For many young people in industrialized nations, the transition to early adulthood is a time of prolonged exploration of attitudes, values, and life possibilities. This young adult has interrupted his education to volunteer for Clowns Without Borders, an organization that brings joy to children living in refugee camps and conflict zones. Here he entertains a Haitian audience, most of whom endure harsh and often dangerous living conditions.
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 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 their junior year in college and parents of two children born within the next few years. Financial pressures and the demands of parenthood had 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. But Ernie reassured her of his love. His career had been under way for two years, he had received a company promotion, and at age 28, he looked forward to marriage and starting a family. Uncertain and conflicted, Sharese felt swept toward the altar as relatives, friends, and gifts arrived. 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 wavering along the way. Not until their mid- to late twenties did they make lasting career and romantic choices and attain full economic independence—markers of adulthood that young people of previous generations reached considerably earlier. Each of these young people 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 we must posit 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 (see page 316). 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 sharp rise in the extent to which people feel they are personally in control of events in their lives. Indeed, 20- to 29-year-olds report a greater sense of control than they ever will 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 skills and 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 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” (see Figure 14.1). Only after reaching their late twenties and

![Figure 14.1](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

**Percentage of Young People**

- **Yes**
- **No**
- **Yes and no**

---

*American young people’s responses to the question, “Do you feel that you have reached adulthood?”*

Between ages 18 and 25, the majority answered “yes and no,” reflecting their view that they had left adolescence but were not yet fully adult. Even in their late twenties and early thirties, about one-third of young people judged that they had not completed the transition to adulthood. (Adapted from Arnett, 2001.)
early thirties did most feel that they were truly adult—findings evident in a wide range of industrialized nations (Arnett, 1997, 2001, 2003, 2007a; Buhl & Lanz, 2007; Macek, Bejcek, & Vanickova, 2007). 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-twenties, called emerging adulthood.

Unprecedented Exploration and Advances in Identity

The late teens and early twenties are a time of great challenge and uncertainty. Emerging adults have left adolescence but are some distance from taking on adult responsibilities, and 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). Rather, young people who have the economic resources to do so explore alternatives in education, work, personal beliefs and values, and love more intensively than they did as teenagers (Arnett, 2006, 2007b).

Emerging adulthood greatly prolongs identity development. Released from the oversight of parents but not yet immersed in adult roles, 18- to 25-year-olds 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, many 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 or travel. 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, 2009).

As a result of these experiences, young people's attitudes and values broaden. They express increased interest in philosophical, historical, and political issues and greater tolerance for ethnic and cultural diversity. Furthermore, exposure to multiple viewpoints encourages development of a more complex self-concept that includes awareness of their own changing traits and values over time, along with enhanced self-esteem (Galambos, Barker, & Krahn, 2006; Labouvie-Vief, 2006; Montgomery & Côté, 2003). Together, these changes contribute to advances in identity.

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. As a result, either your commitment to your major strengthens, or you return to 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 better-adjusted, academically and socially. Those who spend much time exploring in breadth without making commitments tend to be poorly adjusted—depressed and higher in drug use (Luyckx et al., 2006).

Many aspects of the life course that were once socially structured—marriage, parenthood, religious beliefs, and career paths—are increasingly left to individual decision. During the college years, for example, attendance at religious services drops to its lowest level—about 30 percent in the United States.
States—as young people continue to evaluate beliefs acquired in their families against alternatives. Many emerging adults work on constructing their own individualistic faith, often weaving together beliefs and practices from a variety of sources, including Eastern and Western religious traditions, science, and popular culture (Shipman et al., 2002).

Identity progression in emerging adulthood requires a sense of purpose, self-efficacy (belief in one’s ability to succeed), determination to overcome obstacles, and responsibility for outcomes. Among young people of diverse ethnicities and SES levels, this set of qualities—called personal agency—is positively related to an information-gathering cognitive style and to identity exploration and commitment, and negatively related to identity diffusion (Schwartz, Côté, & Arnett, 2005).

### Cultural Change, Cultural Variation, and Emerging Adulthood

Rapid cultural change explains the recent appearance of this rich, complex bridge between adolescence and assumption of adult responsibilities. 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 18- to 25-year-olds for extended exploration.

Indeed, emerging adulthood is limited to cultures that postpone entry into adult roles until the twenties. In developing nations such as China and India, only a privileged few—usually those from wealthier families who are admitted to universities—experience emerging adulthood, often for a shorter time span than their Western counterparts (Badger, Nelson, & Barry, 2006; 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 rural regions where they grew up—have no “emerging adulthood.” With limited education, they typically enter marriage, parenthood, and lifelong work early (UNICEF, 2009).

In industrialized countries, where many benefit from these transitional years, young people nevertheless vary in their beliefs about what it means to become an adult. Reflecting on the self-searching of these years, respondents from diverse cultures, ethnicities, and religious backgrounds emphasize psychological qualities, especially self-sufficiency—accepting responsibility for one’s actions, deciding on personal beliefs and values, establishing an equal relationship with parents, and becoming financially independent (Facio & Micocci, 2003; Mayseless & Sharf, 2003; Nelson et al., 2007). Youths from collectivist minority groups also include self-control, becoming more considerate of others, and attaining certain roles, such as marital partner and parent (Arnett, 2003; Cheah & Nelson, 2004).

Nevertheless, for low-SES young people in Western nations 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) (Cohen et al., 2003; Eccles et al., 2003). As the Cultural Influences box on page 368 indicates, because of its strong association with SES and higher education, some researchers reject the notion of emerging adulthood as a distinct period of development. Others disagree, predicting that emerging adulthood will become increasingly common as globalization—the exchange of ideas, information, trade, and immigration among nations—accelerates (Arnett, 2007a; Nelson & Chen, 2007). As globalization proceeds, gains in financial security and higher education and the formation of a common “global identity” among young people may make emerging adulthood a typical experience around the world.

### Risk and Resilience in Emerging Adulthood

In grappling with momentous choices, emerging adults play a more active role in their own development than at any earlier time (Arnett, 2006; Eccles et al., 2003). As they experiment, they often encounter disappointments in love and work that require them to adjust, and sometimes radically change, their life path.

Emerging adults’ vigorous explorations also extend earlier risks, including unprotected sexual activity, substance use, and hazardous driving behavior. For example, drug taking peaks during these years (see Chapter 13). And as we will see later, feelings of loneliness are higher than at any other time of life.

Longitudinal research shows that the personal attributes and social supports listed in Applying What We Know on page 369 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 factors in the table overlap with ones discussed in previous chapters that promote resilience, the capacity to overcome challenge and adversity.

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 promotes 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 reduced anxiety, depression, loneliness, and drug abuse (Aquilino, 2006).

In addition, emerging adults who feel securely attached to parents and who view them as having used an authoritative child-rearing style are more likely to have integrated their parents’ religious or spiritual beliefs into their own personal world view (Okagaki, Hammond, & Seamon, 1999). Then, as young people seek their place in an increasingly complex, ever-changing world, a religious or spiritual ideology helps anchor them. It serves as a reminder of social injustices, motivating—as it did...
Is Emerging Adulthood Really a Distinct Period of Development?

Although 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). 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. Rather, young people have in the past and continue today to reach adult status earlier in some domains, later in others. And they may reverse direction. For example, after finishing college or being laid off from a job, they might move back to the parental home to get their bearings (Cohen et al., 2003). In accord with the lifespan perspective, development is multidimensional and multidirectional for 18- to 25-year-olds, as it is for adults of all ages. Transitions occur during all periods of the lifespan, with societal conditions heavily influencing their length and complexity.

Second, emerging adulthood fails to describe the experiences of most of the world’s youths (Bynner, 2005). In many developing countries, young people—particularly women—are limited in education and marry and have children early (see page 48 in Chapter 2). According to one estimate, nearly 1.5 billion individuals—86 percent of young people—follow this traditional route to adulthood, with no prospect of alternatives (Lloyd, 2005). And as we have seen, many low-SES young people 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, though opening opportunities, might be risky for those without the personal agency to make effective choices and acquire adult skills (Levine, 2005). These young people may remain uncommitted for too long—an outcome that would impede the focused learning required for a successful work life. A favorable emerging adulthood, then, depends on whether it is used effectively to acquire the competencies needed for modern living.

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 rapidly in developing nations that play major roles in our global economy (Arnett, 2007a). Furthermore, the concept reminds us that the lives of many people in their early twenties differ vastly from those in their thirties and of the need to clarify the contextual factors that contribute to their experiences.

But—as skeptics note—age-graded influences have declined in favor of nonnormative influences throughout contemporary adulthood (see page 9 in Chapter 1 to review) (Hendry & Kloep, 2007). 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.

in adolescence—community service. It also offers an image of ideal character traits toward which they can strive (Kerestes & Youniss, 2003).

As one reviewer of research concluded, “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” (Aquillino, 2006, p. 201). In contrast, 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 (Cui & Vaillant, 1996).

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 highly optimistic—convinced that, despite challenges, they will eventually attain happiness in work and close relationships (Arnett, 2000, 2006). Now let’s turn to theories of psychosocial development in early adulthood.
CHAPTER 14 Emotional and Social 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. Intimacy requires that young people redefine their identity to include both partners’ values and interests. Those in their teens and early twenties frequently say they don’t feel ready for a lasting tie (Collins & van Dulmen, 2006b). 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 (Kroger, 2007). 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 (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).
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 childbearing and child rearing usually occur in the twenties and thirties, and contributions to society through work are also under way.

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 and modified his stage approach, adding detail and flexibility.

### 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 George Vaillant’s *Adaptation to Life* (1977) and *Aging Well* (2002) present psychosocial theories in the tradition of Erikson. Each is summarized in Table 14.1.

#### Levinson’s Seasons of Life

Seeking an underlying order to the life course, Levinson (1978) conducted in-depth biographical interviews with 40 35- to 45-year-old men from four occupational subgroups: hourly workers in industry, business executives, university biologists, and novelists. Later he interviewed 45 women, also 35 to 45 years of age, from three subgroups: homemakers, business executives, and university professors. His results and those of others suggest a common path of change within which men and women approach developmental tasks in somewhat different ways (Levinson, 1996; Roberts & Newton, 1987).

Like Erikson, Levinson (1978, 1996) saw development as a sequence of qualitatively distinct eras (stages or seasons). Each begins with a *transition*, followed by a stable phase during which individuals build a life structure aimed at harmonizing inner personal and outer societal demands. Eventually people question the current structure, and a new transition ensues.

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 marriage/family and occupation, are central. But wide individual differences exist in the weight of central and peripheral components.

Men’s and women’s accounts of their lives offer support for Levinson’s description. They also reveal that early adulthood is the era of “greatest energy and abundance, contradiction and stress” (Levinson, 1986, p. 5). These years involve serious decisions about work, marriage, children, and lifestyle before many people have enough experience to choose wisely.

Levinson reported that during the early adult transition, most young people construct a *dream*—an image of themselves in the adult world that guides their decision making. For men, the dream usually emphasizes an independent achiever in an occupational role. In contrast, most career-oriented women display “split dreams” involving both marriage and career. Also, women’s dreams tend to define the self in terms of relationships with husband, children, and colleagues. Men’s dreams are usually more individualistic: They view significant others, especially wives, as vital supporters of their goals and less often see themselves as supporting others’ goals.

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<th>TABLE 14.1</th>
<th>Theories of Adult Psychosocial Development</th>
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<td><strong>PERIOD OF DEVELOPMENT</strong></td>
<td><strong>ERIKSON</strong></td>
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<td>Early adulthood (18–40 years)</td>
<td>Intimacy versus isolation</td>
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<td>Middle adulthood (40–65 years)</td>
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<td>Late adulthood (65 years–death)</td>
<td>Ego integrity versus despair</td>
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Young adults also form a relationship with a mentor who facilitates realization of their dream—often a senior colleague at work but occasionally a more experienced friend, neighbor, or relative. As we will see when we take up vocational development, finding a supportive mentor is easier for men than for women.

During the age-30 transition, young people who had been preoccupied with career and are still single usually focus on finding a life partner, while women who had emphasized marriage and motherhood often develop 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. For young people without a satisfying intimate tie or vocational direction or who question the personal meaning of their life structure, this can be a time of considerable inner conflict and instability.

To create the culminating life structure of early adulthood, men usually “settle down” by focusing on certain relationships and aspirations, setting others aside. Their goal is to establish a stable niche in society that is consistent with their values, whether those be wealth, prestige, artistic or scientific achievement, or forms of family or community participation. In his thirties, Sharese’s husband, Ernie, expanded his knowledge of real estate accounting, became a partner in his firm, coached his son’s soccer team, and was elected treasurer of his church. He paid less attention to golf, travel, and playing the guitar than he had in his twenties.

Many women, however, remain unsettled in their thirties, often because they have added an occupational or relationship commitment (Levinson, 1996). 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 do many women attain the stability typical of men in their thirties—reaching career maturity and taking on more authority in the community.

**Vaillant’s Adaptation to Life**

Vaillant (1977) examined the development of nearly 250 men born in the 1920s, selected for study while they were students at a highly competitive liberal arts college, and followed as many as possible over the lifespan. In college, the participants underwent extensive interviews. During each succeeding decade, they answered lengthy questionnaires. Then Vaillant (2002) interviewed the men at ages 47, 60, and 70 about work, family, and physical and mental health.

Other than denying a strict age-related schedule of change, Vaillant’s theory is compatible with Levinson’s. Both agree that quality of relationships with important people shape the life course. In studying how the men altered themselves and their social world to adapt to life, Vaillant confirmed Erikson’s stages but filled gaps between them. After a period in their twenties devoted to intimacy concerns, the men focused on career consolidation in their thirties. During their forties, they pulled back from individual achievement and became more generative—giving to and guiding others. In their fifties and sixties, they became “keepers of meaning,” or guardians of their culture, expressing concern about the values of the younger generation and the state of their society. Many felt 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.

Although Vaillant initially studied only men, eventually he examined the development of a sample of bright, well-educated women who were participants in another lifelong study. His findings, and those of others, suggest that women undergo a series of changes similar to those just described (Block, 1971; Oden & Terman, 1968; Vaillant, 2002).

**Limitations of Levinson’s and Vaillant’s Theories**

The patterns Levinson and Vaillant identified are based largely on interviews with people born in the first few decades of the twentieth century. As our discussion of emerging adulthood illustrates, young adults’ development is more variable today than in past generations. Furthermore, Levinson’s sample included only a few non-college-educated, low-income adults, and low-SES women remain almost entirely uninvestigated. Examining
longitudinal archives on low-SES men who had grown up in the 1940s, Vaillant (1993) reported evidence for his stage sequence. Still, he acknowledged that the sample was limited.

Finally, Levinson’s participants, interviewed in middle age, might not have remembered all aspects of their early adult-hoods accurately. Studies of new generations—both men and women, of diverse backgrounds—are needed to discern the extent to which the developmental paths just described apply to most or all young people.

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. Being on time or off time can affect self-esteem because adults (like children and adolescents) make social comparisons, measuring their progress against that of agemates.

Conformity to or departure from the social clock can be a major source of adult personality change. In a study of college women born in the 1930s who were followed up at ages 27 and 43, researchers determined how closely participants followed a “feminine” social clock (marriage and parenthood in the early or mid-twenties) or a “masculine” one (entry into a high-status career and advancement by the late twenties). Those who started families on time became more responsible, self-controlled, tolerant, and caring but declined in self-esteem and felt more vulnerable as their lives progressed. Those who followed a “masculine” occupational timetable became more dominant, sociable, independent, and intellectually effective, a trend also found in a cohort born a decade later (Vandewater & Stewart, 1997). And women who had neither married nor begun a career by age 30 suffered from self-doubt, feelings of incompetence, and loneliness (Helson, 1992; Helson, Mitchell, & Moane, 1984).

Following a social clock of some kind seems to foster confidence during early adulthood because it guarantees that young people will engage in the work of society, develop skills, and gain in understanding of the self and others (Helson, 1997; Hendry & Kloep, 2007). As Neugarten (1979) suggested, the stability of society depends on having people committed to social-clock patterns. With this in mind, let’s take a closer look at how young men and women traverse the major tasks of young adulthood.

ASK YOURSELF

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

6 APPLY
Using the concept of the social clock, explain Sharese’s conflicted feelings about marrying Ernie after she finished graduate school.

6 REFLECT
Describe your early adulthood dream (see page 370). 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 a lasting emotional bond. 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

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). 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 find people of their own age, ethnicity, SES, and religion or (somewhat less often) connect through Internet dating services. 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). Overall, little support exists for the idea that “opposites attract.” In fact, many studies confirm that the more
similar partners are, the more satisfied they tend to be with their relationship and the more likely they are to stay together (Blackwell & Lichter, 2004; Lucas et al., 2004).

Nevertheless, men and women differ in the importance they place on certain characteristics. 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).

Evolutionary theory helps us understand these findings. Recall from Chapter 13 that 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, while women typically prefer to take the time to achieve psychological intimacy first (Buss, 2008).

From an alternative, social learning perspective, 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 that fit with this traditional division of labor (Eagly & Wood, 1999; Wood & Eagly, 2000). 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. And both sexes care somewhat less about their mate’s age relative to their own. Instead, they place a high value on relationship satisfaction (Buss et al., 2001; Toro-Morn & Sprecher, 2003).

As the Lifespan Vista box on page 374 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. 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).

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—through warmth, attentiveness, empathy, caring, acceptance, and respect—strongly predicts relationship maintenance (Rusbult et al., 2006). For example, Sharese’s doubts about getting married subsided largely because of Ernie’s expressions of commitment.

Intimate partners who consistently express their commitment report higher-quality and longer-lasting relationships (Fitzpatrick & Sollie, 1999). 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). How men handle conflict is particularly important because they tend to be less skilled than women at negotiating it, often avoiding discussion (Gayle, Preiss, & Allen, 2002).

**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. Trying to satisfy dependency needs through an intimate bond is regarded as immature (Hatfield, Rapson, & Martel, 2007).

This Western view contrasts sharply with the collectivist perspectives of Eastern cultures, such as China and Japan, where dependency throughout life is viewed positively because the self is defined through role relationships—son or daughter, brother or sister, husband or wife. Furthermore, in choosing a mate, Chinese and Japanese young people are expected to consider obligations to others, especially parents. 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). Instead, they stress companionship and practical matters—similarity of background, career promise, and likelihood of being a good parent.

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
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). Along with resistant individuals, avoidant adults 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 a distressed partner support, do so in ways that fit poorly with their partner’s needs (Collins et al., 2006).

Are adults’ descriptions of their childhood attachment experiences accurate? 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 (Allen & Hauser, 1996; Donnellan, Larsen-Rife, & Conger, 2005; Ogawa et al., 1997; Roisman et al., 2001). However, quality of attachment to parents is not the only factor that influences later internal working models and intimate ties. Characteristics of the partner and current life conditions also are important. In one study, adults with an inner sense of security fostered security in their partners as well as in their adolescent and young adult children (Cook, 2000).

In sum, negative parent–child experiences can be carried forward into adult relationships, predisposing people to believe that they are undeserving of love or that their intimate partners cannot be trusted. At the same time, internal working models are continuously “updated.” When adults with unhappy love lives have a chance to form more satisfying intimate ties, they may revise their internal working models.
their children into an unappealing marriage, sympathetic extended family members may come to children’s defense. Today, young people in many countries consider love to be a prerequisite for marriage, though Westerners assign greater importance to it—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 through affirmation and acceptance and provide support in times of stress (Bagwell et al., 2005; Collins & Madsen, 2006). Friends also make life more interesting by expanding social opportunities and access to knowledge and points of view.

Trust, intimacy, and loyalty continue to be important in adult friendships, as they were in middle childhood and adolescence. Sharing thoughts and feelings is sometimes greater in friendship than in marriage, although commitment is less strong as friends come and go over the life course. Even so, some adult friendships continue for many years, at times throughout life. Female friends see one another more often, which contributes to greater friendship continuity for women (Sherman, de Vries, & Lansford, 2000).

**SAME-SEX FRIENDSHIPS.** Extending a pattern evident in childhood and adolescence, women have more intimate same-sex friendships than men. 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 a balance of power and give-and-take is basic to a good friendship, women generally evaluate their same-sex friendships more positively than men do (Veniegas & Peplau, 1997).

Of course, individual differences in friendship quality exist. The longer-lasting men’s friendships are, the closer they become and the more they involve disclosure of personal information (Sherman, de Vries, & Lansford, 2000). And gay and lesbian romantic relationships often develop out of close same-sex friendships, with lesbians, especially, forging compatible friendships based on gratifying communication 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 & Buhmester, 1998; Kito, 2005). Still, friendships continue to be vital contexts for personal sharing throughout adulthood. Turn back to Figure 12.2 on page 328 to view developmental trends in self-disclosure to romantic partners and friends.

**OTHER-SEX FRIENDSHIPS.** During the college years, other-sex friendships are as common as romantic relationships. After marriage, they decline with age for men but increase for women, who tend to form them in the workplace. Highly educated, employed women have the largest number of other-sex friends. Through these relationships, young adults often gain in companionship and self-esteem and learn a great deal 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). Still, about half of college students engage in sexual activity with an other-sex friend whom they have no intention of dating (Kaplan & Keys, 1997). If both sexual attraction and intimacy persist, the relationship often changes into a romantic bond (Afifi & Faulkner, 2000). 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 (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1993).

**SIBLINGS AS FRIENDS.** 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. 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 same-sex siblings can be especially close. A shared background promotes similarity in values and perspectives and the possibility of deep mutual understanding. Warm sibling relationships in adulthood...
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, then declines steadily into the seventies (see Figure 14.2) (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. With age, people become better at accepting loneliness and using it for positive ends—to sharpen awareness of their personal fears and needs (Rokach, 2003).

Loneliness is intense after loss of an intimate tie: Separated, divorced, or widowed adults are lonelier than their married, cohabiting, or single counterparts. Men not involved in a romantic relationship feel lonelier than women, perhaps because they have fewer alternatives for satisfying intimacy needs (Stroebe et al., 1996). 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). But 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?
- 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 sequence 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 (Carter & McGoldrick, 2005).

But today, wide variations exist in the sequence and timing of family life-cycle 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 phases. Still, the family life-cycle model 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 its members.

Leaving Home

Departure from the parental home is a major step toward assuming adult responsibilities. The average age of leaving has decreased in recent years as more young people live independently before marriage. In 1940, over 80 percent of Americans in their twenties resided with their parents; today, only about 50 percent of 18- to 25-year-olds do. Residential independence rises steadily with age—a trend evident in most industrialized nations (Cohen et al., 2003).

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. Other young people leave early to escape family friction (Stattin & Magnusson, 1996). 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. But difficult job markets and high housing costs mean that many must take undesirable work or remain financially dependent on parents (Lindsay, Almey, & Normand, 2002).

Nearly half of young adults return home for a brief time after initial leaving. As people encounter unexpected twists and turns on the road to independence, the parental home offers a safety net and base of operations for launching adult life. Failures in work or marriage can prompt a move back. Usually, though, role transitions, such as the end of college or military service, bring people back. Contrary to popular belief, returning home usually is not a sign of weakness but a common event (Ward & Spitz, 2007).

The extent to which young people live on their own before marriage varies with SES and ethnicity. Those who are economically well-off are more likely to establish their own residence. Among African-American, Hispanic, and Native-American groups, poverty and a cultural tradition of extended family living lead to lower rates of leaving home, even among young people in college or working (De Marco & Berzin, 2008; Fussell & Furstenberg, 2005). Unmarried Asian young adults also tend to live with their parents. But the longer Asian families have lived in the United States and thus been exposed to individualistic values, the more likely young people are to move out after finishing high school (Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1999).

When young adults are prepared for independence and feel securely attached to their parents, 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). In contrast, leaving home very early because of lack of parental financial and social support is associated with long-term disadvantage—less successful marriage and work life (White, 1994).

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 1950 to 25% for women and 27% for men today. 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. Still, nearly 90 percent of Americans marry at least once. At present, 58 percent of U.S. adults live together as married couples (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009b).

Same-sex marriages are recognized nationwide in Belgium, Canada, the Netherlands, Norway, South Africa, Spain, and Sweden. In the United States, Connecticut, Iowa, Massachusetts, and Vermont have legalized same-sex marriage. California, Hawaii, Maine, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Washington, and the District of Columbia grant people in same-sex unions the same legal status as married couples. 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 involves 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.

■ Marital Roles. Their honeymoon over, Sharese and Ernie turned to a multitude of issues that they had previously decided individually or that 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.
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 (Botkin, Weeks, & Morris, 2000; 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. But housework—cleaning, shopping, cooking, laundry, picking up clutter—reveals a different story. Recent surveys indicate that women in the United States and Canada spend nearly twice as much time as men on housework, women in Australia nearly three times as much (see Figure 14.3). 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 typically demand long work hours (Institute for Social Research, 2002; Shwalb et al., 2004). 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. Differences between these two couples mirror the findings of a large body of research on personal and contextual factors, summarized in Table 14.2.

Christy and Gary had a brief courtship, married and 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 felt threatened by 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, enjoyment of each other’s company, sharing of personal experiences through conversation, cooperating in household responsibilities, and good conflict-resolution skills contributed to their compatibility.

Quality of the marital relationship predicts mental health similarly for both genders (Kurdek, 2005; Williams, 2003). But men tend to feel slightly happier with their marriages than women do (Dillaway & Broman, 2001; Kurdek, 2005). Women feel particularly dissatisfied 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 enhances both men’s and women’s satisfaction, largely by strengthening marital harmony (Amato & Booth, 1995; Xu & Lai, 2004).

At their worst, marital relationships can become contexts for intense opposition, dominance–submission, and emotional and physical violence. As the Social Issues box on page 380 explains, although women are more often targets of severe partner abuse, both men and women play both roles: perpetrator and victim.

In view of its long-term implications, it is surprising that most couples spend little time before their wedding day reflecting on the decision to marry. High school and college courses in family life education can promote better mate selection. And counseling aimed at helping couples discuss their desires openly and use positive, respectful conflict-resolution strategies is highly effective in easing adjustment to marriage and enhancing relationship quality (Gordon, Temple, & Adams, 2005).

### Parenthood

For many adults, the decision to have children used to be “a biological given or an unavoidable cultural demand” (Michaels, 1988, p. 23). Today, in Western industrialized nations, parenthood 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 little fear of social criticism.

### TABLE 14.2 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 age 23</td>
<td>Before age 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of courtship</td>
<td>At least six months</td>
<td>Less than six months</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</td>
<td>Emotionally positive; good conflict-resolution skills</td>
<td>Emotionally negative and impulsive; poor conflict-resolution skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

Sources: Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000; Johnson et al., 2005; Waldinger et al., 2004.
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 (Dutton, 2007; Dutton & Nicholls, 2005). 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 the type 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 (Archer, 2002; Dutton, 2007). Women victims are more often physically injured, but sex differences in severity of abuse are not great (Archer, 2002; Ehrensaft, Moffitt, & Caspi, 2004). Partner abuse occurs at about the same rate in same-sex relationships as in heterosexual relationships (Schwartz & Waldo, 2004). “Getting my partner’s attention,” “gaining control,” and “expressing anger” are reasons that partners typically give for abusing each other (Dutton, 2007).

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 hurled epithets, threw objects, and slapped her. When she screamed at him, he returned to his hotel room. Later that night, Pat’s hostilities that he smashed a dish against the wall, threw his wedding ring at her, and hurled epithets, threw objects, and slapped her.

These violence–remorse cycles, in which aggression escalates, characterize many abusive relationships. Personality and developmental history, family circumstances, and cultural factors combine to make partner abuse more likely (Dixon & Browne, 2003). Many abusers are overly dependent on their spouses as well as jealous, possessive, and controlling. For example, the thought of Karen ever leaving induced such high anxiety in Mike that he monitored all her activities. Depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem also characterize abusers. And because they have great difficulty managing anger, trivial events—such as an unwashed shirt or a late meal—can trigger abusive episodes. When asked to explain their offenses, they attribute greater blame to their partner than to themselves (Henning, Jones, & Holdford, 2005).

A high proportion of abusers grew up in homes where parents engaged in hostile interactions, used coercive discipline, and were abusive toward their children (Bevan & Higgins, 2002; Ehrensaft, Cohen, & Johnson, 2006). Perhaps this explains why conduct problems in childhood and violent delinquency in adolescence also predict partner abuse (Dutton, 2007). Stressful life events, such as job loss or financial difficulties, increase its likelihood (Emery & Laumann-Billings, 1998). Because of widespread poverty, African Americans and Native Americans report high rates of partner violence (Hoff, 2001). Alcohol abuse is another related factor.

At a societal level, cultural norms that endorse male dominance and female subservience promote partner abuse (World Health Organization, 2000, 2005). 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 (Stuart et al., 2006). Yet a variety of situational factors discourage them from leaving these destructive relationships. 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. And victims of both sexes, but especially men, are deterred by the embarrassment of going to the police.

Intervention and Treatment

Community services available to battered women include crisis telephone lines that provide anonymous counseling and social support and shelters that offer protection and treatment (see page 352). 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. 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 World Health Organization, 2000, 2005.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage Reporting Ever Having Experienced Partner Assault</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 couple was 3.1. Currently, it is 1.8 in the United States and Canada; 1.7 in Australia, Great Britain, and Sweden; 1.4 in Japan and Germany; and 1.3 in Italy (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009a, 2009b). Nevertheless, the vast majority of married people continue to embrace parenthood as one of life’s most meaningful experiences.

**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 with high-status, demanding careers less often choose parenthood and, when they do, more often delay it than women with less consuming jobs (Barber, 2001a; Tangri & Jenkins, 1997).

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 “financial strain.” According to a conservative estimate, new parents in the United States today will spend about $200,000 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, 2007).

**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. These demands usually cause the gender roles of husband and wife to become more traditional—even for couples like Sharese and Ernie who are strongly committed to gender equality (Cowan & Cowan, 2000; Salmela-Aro et al., 2001).

For most new parents, however, the arrival of a baby does not cause significant marital strain. Marriages that are gratifying and supportive tend to remain so (Feeney et al., 2001; Miller, 2000). But troubled marriages usually become more unhappy and distressed (Houts et al., 2008; Kluwer & Johnson, 2007). In a study of newlyweds who were interviewed annually for six years, the husband’s affection, expression of “we-ness” (values and goals similar to his wife’s), and awareness of his wife’s daily life predicted mothers’ stable or increasing marital satisfaction after childbirth (Shapiro, Gottman, & Carrere, 2000). When expectant couples anticipate lack of partner support in parenting, their prediction generally becomes reality, yielding an especially difficult post-birth adjustment (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).

Postponing childbearing 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 & Dougherty, 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. In a study that tracked parents from the end of pregnancy through the first year after their second child’s birth, fathers’ willingness to place greater emphasis on the parenting role was strongly linked to mothers’ adjustment after the arrival of a second baby (Stewart, 1990).

Generous, paid employment leave—widely available in other industrialized nations but not in the United States—is crucial for parents of newborns (see Chapter 3, pages 81–82). 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 (Han & Waldfogel, 2003). 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). As a result, the stress caused by the birth of a baby stays at manageable levels.

■ FAMILIES WITH YOUNG CHILDREN. 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 the lack of many societal supports for children and families (see Chapter 2, page 51). 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 work together as a coparenting team, cooperating 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., 2002a; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2004).

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); and who typically cannot afford the cost of child care (Halpern, 2005b). 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 and enriches their lives. 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 (Knoester & Eggebeen, 2006; Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2003).

■ 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 bickering 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 adolescence 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. New mothers often regard popular parenting books and magazines as particularly valuable. They also reach out to a network 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.

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 accepted a management position with an insurance company. At age 35, over lunch with Sharese, she reflected on her life: “I was open to marriage, but after my career took off, 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. 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, rates of never-married American 30- to 34-year-olds have risen sixfold since 1970, to about one-third of males and one-fourth of females. More people marry later or not at all, and divorce has added to the number of singles. In view of these trends, it is likely that most Americans will spend a substantial part of their adult lives single, and a growing minority—about 8 to 10 percent—will stay that way (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009b).
Because they marry later, more young adult men than women are single. But women are far more likely than men to remain single for many years or their entire life. With age, fewer men are available with characteristics that most women seek in a mate—the same age or older, equally or better educated, and professionally successful. In contrast, men can choose partners from a large pool of younger unmarried women. Because of the tendency for women to “marry up” and men to “marry down,” men in blue-collar occupations and women in prestigious careers are overrepresented among singles after age 30.

Ethnic differences also exist. For example, the percentage of never-married African Americans is nearly twice as great as that of Caucasian Americans in early adulthood. As we will see later, high unemployment among black men interferes with marriage. Many African Americans eventually marry in their late thirties and forties, a period in which black and white marriage rates come closer together (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009b).

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 who have always been single are content with their lives. Though not quite as happy as married people, they report feeling considerably happier than people recently widowed or divorced (DePaulo & Morris, 2005; Lucas et al., 2003).

Nevertheless, many single people go through a stressful period in their late twenties, when most of their friends have married. Widespread veneration of marriage, along with negative stereotyping of singles as socially immature and self-centered, probably contributes (DePaulo & Morris, 2006). For single women, the mid-thirties is another trying time, as the biological deadline for childbearing approaches. 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 Americans in their twenties, cohabitation is now the preferred mode of entry into a committed intimate partnership, chosen by more than 50 percent of couples (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009b). Cohabitation rates are even higher among adults with failed marriages (Cohan & Kleinbaum, 2002).

Although Americans are more open to cohabitation than in the past, their attitudes are not yet as positive as those of Western Europeans. Furthermore, American 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, where cohabitation is thoroughly integrated into society and cohabiters are nearly as devoted to each other as married people (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 (Axinn & Barber, 1997; Kurdek, 2006).

These personal characteristics may contribute to the negative outcomes associated with cohabitation. But the cohabitation experience itself also plays a role. American cohabiters are less likely than married people to pool finances or jointly own a house. In addition, they 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.

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 (Smock & Gupta, 2002). Similarly, cohabitation is often an alternative to marriage among low-SES couples. 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 (Jayakody & Cabrera, 2002).

Finally, cohabiting gay and lesbian couples report strong commitment, equal to that of married people. When their relationships become difficult, they end more often than marriages only because of fewer barriers to separating, including children in common, financial dependence on a partner, or concerns about the costs of divorce (Kurdek, 1998, 2006). 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.

**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.”

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.

Childlessness in the United States has increased steadily, from 9 percent of women between ages 20 and 44 in 1975 to about 20 percent in the mid-2000s, with similar trends occurring in other Western nations (Rowland, 2007; Sewall & Burns, 2006). Current figures vary somewhat, perhaps because 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. Consistent with these motives, the voluntarily childless are usually college-educated, have prestigious occupations, and are highly committed to their work (Amba & Martinez, 2006; Kemkes-Grottenhaler, 2003).

Negative stereotypes of nonparenthood—as a sign of self-indulgence and irresponsibility—have weakened in Western nations (Dykstra & Hagesestad, 2007). In line with this trend, voluntarily childless adults are just as content with their lives as parents who have good 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 interferes with adjustment 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 break up before marriage (Bumpass, 2004; Heaton, 2002). Still, 45 percent of U.S. marriages dissolve. 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.

**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. When Christy raised concerns, Gary reacted with resentment, defensiveness, and retreat—a demand–withdraw pattern found in many partners who split up (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. 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).
An ineffective problem-solving style can lead to divorce. Many partners who split up follow a pattern in which one partner raises concerns, and the other reacts with resentment, anger, and retreat.

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 differing gender-role beliefs between the spouses. 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 (Popenoe, 2006). Overall, women are twice as likely as men to initiate divorce proceedings.

**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 impulsive behavior (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. Others distract themselves with a frenzy of social activity (Coleman, Ganong, & Leon, 2006).

Finding a new partner contributes most to the life satisfaction 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 friendships and a sense of self-reliance that might not have emerged had she remained married to Gary. However, a few women—especially those who are anxious and fearful, who remain strongly attached to their ex-spouses, or who lack education and job skills—experience a drop in self-esteem and persistent depression and sometimes enter into unsuccessful relationships repeatedly (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. Remarriages are especially vulnerable to breakup for several reasons. First, practical matters—financial security, help in rearing children, relief from loneliness, and social acceptance—figure more heavily into a second marriage. These concerns do not provide a sound footing for a lasting partnership. Second, some people transfer the negative patterns of interaction and problem solving learned in their first marriage to the second. Third, people with a failed marriage behind them are more likely to view divorce as an acceptable solution when marital difficulties 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 (Ihinger-Tallman & Pasley, 1997). Family life education, couples counseling, and group therapy can help divorced and remarried adults adapt to the complexities of their new circumstances (Whiteside, 2006).

**Variant 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.

**STEPFATHERS**. 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 attachment 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 marriages, rather than only one, more opportunities for conflict exist and relationship quality is poorer (Coleman, Ganong, & Fine, 2000).

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 frequently jealous, uncooperative, and possessive of their children. Even when their husbands do not have custody, stepmothers feel stressed (Church, 2004; MacDonald & DeMaris, 1996). As stepchildren go in and out of the home, stepmothers find life easier without resistant children and then feel guilty about their “unmaternal” feelings.

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. And stepchildren generally respond favorably to stepfathers’ efforts to connect with them through enjoyable activities (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.

A caring marital relationship, cooperation from the biological parent, and children’s willingness to accept their parent’s new spouse are crucial for stepparent adjustment. Over time, many couples strengthen their relationship and build a coparenting partnership that improves interactions with stepchildren (Church, 2004). 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. About 10 percent of U.S. children live with a single parent who has never married and does not have a partner. Of these parents, about 85 percent are mothers, 15 percent fathers (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009b). In the United States, African-American young women make up the largest group of never-married parents. Over 60 percent of births to black mothers in their twenties are to women without a partner, compared with 13 percent of births to white women (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009b). 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 postponement of marriage.

Never-married black 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. And children of low-SES 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 (Coley, 1998). But marriage to the child’s biological father benefits children only when the father is a reliable source of economic and emotional support. When a mother pairs up with an antisocial father, her child is at greater risk for conduct problems than if she had reared the child alone (Jaffee et al., 2003). Strengthening 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. Several million American gay men and lesbians are parents, most through previous heterosexual marriages, some through adoption, and a growing number through reproductive technologies (Ambert, 2005; Patterson, 2002). 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.

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 children of heterosexuals in mental health, peer relations, or gender identity (Allen & Burrell, 1996; Flaks et al., 1995; Golombok & Tasker, 1996).

Two additional studies, which surmounted the potential bias associated with a volunteer sample by including all 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 nonsupportive society.
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 do not differ from other children in sexual orientation; the large majority are heterosexual (Tasker, 2005).

When extended-family members have difficulty accepting them, 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, & Lazor, 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). But in an Australian study, even though most third to tenth graders were guarded about their sexual orientation; the large majority are heterosexual (Tasker, 2005). When extended-family members have difficulty accepting them, 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, & Lazor, 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). But in an Australian study, even though most third to tenth graders were guarded about discussing their parents’ relationship with peers, nearly half reported harassment (Ray & Gregory, 2001). Overall, families headed by homosexuals can be distinguished from other families only by issues related to living in a nonsupportive society.

**Establishing a Career**

Our discussion of Levinson’s and Vaillant’s theories highlighted diverse paths and timetables for career development. Consider the wide variations among Sharaee, Ernie, Christy, and Gary. As is typical for men, Ernie’s and Gary’s career lives were long and continuous, from completion of formal education to retirement. Sharaee 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. In an Australian study that followed 1,200 young people after they finished their schooling, at any given time during the next seven years, only 20 percent were working in a field consistent with their greatest interest (Athanasou, 2002).

Even for those who enter their chosen field, initial experiences can be discouraging. At the health department, Sharaee discovered that committee meetings and 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 workers become aware of the gap between their expectations and reality, resignations are common. On average, people in their twenties move to a new job every two years (Petersen & Gonzales, 1999).

After a period of evaluation and adjustment, young adults generally settle into their work. In careers with opportunities for promotion, high aspirations must often be revised downward because the structure of most work settings resembles a pyramid, with few high-level executive and supervisory jobs. Besides opportunity, personal characteristics affect career progress. As we will see, a sense of self-efficacy is influential. Young people who are very anxious about on-the-job failure tend to set their career aspirations either too high or too low. When they encounter obstacles, they quickly conclude that career tasks are too hard and give up (Lent & Brown, 2002). As a result, they achieve far less than their abilities would permit.

Recall from Levinson’s theory that career success often depends on the quality of a mentoring relationship. Access to an effective mentor is jointly affected by the availability of willing people and the individual’s capacity to select an appropriate individual (Ramaseswami & 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 lower-level mentors—more experienced co-workers or members of their professional associations (Allen & Finkelstein, 2003).

**Career Development**

Besides family life, vocational life is a vital domain of social development in early adulthood. Young people must learn how to perform work 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.
Women and Ethnic Minorities

Although women and ethnic minorities have penetrated nearly all professions, 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, pages 359–360). And although the overall difference between men's and women's earnings is smaller today than 30 years ago, it remains considerable. 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 (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. Many enter and exit the labor market several times as they give birth to and rear children. Between ages 18 and 34, the typical woman has been out of the labor force 26 percent of the time, in contrast to 11 percent for the typical man (Furchtgott-Roth, 2009; U.S. Department of Labor, 2004). 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).

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 (Lindley, 2005). 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, fewer women are available to serve as mentors (Stewart & Lavaque-Manty, 2008).

Despite laws guaranteeing equal opportunity, racial bias in the labor market remains strong. In one study, researchers responded to more than 1,300 help-wanted newspaper ads with fictitious résumés, some containing higher qualifications and some lower qualifications. Half the résumés were assigned a white-sounding name (Emily Walsh, Brendan Baker) and half a black-sounding name (Lakisha Washington, Jamal Jones). At all job levels, from clerical work to top management, résumés with “white” names evoked 50 percent more callbacks than résumés with “black” names. And although whites received substantially more callbacks in response to high-quality than to
low-quality résumés, having a high-quality résumé made little
difference for blacks. As the researchers noted, “Discrimination
appears to bite twice, making it harder for African Americans to
find a job and to improve their employability” (Bertrand &
Mullainathan, 2004, p. 3). Consistent with this conclusion,
African Americans spend more time searching for work, expe-
rience less stable employment, and acquire less work experience
than Caucasian Americans with equivalent job qualifications
(Pager & Shepherd, 2008).

Ethnic minority women must surmount combined gender
and racial discrimination to realize their career potential. Those
who succeed often display an unusually high sense of self-
efficacy, attacking problems head-on despite repeated obstacles
to achievement (Byars & Hackett, 1998). In an interview study
of African-American women who had become leaders in diverse
fields, all reported intense persistence, fueled by supportive rela-
tionships with other women, including teachers, colleagues, and
friends who countered their sense of professional isolation
(Richie et al., 1997). Many described their mothers as inspiring
role models who had set high standards for them. Others felt
empowered by a deep sense of connection to their African-
American communities.

**Combining Work and Family**

Whether women work because they want to or have to (or
both), the dominant family form today is the dual-earner mar-
rriage. Most dual-earner couples are also parents, since the ma-
majority of women with children are in the work force (see page
274 in Chapter 10). But many more women than men experi-
ence moderate to high levels of stress in trying to meet both
work and family responsibilities (Cinamon & Rich, 2002).

**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 work and family
responsibilities. In addition to a demanding career, she also
(like most employed women) shouldered most of the house-
hold 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 psy-
chological stress, poorer marital relations, less effective parent-
ing, and child behavior problems (Perry-Jenkins, Repetti, &
Crouter, 2000; Saginak & Saginak, 2005).

Workplace supports can greatly reduce role overload,
yielding substantial payoffs for employers. Among a large, na-
tionally 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 re-
ported fewer stress-related health symptoms.

Effectively balancing work and family brings many bene-
fits—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 career ac-
complishments, which contributed to his view of her as an in-
teresting, capable helpmate. Multiple roles also granted both
young people expanded contexts for experiencing success and
greater similarity in everyday experiences, which fostered grat-
ifying communication (Barnett & Hyde, 2001). Applying What
We Know on the following page lists strategies that help dual-
earer couples combine work and family roles in ways that pro-
 mote mastery and pleasure in both spheres of life.

**ASK YOURSELF**

**REVIEW**

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

**APPLY**

Heather climbed the career ladder of her company quickly,
reaching a top-level executive position by her early thirties. In
contrast, Sharese and Christy did not attain managerial roles
in early adulthood. What factors might account for this disparity
in career progress?

**REFLECT**

Contact a major employer in your area and ask about its policies
for helping employees combine work and family roles. What
improvements would you suggest? Why are family-friendly
policies “win-win” situations for both workers and employers?
**CHAPTER 14  Emotional and Social Development in Early Adulthood**

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### 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 values and priorities. If it is too much, cut back.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Press for workplace and public policies that assist dual-earner-family roles.</td>
<td>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>
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**Summary**

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**A Gradual Transition: Emerging Adulthood**

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

- In emerging adulthood, young adults from about age 18 to 25 are released from parental oversight but have not yet taken on adult roles. During these years of extended exploration, young people prolong identity development as they explore alternatives in breadth and depth.

- Increased education required for entry-level positions in many fields, gains in economic prosperity, reduced need for young people’s labor, and globalization have prompted the appearance and spread of emerging adulthood.

- In trying out possibilities, emerging adults must adjust to disappointments in love and work, and their explorations also extend risky behaviors of adolescence. A wide array of personal attributes and social supports foster resilience.

- Levinson described a series of eras, each consisting of a transition and a stable phase, in which people revise their life structure. Young adults usually construct a dream, typically involving career for men and both marriage and career for women, and form a relationship with a mentor to help them realize their dream. In their thirties, men tend to settle down, whereas many women remain unsettled into middle adulthood.

- Vaillant refined Erikson’s stages, portraying the twenties as devoted to intimacy, the thirties to career consolidation, the forties to generativity, and the fifties and sixties to cultural values.

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

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

- In Erikson’s theory, young adults must resolve the conflict of intimacy versus isolation, balancing independence and intimacy as they form a close relationship with a partner. Research confirms that a secure identity fosters attainment of intimacy.

- Young people also focus on aspects of generativity, including parenting and contributions to society through work.

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**Other Theories of Adult Psychosocial Development**

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

- Levinson described a series of eras, each consisting of a transition and a stable phase, in which people revise their life structure. Young adults usually construct a dream, typically involving career for men and both marriage and career for women, and form a relationship with a mentor to help them realize their dream. In their thirties, men tend to settle down, whereas many women remain unsettled into middle adulthood.

- Vaillant refined Erikson’s stages, portraying the twenties as devoted to intimacy, the thirties to career consolidation, the forties to generativity, and the fifties and sixties to cultural values.
The patterns Levinson and Vaillant identified are based on limited samples of people born in the first few decades of the twentieth century. Young adults’ development is more variable today than in past generations.

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

- Conformity to or departure from the social clock—age-graded expectations for major life events—can be a major source of personality change. Following a social clock grants confidence to young adults; deviating from it can bring psychological distress.

### Close Relationships

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

- Romantic partners tend to resemble one another in age, ethnicity, SES, religion, and various personal and physical attributes. According to evolutionary theory, 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. An alternative, social learning perspective emphasizes that gender roles profoundly influence criteria for mate selection. Research suggests that both biological and social forces are involved.

- According to the triangular theory of love, the balance among intimacy, passion, and commitment changes as romantic relationships move from the intense sexual attraction of passionate love toward more settled companionate love. Commitment is key to a satisfying, enduring relationship.

Young adults are vulnerable to loneliness, which declines with age as they form satisfying intimate ties. As long as it is not too intense, loneliness can encourage young people to reach out to others and better understand themselves.

### The Family Life Cycle

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

- Wide variations exist in the sequence and timing of phases of the family life cycle. Leaving home is a major step in assuming adult responsibilities. Departures for education occur earlier than those for full-time work and marriage. SES and ethnicity influence the likelihood that a young person will live independently before marriage. Many unmarried young adults return home for a period of time.

- Nearly 90 percent of Americans marry, at later ages than in the past. Today, couples must work harder to define their marital roles. Both traditional marriages and egalitarian marriages are affected by women’s participation in the workforce. Even in dual-earner marriages, North American women spend nearly twice as much time as men on housework.

### The Diversity of Adult Lifestyles

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

- Singlehood has risen in recent years because of a trend toward later marriage and a high divorce rate. Despite certain drawbacks, singles appreciate their freedom and mobility. Women tend to adjust more favorably than men.

- Cohabitation has risen dramatically, especially among well-educated, economically advantaged young adults. Compared with their Western European counterparts, American cohabiters tend to be less conventional in values and behavior and less committed to their partner, and their subsequent marriages are more likely to fail. However, gay and lesbian couples who cohabit because they cannot marry report commitment equal to that of married couples.

- Voluntarily childless adults tend to be well-educated and career-oriented and are as satisfied with their lives as parents who have good relationships with their children. But when childlessness is beyond a person’s control, it interferes with adjustment.

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

- In families with adolescents, parents must blend guidance with freedom and gradually loosen control. Marital satisfaction often declines in this phase. Parent education programs can help parents clarify their child-rearing values and use more effective strategies.

- Quality of the marital relationship predicts mental health similarly for both men and women. Women, however, feel particularly dissatisfied when the combined demands of work and family roles are overwhelming. Although most couples become parents, they do so at a later age and have fewer children than in the past.

- The arrival of a child requires couples to adjust to increased responsibilities and often prompts a shift to more traditional roles, though this may reverse after the birth of a second child. Shared caregiving predicts greater parental happiness and positive parent–infant interaction.

- Families with young children face challenges of clarifying and implementing child-rearing values. Couples who work together as a parenting team 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.

- In families without children, parents may face the challenge of having their identity centered in their roles as parents. Single parents may feel particularly isolated, especially if they have children who are school-aged. 

- Voluntary childlessness decreases the likelihood of divorce, but remarriage to a divorced person increases the risk of divorce. High rates of divorce among remarriages are attributed to the high risk of reuniting with an ex-spouse, greater economic hardships, and less time for the remarriage to develop. 

- Nearly half of U.S. marriages dissolve, often while children are at home. About two-thirds of divorced people remarry. Maladaptive communication patterns, younger ages at marriage, a family history of divorce, poverty, and the changing status of women all contribute to divorce.
Finding a new partner is important to many divorced adults, especially men. Remarriages break up for several reasons, including the prominence of practical concerns rather than love in the decision to remarry, the persistence of negative styles of communication, the acceptance of divorce as a solution to marital difficulties, and problems adjusting to a stepfamily.

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

Establishing stepparent–stepchild ties is difficult, especially for stepmothers and for stepfathers without children of their own. A caring husband–wife relationship, cooperation from the biological parent, and children’s acceptance are crucial for stepparent adjustment.

Never-married single parenthood is especially high among low-income African-American women in their twenties. Unemployment among black men contributes to this trend. Although these mothers often receive help from extended family members, they find it difficult to overcome poverty.

Gay and lesbian parents are as committed to and effective at child rearing as heterosexual parents, and their children are as well-adjusted as those reared by heterosexual parents.

Career Development

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 discontinuous because of child rearing and other family needs. After adjusting to the realities of the work world, young adults settle into an occupation. Their progress is affected by opportunities for promotion, personal characteristics such as self-efficacy, and access to an effective mentor.

Women and ethnic minorities have penetrated nearly all professions but have made limited progress in career advancement. Women are hampered by time away from the labor market, low self-efficacy and lack of mentoring in traditionally male-dominated fields, and gender stereotypes of women as followers rather than leaders. Racial bias in the labor market remains strong, and ethnic minority women who succeed display an unusually high sense of self-efficacy.

Couples, particularly women, in dual-earner marriages often experience role overload. Effectively balancing work and family brings a better standard of living, enhanced psychological well-being, and happier marriages. Time-flexible workplace policies reduce stress while augmenting work performance.

Important Terms and Concepts

- Cohabitation (p. 384)
- Companionate love (p. 373)
- Egalitarian marriage (p. 378)
- Emerging adulthood (p. 366)
- Family life cycle (p. 377)
- Intimacy versus isolation (p. 369)
- Life structure (p. 370)
- Loneliness (p. 376)
- Passionate love (p. 373)
- Social clock (p. 372)
- Traditional marriage (p. 378)
- Triangular theory of love (p. 373)