Development Through the Lifespan, 6/e

Laura E. Berk


To request an examination copy or for additional information, please visit us at www.pearsonhighered.com or contact your Pearson representative at www.pearsonhighered.com/replocator.
This college student, a volunteer for a nonprofit organization called FoodCorps, helps children in economically disadvantaged communities plant a school garden, teaching them about healthy foods and how they grow. For many young people in industrialized nations, the transition to early adulthood is a time of prolonged exploration of attitudes, values, and life possibilities.
After completing her master’s degree at age 26, Sharese returned to her hometown, where she and Ernie would soon be married. During their year-long engagement, Sharese had vacillated about whether to follow through. At times, she looked with envy at Heather, still unattached and free to choose from an array of options before her. After graduating from college, Heather accepted a Peace Corps assignment in a remote region of Ghana, forged a romance with another Peace Corps volunteer that she ended at the conclusion of her tour of duty, and then traveled for eight months before returning to the United States to contemplate next steps.

Sharese also pondered the life circumstances of Christy and her husband, Gary—married and first-time parents by their mid-twenties. Despite his good teaching performance, Gary’s relationship with the high school principal deteriorated, and he quit his job at the end of his first year. A tight job market impeded Gary’s efforts to find another teaching position, and financial pressures and parenthood put Christy’s education and career plans on hold. Sharese wondered whether it was really possible to combine family and career.

As her wedding approached, Sharese’s ambivalence intensified, and she admitted to Ernie that she didn’t feel ready to marry. Ernie’s admiration for Sharese had strengthened over their courtship, and he reassured her of his love. His career as an accountant had been under way for two years, and at age 28, he looked forward to marriage and starting a family. Uncertain and conflicted, Sharese felt swept toward the altar as relatives and friends began to arrive. On the appointed day, she walked down the aisle.

In this chapter, we take up the emotional and social sides of early adulthood. Notice that Sharese, Ernie, and Heather moved toward adult roles slowly, at times vacillating along the way. Not until their mid- to late twenties did they make lasting career and romantic choices and attain full economic independence—broadly accepted markers of adulthood that young people of previous generations reached considerably earlier. Each received financial and other forms of support from parents and other family members, which enabled them to postpone taking on adult roles. We consider whether prolonged exploration of life options has become so widespread that it merits a new developmental period—emerging adulthood—to describe and understand it.
Recall from Chapter 12 that identity development continues to be a central focus from the late teens into the mid-twenties. As they achieve a secure identity and independence from parents, young adults seek close, affectionate ties. Yet the decade of the twenties is accompanied by a rise in feelings of personal control over events in their lives—in fact, a stronger sense of control than they will ever experience again (Grob, Krings, & Bangerter, 2001). Perhaps for this reason, like Sharese, they often fear losing their freedom. Once this struggle is resolved, early adulthood leads to new family units and parenthood, accomplished in the context of diverse lifestyles. At the same time, young adults must master the tasks of their chosen career.

Our discussion will reveal that identity, love, and work are intertwined. In negotiating these arenas, young adults do more choosing, planning, and changing course than any other age group. When their decisions are in tune with themselves and their social and cultural worlds, they acquire many new competencies, and life is full and rewarding.

A Gradual Transition: Emerging Adulthood

Take a Moment... Think about your own development. Do you consider yourself to have reached adulthood? When a large sample of American 18- to 25-year-olds was asked this question, the majority gave an ambiguous answer: “yes and no.” Only after reaching their late twenties and early thirties did most feel that they were truly adult—findings evident in a wide range of industrialized nations, including Argentina, Austria, the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Italy, Romania, Spain, and Israel (Arnett, 2001, 2003, 2007a; Buhl & Lanz, 2007; Macek, Bejček, & Vaníčková, 2007; Nelson, 2009; Sirsch et al., 2009). The life pursuits and subjective judgments of many contemporary young people indicate that the transition to adult roles has become so delayed and prolonged that it has spawned a new transitional period extending from the late teens to the mid- to late-twenties, called emerging adulthood.

Unprecedented Exploration

Psychologist Jeffrey Arnett is the leader of a movement that regards emerging adulthood as a distinct period of life. As Arnett explains, emerging adults have left adolescence but are still a considerable distance from taking on adult responsibilities. Their parents agree: In a survey of parents of a large sample of ethnically and religiously diverse U.S. undergraduate and graduate students, most viewed their children as not yet fully adult (Nelson et al., 2007). Furthermore, 18- to 25-year-olds who do not consider themselves adults are less adultlike in life goals and behavior—less certain about their identity and the qualities they desire in a romantic partner and more likely to engage in risk taking, including substance use and unprotected sex (Nelson & Barry, 2005). During these years, young people who have the economic resources to do so explore alternatives in education, work, and personal values and behavior more intensely than they did as teenagers.

Not yet immersed in adult roles, many emerging adults can engage in activities of the widest possible scope. Because so little is normative, or socially expected, routes to adult responsibilities are highly diverse in timing and order across individuals (Côté, 2006). For example, more college students than in past generations pursue their education in a drawn-out, nonlinear way—changing majors as they explore career options, taking courses while working part-time, or interrupting school to work, travel, or participate in national or international service programs. About one-third of U.S. college graduates enter graduate school, taking still more years to settle into their desired career track (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

As a result of these experiences, young people’s interests, attitudes, and values broaden (see Chapter 13). Exposure to multiple viewpoints also encourages young people to look more closely at themselves. Consequently, they develop a more complex self-concept that includes awareness of their own changing traits and values over time, and self-esteem rises (Labouvie-Vief, 2006; Orth, Robins, & Widaman, 2012). Together, these changes contribute to advances in identity.

Identity Development. During the college years, young people refine their approach to constructing an identity. Besides exploring in breadth (weighing multiple possibilities), they also explore in depth—evaluating existing commitments (Luyckx et al., 2006). For example, if you have not yet selected your major, you may be taking classes in a broad array of disciplines. Once you choose a major, you are likely to embark on an in-depth evaluation of your choice—reflecting on your interest, motivation, and performance and on your career prospects as you take additional classes in that field. Depending on the outcome of your evaluation, either your commitment to your major strengthens, or you return to a broad exploration of options.

In a longitudinal study extending over the first two years of college, most students cycled between making commitments and evaluating commitments in various identity domains. Fluctuations in students’ certainty about their commitments sparked movement between these two states (Luyckx, Goossens, & Soenens, 2006). Take a Moment... Consider your own identity progress. Does it fit this dual-cycle model, in which identity formation is a lengthy process of feedback loops? Notice how the model helps explain the movement between identity statuses displayed by many young people, described in Chapter 12. College students who move toward exploration in depth and certainty of commitment are higher in self-esteem, psychological well-being, and academic, emotional, and social adjustment. Those who spend much time exploring in breadth without making commitments, or who are identity diffused (engaging in no exploration), tend to be poorly adjusted—anxious, depressed,
Religion and Worldview. Most emerging adults say that constructing a worldview, or a set of beliefs and values to live by, is essential for attaining adult status—even more important than finishing their education and settling into a career and marriage (Arnett, 2006, 2007b). During the late teens and twenties, attendance at religious services drops to its lowest level throughout the lifespan as young people continue to question the beliefs they acquired in their families (Kunnen et al., 2008; Schwartz et al., 2011). About one-fourth of U.S. 18- to 29-year-olds are unaffiliated with a particular faith—considerably more than in their parents’ generation at the same age (see Figure 14.1).

Yet about 50 percent of U.S. young people remain stable in their religious commitment (or lack thereof) from adolescence into emerging adulthood (Smith & Snell, 2009). And in certain ways, U.S. emerging adults are quite traditional in their religious beliefs and practices. Religion is more important in their lives than it is for young people in other developed countries. More than half of U.S. 18- to 29-year-olds say they believe in God with certainty, and more than one-third of those who are religiously affiliated say they are “strong” members of their faith—equivalent to same-age individuals who said so a decade earlier (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2010). Women are more religious than men, a difference evident in other Western nations and throughout the lifespan. Also among the more religious are immigrants and certain ethnic minorities, including African Americans and Hispanics (Barry et al., 2010). Of the small number of young people who increase in religiosity during the late teens and early twenties, many are women, African American, and Hispanic.

Whether or not they are involved in organized religion, many young people begin to construct their own individualized faith and, if attending college, discuss religious beliefs and experiences more often with friends than with parents or other adults (Montgomery-Goodnough & Gallagher, 2007; Stoppa & Lefkowitz, 2010). Often they weave together beliefs and practices from diverse sources, including Eastern and Western religious traditions, science, and popular culture, including music and other media images.

As with adolescents, U.S. emerging adults who are religious or spiritual tend to be better adjusted. They are higher in self-esteem, less likely to engage in substance use and antisocial acts, and more likely to become involved in community service (Barry & Nelson, 2008; Knox, Langehough, & Walters, 1998; White et al., 2006). But outcomes vary: Among sexual minority young people, religiosity does not protect against drug taking (Rostosky, Danner, & Riggle, 2007). A possible explanation is that their religious communities often do not support (and sometimes condemn) their sexual orientation.

Perhaps because emerging adults are so focused on exploring and “finding themselves,” a widespread view among older adults is that they forge self-centered worldviews, as the descriptor “generation me” suggests (Arnett, 2010). This issue has generated heated controversy. Analyses of large, nationally representative samples of U.S. young people, collected repeatedly over several decades, suggest that compared to past generations, the Millennial generation reports greater narcissism (egotistical self-admiration) and materialism—valuing of money and leisure and reduced empathy for the less fortunate (Gentile, Twenge, & Campbell, 2010; O’Brien, Hsing, & Konrath, 2010; Twenge, Campbell, & Freeman, 2012).

But other researchers claim that generational changes in egotism and other traits are too small to be meaningful (Trzesniewski & Donnellan, 2009, 2010). And gradual, age-related gains in self-esteem extending from adolescence through emerging adulthood and into mid-life are similar across generations, with average self-esteem of today’s young people no
higher than that of past cohorts (Orth, Robins, & Widaman, 2012; Orth, Trzesniewski, & Robins, 2010). Over these years, adults derive a greater sense of competence from making identity commitments, entering and succeeding at their careers, and becoming involved in their communities.

Additional evidence supports the view that many emerging adults are committed to improving their communities, nation, and world. In a survey of several hundred thousand first-year students enrolled in nearly 300 U.S. colleges and universities, a record number—nearly 30 percent—said that there is “a very good chance” they will participate in community service—nearly double the number two decades earlier (Pryor et al., 2009). An additional 41 percent expressed “some chance” of participating, and only 6 percent said they would not volunteer.

Among college students who expect to volunteer, the overwhelming majority actually do so within their first year (DeAngeleo, Hurtado, & Pryor, 2010). And compared with their nonvolunteer counterparts, volunteers have a stronger pluralistic orientation—disposition for living in a diverse society that includes respect for others with differing beliefs and willingness to discuss and negotiate controversial issues (Pryor et al., 2009).

LOOk AND LISTEN

Ask 10 to 15 of your college classmates to answer the following question: What would you do if you had a million dollars? How often do respondents mention prosocial as opposed to self-centered acts?

Finally, compared to previous generations, contemporary 18- to 29-year-olds have been labeled “apathetic no shows” when it comes to voting. But in the 2012 U.S. presidential election, they made up more of the total electorate (19 percent) than did citizens over age 65 (16 percent), who traditionally have been the highest participants. In this respect, emerging adults’ civic involvement appears to have strengthened.

Cultural Change, Cultural Variation, and Emerging Adulthood

Rapid cultural change explains the recent appearance of emerging adulthood. First, entry-level positions in many fields require more education than in the past, prompting young adults to seek higher education in record numbers and thus delaying financial independence and career commitment. Second, wealthy nations with longer-lived populations have no pressing need for young people’s labor, freeing those who are financially able for rich, extended exploration.

Indeed, emerging adulthood is limited to cultures that postpone entry into adult roles until the twenties. In developing nations such as Brazil, China, India, and Mexico, only a privileged few—usually those from wealthier families who are admitted to universities—experience it, often for a shorter time than their Western counterparts (Arnett, 2011; Nelson & Chen, 2007). Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of young people in traditional non-Western countries—those who have few economic resources or who remain in the rural regions where they grew up—have no emerging adulthood. With limited education, they typically enter marriage, parenthood, and lifelong work early (UNICEF, 2010c).

In industrialized countries, many young people experience these transitional years. Typically, their families are sufficiently well-off to provide them with financial support, without which few could advance their education, explore career possibilities, or travel the country and world to—as one emerging adult put it—“experience as much as possible.” And although most emerging adults are pursuing higher education or have earned an advanced degree, some non-college-bound young people also benefit from this extended transition to adult roles (Tanner, Arnett, & Leis, 2009). But they may do so by trying out different types of work rather than college majors or travel.

Nevertheless, for the large numbers of U.S. low-SES young people who are burdened by early parenthood, do not finish high school, are otherwise academically unprepared for college, or do not have access to vocational training, emerging adulthood is limited or nonexistent (see Chapters 11 and 13). Instead of excitement and personal expansion, these individuals encounter a “floundering period” during which they alternate between unemployment and dead-end, low-paying jobs (Cohen et al., 2003; Eccles et al., 2003). When the late-2000s recession hit, work opportunities for low-SES high school graduates declined further, leaving increasing numbers in search of employment (see Chapter 13) and without the economic resources for intensive exploration.

Because of its strong association with SES and higher education, some researchers reject the notion of emerging adulthood as a distinct period of development (see the Cultural Influences box on the following page). Others disagree, predicting that emerging adulthood will become increasingly common as globalization—the exchange of ideas, information, trade, and immigration among nations—accelerates. As globalization proceeds, gains in higher education and the formation of a common “global identity” among young people may lead to the spread of
Is Emerging Adulthood Really a Distinct Period of Development?

A

Though broad consensus exists that cultural change has prolonged the transition to adult roles for many young people, disagreement exists over whether these years of “emergence” merit the creation of a new developmental period (Hendry & Kloep, 2007, 2011). Critics of the concept of emerging adulthood offer the following arguments.

First, burgeoning higher education enrollment, delayed career entry, and later marriage and parenthood are cultural trends that began as early as the 1970s in industrialized nations, only gradually becoming more conspicuous. At no time has adulthood in complex societies been attained at a distinct moment (Côté & Bynner, 2008). Rather, young people in the past reached adult status earlier in some domains and later in others, just as they do today. They also may reverse direction—for example, move back to the parental home to get their bearings after finishing college or being laid off from a job. In accord with the lifespan perspective, development is multidimensional and multidirectional, for 18- to 29-year-olds as it is for adults of all ages. Transitions occur during all periods of adult life, with societal conditions heavily influencing their timing, length, and complexity.

Second, the term emerging adulthood fails to describe the experiences of the majority of the world’s youths (Galambos & Martinez, 2007). In most developing countries, young people—particularly women—are limited in education and marry and have children early. According to one estimate, over 1 billion individuals—nearly 70 percent of young people—follow this traditional route to adulthood (World Health Organization, 2011). We have also seen that many low-SES youths in industrialized nations lack the academic preparation and financial resources to experience an emerging adulthood.

Third, research on emerging adulthood largely emphasizes its personal and societal benefits. But the extended exploration that defines this period can be risky for those who have not developed the personal agency to make good choices and acquire adult skills. These young people may remain uncommitted for too long—an outcome that impedes the focused learning required for a successful work life. A favorable emerging adulthood, then, depends on whether it is used to acquire competencies essential for contemporary living.

Finally, the financial upheaval of the late 2000s has left large numbers of bachelor’s degree holders under age 25 with restricted options. In 2011, over 9 percent were unemployed and 20 percent underemployed—in low-paid jobs not requiring a college degree and, thus, without experiences necessary for advancing their skills (Shierholz, Sabadish, & Wething, 2012). Rather than a period of unparalleled opportunities, these graduates’ delayed leap into adult roles is filled with anxiety and frustration. One young person, who might have been high in personal agency in a stable economy, remarked, “It has been tough finding a job that keeps me wanting to stick with something” (Kotkin, 2012).

Proponents of emerging adulthood as a distinct developmental period respond that, though not universal, it applies to most young people in industrialized societies and is spreading in developing nations that play major roles in our global economy (Tanner & Arnett, 2011). But skeptics counter that emerging adulthood is unlikely to become a prominent period of life in developing countries with high concentrations of poverty or, in industrialized countries, among low-income youths or those not involved in higher education (Côté & Bynner, 2008; Kloep & Hendry, 2011). And for college graduates, societal conditions can readily restrict the prospects and rewards of this period.

Critics also emphasize that in developed nations, age-graded influences have declined in favor of nonnormative influences throughout contemporary adulthood (see page 12 in Chapter 1 to review) (Hendry & Kloep, 2010). In their view, rather than being unique, emerging adults are part of a general trend toward blurring of age-related expectations, yielding multiple transitions and increased diversity in development across the adult years.

Emerging Adulthood

Risk and Resilience in Emerging Adulthood

In grappling with momentous choices and acquiring the skills to succeed in demanding life roles, emerging adults often encounter disappointments in love and work that require them to
adjust, and sometimes radically change, their life path (Arnett, 2006). Their vigorous explorations also extend earlier risks, including unprotected sexual activity, substance use, and hazardous driving behavior (see Chapter 13). And later in this chapter, we will see that feelings of loneliness are higher at this time than at any other time of life. As emerging adults move through school and employment settings, they must constantly separate from friends and forge new relationships.

Longitudinal research shows that the personal attributes and social supports listed in Applying What We Know above foster successful passage through these years, as indicated by completing a college education, forging a warm, stable intimate relationship, finding and keeping a well-paying job, and volunteering in one’s community (Benson et al., 2006; Eccles & Gootman, 2002). Notice how the resources in the table overlap with ones discussed in previous chapters that promote development through resilience, the capacity to overcome challenge and adversity. Young people with more of these resources—and with resources in all three categories—probably make an especially smooth transition to adulthood. But many emerging adults with only a few resources also fare well.

As in childhood, certain resources strengthen others. Relationships with parents have an especially wide-ranging influence. A secure, affectionate parent—emerging adult bond that extends the balance of connection and separation established in adolescence—an empathic approach in which parents recognize the weighty challenges the young person faces and encourage personally valued choices—predicts many aspects of adaptive functioning: favorable self-esteem, identity progress, successful transition to college life, higher academic achievement, more rewarding friendships and romantic ties, and positive psychological well-being. As one reviewer of research summed up, “What seems advantageous for emerging adults’ achievement of independence is feeling connected, secure, understood, and loved in their families, and having the willingness to call on parental resources” (Aquilino, 2006, p. 201).

In contrast, excessive parental rule-setting and regulation of the young person’s daily life (including taking over when the young person encounters challenges) and psychological control (invalidating the young person’s thoughts and feelings and, when dissatisfied, withdrawing love) are linked to poor adjustment, including low self-esteem, inability to make commitments in identity formation, and increased anxiety, depression, and alcohol use (Luyckz et al., 2007; Nelson et al., 2011; Patock-Peckam & Morgan-Lopez, 2009). In another form of parenting—called helicopter parenting in popular culture—warm, well-intentioned parents “hover” over the emerging adult out of excessive concern for his or her well-being. They might, for example, take the child to college but refuse to leave, attend classes with the child for the first week, and contact professors to discuss the child’s grades. Perhaps because helicopter parenting is motivated by strong parental affection and involvement,
it is not associated with the negative outcomes just noted. But it is related to reduced school engagement (going to class, completing assignments) (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012). And it likely interferes with emerging adults’ ability to acquire the skills they need to act on their own.

Finally, exposure to multiple negative life events—family conflict, abusive intimate relationships, repeated romantic breakups, academic or employment difficulties, and financial strain—undermines development, even in emerging adults whose childhood and adolescence prepared them well for this transition (Masten et al., 2004). In sum, supportive family, school, and community environments are crucial, just as they were at earlier ages. The overwhelming majority of young people with access to these resources are optimistic about their future and likely to transition successfully to adult roles (Arnett, 2006). Now let’s turn to theories of psychosocial development in early adulthood.

**Erikson’s Theory: Intimacy versus Isolation**

Erikson’s vision has influenced all contemporary theories of adult personality development. His psychological conflict of early adulthood is **intimacy versus isolation**, reflected in the young person’s thoughts and feelings about making a permanent commitment to an intimate partner.

As Sharese discovered, establishing a mutually gratifying close relationship is challenging. Most young adults are still grappling with identity issues. Yet intimacy requires that they give up some of their independent self and redefine their identity to include both partners’ values and interests. Those in their late teens and early twenties frequently say they don’t feel ready for a lasting tie (Carroll et al., 2009). During their first year of marriage, Sharese separated from Ernie twice as she tried to reconcile her desire for self-determination with her desire for intimacy. Maturity involves balancing these forces. Without intimacy, young adults face the negative outcome of Erikson’s early adulthood stage: loneliness and self-absorption. Ernie’s patience and stability helped Sharese realize that committed love requires generosity and compromise but not total surrender of the self.

Research confirms that—as Erikson emphasized—a secure identity fosters attainment of intimacy. Commitment to personally meaningful values and goals prepares young adults for interpersonal commitments, which increase as early adulthood progresses. Among large samples of college students, identity achievement was positively correlated with fidelity (loyalty in relationships) and love, for both men and women. In contrast, identity moratorium—a state of searching prior to commitment—was negatively associated with fidelity and love (Markstrom et al., 1997; Markstrom & Kalmanir, 2001). Other studies show that advanced identity development strongly predicts involvement in a deep, committed love partnership or readiness to establish such a partnership (Beyers & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010; Montgomery, 2005). Still, the coordination of identity and intimacy is more complex for women, who are more likely than men to consider the impact of their personal goals on important relationships (Archer, 2002).

In friendships and work ties, too, young people who have achieved intimacy are cooperative, tolerant, and accepting of differences in background and values. In contrast, people with a sense of isolation hesitate to form close ties because they fear loss of their own identity, tend to compete rather than cooperate, are not accepting of differences, and are easily threatened when others get too close (Marcia, 2002).

Erikson believed that successful resolution of intimacy versus isolation prepares the individual for the middle adulthood stage, which focuses on **generativity**—caring for the next generation and helping to improve society. But as noted previously, few adults follow a fixed series of tasks tied neatly to age. Some aspects of generativity—childbearing and child rearing, as well as contributions to society through work and community.
service—are under way in the twenties and thirties. Still, in line with Erikson’s ideas, high friendship or romantic intimacy in early adulthood does predict a stronger generative orientation (Mackinnon et al., 2011).

In sum, identity, intimacy, and generativity are concerns of early adulthood, with shifts in emphasis that differ among individuals. Recognizing that Erikson’s theory provides only a broad sketch of adult personality development, other theorists have expanded his stage approach, adding detail.

**Other Theories of Adult Psychosocial Development**

In the 1970s, growing interest in adult development led to several widely read books on the topic. Daniel Levinson’s *The Seasons of a Man’s Life* (1978) and *The Seasons of a Woman’s Life* (1996), and George Vaillant’s *Adaptation to Life* (1977) and *Aging Well* (2002), present psychosocial theories in the tradition of Erikson.

**Levinson’s Seasons of Life**

On the basis of in-depth biographical interviews with 35- to 45-year-old men—and, later, similar interviews with women in the same age range—Levinson (1978, 1996) depicted adult development as a sequence of qualitatively distinct eras (or “seasons”) coinciding with Erikson’s stages and separated by transitions. The *life structure*, a key concept in Levinson’s theory, is the underlying design of a person’s life, consisting of relationships with significant others—individuals, groups, and institutions. Of its many components, usually only a few, relating to family, close friendships, and occupation, are central. But wide individual differences exist in the weights of central and peripheral components.

Levinson found that during the transition to early adulthood, most young people constructed a *dream*—an image of themselves in the adult world that guides their decision making. For men, the dream usually emphasized achievement in a career, whereas most career-oriented women had “split dreams” involving both marriage and career. Young adults also formed a relationship with a *mentor* who facilitated realization of their dream—often a senior colleague at work but occasionally a more experienced friend, neighbor, or relative. According to Levinson, men oriented toward high-status careers spent their twenties acquiring professional skills, values, and credentials. In contrast, for many women, career development extended into middle age.

Around age 30, a second transition occurred: Young people who had been preoccupied with career and were single usually focused on finding a life partner, while women who had emphasized marriage and family often developed more individualistic goals. For example, Christy, who had dreamed of becoming a professor, finally earned her doctoral degree in her mid-thirties and secured a college teaching position. Married women tended to expect their spouse to recognize and accommodate their career interests and aspirations. For young people without a satisfying intimate tie or a vocational direction, this can be a time of crisis.

To create an early adulthood culminating life structure, men usually “settled down” by focusing on certain relationships and aspirations, in an effort to establish a niche in society consistent with their values, whether those be wealth, prestige, artistic or scientific achievement, or forms of family or community participation. In his late thirties, Ernie became a partner in his firm, coached his son’s soccer team, and was elected treasurer of his church. He paid less attention to golf, travel, and playing the guitar than previously.

Many women, however, remained unsettled in their thirties, often because they added an occupational or relationship commitment. When her two children were born, Sharese felt torn between her research position in the state health department and her family. She took three months off after the arrival of each baby. When she returned to work, she did not pursue attractive administrative openings that required travel and time away from home. And shortly after Christy began teaching, she and Gary divorced. Becoming a single parent while starting her professional life introduced new strains. Not until middle age did many women reach career maturity and take on more authority in the community.

**Vaillant’s Adaptation to Life**

Vaillant (1977) followed the development of nearly 250 men born in the 1920s, selected for study while they were students at a competitive liberal arts college. Participants were interviewed extensively while in college and answered lengthy questionnaires
during each succeeding decade. Then Vaillant (2002) interviewed them at ages 47, 60, and 70 about work, family, and physical and mental health.

Looking at how the men altered themselves and their social world to adapt to life, Vaillant—like Levinson—confirmed Erikson’s stages but filled gaps between them. After focusing on intimacy concerns in their twenties, the men turned to career consolidation in their thirties. During their forties, they became more generative. In their fifties and sixties, they extended that generativity; they became “keepers of meaning,” or guardians of their culture, expressing a deep need to preserve and pass on cultural traditions by teaching others what they had learned from life experience (Vaillant & Koury, 1994). Finally, in their seventies, the men became more spiritual and reflective, contemplating the meaning of life and accepting its finiteness. In a later lifelong study of a sample of well-educated women, Vaillant (2002) identified a similar series of changes.

Nevertheless, the developmental patterns Vaillant and Levinson described are based largely on interviews with people born in the first few decades of the twentieth century. As our discussion of emerging adulthood illustrates, development is far more variable today—so much so that some researchers doubt that adult psychosocial changes can be organized into distinct stages (Newton & Stewart, 2010). Rather, people may assemble the themes and dilemmas identified by these theorists into individualized arrangements, in a dynamic system of interacting biological, psychological, and social forces. Studies of new generations—both men and women of diverse backgrounds—are needed to shed light on the extent of commonality and variation among young people in psychosocial development.

The Social Clock

As we have seen, changes in society from one generation to the next can affect the life course. Bernice Neugarten (1968a, 1979) identified an important cultural and generational influence on adult development: the social clock—age-graded expectations for major life events, such as beginning a first job, getting married, birth of the first child, buying a home, and retiring. All societies have such timetables. Research of two to three decades ago revealed that conformity to or departure from the social clock can be a major source of adult personality change, affecting self-esteem, independence, responsibility, and other attributes because adults (like children and adolescents) make social comparisons, measuring their progress against that of agemates (Helson, 1992; Vandewater & Stewart, 1997).

But as noted earlier, age-graded expectations for appropriate behavior have become increasingly flexible. Among economically better-off young people, finishing one’s education, marrying, and having children occur much later in the life span than they did a generation or two ago. Furthermore, departures from social-clock life events have become increasingly common. As we will see later, a growing number of women, mostly of lower income, are not marrying and, instead, rearing children as single mothers, turning not to a spouse but rather to their own parents and extended families for assistance (Furstenberg, 2010).

These conditions can create intergenerational tensions when parents expect their young-adult children to attain adult milestones on an outdated schedule, at odds with their children’s current opportunities and desires. Young adults may also feel distressed because their own timing of major milestones is not widely shared by their contemporaries or supported by current public policies, thereby weakening the availability of both informal and formal social supports. (Settersten, 2007). And while rendering greater flexibility and freedom to young people’s lives, an ill-defined social clock likely causes them to feel inadequately grounded—unsure of what others expect and of what to expect of themselves.

In sum, following a social clock of some kind seems to foster confidence and social stability because it guarantees that young people will develop skills, engage in productive work, and gain in understanding of self and others (Hendry & Kloep, 2007). In contrast, “crafting a life of one’s own,” whether self-chosen or the result of circumstances, is risky—more prone to breakdown (Settersten, 2007, p. 244). With this in mind, let’s take a closer look at how men and women traverse major tasks of young adulthood.
ASK YOURSELF

REVIEW According to Levinson, how do the life structures of men and women differ?

CONNECT Return to Chapter 12 and review the contributions of exploration and commitment to a mature identity. Using the two criteria, explain why identity achievement is positively related to attainment of intimacy (fidelity and love), whereas identity moratorium is negatively predictive.

APPLY In view of contemporary changes in the social clock, explain Sharese’s conflicted feelings about marrying Ernie.

REFLECT Describe your early adulthood dream. Then ask a friend or classmate of the other gender to describe his or her dream, and compare the two. Are they consistent with Levinson’s findings?

Close Relationships

To establish an intimate tie to another person, people must find a partner and build an emotional bond that they sustain over time. Although young adults are especially concerned with romantic love, the need for intimacy can also be satisfied through other relationships involving mutual commitment—with friends, siblings, and co-workers.

Romantic Love

At a party during her junior year of college, Sharese fell into conversation with Ernie, a senior and one of the top students in her government class. Sharese had already noticed Ernie in class, and as they talked, she discovered that he was as warm and interesting as he had seemed from a distance. Ernie found Sharese to be lively, intelligent, and attractive. By the end of the evening, the two realized that they had similar opinions on important social issues and liked the same leisure activities. They began dating steadily. Six years later, they married.

Finding a life partner is a major milestone of early adult development, with profound consequences for self-concept and psychological well-being (Meeus et al., 2007). As Sharese and Ernie’s relationship reveals, it is also a complex process that unfolds over time and is affected by a variety of events.

Selecting a Mate. Recall from Chapter 13 that intimate partners generally meet in places where they are likely to find people of their own age, level of education, ethnicity, and religion, or they connect through dating websites. People usually select partners who resemble themselves in other ways—attitudes, personality, educational plans, intelligence, physical attractiveness, and even height (Keith & Schafer, 1991; Simpson & Harris, 1994). Romantic partners sometimes have complementary personality traits—one self-assured and dominant, the other hesitant and submissive. Because this difference permits each to sustain their preferred style of behavior, it contributes to compatibility (Sadler, Ethier, & Woody, 2011). But partners differing in other ways generally are not complementary! For example, a warm, agreeable person and an emotionally cool person usually react with discomfort to each other. Overall, little support exists for the idea that “opposites attract.” Rather, adults typically indicate that their romantic ideal is someone with a personality similar to their own (Markey & Markey, 2007). And partners who are similar in personality and other attributes tend to be more satisfied with their relationship and more likely to stay together (Blackwell & Lichter, 2004; Furnham, 2009).

Nevertheless, in choosing a long-term partner, men and women differ in the importance they place on certain characteristics. In research carried out in diverse industrialized and developing countries, women assign greater weight to intelligence, ambition, financial status, and moral character, whereas men place more emphasis on physical attractiveness and domestic skills. In addition, women prefer a same-age or slightly older partner, men a younger partner (Buunk, 2002; Cramer, Schaefer, & Reid, 2003; Stewart, Stinnett, & Rosenfeld, 2000).

According to an evolutionary perspective, because their capacity to reproduce is limited, women seek a mate with traits, such as earning power and emotional commitment, that help ensure children’s survival and well-being. In contrast, men look for a mate with traits that signal youth, health, sexual pleasure, and ability to give birth to and care for offspring. As further evidence for this difference, men often want a relationship to move quickly toward physical intimacy, whereas women typically prefer to take the time to achieve psychological intimacy first (Buss, 2012).

In an alternative, social learning view, gender roles profoundly influence criteria for mate selection. Beginning in childhood, men learn to be assertive and independent—behaviors needed for success in the work world. Women acquire nurturant behaviors, which facilitate caregiving. Then each sex learns to value traits in the other that fit with this traditional division of labor (Eagly & Wood, 2012). In support of this theory, in cultures and in younger generations experiencing greater gender equity, men and women are more alike in their mate preferences. For example, compared with men in China and Japan, American men place more emphasis on their mate’s financial prospects, less on her domestic skills. Also, when either male or female young adults are asked to imagine themselves as a future home-maker, their preferences for a good provider and an older partner strengthen (Eagly, Eastwick, & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2009).

But neither men nor women put good looks, earning power, and mate’s age relative to their own at the top of their wish list. Rather, they place a higher value on attributes that contribute to relationship satisfaction: mutual attraction, caring, dependability, emotional maturity, and a pleasing disposition (Buss et al., 2001; Toro-Morn & Sprecher, 2003). Nevertheless, men continue to emphasize physical attractiveness more than women do, and women earning capacity more than men do. Furthermore, these
gender differences—along with gender similarity in desire for a caring partner—also characterize gay men and lesbians (Impett & Peplau, 2006; Regan, Medina, & Joshi, 2001). In sum, both biological and social forces contribute to mate selection.

As the Social Issues: Health box on page 474 reveals, young people's choice of an intimate partner and the quality of their relationship also are affected by memories of their early parent–child bond. Finally, for romance to lead to a lasting partnership, it must happen at the right time. Two people may be right for each other, but if one or both do not feel ready to marry, the relationship is likely to dissolve.

The Components of Love. How do we know that we are in love? Robert Sternberg's (1988, 2000, 2006) triangular theory of love identifies three components—intimacy, passion, and commitment—that shift in emphasis as romantic relationships develop. Intimacy, the emotional component, involves warm, tender communication, expressions of concern about the other's well-being, and a desire for the partner to reciprocate. Passion, the desire for sexual activity and romance, is the physical- and psychological-arousal component. Commitment is the cognitive component, leading partners to decide that they are in love and to maintain that love.

At the beginning of a relationship, passionate love—intense sexual attraction—is strong. Gradually, passion declines in favor of intimacy and commitment, which form the basis for companionate love—warm, trusting affection and caregiving (Acker & Davis, 1992; Fehr, 1994). Each aspect of love, however, helps sustain the relationship. Early passionate love is a strong predictor of whether partners keep dating. But without the quiet intimacy, predictability, and shared attitudes and values of companionate love, most romances eventually break up (Hendrick & Hendrick, 2002).

An ongoing relationship requires effort from both partners. Research on newlyweds' feelings and behavior over the first year of marriage reveals that partners gradually felt less "in love" and less pleased with married life (Huston, McHale, & Crouter, 1986; Murray et al., 2011). A variety of factors contributed, including a sharp drop in time spent talking to each other and doing things that brought each other pleasure (for example, saying "I love you" or making the other person laugh). Joint leisure pursuits gave way to more household tasks and chores and, therefore, fewer enjoyable times together. Also, when discussing areas of conflict, partners declined in accurate reading of each other's thoughts and feelings (Kilpatrick, Bissonnette, & Rusbult, 2002). Perhaps after an increasing number of such interactions, they tried less hard to grasp the other's point of view and resorted to well-established habits, such as giving in or withdrawing.

But couples whose relationships endure generally report that they love each other more than they did earlier (Sprecher, 1999). In the transformation of romantic involvements from passionate to companionate, commitment may be the aspect of love that determines whether a relationship survives. Communicating that commitment in ways that strengthen intimacy—through warmth, attentiveness, empathy, caring, acceptance, and respect—strongly predicts relationship maintenance and satisfaction (Neff & Karney, 2008; Lavner & Bradbury, 2012). For example, Sharese's doubts about getting married subsided largely because of Ernie's expressions of commitment. In the most dramatic of these, he painted a large sign, reading "I LOVE SHARESE" and placed it in their front yard on her birthday. Sharese returned Ernie's sentiments, and the intimacy of their bond deepened.

Partners who consistently express their commitment report higher-quality and longer-lasting relationships (Fitzpatrick & Sollie, 1999; Madey & Rodgers, 2009). An important feature of their communication is constructive conflict resolution—directly expressing wishes and needs, listening patiently, asking for clarification, compromising, accepting responsibility, forgiving their partner, and avoiding the escalation of negative interaction sparked by criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling (Johnson et al., 2005; Schneewind & Gerhard, 2002). In a longitudinal study, newlyweds' negativity during problem solving predicted marital dissatisfaction and divorce over the following decade (Sullivan et al., 2010). Those who displayed little warmth and caring often resorted to anger and contempt when dealing with problems.

These findings reveal that deficits in intimacy foreshadow poor conflict-resolution skills and eventual weakening of the marital tie. Although the capacity for constructive conflict resolution is a vital ingredient of enduring marriages, a tender, caring bond seems to energize that capacity, motivating couples to resolve conflicts in ways that preserve a gratifying sense of intimacy.

Compared with women, men are less skilled at communicating in ways that foster intimacy, offering less comfort and helpful support in their close relationships. Men also tend to be less effective at negotiating conflict, frequently avoiding discussion (Burleson & Kunkel, 2006; Wood, 2009).
Social Issues: Health

Childhood Attachment Patterns and Adult Romantic Relationships

In Bowlby’s ethological theory of attachment, the early attachment bond leads to the construction of an internal working model, or set of expectations about attachment figures, that serves as a guide for close relationships throughout life. Adults’ evaluations of their early attachment experiences are related to their parenting behaviors—specifically, to the quality of attachments they build with their children (see page 201 in Chapter 6). Additional evidence indicates that recollections of childhood attachment patterns predict romantic relationships in adulthood.

In studies carried out in Australia, Israel, and the United States, researchers asked people about their early parental bonds (attachment history), their attitudes toward intimate relationships (internal working model), and their actual experiences with romantic partners. In a few studies, investigators also observed couples’ behaviors. Consistent with Bowlby’s theory, adults’ memories and interpretations of childhood attachment patterns were good indicators of internal working models and relationship experiences. (To review patterns of attachment, see pages 197–198.)

**Secure Attachment**

Adults who described their attachment history as secure (warm, loving, and supportive parents) had internal working models that reflected this security. They viewed themselves as likable and easy to get to know, were comfortable with intimacy, and rarely worried about abandonment. They characterized their most important love relationship in terms of trust, happiness, and friendship (Cassidy, 2001). Their behaviors toward their partner were empathic and supportive and their conflict resolution strategies constructive. They were also at ease in turning to their partner for comfort and assistance and reported mutually initiated, enjoyable sexual activity (Collins et al., 2006; Creasey & Jarvis, 2009; Roisman et al., 2002).

**Avoidant Attachment**

Adults who reported an avoidant attachment history (demanding, disrespectful, and critical parents) displayed internal working models that stressed independence, mistrust of love partners, and anxiety about people getting too close. They were convinced that others disliked them and that romantic love is hard to find and rarely lasts. Jealousy, emotional distance, lack of support in response to their partner’s distress, and little enjoyment of physical contact pervaded their most important love relationship (Collins et al., 2006). Avoidant adults often deny attachment needs through excessive work and brief sexual encounters and affairs (Feeney, 1999). They endorse many unrealistic beliefs about relationships—for example, that partners cannot change, that males’ and females’ needs differ, and that “mind reading” is expected (Stackert & Bursik, 2003).

**Resistant Attachment**

Adults recalling a resistant attachment history (parents who responded unpredictably and unfairly) presented internal working models in which they sought to merge completely with another person and fall in love quickly (Cassidy, 2001). At the same time, they worried that their intense feelings would overwhelm others, who really did not love them and would not want to stay with them. Their most important love relationship was riddled with jealousy, emotional highs and lows, and desperation about whether the partner would return their affection (Feeney, 1999). Resistant adults, though offering support, do so in ways that fit poorly with their partner’s needs (Collins et al., 2006). They are also quick to express fear and anger, and they disclose information about themselves at inappropriate times (Brennan & Shaver, 1995).

Are adults’ descriptions of their childhood attachment experiences accurate, or are they distorted or even completely invented? In several longitudinal studies, quality of parent–child interactions, observed or assessed through family interviews 5 to 23 years earlier, were good predictors of internal working models and romantic-relationship quality in early adulthood (Donnellan, Larsen-Rífe, & Conger, 2005; Ogawa et al., 1997; Roisman et al., 2001). These findings suggest that adult recollections bear some resemblance to actual parent–child experiences. However, attributes of the current partner also influence internal working models and intimate ties. When generally insecure individuals manage to form a secure representation of their partner, they report stronger feelings of affection and concern and reduced relationship conflict and anxiety (Sibley & Overall, 2010; Sprecher & Fehr, 2011).

In sum, negative parent–child experiences can be carried forward into adult close relationships. At the same time, internal working models are continuously “updated.” When adults with a history of unhappy love lives have a chance to form a satisfying intimate tie, they may revise their internal working model. As the new partner approaches the relationship with a secure state of mind and sensitive, supportive behavior, the insecure partner may reappraise her expectations and respond in kind (Creasey & Jarvis, 2009). This reciprocity creates a feedback loop through which a revised, more favorable internal working model, along with mutually gratifying interaction, persists over time.
Finally, for gay and lesbian couples, widespread social stigma complicates the process of forging a satisfying, committed bond. Those who worry most about being stigmatized, try to conceal their romance, or harbor negative attitudes toward their own sexual orientation report lower-quality and less enduring love relationships (Mohr & Daly, 2008; Mohr & Fassinger, 2006). Applying What We Know above lists ways to help keep the embers of love aglow in a romantic partnership.

**Culture and the Experience of Love.** Passion and intimacy, which form the basis for romantic love, became the dominant basis for marriage in twentieth-century Western nations as the value of individualism strengthened. From this vantage point, mature love is based on autonomy, appreciation of the partner’s unique qualities, and intense emotion (Hatfield, Rapson, & Martel, 2007). Trying to satisfy dependency needs through an intimate bond is regarded as immature.

This Western view contrasts sharply with the perspectives of Eastern cultures. In Japan, for example, lifelong dependency is accepted and viewed positively. The Japanese word *amae*, or love, means “to depend on another’s benevolence.” The traditional Chinese collectivist view defines the self through role relationships—son or daughter, brother or sister, husband or wife. Feelings of affection are distributed across a broad social network, reducing the intensity of any one relationship.

In choosing a mate, Chinese and Japanese young people are expected to consider obligations to others, especially parents. As one writer summarized, “An American asks, ‘How does my heart feel?’ A Chinese asks, ‘What will other people say?’” (Hsu, 1981, p. 50). College students of Asian heritage are less likely than those of American or European descent to endorse a view of love based solely on physical attraction and deep emotion (Hatfield, Rapson, & Martel, 2007; Hatfield & Sprecher, 1995). Instead, compared to Westerners, they place greater weight on companionship and practical matters—similarity of background, career promise, and likelihood of being a good parent. Similarly, compared with American couples, dating couples in China report less passion but equally strong feelings of intimacy and commitment (Gao, 2001).
Still, even in countries where arranged marriages are still fairly common (including China, India, and Japan), parents and prospective brides and grooms consult one another before moving forward (Goodwin & Pillay, 2006). If parents try to force their children into an unappealing marriage with little chance of love, sympathetic extended family members may come to children's defense. And in developing countries, women who attain higher education are more likely to insist on actively participating in an arranged marriage. They have acquired more of an autonomous identity, along with knowledge and skills from which to bargain for a greater say (Bhopal, 2011). In sum, today young people in many countries consider love to be a prerequisite for marriage, though Westerners assign greater importance to love—especially, its passionate component.

**Friendships**

Like romantic partners and childhood friends, adult friends are usually similar in age, sex, and SES—factors that contribute to common interests, experiences, and needs and therefore to the pleasure derived from the relationship. As in earlier years, friends in adulthood enhance self-esteem and psychological well-being through affirmation, acceptance, autonomy support (permitting disagreement and choice), and support in times of stress (Collins & Madsen, 2006; Deci et al., 2006). Friends also make life more interesting by expanding social opportunities and access to knowledge and points of view.

Trust, intimacy, and loyalty, along with shared interests and values and enjoyment of each other's company, continue to be important in adult friendships, as they were in adolescence (Blieszner & Roberto, 2012). Sharing thoughts and feelings is sometimes greater in friendship than in marriage, although commitment is less strong as friends come and go over the life course. Even so, some adult friendships continue for many years, at times throughout life. Seeing each other with frequency contributes to friendship continuity and because female friends get together more than male friends do—to longer-lasting friendship ties among women (Sherman, de Vries, & Lansford, 2000).

But because of the dramatic rise in social media use, today's friendships are no longer as constrained by physical proximity. Nearly three-fourths of 18- to 29-year-olds who access the Internet use social networking sites; Facebook reports more than 500 million active users worldwide. Consequently, networks of “friends” have expanded. These include new types of friends—for example, people who meet through an interest-group chat room or blog and may never meet in person but who offer emotional support (Lefkowitz, Vukman, & Loken, 2012). As yet, little is known about the role of these online ties in adults’ lives.

Do social networking sites lead young adults to form a large number of acquaintances at the expense of intimate friendships? Research reveals that people with 500 or more Facebook friends actually interact individually—by “liking” posts, leaving comments on walls, or engaging in Facebook chats—with far fewer. Among these large-network Facebook users, men engaged in one-on-one communication with an average of just 10 friends, women with just 16 (Henig & Henig, 2012). Facebook led passive tracking of casual relationships to rise while core friendships remained limited.

**LOOK AND LISTEN**

Ask your Facebook friends to indicate the size of their Facebook network along with the number of friends they interacted with individually during the past month. Do large-network users have only a limited number of core friendships?

**Same-Sex Friendships.** Throughout life, women have more intimate same-sex friendships than men. Extending a pattern evident in childhood and adolescence, female friends often say they prefer to “just talk,” whereas male friends say they like to “do something” such as play sports (see Chapter 12). Barriers to intimacy between male friends include competitiveness, which may make men unwilling to disclose weaknesses, and concern that if they tell about themselves, their friends will not reciprocate (Reid & Fine, 1992). Because of greater intimacy and give-and-take, women generally evaluate their same-sex friendships more positively than men do. But they also have higher expectations of friends (Blieszner & Roberto, 2012). Thus, they are more disapproving if friends do not meet their expectations.

Of course, individual differences in friendship quality exist. The longer-lasting men's friendships are, the closer they become and the more they include disclosure of personal information (Sherman, de Vries, & Lansford, 2000). Furthermore, involvement in family roles affects reliance on friends. For single adults, friends are the preferred companions and confidants. The more intimate young adults' same-sex friendships are in terms of warmth, exchange of social support, and self-disclosure, the more satisfying and longer-lasting the relationship and the
greater its contribution to psychological well-being (Sanderson, Rahm, & Beigbeder, 2005; Sherman, Lansford, & Volling, 2006). Gay and lesbian romantic relationships often develop out of close same-sex friendships, with lesbians, especially, forging compatible friendships before becoming involved romantically (Diamond, 2006).

As they develop romantic ties and marry, young adults—especially men—direct more of their disclosures toward their partners (Carbery & Buhrmester, 1998). Still, friendships continue to be vital contexts for personal sharing throughout adulthood. A best friendship can augment well-being when a marriage is not fully satisfying (but not when the marriage is low in quality) (Birditt & Antonucci, 2007). Turn back to Figure 12.2 to view developmental trends in self-disclosure to romantic partners and friends.

**Other-Sex Friendships.** From the college years through career exploration and settling into work roles, other-sex friendships increase. After marriage, they decline for men but continue to rise for women, who more often form them in the workplace. Highly educated, employed women have the largest number of other-sex friends. Through these relationships, young adults often gain in companionship and self-esteem and learn about masculine and feminine styles of intimacy (Bleske & Buss, 2000). Because men confide especially easily in their female friends, such friendships offer them a unique opportunity to broaden their expressive capacity. And women sometimes say male friends offer objective points of view on problems and situations—perspectives not available from female friends (Monsour, 2002).

Many people try to keep other-sex friendships platonic to safeguard their integrity (Messman, Canary, & Hause, 2000). But sometimes the relationship changes into a romantic bond. When a solid other-sex friendship does evolve into a romance, it may be more stable and enduring than a romantic relationship formed without a foundation in friendship. And emerging adults, especially, are flexible about people they include in their friendship networks (Barry & Madsen, 2010). After a breakup, they may even keep a former romantic partner on as a friend.

**Siblings as Friends.** Whereas intimacy is essential to friendship, commitment—willingness to maintain a relationship and care about the other—is the defining characteristic of family ties. As young people marry and invest less time in developing a romantic partnership, siblings—especially sisters whose earlier bond was positive—become more frequent companions than in adolescence (Birditt & Antonucci, 2007). Often, friend and sibling roles merge. For example, Sharese described Heather’s practical assistance—helping with moving and running errands during an illness—in kinship terms: “She’s like a sister to me. I can always turn to her.” And adult sibling ties resemble friendships, in which the main concerns are staying in contact, offering social support, and enjoying being together.

A childhood history of intense parental favoritism and sibling rivalry can disrupt sibling bonds in adulthood (Panish & Stricker, 2002). But when family experiences have been positive, relationships between adult siblings can be especially close and are important sources of psychological well-being (Sherman, Lansford, & Volling, 2006). A shared background promotes similarity in values and perspectives and the possibility of deep mutual understanding.

In families with five to ten siblings, common in industrialized nations in the past and still widespread in some cultures, close sibling bonds may replace friendships (Fuller-Iglesias, 2010). One 35-year-old with five siblings, who all—with their partners and children—resided in the same small city, remarked, “With a family like this, who needs friends?”

**Loneliness**

Young adults are at risk for loneliness—unhappiness resulting from a gap between the social relationships we currently have and those we desire—when they either do not have an intimate partner or lack gratifying friendships. Though both situations give rise to similar emotions, they are not interchangeable. For example, even though she had several enjoyable friendships, Heather sometimes felt lonely because she was not dating someone she cared about. And although Sharese and Ernie were happily married, they felt lonely after moving to a new town where they did not know anyone.

Loneliness peaks in the late teens and early twenties and then declines steadily into the seventies. Figure 14.2 shows this trend, based on a large Canadian sample ranging in age from 13 to 80 (Rokach, 2001). The rise in loneliness during early adulthood is understandable. As young people move through school and employment settings, they must constantly develop new relationships. Also, young adults may expect more from their intimate ties than older adults, who have learned to live with imperfections (Rokach, 2003). With age, people become better at accepting loneliness and using it for positive ends—to sharpen awareness of their personal fears and needs.

**FIGURE 14.2** Changes in emotional distress due to loneliness from adolescence to late adulthood. More than 700 Canadian 13- to 80-year-olds responded to a questionnaire assessing the extent to which they experienced emotional distress due to loneliness. Loneliness rose sharply from the early teens to the late teens and early twenties and then declined. (Adapted from Rokach, 2001.)
Loneliness is intense after loss of an intimate tie: Separated, divorced, or widowed adults are lonelier than their married, cohabiting, or single counterparts. And immigrants from collectivist cultures report higher levels of loneliness than people born in the United States and Canada (DiTommaso, Brannen, & Burgess, 2005). Leaving a large, close-knit family system for an individualistic society seems to prompt intense feelings of isolation.

Personal characteristics also contribute to loneliness. Young adults who are socially anxious or who have insecure working models of attachment to parents are more often intensely lonely (Jackson et al., 2002). When extreme loneliness persists, it is associated with self-defeating attitudes and behaviors. To prevent anticipated rejection, people who are chronically lonely tend to be socially unresponsive, insensitive, and even hostile to others (Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008). These defensive responses, whether cause or consequence of loneliness, promote further isolation.

As long as loneliness is not overwhelming, it can motivate young people to reach out to others. It can also encourage them to find ways to be comfortably alone and to use this time to understand themselves better (Rokach & Neto, 2006). Healthy personality development involves striking this balance between gratifying relationships with others and contentment within ourselves.

**ASK YOURSELF**

| REVIEW | Describe gender differences in traits usually desired in a long-term partner. What findings indicate that both biological and social forces contribute to those differences? |
|**CONNECT** | How might recollections and evaluations of childhood attachment history, discussed on page 474, affect intimate partners’ readiness to develop companionate love? |
|**APPLY** | After dating for two years, Mindy and Graham reported greater love and relationship satisfaction than during their first few months of dating. What features of communication probably deepened their bond, and why is it likely to endure? |
|**REFLECT** | Do you have a nonromantic, close other-sex friendship? If so, how has it enhanced your emotional and social development? |

### The Family Life Cycle

For most young people, the life course takes shape within the family life cycle—a series of phases characterizing the development of most families around the world. In early adulthood, people typically live on their own, marry, and bear and rear children. In middle age, as their children leave home, their parenting responsibilities diminish. Late adulthood brings retirement, growing old, and (more often for women) death of one’s spouse (McGoldrick & Shibusawa, 2012). Stress tends to be greatest during transitions between phases, as family members redefine and reorganize their relationships.

But as our earlier discussion made clear, we must be careful not to view the family life cycle as a fixed progression. Wide variations exist in the sequence and timing of its phases—high rates of out-of-wedlock births, delayed marriage and childbearing, divorce, and remarriage, among others. And some people, voluntarily or involuntarily, do not experience all family life-cycle phases. Still, the family life-cycle model is useful. It offers an organized way of thinking about how the family system changes over time and the impact of each phase on the family unit and the individuals within it.

### Leaving Home

During her first semester of college, Sharese noticed a change in how she related to her mother. She found it more enjoyable to discuss daily experiences and life goals, sought advice and listened with greater openness, and expressed affection more freely.

Departure from the parental home is a major step toward assuming adult responsibilities. The average age of leaving has risen since the 1960s; today, it resembles the departure age at the beginning of the twentieth century. But reasons for coresidence have changed: Early twentieth-century young adults resided with parents so they could contribute to the family economy.

Twenty-first-century young adults living at home are typically financially dependent on their parents. This trend toward later home-leaving is evident in most industrialized nations, though substantial variation in timing exists. Because government support is available, young adults in the Scandinavian countries move out relatively early (Furstenberg, 2010). In contrast, cultural traditions in Mediterranean countries promote lengthy coresidence, extending for men into the mid-thirties.

Departures for education tend to occur at earlier ages, those for full-time work and marriage later. Because the majority of U.S. young adults enroll in higher education, many leave home around age 18. Those from divorced, single-parent homes tend to be early leavers, perhaps because of family stress (Cooney & Mortimer, 1999). Compared with the previous generation, fewer North American and Western European young people leave home to marry; more do so just to be “independent”—to express their adult status.

Slightly over half of U.S. 18- to 25-year-olds return to their parents’ home for brief periods after first leaving (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b). Usually, role transitions, such as the end of college or military service, bring young people back. But tight job markets, high housing costs, or failures in work or love can also prompt a temporary return home. Also, young people who left because of family conflict often return—largely because they were not ready for independent living.

Residential independence rises steadily with age; by the early thirties, 90 percent of U.S. young adults live on their own (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b). Contrary to popular belief, returning home usually is not a sign of weakness (Ward & Spitze, 2007). Rather, as people encounter unexpected twists and turns
The average age of first marriage in the United States has risen from about 20 for women and 23 for men in 1960 to 26½ for women and 29 for men today. Consequently, just 20 percent of contemporary U.S. 18- to 29-year-olds are married, compared to 60 percent a half-century ago (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b). Postponement of marriage is even more marked in Western Europe—to the early thirties for men and the late twenties for women.

The number of first and second marriages has declined over the last few decades as more people stay single, cohabit, or do not remarry after divorce. In 1960, 85 percent of Americans had been married at least once; today, the figure is 70 percent. At present, 51 percent of U.S. adults, only a slight majority, live together as married couples (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b). In one recent survey, 4 out of 10 American adults agreed that “marriage is becoming obsolete.” Nevertheless, marriage remains a central life goal for young people (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2010; Smith & Snell, 2009). Irrespective of SES and ethnicity, most U.S. 18- to 29-year-olds are married, compared to 60 percent a half-century ago (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b).

Postponement of marriage is even more marked in Western Europe—to the early thirties for men and the late twenties for women.

The number of first and second marriages has declined over the last few decades as more people stay single, cohabit, or do not remarry after divorce. In 1960, 85 percent of Americans had been married at least once; today, the figure is 70 percent. At present, 51 percent of U.S. adults, only a slight majority, live together as married couples (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b). In one recent survey, 4 out of 10 American adults agreed that “marriage is becoming obsolete.” Nevertheless, marriage remains a central life goal for young people (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2010; Smith & Snell, 2009). Irrespective of SES and ethnicity, most U.S. 18- to 23-year-olds say they want to marry and have children.

Same-sex marriages are recognized nationwide in Argentina, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, and Sweden. In the United States, nine states—Connecticut, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Vermont, and Washington—as well as the District of Columbia have legalized same-sex marriage. Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, New Jersey, and Rhode Island grant people in same-sex unions the same legal status as married couples, with California, Nevada, and Oregon extending nearly all spousal rights to same-sex partnerships.

Joining of Families in Marriage

Still, in homes where parents and young adults live together, conflict over personal and moral values related to the young person’s future tends to rise (Rodriguez & López, 2011). But when young adults feel securely attached to parents and well-prepared for independence, departure from the home is linked to more satisfying parent–child interaction and successful transition to adult roles, even among ethnic minorities that strongly emphasize family loyalty and obligations (Smetana, Metzger, & Campione-Barr, 2004; Whiteman, McHale, & Crouter, 2010). And regardless of living arrangements, young people doing well often have close, enjoyable relationships with their parents, who offer help because they see it as key to their child’s future success (Fingerman et al., 2012b).

Finally, leaving home very early can contribute to long-term disadvantage because it is associated with lack of parental financial and emotional support, job seeking rather than education, and earlier childbearing (Furstenberg, 2010). Not surprisingly, non-college-bound youths who move out in their late teens tend to have less successful educational, marriage, and work lives. U.S. poverty-stricken young people are more likely than their nonpoor counterparts to leave home by age 18 (Berzin & De Marco, 2010). But if still at home beyond that age, they are less likely to move out well into their thirties—a trend that may reflect the steep challenges they face in attaining self-sufficiency and exiting poverty.

Joining of Families in Marriage

The average age of first marriage in the United States has risen from about 20 for women and 23 for men in 1960 to 26½ for women and 29 for men today. Consequently, just 20 percent of contemporary U.S. 18- to 29-year-olds are married, compared to 60 percent a half-century ago (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b). Postponement of marriage is even more marked in Western Europe—to the early thirties for men and the late twenties for women.

The number of first and second marriages has declined over the last few decades as more people stay single, cohabit, or do not remarry after divorce. In 1960, 85 percent of Americans had been married at least once; today, the figure is 70 percent. At present, 51 percent of U.S. adults, only a slight majority, live together as married couples (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b). In one recent survey, 4 out of 10 American adults agreed that “marriage is becoming obsolete.” Nevertheless, marriage remains a central life goal for young people (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2010; Smith & Snell, 2009). Irrespective of SES and ethnicity, most U.S. 18- to 23-year-olds say they want to marry and have children.

Same-sex marriages are recognized nationwide in Argentina, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, and Sweden. In the United States, nine states—Connecticut, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Vermont, and Washington—as well as the District of Columbia have legalized same-sex marriage. Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, New Jersey, and Rhode Island grant people in same-sex unions the same legal status as married couples, with California, Nevada, and Oregon extending nearly all spousal rights to same-sex partnerships.
Because legalization is so recent, research on same-sex couples in the context of marriage is scant. But evidence on cohabiting same-sex couples suggests that the same factors that contribute to happiness in other-sex marriages do so in same-sex unions (Diamond, 2006).

Marriage is more than the joining of two individuals. It also requires that two systems—the spouses' families—adapt and overlap to create a new subsystem. Consequently, marriage presents complex challenges. This is especially so today because husband-wife roles are only gradually moving toward true presents complex challenges. This is especially so today because husband-wife roles are only gradually moving toward true partnerships—educationally, occupationally, and in emotional connectedness. Among same-sex couples, acceptance of the relationship by parents, inclusion of the partner in family events, and living in a supportive community where they can be open about their bond benefit relationship satisfaction and durability (Diamond, 2006).

**Marital Roles.** Their honeymoon over, Sharese and Ernie turned to a multitude of issues they had previously decided individually or their families of origin had prescribed—from everyday matters (when and how to eat, sleep, talk, work, relax, have sex, and spend money) to family traditions and rituals (which to retain, which to work out for themselves). And as they related to their social world as a couple, they modified relationships with parents, siblings, extended family, friends, and co-workers.

Contemporary alterations in the context of marriage, including changing gender roles and living farther from family members, mean that couples must work harder than in the past to define their relationships. Although partners are usually similar in religious and ethnic background, “mixed” marriages are increasingly common today. Among new marriages in the United States, 15 percent are between partners of a different race or ethnicity, more than double the rate in 1980 (Taylor et al., 2012). Because of increased opportunities for interracial contact in colleges, workplaces, and neighborhoods and more positive attitudes toward intermarriage, highly educated young adults are more likely than their less educated counterparts to marry partners of another race or ethnicity (Qian & Lichter, 2011). Nevertheless, couples whose backgrounds differ face extra challenges in transitioning to married life.

Because many couples live together beforehand, marriage has become less of a turning point in the family life cycle. Still, defining marital roles can be difficult. Age of marriage is the most consistent predictor of marital stability. Young people who marry in their teens to mid-twenties are more likely to divorce than those who marry later (Lehrer & Chen, 2011). Most of those who marry early have not developed a secure identity or sufficient independence to form a mature marital bond. Both early marriage followed by childbirth and childbirth before marriage are more common among low-SES adults (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b). This acceleration of family formation complicates adjustment to life as a couple.

Despite progress in the area of women’s rights, traditional marriages, involving a clear division of roles—husband as head of household responsible for family economic well-being, wife as caregiver and homemaker—still exist in Western nations. In recent decades, however, these marriages have changed, with many women who focused on motherhood while their children were young returning to the work force later.

In egalitarian marriages, partners relate as equals, sharing power and authority. Both try to balance the time and energy they devote to their occupations, their children, and their relationship. Most well-educated, career-oriented women expect this form of marriage. And college-student couples who eventually intend to marry often plan in advance how they will coordinate work and family roles, especially if the woman intends to enter a male-dominated career (Peake & Harris, 2002).

In Western nations, men in dual-earner marriages participate much more in child care than in the past. U.S. fathers in such marriages put in 85 percent as much time as mothers do (see pages 202–203 in Chapter 6). But housework—cleaning, cooking, laundry, and picking up clutter, which (unlike children) do not require immediate attention—reveals a different story. Recent surveys indicate that women in the United States and most Western European nations spend nearly twice as much time as men on housework, and women in Australia spend four times as much (Sayer, 2010). In Sweden, which places a high value on gender equality, men do more than in other nations. In contrast, men typically do little housework or child care in Japan, where corporate jobs demand long work hours and traditional marriages are common (Geist, 2010; Shwalb et al., 2004).

Women’s housework hours do decline as their employment hours increase. But a close look at gender differences in most industrialized countries reveals that men fail to compensate (Cooke, 2010; Lippe, 2010). As Figure 14.3 shows for Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, men spend the same amount of time at housework, irrespective of their partners’ employment schedules. Therefore, employed women’s reduced housework hours are made possible by either purchase of time-saving services (cleaning help, prepackaged meals) or greater tolerance for unkempt homes, or both. Perhaps women continue to do the lion’s share of housework because their paid
work is viewed as secondary to their husband's, regardless of how much they earn (Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010). In sum, true equality in marriage is still rare, and couples who strive for it usually attain a form of marriage in between traditional and egalitarian.

**Marital Satisfaction.** Despite its rocky beginnings, Sharese and Ernie's marriage grew to be especially happy. In contrast, Christy and Gary became increasingly discontented. What distinguishes satisfying marriages from less successful partnerships? Differences between these two couples mirror the findings of a large body of research on personal and contextual factors, summarized in Table 14.1.

Christy and Gary had children early and struggled financially. Gary's negative, critical personality led him to get along poorly with Christy's parents and to feel threatened when he and Christy disagreed. Christy tried to offer Gary encouragement and support, but her own needs for nurturance and individuality were not being met. Gary was uncomfortable with Christy's career aspirations. As she came closer to attaining them, the couple grew further apart. In contrast, Sharese and Ernie married later, after their educations were complete. They postponed having children until their careers were under way and they had built a sense of togetherness that allowed each to thrive as an individual. Patience, caring, common values and interests, humor, affection, sharing of personal experiences through conversation, cooperating in household responsibilities, and good conflict-resolution skills contributed to their compatibility.

Men tend to report feeling slightly happier with their marriages than women do (Howard, Galambos, & Krahn, 2010; Kurdek, 2005). In the past, quality of the marital relationship had a greater impact on women's psychological well-being, but today it predicts mental health similarly for both genders. Women, however, feel particularly dissatisfied with marriage when the demands of husband, children, housework, and career are overwhelming (Forry, Leslie, & Letiecq, 2007; Saginak & Saginak, 2005). Research in both Western and non-Western industrialized nations reveals that equal power in the relationship and sharing of family responsibilities usually enhance both partners' satisfaction, largely by strengthening marital harmony (Amato & Booth, 1995; Xu & Lai, 2004).

**TABLE 14.1 Factors Related to Marital Satisfaction**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FACTOR</th>
<th>HAPPY MARRIAGE</th>
<th>UNHAPPY MARRIAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family backgrounds</td>
<td>Partners similar in SES, education, religion, and age</td>
<td>Partners very different in SES, education, religion, and age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age at marriage</td>
<td>After mid-20s</td>
<td>Before mid-20s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timing of first pregnancy</td>
<td>After first year of marriage</td>
<td>Before or within first year of marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship to extended family</td>
<td>Warm and positive</td>
<td>Negative; wish to maintain distance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital patterns in extended family</td>
<td>Stable</td>
<td>Unstable; frequent separations and divorces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial and employment status</td>
<td>Secure</td>
<td>Insecure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family responsibilities</td>
<td>Shared; perception of fairness</td>
<td>Largely the woman's responsibility; perception of unfairness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality characteristics and behavior</td>
<td>Emotionally positive; common interests; good conflict-resolution skills</td>
<td>Emotionally negative and impulsive; lack of common interests; poor conflict-resolution skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

Sources: Diamond, Fagundes, & Butterworth, 2010; Gere et al., 2011; Johnson et al., 2005.
Partner Abuse

Violence in families is a widespread health and human rights issue, occurring in all cultures and SES groups. Often one form of domestic violence is linked to others. Recall the story of Karen in Chapter 13. Her husband, Mike, not only assaulted her sexually and physically but also abused her psychologically—isolating, humiliating, and demeaning her. Violent adults also break their partner’s favorite possessions, punch holes in walls, or throw objects. If children are present, they may become victims.

Partner abuse in which husbands are perpetrators and wives are physically injured is most likely to be reported to authorities. But many acts of family violence are not reported. When researchers ask American couples about fights that led to acts of hostility, men and women report similar rates of assault (Dutton, 2007). Women victims are more often physically injured, but sex differences in severity of abuse are small (Dutton, 2012; Ehrensaft, Moffitt, & Caspi, 2004). Partner abuse occurs at about the same rate in same-sex relationships as in heterosexual relationships (Schwartz & Waldo, 2004).

Although self-defense is a frequently reported cause of domestic assault by women, American men and women are equally likely to “strike first” (Currie, 1999; Dutton, 2007). “Getting my partner’s attention,” “gaining control,” and “expressing anger” are reasons that partners typically give for abusing each other.

Factors Related to Partner Abuse

In abusive relationships, dominance–submission sometimes proceeds from husband to wife, sometimes from wife to husband. In about one-third to one-half of cases, both partners are violent (Dutton, Nicholls, & Spidel, 2005). Marvin’s and Pat’s relationship helps us understand how partner abuse escalates. Shortly after their wedding, Pat began complaining about the demands of Marvin’s work and insisted that he come home early to spend time with her. When he resisted, she hurled epithets, threw objects, and slapped him. One evening, Marvin became so angry at Pat’s hostilities that he smashed a dish against the wall, threw his wedding ring at her, and left the house. The next morning, Pat apologized and promised not to attack again. But her outbursts became more frequent and desperate.

These violence–remorse cycles, in which aggression escalates, characterize many abusive relationships. Why do they occur?

Of course, from time to time, individuals are bound to say or do something upsetting to their partner. When this happens, the partner’s attributions, or explanations for the behavior, make a difference. For example, a wife who interprets her husband’s critical remark about her weight as unintentional (“He just isn’t aware I’m sensitive about that”) is far more likely to express both current and long-term marital satisfaction than a wife who views such comments as malicious (“He’s trying to hurt my feelings”) (Barelks & Dijkstra, 2011; Fincham & Bradbury, 2004). In fact, partners who hold overly positive (but still realistic) biases concerning each other’s attributes are happier with their relationships (Claxton et al., 2011). As they turn to each other for feedback about themselves, these “positive illusions” enhance self-esteem and psychological well-being. And over time, positive illusions favorably influence behavior, as partners modify their actions to bring them closer to their partner’s generous perceptions. In contrast, people who feel devalued by their partner tend to react with anxiety and insecurity—more so when they are low in self-esteem, which heightens fear of rejection. To protect themselves, they often mete out criticism and contempt in kind, setting in motion hostile, defensive exchanges that create the very rejection they fear (Murray, 2008). Alternatively, individuals may disengage emotionally, suppressing negative feelings so as not to poison the relationship (Driver et al., 2012). In the process, shared positive emotion also declines, and intimacy erodes.

At their worst, marital relationships can become contexts for intense opposition, dominance–submission, and emotional and physical violence. As the Social Issues: Health box above explains, although women are more often targets of severe partner abuse, both men and women play both roles: perpetrator and victim.

High school and college courses in family life education can promote better mate selection and teach communication

At a societal level, cultural norms that endorse male dominance and female subservience promote partner abuse (Kaya & Cook, 2010). As Figure 14.4 shows, in countries with widespread poverty that also sanction gender inequality, partner violence against women is especially high, affecting nearly half or more of the female population.

Victims are chronically anxious and depressed and experience frequent panic attacks (Warshaw, Brashler, & Gil, 2009). Why don’t they simply leave these destructive relationships? A variety of situational factors discourage them from leaving. A victimized wife may depend on her husband’s earning power or fear even worse harm to herself or her children. Extreme assaults, including homicide, tend to occur after partner separation (Campbell & Glass, 2009). And victims of both sexes, but especially men, are deterred by the embarrassment of going to the police. Also, victims may falsely believe that their partner will change.

**Intervention and Treatment**
Community services available to battered women include crisis telephone lines that provide anonymous counseling and social support and shelters that offer safety and treatment. Because many women return to their abusive partners several times before making their final move, community agencies usually offer therapy to male batterers. Most rely on several months to a year of group sessions that confront rigid gender stereotyping; teach communication, problem solving, and anger control; and use social support to motivate behavior change (Whitaker, Baker, & Arias, 2007).

Although existing treatments are better than none, most are not effective at dealing with relationship difficulties or alcohol abuse. Consequently, many treated perpetrators repeat their violent behavior with the same or a new partner (Hamberger et al., 2009). At present, few interventions acknowledge that men also are victims. Yet ignoring their needs perpetuates domestic violence. When victims do not want to separate from a violent partner, a whole-family treatment approach that focuses on changing partner interaction and reducing high life stress is crucial.

---

**FIGURE 14.4 Assaults by intimate partners against women in seven nations.** In each country, samples of women were asked to indicate whether they had ever experienced partner physical abuse. The incidence, always underreported, is high in all nations. It is especially high in countries that endorse traditional gender roles and suffer from widespread poverty. (From Kaya & Cook, 2010; World Health Organization, 2000, 2005.)

---

skills that contribute to gratifying romantic partnerships and marriages. And counseling aimed at helping couples listen to each other with understanding and empathy, focus on positive traits and memories, and use effective conflict-resolution strategies can cultivate the self-esteem, affection, and respect needed for the relationship to be resilient and enduring (Gottman, 2011).

**Parenthood**
In the past, the issue of whether to have children was, for many adults, a biological given or a compelling social expectation. Today, in Western industrialized nations, it is a matter of true individual choice. Effective birth control techniques enable adults to avoid having children in most instances. And changing cultural values allow people to remain childless with far less fear of social criticism and rejection than a generation or two ago.

In 1950, 78 percent of American married couples were parents. Today, 70 percent bear children, and they tend to be older when they have their first child. Consistent with this pattern of delayed childbearing and with the decision of most women to divide their energies between family and work, family size in industrialized nations has declined. In 1950, the average number of children per woman was 3.1. Currently, it is 2.1 in the United States and Canada; 1.9 in the United Kingdom; 1.7 in Sweden; 1.6 in Canada; 1.4 in Germany; and 1.3 in Italy and Japan (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012a, 2012b). Nevertheless, the vast majority of married people continue to embrace parenthood as one of life’s most meaningful experiences. Why do they do so, and how do the challenges of child rearing affect the adult life course?

**The Decision to Have Children.** The choice of parenthood is affected by a complex array of factors, including financial circumstances, personal and religious values, and health
conditions. Women with traditional gender identities usually decide to have children. Whether a woman is employed has less impact on childbearing than her occupation. Women in high-status, demanding careers less often choose parenthood and, when they do, more often delay it than women with less consuming jobs. Parenthood typically reduces work hours and slows career progress among career-oriented women but has no impact on men (Abele & Spurk, 2011). Professional women seem to consider these consequences in decision making about parenthood.

When Americans are asked about their desire to have children, they mention a variety of advantages and disadvantages. Some ethnic and regional differences exist, but in all groups, the most important reasons for having children include the warm, affectionate relationship and the stimulation and fun that children provide. Also frequently mentioned are growth and learning experiences that children bring to the lives of adults, the desire to have someone carry on after one's own death, and feelings of accomplishment and creativity that come from helping children grow (Cowan & Cowan, 2000; O’Laughlin & Anderson, 2001).

Most young adults also realize that having children means years of extra burdens and responsibilities. Among disadvantages of parenthood, they cite loss of freedom most often, followed by concerns about role overload (not enough time for both family and work responsibilities) and about the financial strains of child rearing. According to a conservative estimate, today’s new parents in the United States will spend about $280,000 to rear a child from birth to age 18, and many will incur substantial additional expense for higher education and financial dependency during emerging adulthood (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2012).

Greater freedom to choose whether and when to have children makes family planning more challenging today than in the past. With each partner expecting an equal say, childbearing often becomes a matter of delicate negotiation (Cowan & Cowan, 2000). Yet carefully weighing the pros and cons of parenthood means that many more couples are making informed and personally meaningful choices—a trend that should increase the chances that they will have children when ready and will find parenting an enriching experience.

**Transition to Parenthood.** The early weeks after a baby enters the family are full of profound changes: constant caregiving, added financial responsibilities, and less time for the couple’s relationship. In response, gender roles of husband and wife usually become more traditional—even for couples like Sharese and Ernie who are strongly committed to gender equality (Katz-Wise, Priess, & Hyde, 2010; Lawrence et al., 2010).

**First and Second Births.** For most new parents, the arrival of a baby—though often associated with mild declines in relationship satisfaction and communication quality—does not cause significant marital strain. Marriages that are gratifying and supportive tend to remain so (Doss et al., 2009; Feeney et al., 2001; Miller, 2000). And the small decrease in satisfaction from pregnancy to post-birth may not be unique to early parenthood (Mitnick, Heyman, & Slep, 2009). Couples who do not become parents also experience a slight decrease in relationship satisfaction across a similar time frame.

Nevertheless, troubled marriages usually become even more distressed after childbirth (Houts et al., 2008; Kluwer & Johnson, 2007). And when expectant mothers anticipate lack of partner support in parenting, their prediction generally becomes reality, yielding an especially difficult post-birth adjustment (Driver et al., 2012; McHale & Rotman, 2007).

Violated expectations about division of labor in the home powerfully affect new parents’ well-being. In dual-earner marriages, the larger the difference in men’s and women’s caregiving responsibilities, the greater the decline in marital satisfaction after childbirth, especially for women—with negative consequences for parent–infant interaction. In contrast, sharing caregiving predicts greater parental happiness and sensitivity to the baby (McHale et al., 2004; Moller, Hwang, & Wickberg, 2008). An exception exists, however, for employed lower-SES women who endorse traditional gender roles. When their husbands take on considerable child-care responsibilities, these mothers tend to report more distress, perhaps because of disappointment at being unable to fulfill their desire to do most of the caregiving (Goldberg & Perry-Jenkins, 2003).

Postponing childbirth until the late twenties or thirties, as more couples do today, eases the transition to parenthood. Waiting permits couples to pursue occupational goals, gain life experience, and strengthen their relationship. Under these circumstances, men are more enthusiastic about becoming fathers and therefore more willing to participate. And women whose careers are well under way and whose marriages are happy are more likely to encourage their husbands to share housework and child care, which fosters fathers’ involvement (Lee & Doherty, 2007; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2008).
A second birth typically requires that fathers take an even more active role in parenting—by caring for the firstborn while the mother is recuperating and by sharing in the high demands of tending to both a baby and a young child. Consequently, well-functioning families with a newborn second child typically pull back from the traditional division of responsibilities that occurred after the first birth. Fathers' willingness to place greater emphasis on the parenting role is strongly linked to mothers' adjustment after the arrival of a second baby (Stewart, 1990). And the support and encouragement of family, friends, and spouse are crucial for fathers' well-being.

**Interventions.** Couples' groups led by counselors are effective in easing the transition to parenthood (Gottman, Gottman, & Shapiro, 2010). Therapists report that many couples know little about caring for infants, perhaps because they grew up in small families where they had few sibling caregiving responsibilities. They are also unaware of the potential impact of a new baby on their relationship.

In one program, first-time expectant couples gathered once a week for six months to discuss their dreams for the family and changes in relationships sparked by the baby's arrival. Eighteen months after the program ended, participating fathers described themselves as more involved with their child than did fathers in a no-intervention condition. Perhaps because of fathers' caregiving assistance, participating mothers maintained their pre-birth satisfaction with family and work roles. Three years after the birth, the marriages of participating couples were intact and just as happy as they had been before parenthood. In contrast, 15 percent of couples receiving no intervention had divorced (Cowan & Cowan, 1997; Schulz, Cowan, & Cowan, 2006). For high-risk parents struggling with poverty or the birth of a child with disabilities, interventions must be more intensive, focusing on enhancing social support and parenting skills (Petch & Halford, 2008).

Generous, paid employment leave—widely available in industrialized nations but not in the United States—is crucial for parents of newborns (see Chapter 3, pages 104–105). But financial pressures mean that many new mothers who are eligible for unpaid work leave take far less than they are guaranteed by U.S. federal law, while new fathers take little or none. When favorable workplace policies exist and parents take advantage of them, couples are more likely to support each other and experience family life as gratifying (Feldman, Sussman, & Zigler, 2004; Han & Waldfogel, 2003). As a result, the stress caused by the birth of a baby stays at manageable levels.

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

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

In today's complex world, men and women are less certain about how to rear children than in previous generations. Clarifying child-rearing values and implementing them in warm, involved, and appropriately demanding ways are crucial for the welfare of the next generation and society. Yet cultures do not always place a high priority on parenting, as indicated by lack of many societal supports for children and families (see Chapter 2, pages 66–67). Furthermore, changing family forms mean that the lives of today's parents differ substantially from those of past generations.

In previous chapters, we discussed a wide variety of influences on child-rearing styles, including personal characteristics of children and parents, SES, and ethnicity. The couple's relationship is also vital. Parents who engage in effective coparenting, collaborating and showing solidarity and respect for each other in parenting roles, are more likely to gain in warm marital interaction, feel competent as parents, use effective child-rearing practices, and have children who are developing well (McHale et al., 2002; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2004). When parents forge this supportive coparenting alliance within the first few months after childbirth, it is more likely to persist (Fivaz-Depeursinge & Corboz-Warnery, 1999).

For employed parents, a major struggle is finding good child care and, when their child is ill or otherwise in need of emergency care, taking time off from work or making other urgent arrangements. The younger the child, the greater parents' sense of risk and difficulty—especially low-income parents, who must work longer hours to pay bills; who often, in the United States, have no workplace benefits (health insurance or paid sick leave); who typically cannot afford the cost of child care; and who experience more immediate concerns about their children's safety (Halpern, 2005b; Nomaguchi & Brown, 2011). When competent, convenient child care is not available, the woman usually faces added pressures. She must either curtail or give up her work, with profound financial consequences in low-income families, or endure unhappy children, missed workdays, and constant searches for new arrangements.

Despite its challenges, rearing young children is a powerful source of adult development. Parents report that it expands their emotional capacities, enriches their lives, and enhances psychological well-being (Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2003; Schindler, 2010). For example, Ernie remarked that through sharing in child rearing, he felt "rounded out" as a person. Other involved parents say that parenthood helped them tune in to others' feelings and needs, required that they become more tolerant, self-confident, and responsible, and broadened their extended family, friendship, and community ties. In a survey of a large, nationally representative sample of U.S. fathers, paternal history of engagement with children predicted greater community service and assistance of extended family members in middle adulthood (Eggebeen, Dew, & Knoester, 2010).

**Families with Adolescents.** Adolescence brings sharp changes in parental roles. In Chapters 11 and 12, we noted that parents must establish a revised relationship with their adolescent children—blending guidance with freedom and gradually loosening control. As adolescents gain in autonomy and explore values and goals in their search for identity, parents often complain that their teenager is too focused on peers and no longer
cares about being with the family. Heightened parent–child bick­
ering over everyday issues takes a toll, especially on mothers, who do most of the negotiating with teenagers.

Overall, children seem to navigate the challenges of adoles­
cence more easily than parents, many of whom report a dip in marital and life satisfaction. More people seek family therapy during this period of the family life cycle than during any other (Steinberg & Silk, 2002).

**Parent Education.** In the past, family life changed little from one generation to the next, and adults learned what they needed to know about parenting through modeling and direct experience. Today’s world confronts adults with a host of factors that impinge on their ability to succeed as parents.

Contemporary parents eagerly seek information on child rearing. In addition to popular parenting books, magazines, and websites, new mothers access knowledge about parenting through social media, including chat rooms and blogs. They also reach out to networks of other women for knowledge and assistance. Fathers, by contrast, rarely have social networks through which they can learn about child care and child rearing. Consequently, they frequently turn to mothers to figure out how to relate to their child, especially if they have a close, confiding marriage (Lamb & Lewis, 2004; McHale, Kuersten-Hogan, & Rao, 2004). Recall from Chapter 6 that marital harmony fosters both parents’ positive engagement with babies, but it is especially important for fathers.

Parent education courses exist to help parents clarify child-rearing values, improve family communication, understand how children develop, and apply more effective parenting strategies. A variety of programs yield positive outcomes, including enhanced knowledge of effective parenting practices, improved parent–child interaction, and heightened awareness by par­ents of their role as educators of their children (Bert, Ferris, & Borkowski, 2008; Smith, Perou, & Lesesne, 2002). Another benefit is social support—opportunities to discuss concerns with experts and other dedicated parents, who share the view that no job is more important to the future of society than child rearing.

**ASK YOURSELF**

**REVIEW What strategies can couples use to ease the transition to parenthood?**

**CONNECT What aspects of adolescent development make rearing teenagers stressful for parents, leading to a dip in marital and life satisfaction? (See Chapters 11 and 12.)**

**APPLY After her wedding, Sharese was convinced she had made a mistake. Cite factors that sustained her marriage and led it to become especially happy.**

**REFLECT Do you live with your parents or on your own? Describe factors that contributed to your current living arrangements. How would you characterize the quality of your relationship with your parents? Do your responses match the findings of research?**

---

**The Diversity of Adult Lifestyles**

The current array of adult lifestyles dates back to the 1960s, when young people began to question the conventional wisdom of previous generations and to ask, “How can I find happiness? What kinds of commitments should I make to live a full and rewarding life?” As the public became more accepting of diverse lifestyles, choices such as staying single, cohabiting, remaining childless, and divorcing seemed more available.

Today, nontraditional family options have penetrated the American mainstream. Many adults experience not just one but several. As we will see, some adults make a deliberate decision to adopt a lifestyle, whereas others drift into it. The lifestyle may be imposed by society, as is the case for cohabiting same-sex couples in the United States, who cannot marry legally in most states. Or people may choose a certain lifestyle because they feel pushed away from another, such as a marriage gone sour. In sum, the adoption of a lifestyle can be within or beyond the person’s control.

**Singlehood**

On finishing her education, Heather joined the Peace Corps and spent four years in Ghana. Though open to a long-term relation­ship, she had only fleeting romances. After she returned to the United States, she went from one temporary job to another until, at age 30, she finally found steady employment in a large inter­national travel company as a tour director. A few years later, she

---

Men are less likely than women to learn about child rearing through informal social networks. Fathers especially may benefit from parent education programs that help them clarify child-rearing values, learn about child development, and parent effectively.
advanced into a management position. At age 35, over lunch with Sharesse, she reflected on her life: “I was open to marriage, but after I got my career going, it would have interfered. Now I’m so used to independence that I question whether I could adjust to living with another person. I like being able to pick up and go where I want, when I want, without having to ask anyone or think about caring for anyone. But there’s a tradeoff: I sleep alone, eat most of my meals alone, and spend a lot of my leisure time alone.”

Singlehood—not living with an intimate partner—has increased in recent years, especially among young adults. For example, the rate of never-married Americans in their twenties has nearly tripled since 1960, to 75 percent of young people. As they move into their thirties, more people marry: By 30 to 34 years of age, about 32 percent remain single. Today, more people marry later or not at all, and divorce has added to the numbers with negative stereotyping of singles as socially immature and professional success. Since then, it has increased in all groups, with an especially dramatic rise among well-educated, economically advantaged young people. Today’s young adults are more likely than those of a generation ago to form their first conjugal union through cohabitation.

Compared with single men, single women more easily come to terms with their lifestyle, in part because of the greater social support available to women through intimate same-sex friendships. Ethnic differences also exist. For example, the percentage of never-married African Americans is nearly twice as great as that of Caucasian Americans in early adulthood (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b). As we will see later, high unemployment among black men interferes with marriage. Many African Americans eventually marry in their late thirties and forties, a period in which black and white marriage rates come closer together.

Singlehood can have a variety of meanings. At one extreme are people who choose it deliberately; at the other those who see themselves as single because of circumstances beyond their control. Most, like Heather, are in the middle—adults who wanted to marry but made choices that took them in a different direction. In interview studies of never-married women, some said they focused on occupational goals instead of marriage. Others reported that they found singlehood preferable to their disappointing intimate relationships. And still others commented that they just did not meet “the right person” (Baumbusch, 2004; Lewis, 2000).

The most commonly mentioned advantages of singlehood are freedom and mobility. But singles also recognize drawbacks—loneliness, the dating grind, limited sexual and social life, reduced sense of security, and feelings of exclusion from the world of married couples. Single men have more physical and mental health problems than single women, who more easily come to terms with their lifestyle, in part because of the greater social support available to women through intimate same-sex friendships (Pinquart, 2003). But overall, people over age 35 who have always been single are content with their lives (DePaulo & Morris, 2005; Lucas et al., 2003). Though not quite as happy as married people, they report feeling considerably happier than people recently widowed or divorced.

Nevertheless, many single people go through a stressful period in their late twenties or early thirties, when most of their friends have married. Widespread veneration of marriage, along with negative stereotyping of singles as socially immature and self-centered, contributes (Morris et al., 2008). The mid-thirties is another trying time, as the biological deadline for pregnancy approaches. Interviews with 28- to 34-year-old single women revealed that they were acutely aware of pressures from family members, the shrinking pool of eligible men, the risks of later childbearing, and a sense of being different (Sharp & Ganong, 2011). A few decide to become parents through artificial insemination or a love affair. And an increasing number are adopting, often from overseas countries.

### Cohabitation

**Cohabitation** refers to the lifestyle of unmarried couples who have a sexually intimate relationship and who share a residence. Until the 1960s, cohabitation in Western nations was largely limited to low-SES adults. Since then, it has increased in all groups, with an especially dramatic rise among well-educated, economically advantaged young people. Today’s young adults are much more likely than those of a generation ago to form their first conjugal union through cohabitation. Among American young people, cohabitation is now the preferred mode of entry into a committed intimate partnership, chosen by over 60 percent of couples (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b). Cohabitation rates are even higher among adults with failed marriages, about one-third of these households include children.
For some couples, cohabitation serves as preparation for marriage—a time to test the relationship and get used to living together. For others, however, it is an alternative to marriage, offering the rewards of sexual intimacy and companionship along with the possibility of easy departure if satisfaction declines. It is not surprising, then, that cohabiters vary greatly in the extent to which they share money and possessions and take responsibility for each other’s children.

Although Americans are more open to cohabitation than in the past, their attitudes are not as positive as those of Western Europeans. In the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden, cohabitation is thoroughly integrated into society, with cohabiters having many of the same legal rights and responsibilities as married couples. Between 70 and 90 percent of young people cohabit in their first intimate partnership, and cohabiters are nearly as committed to each other as married people (Fussell & Gauthier, 2005; Perelli-Harris & Gassen, 2012). Whereas about 50 percent of American cohabiting unions break up within two years, only 6 to 16 percent dissolve in Western Europe (Jose, O’Leary, & Moyer, 2010; Kiernan, 2002). When they decide to marry, Dutch, Norwegian, and Swedish cohabiters more often do so to legalize their relationships, especially for the sake of children. American cohabiters typically marry to confirm their love and commitment—sentiments that Western Europeans attach to cohabitation.

Furthermore, U.S. couples who cohabit before they are engaged to be married are more prone to divorce than couples who wait to live together until after they have made a commitment to each other. But this association is less strong or absent in Western European nations (Jose, O’Leary, & Moyer, 2010; Kline et al., 2004; Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2006). U.S. young people who cohabit prior to engagement tend to have less conventional values. They have had more sexual partners and are more politically liberal, less religious, and more androgynous. In addition, a larger number have parents who divorced (Kurdek, 2006).

These personal characteristics may contribute to the negative outcomes associated with cohabitation. But the cohabitation experience itself also plays a role. Cohabiters are less likely than married people to pool finances or jointly own a house. In addition, both preengagement cohabiters and formerly cohabiting married couples have poorer-quality relationships (Cohan & Kleinbaum, 2002; Kline et al., 2004). Perhaps the open-ended nature of the cohabiting relationship reduces motivation to develop effective conflict-resolution skills. When cohabiters carry negative communication into marriage, it undermines marital satisfaction. Finally, a history of parental divorce may increase cohabiters’ willingness to dissolve a union when it becomes less satisfying.

Certain couples, however, are exceptions to the trends just described. People who cohabit after separation or divorce often test a new relationship carefully to prevent another failure, especially when children are involved. As a result, they cohabit longer and are less likely to move toward marriage. Similarly, cohabitation is often an alternative to marriage among low-SES couples (Pew Research Center, 2010). Many regard their earning power as too uncertain for marriage and continue living together, sometimes giving birth to children and marrying when their financial status improves.

Finally, cohabiting gay and lesbian couples report strong relationship commitment (Kurdek, 2006). When their relationships become difficult, they end more often than those of heterosexual cohabiters and married couples because of fewer barriers to separating. For example, in 37 U.S. states, same-sex cohabiters cannot plan to legalize their relationship because of laws or constitutional provisions that limit marriage to a man and a woman. Furthermore, same-sex cohabiters are less likely to have children in common and more likely to have extended family members who are unsupportive (Lau, 2012; Rothblum, Balsam, & Solomon, 2011). In a study in which same-sex couples in Vermont were followed over three years, cohabiters were more likely than couples in civil unions to have ended their relationships (Balsam et al., 2008). Civil unions were as stable as heterosexual marriages.

For people not ready for marriage, cohabitation combines the rewards of a close relationship with the opportunity to avoid the legal obligations of marriage. But cohabiting couples can encounter difficulties precisely because they do not have these obligations. Bitter fights over property, money, rental contracts, and responsibility for children are the rule rather than the exception when unmarried couples split up.

**Childlessness**

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

Childlessness in the United States has increased steadily, from 9 percent of women between ages 20 and 44 in 1975 to
about 20 percent today, with similar trends occurring in other Western nations (Livingston & Cohn, 2010). Some people are involuntarily childless because they did not find a partner with whom to share parenthood or their efforts at fertility treatments did not succeed. Beatrice and Daniel are in another category—men and women who are voluntarily childless. But voluntary childlessness is not always a permanent condition. A few people decide early that they do not want to be parents and stick to their plans. But most, like Beatrice and Daniel, make their decision after they are married and have developed a lifestyle they do not want to give up. Later, some change their minds.

Besides marital satisfaction and freedom from child-care responsibilities, common reasons for not having children include the woman’s career and economic security (Amba & Martinez, 2006; Kemkes-Gronenhaver, 2003). Consistent with these motives, the voluntarily childless are usually college-educated, have prestigious occupations, and are highly committed to their work.

Negative stereotypes of nonparenthood—as a sign of self-indulgence and irresponsibility—have weakened in Western nations as people have become more accepting of diverse lifestyles (Dykstra & Hagestad, 2007). Acceptance is greatest among highly educated women, who—while not necessarily embracing childlessness—may be more attuned to the demands of parenthood, which are still borne mostly by women (Koropeckyj-Cox & Pendell, 2007).

In line with this trend, voluntarily childless adults are just as content with their lives as parents who have warm relationships with their children. But adults who cannot overcome infertility are likely to be dissatisfied—some profoundly disappointed, others more ambivalent, depending on compensations in other areas of their lives (Letherby, 2002; Nichols & Pace-Nichols, 2000). Childlessness seems to interfere with adjustment and life satisfaction only when it is beyond a person’s control.

Divorce and Remarriage

Divorce rates have stabilized since the mid-1980s, partly because of rising age of marriage, which is linked to greater financial stability and marital satisfaction. In addition, the increase in cohabitation has curtailed divorce: Many relationships that once would have been marriages now break up before marriage. Still, 45 percent of U.S. marriages dissolve (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b). Because most divorces occur within seven years of marriage, many involve young children. Divorces are also common during the transition to midlife, when people have adolescent children—a period (as noted earlier) of reduced marital satisfaction.

Nearly two-thirds of divorced adults remarry. But marital failure is even greater during the first few years of second marriages—10 percent above that for first marriages. Afterward, the divorce rates for first and second marriages are similar (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b).

Factors Related to Divorce. Why do so many marriages fail? As Christy and Gary’s divorce illustrates, the most obvious reason is a disrupted husband–wife relationship. Christy and Gary did not argue more than Sharese and Ernie. But their problem-solving style was ineffective, and it weakened their attachment to each other. When Christy raised concerns, Gary reacted with contempt, resentment, defensiveness, and retreat. This demand–withdraw pattern is found in many partners who split up, with women more often insisting on change and men more often retreating (Birditt et al., 2010; Haltzman, Holstein, & Moss, 2007). Another typical style involves little conflict, but partners increasingly lead separate lives because they have different expectations of family life and few shared interests, activities, or friends (Gottman & Levenson, 2000).

What problems underlie these maladaptive communication patterns? In a nine-year longitudinal study, researchers asked a U.S. national sample of 2,000 married people about marital problems and followed up three, six, and nine years later to find out who had separated or divorced (Amato & Rogers, 1997). Wives reported more problems than husbands, with the gender difference largely involving the wife’s emotions, such as anger and hurt feelings. Husbands seemed to have difficulty sensing their wife’s distress, which contributed to her view of the marriage as unhappy. Regardless of which spouse reported the problem or was judged responsible for it, the strongest predictors of divorce during the following decade were infidelity, spending money foolishly, drinking or using drugs, expressing jealousy, engaging in irritating habits, and moodiness.

Background factors that increase the chances of divorce are younger age at marriage, not attending religious services, being previously divorced, and having parents who had divorced—all of which are linked to marital difficulties. For example, couples who married at younger ages are more likely to report infidelity and jealousy. Low religious involvement subtracts an influential context for instilling positive marital attitudes and behaviors. And research following families over two decades reveals that parental divorce elevates risk of divorce in at least two succeeding generations, in part because it promotes child adjustment problems and reduces commitment to the norm of lifelong marriage (Amato & Cheadle, 2005; Wolfinger, 2005). As a result, when
adult children marry, they are more likely to engage in incon-
siderate behaviors and to have conflict-ridden relationships and
less likely to try to work through these difficulties or (if they do
try) to have the skills to do so. Marriage to a caring spouse from
a stable family background reduces these negative outcomes.

Poorly educated, economically disadvantaged couples who
suffer multiple life stresses are especially likely to split up
(Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006). But Christy’s case represents
another trend—rising marital breakup among well-educated,
career-oriented, economically independent women. When a
woman’s workplace status and income exceed her husband’s,
the risk of divorce increases—an association explained by dif-
fering gender-role beliefs between the spouses (Popenoe, 2006).
A husband’s lack of support for his wife’s career can greatly
heighten her unhappiness and, therefore, the chances that she
will end the marriage. Overall, women are twice as likely as men
to initiate divorce proceedings.

In addition to the relationship factors just described,
American individualism—which includes the belief that each
person has the right to pursue self-expression and personal
happiness—contributes to the unusually high U.S. divorce rate
(see page 346 in Chapter 10) (Cherlin, 2009). Whether cohabit-
ing or married, Americans partner, split up, and repartner more
often than anywhere else in the industrialized world. When
people are dissatisfied with their intimate relationship, the cul-
tural value of individualism encourages moving on.

**Consequences of Divorce.** Divorce involves the loss
of a way of life and therefore a part of the self sustained by that
way of life. As a result, it provides opportunities for both positive
and negative change. Immediately after separation, both men
and women experience disrupted social networks, a decline in
social support, and increased anxiety, depression, and impul-
sivity (Amato, 2000). For most, these reactions subside within
two years. Nonworking women who organized their identities
around their husbands have an especially hard time. And some
noncustodial fathers feel disoriented and rootless as a result
of decreased contact with their children (Coleman, Ganong, &
Leon, 2006). Others distract themselves with a frenzy of social
activity.

Finding a new partner contributes most to the life satisfac-
tion of divorced adults (Forste & Heaton, 2004; Wang & Amato,
2000). But it is more crucial for men, who adjust less well than
women to living on their own. Despite loneliness and a drop
in income (see Chapter 10), women tend to bounce back more
easily from divorce. Christy, for example, developed new friend-
ships and a gratifying sense of self-reliance. However, a few
women—especially those who are anxious and fearful, who
remain strongly attached to their ex-spouses, or who lack edu-
cation and job skills—experience a drop in self-esteem and
persistent depression (Amato, 2000; Coleman, Ganong, & Leon,
2006). Job training, continued education, career advancement,
and social support from family and friends play vital roles in
the economic and psychological well-being of many divorced
women.

**Remarriage.** On average, people remarry within four years
of divorce, men somewhat faster than women. As noted earlier,
remarriages are especially vulnerable to breakup, for several
reasons. First, practical matters—financial security, help in rear-
ing children, relief from loneliness, and social acceptance—
figure more heavily into a second marriage than a first. These
concerns do not provide a sound footing for a lasting part-
nership. Second, some people transfer the negative patterns of
interaction learned in their first marriage to the second. Third,
people with a failed marriage behind them are even more likely
to view divorce as an acceptable solution when marital difficul-
ties resurface. Finally, remarried couples experience more stress
from stepfamily situations (Coleman, Ganong, & Leon, 2006).
As we will see, stepparent–stepchild ties are powerful predictors
of marital happiness.

Blended families generally take three to five years to
develop the connectedness and comfort of intact biological
families. Family life education, couples counseling, and group
therapy can help divorced and remarried adults adapt to the
complexities of their new circumstances (Whiteside, 2006).

**Varied Styles of Parenthood**

Diverse family forms result in varied styles of parenthood. Each
type of family—blended, never-married, gay or lesbian, among
others—presents unique challenges to parenting competence
and adult psychological well-being.

**Stepparents.** Whether stepchildren live in the household
or visit only occasionally, stepparents are in a difficult position.
Stepparents enter the family as outsiders and, too often, move
into their new parental role too quickly. Lacking a warm attach-
ment bond to build on, their discipline is usually ineffective.
Stepparents frequently criticize the biological parent for being
too lenient, while the biological parent may view the stepparent
as too harsh (Ganong & Coleman, 2004). Compared with first-
marriage parents, remarried parents typically report higher
levels of tension and disagreement, most centering on child-
rearing issues. When both adults have children from prior mar-
rriages, rather than only one, more opportunities for conflict
exist and relationship quality is poorer.

Stepmothers are especially likely to experience conflict.
Those who have not previously been married and had children
may have an idealized image of family life, which is quickly
shattered. Expected to be in charge of family relationships,
stepmothers quickly find that stepparent–stepchild ties do not
develop instantly. After divorce, biological mothers are fre-
cently jealous, uncooperative, and possessive of their chil-
dren. Even when their husbands do not have custody, step-
mothers feel stressed. As stepchildren go in and out of the home,
stepmothers find life easier without resistant children and then
may feel guilty about their “unmaternal” feelings (Church, 2004;
MacDonald & DeMaris, 1996). No matter how hard a step-
mother tries to build a close parent–child bond, her efforts are
probably doomed to failure in the short run.
Stepfathers with children of their own tend to establish positive bonds with stepchildren relatively quickly, perhaps because they are experienced in building warm parent–child ties and feel less pressure than stepmothers to plunge into parenting (Ganong et al., 1999). But stepfathers without biological children (like their stepmother counterparts) can have unrealistic expectations. Or their wives may push them into the father role, sparking negativity from children. After making several overtures that are ignored or rebuffed, these stepfathers frequently withdraw from parenting (Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992).

In interviews in which young-adult stepchildren provided retrospective accounts of their stepparent relationships, the quality of these ties varied widely, from warm and loving, to ambivalent, to coexisting, to critical and rejecting. A caring husband–wife bond, sensitive relationship-building behaviors by the stepparent, cooperation from the biological parent, and supportive extended family members all affected the development of stepparent–stepchild ties. Over time, many couples built a coparenting partnership that improved interactions with stepchildren (Ganong, Coleman, & Jamison, 2011). But because stepparent–stepchild bonds are hard to establish, the divorce rate is higher for remarried couples with stepchildren than for those without them.

**Never-Married Single Parents.** Over the past several decades, births to unmarried mothers in industrialized nations have increased dramatically. Today, about 40 percent of U.S. births are to single mothers, more than double the percentage in 1980. Whereas teenage parenthood has recently declined (see Chapter 11), unwed parenthood among mothers in their twenties and older has risen. About 11 percent of U.S. children live with a single mother who has never married (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b). In recent years, more single women over age 30 in high-status occupations have become parents. But they are still few in number, and little is known about how they and their children fare.

In the United States, African-American young women make up the largest group of never-married parents. About 64 percent of births to black mothers in their twenties are to women without a partner, compared with 28 percent of births to white women (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b). African-American women postpone marriage more and childbirth less than women in other U.S. ethnic groups. Job loss, persisting unemployment, and consequent inability of many black men to support a family have contributed to the number of African-American never-married, single-mother families.

Never-married African-American mothers tap the extended family, especially their own mothers and sometimes male relatives, for help in rearing their children (Gasden, 1999; Jayakody & Kalil, 2002). For about one-third, marriage—not necessarily to the child's biological father—occurs within nine years after birth of the first child (Wu, Bumpass, & Musick, 2001). These couples function much like other first-marriage parents. Their children are often unaware that the father is a stepfather, and parents do not report the child-rearing difficulties typical of blended families (Ganong & Coleman, 1994).

Still, for low-SES women, never-married parenthood generally increases financial hardship; about half live in poverty (Mather, 2010). Nearly 50 percent of white mothers and 60 percent of black mothers have a second child while unmarried. And they are far less likely than divorced mothers to receive paternal child support payments, although child support enforcement both reduces financial stress and increases father involvement (Huang, 2006).

Children of never-married mothers who lack father involvement achieve less well in school and display more antisocial behavior than children in low-SES, first-marriage families—problems that make life more difficult for mothers (Waldfogel, Craigie, & Brooks-Gunn, 2010). But marriage to the child's biological father benefits children only when the father is a reliable source of economic and emotional support. For example, adolescents who feel close to their nonresident father fare better in school performance and emotional and social adjustment than do those in two-parent homes where a close father tie is lacking (Booth, Scott, & King, 2009).

Unfortunately, most unwed fathers—who usually have no more than a modest education and are doing poorly financially—gradually spend less and less time with their children (Lerman, 2010). Strengthening parenting skills, social support, education, and employment opportunities for low-SES parents would greatly enhance the well-being of unmarried mothers and their children.

**Gay and Lesbian Parents.** According to recent estimates, about 20 to 35 percent of lesbian couples and 5 to 15 percent of gay couples are parents, most through previous heterosexual partnerships. Gay and lesbian parents are as committed to and effective at child rearing as heterosexual parents. Overall, families headed by same-sex partners can be distinguished from other families only by issues related to living in a non-supportive society.
marriages, some through adoption, and a growing number through reproductive technologies (Gates et al., 2007; Goldberg, 2010; Patterson & Riskind, 2010). In the past, because of laws assuming that homosexuals could not be adequate parents, those who divorced a heterosexual partner lost custody of their children. Today, some U.S. states hold that sexual orientation by itself is irrelevant to custody. A few U.S. states, however, ban gay and lesbian couples from adopting children. Among other countries, gay and lesbian adoptions are legal in Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Iceland, Mexico, the Netherlands, Norway, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and Uruguay.

Most research on homosexual parents and children is limited to volunteer samples. Findings indicate that gay and lesbian parents are as committed to and effective at child rearing as heterosexual parents and sometimes more so (Bos, van Balen, & van den Boom, 2007; Tasker, 2005). Also, whether born to or adopted by their parents or conceived through donor insemination, children in gay and lesbian families did not differ from the children of heterosexuals in mental health, peer relations, or gender-role behavior (Allen & Burrell, 1996; Bos & Sandfort, 2010; Farr, Forssell, & Patterson, 2010; Goldberg, 2010). Two additional studies, which surmounted the potential bias associated with a volunteer sample by including all lesbian-mother families who had conceived children at a fertility clinic, also reported that children were developing favorably (Brewaeys et al., 1997; Chan, Raboy, & Patterson, 1998). Likewise, among participants drawn from a representative sample of British mothers and their 7-year-olds, children reared in lesbian-mother families did not differ from children reared in heterosexual families in adjustment and gender-role preferences (Golombok et al., 2003).

Furthermore, children of gay and lesbian parents are similar to other children in sexual orientation; the large majority are heterosexual (Tasker, 2005). But some evidence suggests that more adolescents from homosexual families experiment for a time with partners of both sexes, perhaps as a result of being reared in families and communities especially tolerant of non-conformity and difference (Bos, van Dalen, & Van den Boom, 2004; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001).

When extended-family members withhold acceptance, homosexual mothers and fathers often build “families of choice” through friends, who assume the roles of relatives. Usually, however, parents of gays and lesbians cannot endure a permanent rift (Fisher, Easterly, & Lazear, 2008). With time, interactions between homosexual parents and their families of origin become more positive and supportive.

A major concern of gay and lesbian parents is that their children will be stigmatized by their parents’ sexual orientation. Most studies indicate that incidents of teasing or bullying are rare because parents and children carefully manage the information they reveal to others (Tasker, 2005). Overall, families headed by homosexuals can be distinguished from other families only by issues related to living in a non-supportive society.

### ASK YOURSELF

**REVIEW** Why is never-married single parenthood especially high among African Americans? What conditions affect parent and child well-being in these families?

**CONNECT** Return to Chapter 10, pages 346–350, and review the impact of divorce and remarriage on children and adolescents. How do those findings resemble outcomes for adults? What might account for the similarities?

**APPLY** After dating for three months, Wanda and Scott decided to live together. Their parents worried that cohabitation would reduce the couple’s chances for a successful marriage. Is this fear justified? Why or why not?

**REFLECT** Do your own experiences or those of your friends match research findings on cohabitation, singlehood, never-married parents, or gay and lesbian parents? Select one instance and discuss.

### Career Development

Besides family life, vocational life is a vital domain of social development in early adulthood. After choosing an occupation, young people must learn how to perform its tasks well, get along with co-workers, respond to authority, and protect their own interests. When work experiences go well, adults develop new competencies, feel a sense of personal accomplishment, make new friends, and become financially independent and secure. And as we have seen, especially for women but also for men who support their partner’s career development, aspirations and accomplishments in the workplace and the family are interwoven.

### Establishing a Career

Our discussion earlier in this chapter highlighted diverse paths and timetables for career development. **TAKE A MOMENT**... Consider, once again, the wide variations among Sharese, Ernie, Christy, and Gary. Notice that Sharese and Christy, like many women, had **discontinuous** career paths—ones that were interrupted or deferred by child rearing and other family needs (Huang & Sverke, 2007; Moen & Roehling, 2005). Furthermore, not all people embark on the vocation of their dreams. As noted in our consideration of emerging adulthood, the late-2000s recession greatly increased the number of young people in jobs that do not match their educational preparation.

Over half of adults in their twenties with bachelor’s or graduate degrees do manage to enter their chosen field. Even so, initial experiences can be discouraging. At the health department, Sharese discovered that paperwork consumed much of her day. Even so, initial experiences can be discouraging. At the health department, Sharese discovered that paperwork consumed much of her day. Because each project had a deadline, the pressure of productivity weighed heavily on her. Adjusting to unanticipated disappointments in salary, supervisors, and co-workers is difficult.
As new employees become aware of the gap between their expectations and reality, resignations are common. Furthermore, in careers with opportunities for promotion, high aspirations must often be revised downward because the structure of most work settings resembles a pyramid, with fewer management and supervisory jobs. For these reasons—in addition to layoffs due to financial exigencies—workers in their twenties change jobs often; five or six changes are not unusual.

Recall from our discussion of Levinson’s theory that career progress often depends on the quality of a mentoring relationship. Access to an effective mentor—a person with advanced experience and knowledge who is invested in the junior person’s career success and who fosters a bond of trust—is jointly affected by the availability of willing people and the individual’s capacity to select an appropriate individual (Ramaswami & Dreher, 2007). The best mentors are seldom top executives, who tend to be preoccupied and therefore less helpful and sympathetic. Usually, young adults fare better with mentors who are just above them in experience and advancement or who are members of their professional associations (Allen & Finkelstein, 2003). Furthermore, mentoring early in a worker’s career increases the likelihood of mentoring later on (Bozionelos et al., 2011). The professional and personal benefits of mentoring induce employees to provide it to others and to seek it again for themselves.

Women and Ethnic Minorities

Women and ethnic minorities have penetrated nearly all professions, but their talents often are not developed to the fullest. Women, especially those who are members of economically disadvantaged minorities, remain concentrated in occupations that offer little opportunity for advancement, and they are underrepresented in executive and managerial roles (see Chapter 13). And although the overall difference between men’s and women’s earnings is smaller today than 30 years ago, it remains considerable in all industrialized countries (Rampell, 2010). U.S. government surveys following 9,000 U.S. college-educated workers for a decade revealed that a year after receiving their bachelor’s degrees, women working full time earned just 80 percent as much as men. The difference was largely (but not entirely) due to gender differences in college majors: Women more often chose education and service fields, men higher-paying scientific and technical fields. Ten years after graduation, the gender pay gap had widened: Women’s pay was only 69 percent of men’s, and in no profession did women’s earnings equal men’s (Dey & Hill, 2007). Gender disparities in career development accounted for about 90 percent of the gap, with the remaining 10 percent attributed to on-the-job discrimination.

Especially for women in traditionally feminine occupations, career planning is often short-term and subject to change. Unlike the continuous career lives of most well-educated men, many women enter and exit the labor market several times, or reduce their work hours from full-time to part-time as they give birth to and rear children (Furchtgott-Roth, 2009; Lips, 2013). Time away from a career greatly hinders advancement—a major reason that women in prestigious, male-dominated careers tend to delay or avoid childbearing (Blair-Loy & DeHart, 2003). Yet an increasing number of accomplished professional women are leaving their jobs to devote themselves full-time to child rearing—a trend that has generated mistaken, gender-stereotyped interpretations of their “choice.” Interviews with such women reveal that the decision to leave their careers is almost always agonizing (Rubin & Wooten, 2007; Stone & Lovejoy, 2004). The most common reason given was a high-pressured, inflexible work environment that offered no leeway for work–family life balance.

In addition, low self-efficacy with respect to male-dominated fields limits women’s career progress. Women who pursue nontraditional careers usually have “masculine” traits—high achievement orientation, self-reliance, and belief that their efforts will result in success. But even those with high self-efficacy are less certain than their male counterparts that they can overcome barriers to career success. In a study of women scientists on university faculties, those reporting a sexist work climate (sexual harassment or discrimination in salary, promotion, or resources) were less satisfied with their jobs and less productive (Settles et al., 2006).

Gender-stereotyped images of women as followers rather than leaders slow advancement into top-level management positions. And because men dominate high-status fields, they must be willing to mentor women into leadership positions and take time from their work responsibilities to do so. Mentoring by a senior-male executive predicts progress into management roles and pay gains more strongly for women in male-dominated industries than for men (Ramaswami et al., 2010). When a powerful male leader sponsors the advancement of a talented woman, designating her as having the qualities to succeed, senior-level decision makers are far more likely to take notice.

Despite laws guaranteeing equality of opportunity, racial and ethnic bias in career opportunities remains strong (Smith, Brief, & Colella, 2010). In one study, researchers recruited two three-member teams consisting of a white, a black, and a Hispanic male job applicant, each 22 to 26 years old and matched...
women, including teachers and peers. Many described their mothers as inspiring role models who had set high standards for them (Richie et al., 1997). Others felt empowered by a deep sense of connection to their African-American communities.

Despite obstacles to success, women who have developed rewarding careers generally report higher levels of psychological well-being and life satisfaction (Erdogan et al., 2012). This finding suggests that some of the discontent frequently expressed by married women may not be due to marriage per se but, rather, to lack of a gratifying work life. Consistent with this idea, most women prefer to blend work and family (Barnett & Hyde, 2001). And those in financially stressed families must do so.

Combining Work and Family

The majority of women with children are in the work force (see page 350 in Chapter 10), most in dual-earner marriages or cohabiting relationships. More women than men report moderate to high levels of stress in trying to meet both work and family responsibilities (Higgins, Duxbury, & Lyons, 2010; Zhao, Settles, & Sheng, 2011).

Take a Moment… Think about a dual-earner family you know well. What are the main sources of strain? When Sharese returned to her job after her children were born, she felt a sense of role overload, or conflict between the demands of work and family responsibilities. In addition to a challenging career, she also (like most employed women) shouldered more household and child-care tasks. And both Sharese and Ernie felt torn between the desire to excel at their jobs and the desire to spend more time with each other, their children, and their friends and relatives. Role overload is linked to increased psychological stress, physical health problems, poorer marital relations, less effective parenting, child behavior problems, and poorer job performance (Perry-Jenkins, Repetti, & Crouter, 2000; Saginak & Saginak, 2005; ten Brummelhuis et al., 2012).

Role overload is magnified for women in low-status work roles with rigid schedules and little autonomy (Marshall, 1997).
Couples in prestigious careers have more control over both work and family domains. For example, Sharese and Ernie devised ways to spend more time with their children. They picked them up at child care early one day a week, compensating by doing certain occupational tasks on evenings and weekends. But in a Canadian study of more than 3,000 individuals in dual-earner families who were employed full-time, most coped with role overload by scaling back at home (leaving things undone) or restructuring family roles (taking over responsibilities for each other, as needed), with women doing more of this than men (Higgins, Duxbury, & Lyons, 2010). Overall, couples expected family life to accommodate to work demands. They seldom adjusted work roles to meet family needs. Although some had little flexibility at work, others simply prioritized work over family life.

Workplace supports can greatly reduce role overload, yielding substantial payoffs for employers. Among a large, nationally representative sample of U.S. working adults, the greater the number of time-flexible policies available in their work settings (for example, time off to care for a sick child, choice in start and stop times, and opportunities to work from home), the better their work performance (Halpern, 2005a). Employees with several time-flexible options missed fewer days of work, less often arrived at work late or left early, felt more committed to their employer, and worked harder. They also reported fewer stress-related health symptoms.

Effectively balancing work and family brings many benefits—a better standard of living, improved work productivity, enhanced psychological well-being, greater self-fulfillment, and happier marriages. Ernie took great pride in Sharese’s dedication to both family life and career. And the skills, maturity, and self-esteem each derived from coping successfully with challenges at home strengthened their capacity to surmount difficulties at work (Graves, Ohlott, & Ruderman, 2007). Applying What We Know above lists strategies that help dual-earner couples attain mastery and pleasure in both spheres of life.

**Look and Listen**

Talk with one or more dual-earner couples about workplace supports for good parenting. Which policies are available? Which additional ones would they find especially helpful?

---

### Applying What We Know

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Devise a plan for sharing household tasks.</td>
<td>As soon as possible in the relationship, discuss relative commitment to work and family and division of household responsibilities. Decide who does a particular chore on the basis of who has the needed skill and time, not on the basis of gender. Schedule regular times to rediscuss your plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Begin sharing child care right after the baby’s arrival.</td>
<td>For fathers, strive to spend equal time with the baby early. For mothers, refrain from imposing your standards on your partner. Instead, share the role of “child-rearing expert” by discussing parenting values and concerns often. Attend a parent education course together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk over conflicts about decision making and responsibilities.</td>
<td>Face conflict through communication. Clarify your feelings and needs and express them to your partner. Listen and try to understand your partner’s point of view. Then be willing to negotiate and compromise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish a balance between work and family.</td>
<td>Critically evaluate the time you devote to work in view of your family values and priorities. If it is too much, cut back.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make sure your relationship receives regular loving care.</td>
<td>See Applying What We Know on page 475.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Press for workplace and public policies that assist dual-earner-family roles.</td>
<td>Difficulties faced by dual-earner couples are partly due to lack of workplace and societal supports. Encourage your employer to provide benefits that help combine work and family, such as flexible work hours, parental leave with pay, and on-site high-quality, affordable child care. Communicate with lawmakers and other citizens about improving public policies for children and families.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**Review** Why do professionally accomplished women, especially those who are members of economically disadvantaged minorities, typically display high self-efficacy?

**Connect** Generate a list of capacities and skills derived from high commitment to family roles (both partner and parent) that could enhance work performance and satisfaction.

**Apply** Write an essay aimed at convincing a company executive that family-friendly policies are “win-win” situations for both workers and employers.

**Reflect** Ask someone who has succeeded in a career of interest to you to describe mentoring relationships that aided his or her progress.
A Gradual Transition: Emerging Adulthood (p. 464)

What is emerging adulthood, and how has cultural change contributed to it?

- In emerging adulthood, young adults from about age 18 to 25 have not yet taken on adult responsibilities and do not view themselves as fully adult. Instead, those with economic resources engage in extended exploration of alternatives in education, work, and personal values. Identity development extends into the college years, with young people exploring possibilities in breadth and depth.

Erikson’s Theory: Intimacy versus Isolation (p. 469)

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

- In Erikson’s theory, young adults must resolve the conflict of intimacy versus isolation as they form a close relationship with a partner. The negative outcome is loneliness and self-absorption.
- Young people also focus on aspects of generativity, including parenting and contributions to society through work and community service.

Other Theories of Adult Psychosocial Development (p. 470)

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

- During the late teens and early twenties, religious attendance drops to its lowest level, though women and ethnic minority young people express greater religiosity. Regardless of whether they participate in organized religion, many emerging adults begin to construct an individualized faith. They are also committed to improving their world, often engaging in community service.
- Increased education required for entry-level positions in many fields, gains in economic prosperity, and reduced need for young people’s labor in industrialized nations have prompted the appearance of emerging adulthood. But because of its strong association with SES and higher education, some researchers do not view emerging adulthood as a distinct period of development.
- In exploring possibilities, emerging adults must adjust to disappointments in love and work, and their explorations may extend risky behaviors of adolescence. A wide array of personal attributes and social supports foster resilience. Relationships with parents are especially influential. A secure, affectionate bond that balances connection and separation predicts many aspects of adaptive functioning.

Close Relationships (p. 472)

Describe factors affecting mate selection and the role of romantic love in the young adult’s quest for intimacy.

- Romantic partners tend to resemble each other in age, education level, ethnicity, religion, and various personal and physical attributes.
- According to an evolutionary perspective, women seek a mate with traits that help ensure children’s survival, while men look for characteristics signaling sexual pleasure and ability to bear offspring. From a social learning perspective, gender roles profoundly influence criteria for mate selection. Research suggests that both biological and social forces are involved.

- According to Sternberg’s triangular theory of love, the balance among intimacy, passion, and commitment changes as romantic relationships move from passionate love toward companionate love. The Western emphasis on romantic love in mate selection does not characterize all cultures.

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

- Following a social clock—age-graded expectations for major life events—grants confidence to young adults. Deviating from it can bring psychological distress.
- As age-graded expectations for appropriate behavior have become increasingly flexible, departures from social-clock life events are common and can create intergenerational tensions.

- Young adults are vulnerable to loneliness, which peaks in the late teens and early twenties. Loneliness that is not overwhelming can encourage young people to reach out to others and better understand themselves.
The Family Life Cycle (p. 478)
Trace phases of the family life cycle that are prominent in early adulthood, and cite factors that influence these phases today.
- Wide variations exist in the sequence and timing of the family life cycle. A trend toward later home-leaving has occurred in most industrialized nations. Departures generally occur earlier for education than for full-time work or marriage; role transitions may prompt a move back. Parents of young adults living at home are usually highly committed to helping their children move into adult roles.
- The average age of first marriage in the United States and Western Europe has risen. Many countries and a growing number of U.S. states recognize same-sex marriages.
- Both traditional marriages and egalitarian marriages are affected by women’s participation in the work force. Women in Western nations spend nearly twice as much time as men on housework, although men participate much more in child care than in the past. Women feel particularly dissatisfied when the combined demands of work and family roles are overwhelming. Partners who hold overly positive (but still realistic) biases concerning each other’s attributes express greater relationship satisfaction.
- Although most couples in industrialized nations become parents, they do so later and have fewer children than in the past. The arrival of a child brings increased responsibilities, often prompting a shift to more traditional roles. After the birth of a second child, this may reverse. Gratifying marriages tend to remain so after childbirth, but troubled marriages usually become more distressed. Shared caregiving predicts greater parental happiness and positive parent–infant interaction.
- Couples with young children face challenges of clarifying and implementing child-rearing values. Those who engage in effective coparenting are more likely to gain in warm marital interaction, use effective child-rearing practices, and have children who are developing well.
- Parents of adolescents must establish revised relationships with their increasingly autonomous teenagers, blending guidance with freedom and gradually loosening control. Marital satisfaction often declines in this phase.

The Diversity of Adult Lifestyles (p. 486)
Discuss the diversity of adult lifestyles, focusing on singlehood, cohabitation, and childlessness.
- Postponement of marriage and a high divorce rate have contributed to a rise in singlehood. Despite an array of drawbacks, singles typically appreciate their freedom and mobility.
- Cohabitation among U.S. couples has increased, becoming the preferred mode of entry into a committed intimate partnership for young people. Compared with their Western European counterparts, Americans who cohabit before marriage tend to be less conventional in values and less committed to their partner, and their subsequent marriages are more likely to fail. But gay and lesbian couples who cohabit because they cannot legally marry report commitment equal to that of married couples.
- Voluntarily childless adults tend to be college-educated, career-oriented, and content with their lives. But involuntary childlessness interferes with adjustment and life satisfaction.

Cite factors that contribute to today’s high rates of divorce and remarriage.
- Almost half of U.S. marriages dissolve. Although nearly two-thirds of divorced people remarry, many divorce again. Maladaptive communication patterns, younger ages at marriage, a family history of divorce, poverty, the changing status of women, and American individualism all contribute to divorce.

Remarriages are especially vulnerable to breakup. Reasons include the prominence of practical concerns in the decision to remarry, the persistence of negative styles of communication, the acceptance of divorce as a solution to marital difficulties, and problems adjusting to a stepfamily.

Discuss the challenges associated with varied styles of parenthood, including stepparents, never-married parents, and gay and lesbian parents.
- Establishing the stepparent–stepchild ties is difficult, especially for stepmothers and stepfathers without children of their own. A caring husband–wife bond that includes a coparenting partnership, cooperation from the biological parent, and extended-family support promote positive stepparent–stepchild ties.

Career Development (p. 492)
Discuss patterns of career development, and cite difficulties faced by women, ethnic minorities, and couples seeking to combine work and family.
- Men’s career paths are usually continuous, whereas women’s are often interrupted by family needs. Once young adults settle into an occupation, their progress is affected by opportunities for promotion, the broader economic environment, and access to an effective mentor.
- Women and ethnic minorities have penetrated most professions, but their career advancement has been hampered by time away from the labor market, low self-efficacy, lack of mentoring, and gender stereotypes. Racial and ethnic bias remains strong. Ethnic minority women who succeed display an unusually high sense of self-efficacy.
- Couples in dual-earner marriages often experience role overload. Effectively balancing work and family enhances standards of living, psychological well-being, marital happiness, and work performance.

Important Terms and Concepts
- cohabitation (p. 487)
- companionate love (p. 473)
- egalitarian marriage (p. 480)
- emerging adulthood (p. 464)
- family life cycle (p. 478)
- intimacy versus isolation (p. 469)
- loneliness (p. 477)
- passionate love (p. 473)
- social clock (p. 471)
- traditional marriage (p. 480)
- triangular theory of love (p. 473)