"), affection, intimate sharing of feelings, reassurance of being loved, escape from sadness or boredom, and maybe even to express anger. If sex doesn't meet those other needs, then for such people, sex isn't achieving its purpose and they come to believe their sexual relations are poor. These authors try to help people meet the other needs in more appropriate ways--or at least get the other needs out of the bedroom. Good sex only meets our sexual needs, not curiosity or achievement needs and perhaps not even loneliness or intimacy needs. We have to discover and deal with the underlying extraneous needs we are trying to meet by having sex (see chapters 5, 6, 7, 8 & 9).

Other interpersonal reasons why sexual interest is low include this kind of thinking: "he/she has more (or fewer) sexual needs than I have, so I'll let him/her decide when we'll have sex," "he/she turned me down last time, I didn't like that, so I'll just wait," or "I'm tense and not very horny, I don't want to give him/her the impression I'm interested." When these kinds of inhibitions have been openly disclosed and discussed, the sexual drive--of moderate strength--will probably return.

Probably the most common device for increasing sexual zest is the VCR and adult films. This is apparently effective and enjoyable stimulation for many people. But some people prefer their partner become interested in and sexually excited by watching (and interacting with) them rather than someone else on tape. Moreover, if a person is already unhappy with his/her body or insecure about his/her love making, watching beautiful, well endowed people making (or faking) wildly passionate love, could increase his/her self-criticism and inhibition. Each person has to figure out what turns him/her on; then compromises have to be made with the partner.

Besides improving the relationship, having stimulating sexual thoughts, and reducing the negative emotions, the self-helper with a low sex drive should concentrate on re-learning how to enjoy sex, so he/she will have an increased interest in sex. Usually a method called "sensate focus" is used by sex therapists. This involves getting undressed with your partner, which can be sexy in itself, but refraining from touching his/her genitals or breasts, thus, removing the pressure to perform sexually. While nude, each person lovingly touches and is touched, savoring the sensations (note: you aren't attempting to sexually arouse the partner). In fact, sex isn't permitted during the first few sessions of this exercise. In the next phase (a few hours or sessions later), the breasts and genitals are included and touched. Each partner must show the other what feels good by guiding their

partner's hands. Intercourse is still prohibited. In the final stage, the massaging and fondling leads up to the woman getting on top and playing with the penis, guiding it to, around, and away from her clitoris and vagina. The idea is to focus on and enjoy the sexual sensations but remain comfortable and without any pressure to perform. Eventually, intercourse occurs naturally.



The best aphrodisiac is know-how which results in an enthusiastic, horny partner.



Three other comments need to be made about this problem. First, some people misunderstand their own sexual feelings early in love making. If they do not get "turned on" right away, they conclude they aren't "in the mood." If foreplay were continued, however, they are likely to respond. Second, your sexual drive depends on how much you think about sex (in a positive way). If you are under pressure at work, your sexual urges will certainly be less than if you are telling dirty jokes with your co-workers or interacting with your attractive co-workers of the opposite sex all day. So, spend more time thinking and fantasizing about sex, see more sexy movies, read sexy books, exchange jokes, create provocative daydreams and so on. The mind is the best aphrodisiac. Third, sexual inhibitions or aversions, such as disliking masturbation or oral sex (actually preferred by 10% of men and almost 20% of women), can be overcome by desensitization and/or covert conditioning (see chapter 12). For example, repeatedly think about the aversive activity while relaxing or while enjoying some other sexual activity (Byrne, 1976). This is usually effective after several 15-minute fantasy sessions. If not, just agree to avoid the distasteful activity... or see a sex therapist.

## Male problems—premature ejaculation and erectile dysfunction

Men, in general, talk about their sexual conquests but not their sexual concerns. They tend to keep up the strong male image, including the impression that they are fantastic in bed and that they have no problems (except they "can't get enough"). Yet, males usually feel responsible for sex--for approaching the woman, arranging the place, skillfully handling the foreplay, and producing both orgasms. Moreover, too many macho males think sex is all that really matters in a relationship; sharing feelings and problems, being tender and caring, doing things together that she likes to do, getting to know each other deeply, etc. are seen too often as silly women's stuff. These men just don't get it: good loving is not in the penis, it is in the heart and the mind. If sex were just coming to a climax, then we'd just masturbate. Sex is a mental-interpersonal process, not just a brief physical act.



With males having all these responsibilities, misconceptions, and sexist attitudes, the truth is men have a lot of sexual problems.

The males who have a hostile, chauvinistic attitude towards women are responsible for much of the rape, abuse, and harassment of children and adult women. About two million girls are sexually abused by a father, brother, or other relative every year, another million or two by rapists and child molesters. By 16, 20% of all girls have become victims of incest. In addition, about 25% of all college women become victims of rape or attempted rape, 60% of the time it was on a date. These statistics reflect very serious sexual-hostility problems in men. Sexual abuse is discussed in chapter 7 because it is selfish aggression, not love.

With more women insisting on equality and becoming more sexually active and sophisticated, men are becoming more interested in being well informed. They are realizing their differences with women. Several books about male sexual anatomy, sexual functions, sexual techniques, sexual communication, sexual diseases, sexual problems, etc. have become popular (Purvis, 1992; Doyle, 1989; and especially Zilbergeld, 1992).

On confidential questionnaires, half of all males say they are not happy with their sex life (many complain about their wives). Most do not seek professional help, but in the privacy of a therapist's office, the most common problems of males are "I can't get it up" and, essentially the opposite, "I come too quickly." Most males have had a few experiences with a weak or partial erection, especially when drinking, tired, rushed, lacking privacy, or with a new partner. Anxiety is a common factor here. When the male is unable to get an erection over 25% of the time, it is called "impotency." *Reportedly, most erection difficulties start with a physical problem*, such as diabetes, drug and alcohol use, and high-blood-pressure medication. At least, this was the accepted wisdom before the recent development of Viagra. So, it is a good idea to *see an urologist*. Most of the cases with erection problems can be helped by physical and psychological treatment combined.

Near the first of April, 1998, the United States Federal Food and Drug Administration approved Viagra as a treatment for impotence. It is reported that 30 million American men are sexually dysfunctional. The researchers report that the drug is quite effective, maybe 70%-80% of the time, with physiologically caused impotence. Apparently it is not clear yet how well it works with psychologically caused impotence. Thus, it is not surprising that there have been lines at drugstores for this expensive (\$10) pill. Considering the importance of "performing" sexually to many men (and to many women, if they haven't learned to have good sex without intercourse), the drug offers hope that one can feel more virile and have a better love life.

Viagra works by relaxing specific muscles in the penis. When these muscles are relaxed an erection is possible. The FDA approved drug is

effective for only 5 or 6 hours; actually, nothing happens penis-wise if the man doesn't experience some sexually arousing situation or fantasy. That is, you don't get an erection just by taking the pill. The little relaxing muscle doesn't make you more horny or more potent, so don't think of Viagra as an aphrodisiac. There are some reported side effects: headaches, painful erections, upset stomach, and vision problems (difficulty distinguishing certain colors or just poor vision for several hours). And, of course, the long-term effects of frequent use, if any, are totally unknown. Caution: Reports in February, 1999, indicate that a few healthy men, who have misguidedly taken Viagra as an aphrodisiac, have permanently damaged their penis so that getting an erection becomes difficult or impossible permanently. Also, it could be dangerous to take Viagra with heart medicine or with certain recreational drugs, such as nitrates ("poppers"). Be careful.

Perhaps the most important thing to realize is that the Alternative Medicine snake oil salesmen are out in full force attempting to make big bucks selling their potions to uninformed people who have heard about the real scientific breakthrough (Viagra). The cons waste no time... during the first month after the FDA announcement I received five or six medical-sounding ads for some miracle herbal cure for impotence. The best advice, at this time, is to get a prescription for Viagra from your doctor. Don't order something through the mail.

Health insurance will, in some cases, pay for Viagra or, at least, for 5 or 6 per month. Other companies said they would pay for physiologically caused impotence but not psychologically caused problems, but this seems discriminatory and besides it is likely to be hard to tell the difference.

An average, normal male has several erections every night; even at age 65 the penis is erect an hour and a half every night! If erections do not occur after being checked and treated for physical problems and taking Viagra, then psychological treatment is needed. Most therapists treat an erection problem by (1) teaching the male to satisfy his partner without using his penis and (2) having the partner stimulate the penis repeatedly (without intercourse or ejaculation) until the male gains confidence it will work. Most importantly the relationship often needs to be worked on, especially resentment and feeling insecure. There is a self-help book for this problem (Williams, 1986). A variety of psychotherapies have been effective about 2/3rds of the time, reflecting the role of psychological and interpersonal factors. But don't overlook the physical causes and the new drug, Viagra; they are important first steps.



Anxiety is when for the first time you can't do it a second time; panic is when for the second time you can't do it once.



Ejaculating quickly and intensely could certainly be considered a sign of potency, rather than inadequacy. But if either partner wants the female to climax during intercourse with stimulation only being provided by the penis, then quick ejaculations are a problem, called "premature ejaculation." Almost all males occasionally ejaculate sooner than they'd like. Perhaps 20% of males consistently have difficulty controlling their ejaculation, but only 20% or less of that group seek help with the problem. It can be changed.

Several things might be helpful with premature ejaculations: (1) use a condom to reduce the stimulation, (2) have one or two drinks before sex, (3) think about other things, (4) ejaculate twice (usually premature ejaculations are no problem the second time), (5) satisfy the partner in other ways and, then, both enjoy the male's quick, powerful climax, (6) avoid deep thrusting by letting the tip of the penis massage clitoris and play at the opening of the vagina or by leaving the penis fully inserted and concentrate on rubbing the pubic areas together (whatever feels good to the female), (7) stop stimulating the penis before reaching "the point of no return" and relax a moment, and (8) use the squeeze technique. The latter method involves squeezing the penis (fingers on top and thumb on bottom) right behind the head or near the base. This is done just before reaching the "point of no return" (when ejaculation can't be avoided). A hard squeeze reduces the urge to ejaculate. In this way the female partner can teach the male to keep an erection. Masters and Johnson claim a 96% success rate. Kaplan's (1989) self-help book, *How To Overcome Premature Ejaculation*, is recommended.

There are other male problems, such as *being unable to ejaculate in the vagina* or taking a long time to do so. These are rare but treatable, usually by a sex therapist. There may be relationship problems. But, a desensitizing process might be tried first involving these steps: (1) masturbating alone thinking of your partner for a week or so, (2) masturbating in front of partner during the next week, (3) being masturbated by partner for another week or so, and (4) being aroused by partner to near the point of ejaculation and then inserting the penis in the vagina. After successfully ejaculating inside the female in this manner several times, the fears usually disappear. This procedure is successful in about 75% of the cases (Masters, Johnson & Kolodny, 1985).

For more information about the treatment of premature ejaculations and impotence, call 312-725-7722. Another problem, sexual addiction, is more common among men than women (see Carnes, 1991), e.g. over 50% of men think about sex every day (or several times a day) but less than 20% of women do. General references are Pervis (1992) and Zilbergeld (1992).

Updated 5/9/98

## **Female problems—difficulty having orgasms and/or little interest**

By far the most common female concern is "I find it hard to have a climax." This may mean many different things: never having an orgasm in any way, never or seldom having a climax during intercourse but other ways work fine, being able to masturbate one's self but not able to climax when stimulated by a partner, being able to climax only after continuous extensive (45 minutes or more) stimulation or being unable to predict or understand one's orgasms, i.e. it is easy sometimes but elusive at other times. It is not known how many women have had some experiences like these--probably a high percentage--but it only becomes a "problem" if someone is dissatisfied. About 10% of sexually experienced women have never had an orgasm during intercourse, another 10% climax infrequently with intercourse, another 10% are inconsistent. Actually, only 30% or 40% of women orgasm through intercourse alone, which our puritanical culture would consider "normal." About half of all women have trouble having an orgasm. Almost 60% privately say they are dissatisfied with their husband's sexual performance. To what extent are males being held responsible for the female's sexual response?

Note: if you aren't interested and don't become sexually aroused, then you almost certainly are not going to have a climax. In that case, please refer to the "lack of interest" in the last section.

Of course, it isn't necessary to climax during intercourse in order to be sexually satisfied. There are other ways to achieve an orgasm; in fact, many (33%) women prefer these "noncoital" orgasms (Hite, 1977). However, if one wants an orgasm during intercourse, most women need more stimulation than just intercourse, for instance extensive foreplay or stroking the clitoris during intercourse. There are two major points: (1) Women should not feel inadequate if they don't climax every time. For many women (70%), orgasms are not always necessary (Sarrel & Sarrel, 1980). Sex can be satisfying and comforting if the woman is "aroused" and experiences the man climax inside of her (Collier, 1982). Yet, it is a safe bet that sex is better with an orgasm than without one. Indeed, over 65% of women sometimes fake orgasms (Butler, 1976), presumably to make the male feel better. (2) Most women can, with practice, learn to have an orgasm either during or without intercourse. Becoming orgasmic may take a little time every day for several days and you may have to deal with some of your childhood inhibitions, but it can be done and it is worth it! Fortunately for women, climaxing improves with age (well, up to a point). There is a lot of interest in female orgasms (Fisher, 1973; Meshorer & Meshorer, 1986).

Several successful treatment programs have been developed for women who have difficulty climaxing (Hutchins, 2000; Fenwick & Yaffee, 1992; Barbach, 1975, 1980, 1982; Dodson, 1987; Masters, Johnson & Kolodny, 1985; Heiman, LoPiccolo & LoPiccolo, 1976,

1987). Barbach has written the most. Heiman and LoPiccolo have a good book and an instructional video (1-800-955-0888). Hutchins has perhaps the most straight-forward technique. (Remember, these references are for women who are having trouble orgasming, not for those wanting multiple orgasms and/or more novelty.) Most how-to-orgasm books/programs use similar methods: First, the pressure to perform is removed and attitudes about self-stimulation are explored. Certain facts are explained: 42% of women masturbated during the last year, that masturbation more frequently (95%) produces a climax than intercourse (60%), and that [masturbation](#) usually produces a *more* intense orgasm. Sexual taboos cause 40% of college-age women to avoid masturbation, so this is a scary concept for many women and, if so, has to be dealt with.

Secondly, the woman slowly becomes comfortable examining and touching herself, especially her genitals. Through something like sensate focusing (see above) by herself, she learns what feels the best and she overcomes any distaste with touching herself. After several hours (spread over 10-15 days) of this "pleasuring," including the use of a gentle vibrator, she should be able to overcome her inhibitions about touching herself and her fear of climaxing. (Don't use anything electrical near water.) When she feels safe and able to enjoy self-stimulation, if an orgasm has not already occurred, she is encouraged to masturbate until "something happens." This may take 30-45 minutes; if the orgasm takes a long time, she probably needs to use a vibrator and erotic fantasies. Vibrators are wonderful aids for most women (Blank, 1996 and 2000).

Third, after she has learned to orgasm easily, the woman then shows her lover how she masturbates and teaches him in detail. Fourth, the male masturbates her in the same way until she can have orgasms regularly. Lastly, if she wants to orgasm during intercourse, they have to modify and integrate the masturbation techniques into intercourse. This four or five step process is reported by Masters and Johnson as being 70-80% successful. Note: two people should not try to have climaxes at the same time; I know that is some people's idea of how it should be, but for most couples it is much too hard to get the timing just right. Simultaneous orgasms are for the compulsive, perfectionistic I've-got-to-do-this-right-crowd, who foolishly miss fully appreciating the awesomeness of both orgasms.

It may be necessary, in more difficult cases, to understand the causes underlying the inability to orgasm. For instance, having a bad sexual experience or history can, of course, inhibit a sexual response (see Heart, 1998, who was sexually abused and discusses the physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual aspects of this problem). Likewise, if a woman had been consistently responding sexually and then stopped having orgasms, obviously she should explore what was going on at the time to cause the change. The specific causes will determine what kind of self-help or treatment is needed. Knox (1984) says these causes, beyond those mentioned above, underlie a lack of sexual satisfaction: focusing too much

attention on pleasing the partner and not enough on her own feelings, negative feelings about the partner, not enough stimulation (if the clitoris is stimulated 20 minutes or more, 60% have a climax almost every time), fearing letting go (try desensitization), drinking too much, and just not knowing what kind of touching feels good. Albert Ellis (1974) says the pressure to perform prevents orgasms. Lillian Rubin (1976) believes men are at fault because they make two impossibly conflicting demands-- (a) be a responsive, orgasmic woman and (b) act like a naive, passive, innocent "good girl." As a result, according to her, women turn off to sex but yearn for more love. The love vs. sex conflict can also become a power struggle. These are the kinds of psychological problems that may need to be solved before a woman is free to climax.

Other female problems include painful intercourse, vaginismus (closing up of the vagina causing intercourse to be impossible or uncomfortable), and rapid orgasm (like premature ejaculation). Pain is usually due to a lack of lubrication or an infection. Vaginismus can usually be dealt with by gradually inserting one well lubricated finger and leaving it there while relaxing for a few minutes. Later, two fingers can be inserted, then let the partner insert one finger, then two, then his penis. This procedure may take a few minutes a day for 3 or 4 weeks. Stay relaxed (like in vivo desensitization) and use plenty of KY jelly. Rapid orgasm can just be enjoyed.

Data mentioned earlier in this chapter and in chapter 7 document that many women have been traumatized by many different kinds of sexual abuse and harassment. The mean, hostile, indifferent aspects of sexual abuse are covered in chapter 7. Books for overcoming the long-term emotional scars of incest and sexual abuse include Blume (1990), Jarvis-Kirkendall & Kirkendall (1989), and Poston & Lison (1990). In many cases, psychotherapy and group work will be necessary too.

### Causes of sexual problems

Physical factors, like infections, may cause intercourse to be painful (both for men and women) and this condition may lead to a protective reaction in the woman of vaginismus and a lack of an erection in a man. In addition, hundreds of prescribed drugs, illegal drugs, alcohol, nicotine, and hormones affect our sexual reactions. Hormones may be especially important after menopause. Some physicians claim that 80% of sexual problems are physical in origin, but many psychologists believe psychological causes are just as common as physical causes (Masters, Johnson & Kolodny, 1985). Unfortunately, few therapists are experts at treating both the physical and the psychological factors. So, you may need to see two experts. There is a Male Sexual Dysfunction Hotline (1-312-725-7722).

Premature ejaculation and difficulty having an orgasm may be "natural" or caused by psychological or interpersonal-emotional factors. What are some of the psychological causes? There are many

and every life is unique. As mentioned previously, the family of origin may have had a negative attitude towards sexual body parts or acts, e.g. "sex is crude--something women have to put up with" or "it's a sin to touch down there" or "we don't talk about these parts" (out of 1400 parents interviewed by Elizabeth Roberts *none* had ever discussed the clitoris with a daughter). Unreasonable guilt and embarrassment may stay with us forever. Conflicts with a parent or parents getting a divorce may result in anger and distrust towards the opposite sex or in confusion about sexual identity. Early sexual experiences may have been traumatic--painful, forced, or guilt-producing (see abuse in chapters 7 and 9). Early experiences can also become an obsession, e.g. being attracted to a certain type of person or activity, such as being tickled or spanked. Many fears interfere with "letting go" and enjoying sex: fear of failing to perform, pregnancy, disease, being used, being swept away (Cassell, 1984), making noise, losing control, urinating, looking ugly or absurd, being caught, and so on. These fears have to be unlearned or reduced.

The quality of sex usually depends on how positive the two people feel about each other. You might say, "I can imagine having great sex with a total stranger." That's true. But it becomes much more complex when the relationship is intimate. Examples: If one is in love, able to talk freely, feels secure and trusting, enjoys the lover as a friend and a sex partner, then sex is greatly enriched. If we are angry, distrustful, having a disagreement, feeling critical of the partner's appearance, or losing interest in the partner, our involvement in sex is reduced, perhaps to zero. This is especially true if one partner becomes hypercritical of the other: "You are a lousy lover," "You're getting so fat it's disgusting," "You can't get into sex because you are emotionally hung up on your dad" or "You are so uninterested, I think you are gay." Obviously, sex in these cases probably won't improve until the relationship improves.

## **Difficulty communicating about sex**

Bach and Deutsch (1970) illustrate the deception that occurs early in a relationship, using "Will" and "Carol." These two people have had a couple of dates, like each other, and are trying hard to please and impress the other. After a fun day at the beach and a romantic dinner, Will asks Carol to stay over night at his place. She agrees. But after a long drive home, both are very tired, have sun burns, and need to go to work early in the morning. Actually, both would rather go home tonight and set aside a special night for making love the first time. However, they are pushed by their own needs to please, to impress, and to deceive the other. Each assumes (without asking) the other is horny. Each wants to give the impression that he/she is highly sexual too. The truth is that both are concerned about their sexual adequacy.

Since neither can say "let's wait," Will and Carol stay together and have intercourse. They utter the right words to each other: "I love you," "You are fantastic," "Yes, I came," "You are a real man," "You have a great body," and so on. But during sex they were thinking:

"I'm too tired to come," "I feel miserable," "He will think I'm frigid," "I can't keep this up, I hope she comes soon," "My God, she wants more!" and so on. Will has a climax and Carol fakes one. After telling each other how wonderful it was (while hoping the other is ready to sleep), they struggle to be affectionate and provide a little after play. This leads to more intercourse which neither wants and both fake a climax this time. They weren't honest. The experience was much less satisfying than it could have been. By pretending, they set a high sexual standard to live up to in the future, and they increased their own feelings of sexual inadequacy. If Will and Carol do not become secure enough to be frank with each other, they will become stressed and irritated. Their relationship may be headed for trouble.

Later in marriage a common complaint is "I ain't gettin' enough." But Masters, Johnson and Kolodny (1985) say frequency is almost never the issue. What is the problem then? The complainer may feel neglected or lonely or that something is wrong with the relationship. The partner being complained about may be anxious at work, upset about adding weight, disgusted with his/her lover, or depressed. The tasks of a couple who "ain't gettin' enough" are to recognize what the real underlying problems are, talk about solving those problems, and express loving concern for each other. The freer one can talk to his/her lover about sex *and* other concerns, the better the sex will be (Levin, 1975). Many books discuss intimacy and communication in marriage (Gottman, Notarius, Gonso, & Markman, 1976; Rubinstein & Shaver, 1982b; Rubin, 1983). Below are guidelines for communicating about sex:

1. Be honest, open, and direct. Don't pretend, be genuine. If you don't know what your partner is thinking, wanting, or feeling (and you probably don't), please ask, don't assume. Don't be overly eager to impress, like Will and Carol.
2. Forget the nonsense that men know or are supposed to know all about making love. No man knows how a woman feels or what she needs to climax; each woman is different. Talk to each other, **DON'T AVOID DISCUSSING PROBLEMS**. Both the male and the female have to let the partner know what feels good and what doesn't, what acts are appealing and unappealing. If there is a problem, just say "I'd like to talk about our love-making," then find out when is the best time to talk, i.e. after making love, before, or at an entirely separate time.
3. Forget the notions that men should take the initiative, that the man is responsible for making sex good, and that the woman just lies there, letting the man do things to make her feel good. These are outdated Victorian ideas. So are ideas like: "a man never gets enough" or "most women want to be loved but aren't really interested in sex." The best sexual adjustment (80% satisfied) is achieved when each spouse takes the lead equally often. When the initiative is one-sided, only 66% are satisfied (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983). A wonderful aphrodisiac is an excited, active partner.



4. Try your best to avoid thinking negatively about the partner, especially watch out for blaming the other person for your problems. Examples: "I might have a climax if he were a better lover." "If he loved me, he'd take more time, whisper sweet nothings in my ear, and massage my back." "If she loved me and wasn't such a prude, she'd play with my penis a lot." "He/she never wants sex, he/she must have a problem (gay/lesbian, feels inadequate, ashamed of his/her body)." The stereotypes and negative thinking frequently hide our own feelings of inadequacy: "It's not my fault, he/she is the one to blame." You need to understand what is really going on.
5. Use "I" statements when expressing a concern (see chapter 13). This shows you accept responsibility for your own feelings. It shows that you are hoping to work cooperatively to solve the problems.
6. Use empathy responses when the partner talks about problems (see chapter 13). This helps get the true underlying problems out on the table. Remember nothing kills sexual urges as fast as resentment and depression.
7. Use books as a stimulus for discussing sex. They may help you see the problem from another angle, suggest factors you had not thought of, and offer you a variety of solutions to consider with your partner.
8. Often it is much more effective to show your partner how to do something, rather than trying to tell him/her. If the woman will guide the man's hand as he touches her clitoris, he will more quickly understand what she wants. Likewise, the man can show the woman how he masturbates and then guide her hands so she knows she is doing it just right.
9. Don't expect things to stay the same; how a couple makes love tends to change from time to time. Don't expect perfection--but you do have the right to a good sex life. Talk about trying new things. And don't forget to laugh too.

## About Homosexuality

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Homosexuals are emotionally and/or physically attracted to persons of the same sex. It sounds like a simple, straight-forward definition, but what if you are strongly attracted to your own sex but don't act on it, does that make you a homosexual? What if you seek affection with one sex but physically desire sexual activity with the other? What if you are sexually attracted to both sexes? What if consciously you have only heterosexual thoughts and actions but unconsciously desire sex (or relationships) with the same sex? You can see that this labeling problem could become complicated.

How common is homosexuality? Strangely enough, we don't know! For years it was thought that about 10% of us--males and females--were drawn almost exclusively to our own sex, but recently some

surveys have suggested that only 2% to 4% of Americans are homosexual. About 2% of us have had one gay or lesbian encounter within the last year (Michael, Gagnon, Laumann & Kolata, 1994). On the other hand, sometime during their lives, 7% of men and 4% of women have had sex with the same sex and between 4% and 6% of both genders admit being attracted to the same sex. So, according to this survey, somewhere between 2% and 10% of us will respond when asked in an interview if we have or have had some homosexual interests. We still have little idea what percentage of our population is bisexual *or* is attracted to the same sex for only lust (or love) *or* is only occasionally attracted, e.g. when drunk, to the same sex *or* has homosexual contacts and thoughts only during certain periods of life, e.g. when young, *or* is unconsciously attracted in some indirect ways, for instance loves telling dirty jokes to the same sex.

Several other sources have estimated that between 25% and 40% of all men and around 20% of all women have had sex to the point of orgasm with someone of the same sex. These figures may be inflated. It is also claimed, in addition, that between 10% and 15% of heterosexual teenagers and adults are aware of some temptations to explore having sex with someone of their own sex. Moreover, an unknown percentage of people are "turned on" by viewing films of attractive persons of their own gender nude and engaging in some sexual activity. Likewise, it isn't uncommon to be envious of and excited by well endowed persons of the same sex. Still others fantasize, dream, or read occasionally about homosexual activities with some pleasure. Kinsey believed that we all have a mixture of heterosexual and homosexual tendencies; thus, individuals can be placed along a gradient from almost entirely heterosexual to almost totally homosexual, most of us being somewhere between the extremes. So, it isn't an either-or situation, all "man" or all "faggot," all "woman" or all "lesbian."

For many readers, the idea of being even a little gay/lesbian and attracted to our own sex will be very repulsive. For 2000 years, Jews and Christians have been explicitly taught that homosexuality is "an abomination," "a crime against nature," "a sin," etc. Within most denominations, however, there are groups supportive of gays/lesbians; see Prism Ministries ( <http://prismmin.org/links/> ). Anti-gay and lesbian attitudes are deeply instilled in our society. In 1990, *80% of Americans think homosexuality is wrong*. Moreover, 92% of homosexuals have been threatened or verbally abused; 24% have been physically attacked for being gay. For centuries, homosexuals have been persecuted, castrated, considered abnormal, given shock treatment, assaulted by "gay-bashers," and killed by the hundreds of thousands by Hitler along with Jews, Russians, and other "undesirables." Why such a violent reaction to people just loving or being attracted to each other and harming no one? We don't know for sure, but we know the anti-homosexual prejudice is culturally or psychologically engendered, not innate, because some cultures have approved of homosexuality. Psychoanalysis suggests homophobia arises because we fear or hate our own unconscious homosexual tendencies. Some sociologists say our culture teaches males to hate

anything that is vaguely feminine, including feminine men. Religions and other anti-gay groups picture gays as wanton sinners lusting to seduce small boys. The truth is heterosexual males are, in general, far more abusive towards young victims than homosexual males are. To learn more about homophobia, read Blumenfeld (1992). About 2300 years ago, Plato wrote a defense of homosexuality, titled *Symposium*. On certain topics we are slow learners.

The real sins here are the vile, untrue accusations heaped on gays and lesbians, and the misery and restrictions created for homosexuals by our culture. Gays are openly insulted and demeaned as perverted, sick, immoral, and less than human. So, when a young person experiences some homosexual urge, it is hard to avoid self-hatred and guilt. A 1989 government report states that gay teens are two to six times more likely to attempt suicide than straights their age. Learning to hide and handle your strong homoerotic feelings is a very difficult, scary situation for a gay or lesbian teenager who may be bewildered by what is happening to him/her. Fortunately, there are several good books for understanding homosexuality which also give advice to gays and lesbians and their parents. Berzon (1988; 1992) and Heron (1983) discuss establishing homosexual relationships, both lesbian and gay. Clark (1987), Green (1987), Tessina (1989), and Doyle (1989) focus on gay relationships and problems. Clunis & Green (1988) deal with lesbian couples. "Coming out" to your family, to straight spouses, to your children, to friends, and at work is a special problem (Brans, 1987; Buxton, 1994; MacPike, 1993; Borhek, 1983; Griffin, Wirth & Wirth, 1986). Parents are sometimes shocked but can understand (Bernstein, 1999; Borhek, 1993; Griffin, et al, 1997). These are not easy matters to deal with.

A common misconception about male homosexuals is that they are all cruising for a quick, impersonal sexual experience. Not true, in fact 75% of lesbians and 50% of gays are currently involved in on-going, satisfying, committed love relationships--and others are looking for meaningful love, just like straights. True, some homosexuals (mostly males) do seek one-night stands, but *so do heterosexuals*. Lesbians seem to develop an orientation towards females for love first, and then sexual urges may follow. Gays seem to develop the sexual orientation first, and then the love follows.

Homosexuals simply have the genes, hormones, and/or early childhood experiences that orient them towards their own sex for affection and/or sexual gratification. There are many theories about the causes of homosexuality. And, this needs to be understood better; knowledge would help us give up the notion that it is vile. See Money (1989) for a rather technical summary of the research about homosexuality and unusual sex needs, called paraphilias. I suspect our bodies are built to instinctively respond with interest to almost any kind of sexual activity. Powerful social training is probably necessary to teach us to avoid certain kinds of harmless sexual activity, such as masturbation, and to scorn other activities, such as sex play with our own sex. (Note: we seem to have little interest in theorizing about why

*heterosexual* tendencies, such as breast or buttocks fetishes, occur; we are quite content with the shallow explanation that it is natural. But we seem to need a deeper and more pathological explanation of homosexual tendencies.)

Two interesting recent studies: one compared 27 children with lesbian mothers with a matched group with straight mothers. Will homosexual mothers produce homosexual children? No. Only 2 of 25 children from lesbian families were homosexual (Golombok & Tasker, 1996). The second study found that the more older brothers a man has, the more likely he is to be gay (Blanchard & Bogaert, 1996). Among men with four or more brothers, 70% were reportedly homosexual. Interesting, but that percentage seems too high. Also, just having older brothers doesn't tell us much about the specific causes of homosexuality yet... it is a clue that shouldn't be neglected, however.

Male homosexuals have been degraded in many ways, such as called degenerate and "sick," considered insecure with women, called a sissy and a "Mommy's boy," etc. Research has shown that homosexuals do not have more identity or psychological problems than the rest of us (except for the shame instilled by an intolerant culture). They do not hate or fear women; they haven't had a bad experience with the opposite sex; they were not seduced into homosexuality; they were not the result of bad or neurotic parenting. They should not feel guilty about who they love and find attractive, any more than a straight does. None of us heterosexuals consciously decided which sex we would fall in love with or what body parts would sexually turn us on. It just happened. Why should sexual orientation be considered an immoral conscious choice only for homosexuals?

There is some research that suggests homosexuals are born with a slightly different brain. The significance of this is not known yet. It is known that many gays and lesbians believe they were born that way. Many realize they are "different" by the time they are 6 or 8, others when they are teenagers. Some people convert to homosexuality as adults, sometimes after having children. In spite of these conversions, therapists believe that sexual orientation is hard to change, especially in males. Yet, there are cultures that expect and encourage young males to engage in homosexual activities, including swallowing semen to become a "man," but they easily become heterosexual when the time comes for them to find a partner and father a family.

Females seem more likely than men to change to homosexuality later, even in their thirties or forties. It isn't known how people go from being primarily gay to primarily straight (or the reverse) but a few have been known to change through a religious conversion. Psychotherapy, however, has had very little success in helping unhappy gays become heterosexual (Nicolosi, 1994, reports 8 cases of conversion). Therapists usually believe it is more realistic to help someone adjust to the serious social difficulties of being homosexual than to help the patient actually become heterosexual.

People, especially adults, loving each other and harmlessly having consensual sex are hardly major worries compared to people hating and being mean to each other, such as being prejudice or going to war. Homosexuals who want to love and raise a child are to be supported and praised; children raised by lesbian mothers are just as heterosexual and just as well adjusted as their peers (Tasker, 1995). Likewise, 91% of the sons of gay men (who had been married) lead a heterosexual life style. Gay parents seem to produce straight children.

For additional help with homosexual concerns, beyond the books cited above, check to see if there is a local hotline under "Homosexuality" in your phone book. Write or click to [Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays](#) ( <http://www.dorsai.org/~pflag/> ), P. O. Box 24565, Los Angeles, CA 90024. There is a general guidebook available for homosexuals (Silverstein & Picano, 1993). Bisexuals might be interested in Hutchins & Kaahumanu (1991) or Weinberg, Williams & Pryor (1994).

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Where do teenagers get their sex information and misinformation? From peers 37% of the time! Then from literature and the media 22% of the time, mothers 17%, and schools 15%.

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## Sources of Information about Various Sexual Problems

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A variety of books offer extensive, practical, and valuable knowledge about sex (SIECUS, 80 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10011 provides a helpful book list). The Better Sex Video Series, including "Becoming Orgasmic," is available from Sinclair Institute, Box 8855, Chapel Hill, NC (1-800-955-0888). Masters and Johnson Institute have set up a sex information hotline at 1-900-933-6868 (\$3.99 per minute). For a self-assessment of your sexuality see Valois & Kannermann (1992). For more information about the kind of sexual problems dealt with briefly above, look up the references given above or read *Helen Kaplan's (1975; 1979; 1987)*, *Yaffe & Fenwick's (1988)*, *Domeena Renshaw's (1995)* or *Gary Kelly's (1979)* book. They are excellent.

I have tried to cite the best general literature about sex but there are certain specific topics and references I haven't covered.

For information about *sexually transmitted diseases*, call the National STD Hotline (1-800-227-8922) and look in the phone book under "VD." By the way, while over a million Americans are HIV

positive or have AIDS, 12 million more get other sexual diseases *every year*, including herpes, genital warts, Chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, and others. Write American Social Health Association, P. O. Box 13827, Research Triangle Park, NC 27709 for free information. Read Barlow (1979) or Langston (1983).

For information about *birth control and pregnancy*, look under Family Planning in the Yellow Pages and see the references in the section above about avoiding pregnancy.

For *sexual assault* by a stranger, an acquaintance, a relative, or a spouse, call the police or a local Rape or Crisis Line (or the national center at 301-443-1910) and read Brownmiller (1975), Grossman and Sutherland (1982/83).

For a concern about *incest*, call the local Family and Children's Service agency and see Renshaw's (1983), Bass & Davis (1994), or Russell (1982) or other references mentioned above and in chapters 7 and 9.

For *sexual harassment* at work (40 to 80% of women) or at school (25% of coeds), contact your local Affirmative Action office and read MacKinnon (1979) or Colatosti and Karg (1992).

If you feel you *need a sex therapist*, don't just pick one out of the Yellow Pages. There is *no* regulation of this specialty. Many competent psychotherapists are not well qualified in this area. So what do you do? For help finding a sex therapist or group, contact the American Association of Sex Educators, Counselors and Therapists, 11 Dupont Circle, NW, Suite 220, Washington, DC 20036-1207. Or, call 212-920-4576 for referral to a sex therapist. Consider using the Masters & Johnson Institute in St. Louis but it involves daily sessions for two weeks. Their therapy focuses on the relationship--anger, self-esteem, power struggles. It is quite expensive (\$5,000+). If you can not afford this, consider other specialized "sex therapy centers" associated with medical centers, universities, or hospitals (many charge according to the ability to pay). Your local Mental Health Center can also refer you to a professional clinic or to an experienced sex therapist. Avoid anyone who does not have a doctoral degree and extensive professional experience with sexual problems. Also avoid any therapist who makes unrealistic promises or takes an unprofessional-unethical approach to your problem.

## Bibliography

References cited in this chapter are listed in the [Bibliography](#) (see link on the book title page). Please note that references are on pages

according to the first letter of the senior author's last name (see alphabetical links at the bottom of the main Bibliography page).

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