

CHAPTER 15

"His" and "Her" Relationships? A Review of the Empirical Evidence

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Comparing the experiences of men and women in intimate relationships is a fascination - some might say an obsession - that has long intrigued laypeople and researchers alike. The public appears to crave information about how men and women differ in their approaches to love and relationships, a point reflected in the continuing popularity of John Gray's (1993) best-selling book, *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*. Social scientists, too, have tackled this topic. Thirty years ago, sociologist Jessie Bernard (1972) proposed that in every marriage there are actually two relationships - "his" and "hers." In the intervening years, relationship researchers have energetically investigated the possibility of important gender differences in close relationships, extending their analyses beyond marriage to include cohabiting partners, gay and lesbian couples (see Diamond, this volume), and other intimate relationships.

A comprehensive history of theory and research on gender in close relationships has yet to be written, but a few landmarks are illustrative. Early analyses, primarily by sociologists and anthropologists, focused on

the family (see review by Glenn, 1987). Working from a functionalist perspective, theorists such as Parsons (1955) suggested that the existence of the traditional nuclear family provided evidence that differentiated male-female roles serve vital functions, including the socialization of children and the stabilization of adult personality. In the 1970s, emerging feminist perspectives criticized prevailing theories as justifying the status quo. Instead, feminist scholars urged analyses of male-female relationships that considered gender ideology, power inequalities, the division of labor, and the social context (e.g., Bernard, 1972). Although feminists often argued for the social origins of traditional gender patterns in relationships, the development of sociobiology provided an alternative perspective rooted in human evolution. Symons' (1979) influential book, *The Evolution of Human Sexuality*, laid the groundwork for evolutionary analyses of mate selection, parental investment, and other topics that continue to be studied today. In the 1970s, empirical projects such as the Boston Couples Study (e.g., Peplau, Hill, & Rubin, 1993) paid increasing

attention to the impact of changing gender attitudes and roles on young couples. Early studies of gay and lesbian couples also began to appear (e.g., Peplau & Jones, 1982). The American Couples study (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983) provided extensive survey data on thousands of couples, including not only married heterosexuals, but also cohabiting heterosexual, gay, and lesbian couples. Analytic reviews of research on women and men in personal relationships became more common (e.g., Glenn, 1987; Huston & Ashmore, 1986). Empirical research on gender in close relationships continued to grow in the 1980s and 1990s, and books devoted to this topic began to appear. These included *Gendered Relationships* (Wood, 1996), *Gender and Close Relationships* (Winstead, Derlega, & Rose, 1997), and *Gender and Families* (Coltrane, 2000). A further indication of the wealth of research on gender and relationships comes from a search of the PsycINFO database, which, in February 2004, listed 1,042 articles, books, chapters, and dissertations published since 1960 that combined the thesaurus terms "human sex differences" and "couples."

A major critique of sex difference research is that many studies are purely descriptive (e.g., Yoder & Kahn, 2003). Those studies that are theory-based tend to focus on a limited set of experiences, with evolutionary theorists studying mate selection, social interdependence theorists studying commitment, social role theorists addressing the division of labor, and so on. This lack of theoretical grounding is problematic because gender itself does not provide an explanation for documented differences between the sexes. Demonstrating, for instance, that marriage is more beneficial for the health of husbands than of wives does not explain this gender effect. In other words, sex difference findings do not provide answers but rather lead to more questions. Observed male-female differences are likely to reflect a wide range of factors including an individual's biological makeup and personal dispositions, his or her loca-

tion in the social hierarchy of status and economic resources, attitudes about how men and women should behave in relationships, and the social opportunities available at a given historical moment (Winstead et al., 1997).

In this chapter, we take stock of the extensive empirical research comparing men's and women's experiences in intimate relationships. Of practical necessity, this review concentrates on six major domains: what men and women want in relationships, relationship orientation, sexuality, family work, power and influence, and health. We have selected areas in which there is sufficient empirical research to identify reliable patterns. In addition, this review is limited to adult romantic relationships and focuses on describing gendered patterns rather than tracing their origins. We hope that our review will spur relationship scholars to develop more integrative theoretical accounts of men's and women's experiences in close relationships.

What Men and Women Want in Relationships

We begin our review with research investigating whether women and men approach close relationships with different values and preferences in a mate.

Values about Relationships

Proponents of the position that women and men inhabit "different cultures" suggest that women and men hold distinctive standards for their intimate relationships and have different beliefs about effective communication (e.g., Wood, 1996). For example, whereas women may prefer emotion-focused messages that elaborate on a distressed person's feelings, men may prefer instrumentally oriented messages that focus on fixing a problem rather than expressing feelings. Empirical research provides little empirical support for this argument (see review by Burleson, 2003).

Instead, whereas women rate emotion-focused skills as more important than do men, and men rate instrumentally oriented skills as more important than do women; both sexes rate emotion-focused skills as considerably more important than instrumental skills. These results highlight the importance of examining both between-sex and within-sex effects. That is, although there are mean differences in the importance that men and women place on emotion-focused versus instrumental communication, both sexes value communication focused on emotions more highly.

Whereas the "different cultures" argument holds that women and men have different relational standards, the "different experiences" model holds that the sexes approach their relationships with the same values and goals, but that the behaviors typically displayed by women are more likely to fulfill men's relational standards. Available research supports the latter position. In an illustrative study, individuals in long-term relationships evaluated the importance of 30 relational standards (e.g., trust, affective accessibility, flexibility) as well as the degree to which their current relationship fulfilled each of these qualities (Vangelisti & Daly, 1997). Results showed that men and women attached equal importance to each of the relational standards, but men were more likely than women to report that their standards were fulfilled. Vangelisti and Daly suggested that women's caring and nurturing role, along with their more intimate style of interacting and communicating with a partner, create a context in which men's standards are more likely to be met than women's.

Another possibility is that men and women may have different standards for more specific 'things such as the preferred frequency of household work or sexual activity. For instance, men may have considerably lower standards than women for household work, and women may have lower standards than men for frequency of sexual activity. Differences in "these more specific standards could set the stage for relationship conflict.

This would be a useful direction for future research.

Mate Preferences

What are men and women looking for in selecting a romantic partner? The extensive research on heterosexual mate selection documents two consistent sex differences. First, although both sexes appreciate good looks, men place greater value on the physical attributes of a partner than do women. For example, in a national survey of Americans, men were less willing than women to marry someone who was not "good looking" (Sprecher, Sullivan, & Hatfield, 1994). Second, women place greater emphasis on a partner's status and economic resources than do men. In a national survey, women indicated greater interest than men in marrying someone who had a steady job, earned more, and had more education (Sprecher et al., 1994). Men's greater interest in physical attractiveness and women's greater interest in status and resources have been found not only in the United States but in a wide range of other cultures as well (e.g., Buss & Schmitt, 1993).

However, digging deeper into findings about mate preference indicates that neither men nor women put good looks and economic resources at the top of their wish list. In a recent study that assessed 18 mate characteristics (Buss, Shackelford, Kirkpatrick, & Larsen, 2001), "good looks" ranked 8th on men's list (and 13th on women's list). "Good financial prospects" ranked 11th on women's list (and 13th on men's). At the top of both men's and women's lists were mutual attraction, dependability, emotional maturity, and a pleasing disposition. Taken together, these results find evidence of both gender similarities and gender differences. More broadly, they highlight the importance of taking a balanced view of gender comparisons, one that considers not only differences between the sexes but also individual differences among men and women, and features that are common to humans in general.

Relationship Orientation

Social theorists from diverse perspectives have proposed that women are more relationship-oriented than are men (e.g., Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982). Recent empirical studies provide converging support for this proposition (see Cross & Madson, 1997, for a review). Women's relatively greater relationship orientation is reflected in cognition (i.e., how individuals think about themselves in relation to others), motivation (i.e., the drive or desire to maintain relationships), and behavior (i.e., the activities that individuals engage in to maintain relationships).

Cognition

The ways people construe themselves in relation to important people in their lives indicate their relationship orientation. Research has identified two contrasting self-concepts. For a person with an *independent self-construal*, self-definition is based to a large degree on his or her own unique attributes, and emphasis is placed on maintaining a sense of autonomy from others (Markus & Kitayama, 1994). In contrast, for a person with an *interdependent self-construal*, relationships are viewed as integral parts of his or her very being. Emphasis is placed on connection with others, so that the self is defined, at least in part, by important relationships with close others.

In U.S. society, women are more likely than men to construct an interdependent self-view, and men are more likely than women to construct an independent self-view. In a comprehensive review of research on gender and self-construal, Cross and Madson (1997) showed that women describe themselves in more relational terms, rank relationship-oriented aspects of their identity as more important, pay closer attention to others, talk more about their relationships, and have a better memory for close others and relationship events than do men. Across eight samples, women scored higher than men on a composite mea-

sure of the relational-interdependent self-construal (effect size of $d = -0.41$), more frequently endorsing such items as "My close relationships are an important reflection of who I am" (Cross, Bacon, & Morris, 2000). Some theorists have challenged this gender difference, asserting that whereas women's self-construal focuses on the self in intimate, dyadic relationships, men's focuses on the collective or group self (e.g., Baumeister & Sommer, 1997). Nonetheless, in the context of dyadic relationships (which is the focus of this review), women's and men's self-construals may differ in important ways.

Gender differences in self-construal can influence the characteristics that men and women value in an intimate relationship. Specifically, women may value closeness and intimate connections more than men, and men may value individuality and autonomy more than women. Indeed, a major source of conflict in marriage concerns the amount of closeness or intimacy that spouses desire in their relationships (see Eldridge & Christensen, 2002, for a review). In marriage, it is more often the wife who wants greater closeness and the husband who desires greater autonomy. Therapists report that the most common complaint of women in distressed marriages is that their husbands are too withdrawn, whereas men complain that their wives are overly expressive, emotional, and nagging (e.g., Markman & Kraft, 1989). These ideas are also consistent with research showing that women are most angry and upset when their partners behave in an inconsiderate, neglectful, emotionally restrictive, or condescending manner, whereas men are most angry and upset when their partners are possessive and dependent (Buss, 1991).

Consistent with what we might expect from research on self-construal, several studies have documented gender differences in adult attachment styles. Women are more likely than men to be "preoccupied" as measured by both self-reports and interviews (e.g., Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1994). That is, women place an extremely high value

on feeling intimate with a romantic partner but are anxious about abandonment and fear that their partners will not want to get as close as they would like. In contrast, men in most cultures around the world are more likely than women to be "dismissing" (e.g., Schmitt, Alcalay, Allensworth, Allik, Ault, Austers, et al., 2003). Men are more likely to report that it is important to feel independent and self-sufficient, and they prefer not having to depend on others or have others depend on them.

Motivation

Evidence that women are more motivated than men to maintain their romantic relationships comes from research on commitment. Commitment has been defined as the degree to which an individual experiences long-term orientation toward a relationship, including the desire to maintain the relationship for better or worse (e.g., Rusbult, 1980). Although gender differences are not invariable, when they do arise, it is typically women who show greater relationship commitment. In a recent meta-analysis of 52 published and unpublished studies, Le and Agnew (2003) found a moderate effect size for gender ($d = -0.36$); women felt significantly more committed to their relationships than did men. Three important factors that influence commitment are relationship satisfaction, the quality of perceived alternatives to the current relationship, and the amount that a person has already invested in the relationship (see Rusbult & Van Lange, 1996, for a review). In the meta-analysis by Le and Agnew (2003), women were more satisfied ($d = -0.31$), felt that they had invested more into the relationship ($d = -0.13$), and perceived fewer alternatives to the current relationship ($d = 0.21$) than did men. In short, not only did women report "wanting" their relationships to continue - as indicated by their higher levels of satisfaction, they also reported "needing" their relationships to continue, reflected by their greater investments and fewer perceived alternatives.

This gender difference in commitment has also been documented in a gay and lesbian sample. Duffy and Rusbult (1985/1986) found that women, both heterosexual and lesbian, reported that they were more committed to maintaining their relationships and had invested more in their relationships than did men. In this sample, gay men reported the lowest levels of commitment and investment in their relationships. It will be valuable for future research to replicate the findings from this single study.

Behavior

For a relationship to persist over time, perhaps especially in societies where divorce is commonplace, partners need to engage in ongoing relationship "work" to maintain the relationship. In a typical study of relationship maintenance, dating or married participants indicate in an open-ended format the kinds of things they do to maintain their relationships (e.g., Stafford & Canary, 1991). Common strategies include acting cheerful around a partner, talking openly about the relationship, assuring a partner of one's love, surrounding the relationship with valued friends and family who support the relationship, and performing tasks. Although men and women do not differ in the types of behaviors they list as important, women report engaging in these behaviors more frequently than do men (e.g., Dindia & Baxter, 1987; Ragsdale, 1996).

Three maintenance strategies appear to be particularly gendered. First, women are more likely than men to express their love and affection for a partner (e.g., Ragsdale, 1996; Stafford, Dainton, & Haas, 2000). Second, women are more likely to engage in sexual activity that they do not desire in an effort, to maintain a valued intimate relationship (see Impett & Peplau, 2003 for a review). Third, in communicating with their partner, women are more likely than men to report being cheerful and polite, and initiating open and direct discussions about the nature of their relationship (e.g., Dainton & Stafford, 1993).

Sexuality

In recent years, empirical research comparing men's and women's sexuality has flourished. A consensus appears to be emerging about several basic areas of difference (see reviews in Harvey Wenzel, & Sprecher, 2004; Okami & Shackelford, 2001; Peplau, 2003). Our review focuses on five areas of difference.

Sexuality and Relationships

One consistent gender difference is women's greater tendency to emphasize relationships and commitment as a context for sexuality, and men's greater tendency to separate sexuality from love and commitment (see review by Peplau, 2003). For example, men and women differ in their definitions of "sexual desire." Women are more likely than men to "romanticize" the experience of sexual desire; men more often equate sexual desire with physical pleasure and sexual intercourse. In an illustrative study (Regan & Berscheid, 1996), more men (70%) than women (43%) believed that sexual desire was aimed at the physical act of sex. In contrast, more women (35%) than men (13%) cited love or emotional intimacy as the goal of sexual desire. Further, women's sex fantasies are more likely to include a familiar partner, to include affection and commitment, and to describe the setting for the sexual encounter. In contrast, men's fantasies are more likely to involve strangers, anonymous partners, or multiple partners and to focus on specific sex acts or body parts. Compared with women, men have more permissive attitudes toward casual premarital sex and toward extramarital sex. The size of these gender differences is relatively large, particularly for casual premarital sex ($d = 0.81$, Oliver & Hyde, 1993). The term *sociosexual orientation* has been used to capture this correlated set of sexual attitudes, preferences, and behaviors (see review by Simpson, Wilson & Winterheld, 2004). Significant gender differences are reliably found on measures of sociosexuality, both in the United States and in more than

50 other countries (Schmitt, Alcalay, Aulik, Ault, Austers, Bennett, et al., 2003).

The gender difference in emphasizing the relational aspects of sexuality is also found among lesbians and gay men (see review by Peplau, Fingerhut, & Beals, 2004). Compared with gay men, lesbians have less permissive attitudes toward casual sex and are more likely to become sexually involved with partners who were first their friends. Lesbians' sex fantasies are more likely to be personal and romantic. Lesbians report having fewer lifetime sex partners than do gay men. Indeed, gay men report substantially more sex partners than either lesbians or heterosexuals and score significantly higher than other groups on a general measure of sociosexuality (Bailey, Gaulin, Agyei, & Gladue, 1994). Gay men in committed relationships are more likely than any group to report that they have sex with partners outside the relationship (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Peplau, Fingerhut, & Beals, 2004).

Erotic Plasticity

Erotic plasticity is the extent to which an individual's sexual beliefs and behaviors can be shaped and altered by cultural, social, and situational factors. In a comprehensive review of empirical research, Baumeister (2000) showed that women's sexuality tends to be more malleable or "plastic" than men's. One sign of plasticity is that a person's sexual attitudes and behaviors are responsive to social and situational influences. Such factors as education, religion, and acculturation are more strongly linked to women's sexuality than to men's. For example, college education is associated with more permissive sexual attitudes and behavior, but this correlation is greater for women than for men. Another indicator of plasticity concerns changes in aspects of a person's sexuality over time. For example, the frequency of women's sexual activity is more variable than men's. If a woman is in an intimate relationship, she might have frequent sex with her partner. Following a breakup, however, she might have no sex at all, including masturbation, for several months. Men show

less temporal variability: following a romantic breakup, men may substitute masturbation for interpersonal sex and so maintain a more constant frequency of sex. There is also growing evidence that women are more likely than men to change their sexual orientation over time (e.g., Diamond, 2003).

Sexual Desire

Many lines of research demonstrate that men show more interest in sex than do women (see review by Baumeister, Catanese, & Vohs, 2001). Compared with women, men think about sex more often. Men report more frequent sex fantasies and more frequent feelings of sexual desire. Across the life span, men rate the strength of their own sex drive higher than do their female age-mates. Men are more interested in visual sexual stimuli and more likely to spend money on such explicitly sexual products and activities as x-rated videos and visits to prostitutes. Men and women also differ in their preferred frequency of sex. Masturbation provides a good index of sexual desire because it is not constrained by the availability of a partner. Men are more likely than women to masturbate, start masturbating at an earlier age, and do so more often. In a review of 177 studies, Oliver and Hyde (1993) found large male-female differences in the incidence of masturbation (effect size of $d = 0.96$). When dating and marriage partners disagree about sexual frequency, men usually want to have sex more often. In heterosexual couples, actual sexual frequency may reflect a compromise in the desires of the male and female partner. In gay and lesbian relationships, where sexual frequency is decided by partners of the same sex, lesbians report having sex less often than gay men or heterosexuals.

Caution is needed in interpreting evidence of men's greater sexual desire. First, it is important to avoid inadvertently using male standards such as penile penetration and orgasm as the basis for understanding women's sexuality. Some have suggested that other activities such as intimate kissing, cuddling, and touching may be uniquely

important to women's erotic lives (e.g., Peplau & Garnets, 2000). This would be consistent with women's tendency to define sexual desire in romantic, relational terms. Second, because women's sexual desire may vary across the menstrual cycle, it may be more appropriate to describe women's desire as periodic rather than weak or limited (Gangestad & Cousins, 2001). Finally, as with all the male-female comparisons reviewed, there are many exceptions to this general pattern. Blumberg's (2003) recent study of "highly sexual" women is illustrative.

Sexual Aggression

A fourth gendered pattern concerns the association between sexuality and aggression. This link has been demonstrated in many domains. Andersen and her colleagues (1999) investigated the dimensions that individuals use to characterize their own sexuality. Both sexes described themselves along a dimension of being romantic, with some individuals seeing themselves as very passionate and loving, and others less so. Men's sexual self-concepts were also characterized by a dimension of aggression, reflected in men's self-ratings on such adjectives as aggressive, powerful, experienced, and domineering. There was no equivalent aggression dimension for women's sexual self-concepts. A second example concerns men's greater use of physical coercion to influence an intimate partner to have sex. It has been estimated that 62 % of the sexual assaults committed against women are committed by relational partners (Christopher & Kisler, 2004). Many women who are battered by a boyfriend or husband also report sexual assaults as part of the abuse. Although men are sometimes victims of sexual aggression by women, this is relatively uncommon and less likely to involve sexual intercourse. Sexual aggression has been documented in both gay and lesbian relationships (Christopher & Kisler, 2004), although the use of convenience samples makes it difficult to ascertain typical rates of sexual aggression in this population. (For a review of violence in relationships, see Johnson, this volume.)

Gendered Patterns of Sexual Initiation and Response

Starting in the 1950s, U.S. researchers (e.g., Ehrmann, 1959) documented that in heterosexual couples men typically took the lead in initiating sexual intimacy and women served as gatekeepers, determining whether and when the couple engaged in sexual activities. This pattern was viewed as consistent with men's greater interest in sex and women's greater stake in preserving a good reputation and avoiding pregnancy. During the 1970s, when many young people were inspired by feminist ideas about sexual equality, researchers continued to find evidence that whether a dating couple had intercourse and how early in the relationship they did so were related to the woman's attitudes and prior experience more than to the man's (e.g., Peplau, Rubin, & Hill, 1977). There is considerable evidence for the persistence of this gendered pattern today. In heterosexual relationships, men are commonly more assertive and take the lead in sexual interactions (see Impett & Peplau, 2003, for a review). Early in a heterosexual relationship, men typically initiate touching and sexual intimacy. When college students describe a typical script for a first date, they consistently depict the man as the active partner who takes the lead in initiating sexual contact (Rose & Frieze, 1993). In ongoing relationships, men report initiating sex about twice as often as their female partners or age-mates (Impett & Peplau, 2003). To be sure, many women do initiate sex, but they do so less frequently than their male partners. As a result, women are more often in the position to respond. As in earlier eras, women sometimes act as gatekeepers, slowing the pace of sexual intimacy in a new relationship or determining whether a couple will have sex on a particular occasion.

One factor contributing to this gendered pattern is the persistence of a sexual double standard (see Crawford & Popp, 2003, for a review). Today, only a minority of religious and ethnic groups in the United States endorse an absolute double standard

prohibiting sex outside marriage for women but not for men. Nonetheless, in many social settings, women are judged more harshly than men for initiating sexual activity, having casual sex, having sex at a young age, or having sex with many partners. Further, men may use more restrictive standards in evaluating a woman as a potential marriage partner versus a dating partner. Although the specifics of the sexual double standard differ across ethnic and social groups, the persistence of more permissive attitudes toward men's sexual activities continues.

Of course, women do not always strive to limit a couple's sexual activity but may instead welcome a male partner's sexual advances, either because of their own sexual desire or because of their concerns about the relationship. Recently, researchers have analyzed a gendered pattern of sexual initiation and response known as *sexual compliance* (see Impett & Peplau, 2003, for a review). This term refers to situations in which one partner consents to sexual activity that he or she does not personally desire. For example, despite personal misgivings, a teenage girl may agree to have sex with her older boyfriend to preserve their relationship. In ongoing male-female relationships, women are roughly twice as likely as men to report complying with a partner's request when they would personally prefer not to have sex. This pattern builds on many of the sex differences noted earlier including men's greater desire for sex, men's taking the lead to initiate sex, and women's more relational orientation to sex, which may encourage them to resolve a dilemma about unwanted sex by taking their partner's welfare into account.

Finally, although male-female differences in sexuality are larger than those found in areas of human cognition and social behavior such as math performance or interpersonal communication, they are not dichotomous. Researchers studying men's and women's sexuality have consistently emphasized the importance of within-sex variability (e.g., Simpson et al., 2004) and the impact of differences among social and ethnic groups (e.g., Crawford & Popp, 2003).

Family Work

A basic tenet of traditional marital roles has been a division of labor by sex, with men cast as economic providers and women as homemakers. During the past 50 years, women's participation in the paid labor force has increased dramatically, and attitudes about distinctive marital roles for men and women have decreased substantially [e.g., Twenge, 1997]. Nonetheless, women continue to shoulder primary responsibility for homemaking and child care. Social scientists refer to the unpaid activities required to feed, clothe, shelter, and care for adults and children as *family work*.

Family Work Is Still Women's Work

The basic facts about family work are simple. Women who live with men typically do the majority of housework and, if they have children, the majority of child care. This is true whether the woman is a full-time homemaker, is employed part time, or has a full-time "job" (Shelton & John, 1996). Despite minor variations, the same pattern is found across U.S. ethnic groups (Coltrane, 2000b) and throughout the industrialized world (e.g., Batalova & Cohen, 2002). Consequently, marriage has opposite effects on the domestic labor performed by men and by women (Coltrane, 2000b). Single and cohabiting men do more housework than married men. Single and cohabiting women do less housework than married women.

In recent years, employed women in the United States have significantly decreased the amount of time they spend on housework: Those who can afford it often pay for domestic services, and Americans are eating fewer home-cooked meals. The amount of time that men devote to housework and child care has increased slightly over time. Together, these changes for women and men have decreased the gender gap in family work. Nonetheless, Coltrane's (2000b, p. 1212) recent review concluded that "the average woman still does about three times the amount of routine housework as the average man." Even when house-

work is shared or delegated to assistants, women typically act as household managers. Further, although it is not usually included in discussions of the division of family work, women are much more likely than men to provide care to family members, including aging parents and children who are ill or disabled (e.g., Cancian & Oliker, 2000). Not surprisingly, employed wives have less leisure time than their husbands.

Many factors affect the magnitude of sex differences in the division of labor (see reviews by Coltrane, 2000a, 2000b; Shelton & John, 1996). We highlight several consistent findings.

EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME

Not surprisingly, employed wives spend about a third less time on housework than do full-time homemakers. In general, the more hours a woman works outside the home and the more money she earns, the less work she does at home and the more balanced the division of labor. Although work hours and earnings can make a difference, most women nonetheless continue to do the majority of housework. Interesting exceptions to this pattern sometimes occur, for example, when work schedules constrain women's ability to perform domestic work. The impact of shift work is illustrative (e.g., Deutsch & Saxon, 1998). In some couples, particularly working-class couples with young children, husbands and wives work different shifts, perhaps with the husband working during the day and the wife leaving for a night shift just as her husband returns home. In such cases, it is more common for husbands to take charge of child care and housework in the wife's absence.

GENDER ATTITUDES

Individuals' attitudes about gender and marital roles are related to the amount of family work they perform, although the magnitude of this effect is often fairly small (e.g., Shelton & John, 1996). The match between partners' attitudes may be especially important. An analysis of data from the National Survey of Families and Households by

Greenstein (1996) is illustrative. Men with nontraditional attitudes whose wives also had nontraditional attitudes did the most family work. Men with traditional attitudes did relatively little work regardless of their wives' attitudes. Other research has sought to understand how couples who have traditional gender attitudes interpret behaviors that are inconsistent with their ideology. Deutsch and Saxon (1998) studied traditional blue-collar married couples in which economic necessity led the wife to take a job and the husband to fill in as primary parent when his wife was at work. Despite their nontraditional behavior, these couples maintained the core belief that the husband was really the primary breadwinner and the wife was really the primary caregiver.

GAY AND LESBIAN COUPLES

Several studies have examined the division of labor in same-sex couples (see review by Peplau & Beals, 2004). Most lesbians and gay men are in dual-earner relationships, so that neither partner is the exclusive breadwinner and each partner has some degree of economic independence. The most common division of labor at home involves flexibility, with partners sharing domestic activities or dividing tasks according to personal preferences or time constraints. In an illustrative study, Kurdek (1993) compared the allocation of household labor in gay, lesbian, and heterosexual married couples, all of whom were cohabiting and childless. Among heterosexual couples, wives typically did most of the housework. In contrast, gay and lesbian couples were more equal in the division of labor. Gay male partners tended to arrive at equality by each partner specializing in certain tasks; lesbian partners were more likely to share tasks. A recent study comparing lesbian and gay couples who obtained civil unions in Vermont to heterosexual married couples also found much greater equality in housework among same-sex couples (Solomon, Rothblum, & Balsam, in press).

PARENTHOOD

Among heterosexual couples, the transition to parenthood typically increases the gen-

der gap in family work, with many women adding primary responsibility for child care to their primary responsibility for housework and sometimes reducing their hours of paid work to compensate (Coltrane, 2000a). Fatherhood may also increase men's workload, but it appears that men are more likely to increase their family work by spending time with children rather than doing more housework. It has become more common on weekends to see fathers taking their children to the park or supermarket. A nationally representative study of families with at least one child under age 13 (Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Kean, & Hofferth, 2001) documented this "weekend father" role among Anglo, Black, and Latino American families. During the week, these fathers spent much less time with their children than their wives did, but on weekends, fathers' time with children increased from 80% to 94% of mothers' time. For some activities, such as coaching or teaching a child sports, fathers spent considerably more time than mothers. On weekdays, dads who earned more money and had longer work hours spent less time with their children than dads with less demanding jobs. In contrast, fathers' work hours did not affect how much time they spent with children on the weekend.

Although research on parenthood among gay and lesbian couples is very limited, it suggests that same-sex partners continue to share major family responsibilities after the arrival of a baby. For example, Chan, Brooks, Raboy, and Patterson (1998) compared 30 lesbian couples and 16 heterosexual couples, all of whom became parents using anonymous donor insemination. In this highly educated sample, both lesbian and heterosexual couples reported a relatively equal division of paid employment, housework, and decision making. However, lesbian couples reported sharing child-care tasks more equally than did heterosexual parents.

Fairness and Marital Quality

In recent years, researchers have addressed a seeming paradox in male-female relationships: Although women perform the majority of family work, most partners view

their division of labor as fair (Coltrane, 2000b; Shelton & John, 1996). If the observable "facts" of the matter do not fully determine assessments of fairness, what other factors make a difference? Individuals' gender attitudes appear to be important. Using the National Survey of Families and Households, Greenstein (1996[^]) found that wives are more likely to perceive the division of household labor as unfair if they have egalitarian rather than traditional gender attitudes. Based on models of justice (e.g., Major, 1993), it has been suggested that women will be most likely to perceive the division of labor as unfair when their relationship differs from their expectations, when they compare their own level of family work to that of their male partner (not to female peers), and when they perceive no legitimate justification for an unequal distribution of family work. Some support for these predictions has been found (Coltrane, 2000 a, Kluwer, Heesink & van de Vliert, 2002]. Finally, researchers are also investigating the symbolic meaning that partners attach to family work, for instance the extent to which women may view housework not merely as "work" but also as an important sign of love and caring for their family. Perceptions of fairness may have much to do with the broader meanings that individuals attach to housework and child care.

Marital quality is more closely linked to spouses' beliefs about their division of labor than to the actual amount of time each person contributes (see Shelton & John, 1996, for a review). Marital quality tends to be higher when spouses agree about the allocation of family work. Relationship satisfaction is also higher when partners perceived the distribution of family work to be fair, and this effect is stronger for wives with egalitarian rather than traditional attitudes (Greenstein, 1996[^]). In general, women are more likely than their husbands to have egalitarian attitudes about marital roles and to be dissatisfied with the balance of family work. If women voice concerns about fairness, relationship conflict may ensue. As Coltrane (2000b) noted, "Women are thus faced with a double bind: They can push for change, threatening the relationship, or they

can accept an unbalanced division of labor, labeling it 'fair' (p. 1225)."

Power and Influence

Traditional conceptions of marriage endorse the idea that the husband should be the head of the family, the patriarch with greater authority in leading the family and making important decisions. Newer conceptions of intimate relationships emphasize a more egalitarian model in which partners share in authority and influence (e.g., VanLear, Koerner, & Allen, this volume). Today, advocates for both positions can readily be found, with the traditional view most common among certain religious and ethnic communities and the egalitarian view gaining ground in the mainstream of life in the United States.

Power refers to one partner's ability to influence deliberately the behavior, thoughts, or feelings of the other. In some relationships, there is an imbalance of power, with one person making more decisions, controlling more of the joint activities and resources, winning more arguments and, in general, being in a position of dominance. In other couples, both partners are equally influential. Researchers often assess this balance of power by asking partners to give their personal evaluations of their relationship. Results of the American Couples Study (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983) are typical. In this sample of more than 3,000 married couples, 64 % reported that the balance of power in their marriage was equal. Most other couples said the husband was more powerful and less than 9% said the wife was dominant. Contrary to popular stereotypes, research on Mexican American and African American families has found similar patterns, with a majority of married couples reporting power equality (see Peplau & Campbell, 1989, for a review). Of course, relative equality of power can be achieved in a variety of ways, with some couples engaging in joint decision making and others dividing areas of responsibility based on gender roles or individual preferences.

Several factors can tip the balance of power in favor of one partner over the other, and these tend to favor the male partner in heterosexual couples (Peplau & Campbell, 1989). In heterosexual relationships, social norms traditionally cast the male partner as the initiator and leader. For example, the typical script for a first date depicts the man as taking the lead to ask the woman out, plan their activities, and pay their joint expenses (e.g., Rose & Frieze, 1993). The relative resources of the partners can also make a difference. The partner who earns more money, has more education, or has a more prestigious job tends to have a power advantage, especially if the partner with the greater resources is a man. In couples where the woman has a better job or earns more money, the result is more likely to be shared decision making (e.g., Tichenor, 1999). Research further suggests that the balance of power is affected by each partner's dependence on the relationship - that is, by their relative level of involvement or commitment. To the extent that one partner feels more committed to a relationship and less able to leave, he or she may be at a power disadvantage. This can affect both sexes, but may be somewhat more characteristic of women (e.g., Le & Agnew, 2003). In general relationship satisfaction is similar in egalitarian and male-dominant relationships but lower in female-dominant ones. As noted in a recent review, "Even today, female dominance in a heterosexual relationship is less acceptable to both parties than is male dominance" (Brehm, Miller, Perlman & Campbell, 2002, p. 323).

Lesbians and gay men tend to have egalitarian attitudes and norms about power that emphasize shared-decision making in intimate relationships (see review by Peplau & Spalding, 2000). In an early study, 92% of gay men and 97% of lesbians denuded the ideal balance of power as one in which both partners were "exactly equal" (Peplau & Cochran, 1980). In a more recent study (Kurdek, 1995), partners in gay and lesbian couples responded to multiitem measures assessing various facets of equality in an ideal relationship. On average, both lesbians and gay men rated equality as quite important,

with lesbians scoring significantly higher on the value of equality than did gay men. It has been estimated that about two thirds of lesbians and gay men describe their current relationship as equal in power, a figure comparable to that typically found for heterosexual couples. In same-sex couples, satisfaction is typically higher among those reporting equal rather than unequal power (Peplau & Spalding, 2000). Although research is limited, it seems likely that the same factors that affect the balance of power in heterosexual relationships - norms, resources, and relative involvement - also apply to lesbians and gay men.

Do men and women differ in the how they try to influence their romantic partners? This question has intrigued researchers for more than 2 decades, but as yet consistent answers have not emerged (e.g., Canary & Emmers-Sommer, 1997). Consider two examples. Some studies have found gender differences in the use of direct styles of influence among heterosexual couples, with men more likely to ask or bargain and women more likely to hint, pout, or withdraw (e.g., Falbo & Peplau, 1980). On closer examination, however, it was found that the tactics used by women were also the tactics used by partners who, regardless of gender, reported having less power in their relationship. This same link between power tactics and the perceived balance of power was also found among lesbians and gay men. In two laboratory experiments with mixed-sex and same-sex dyads, Sagrestano (1992) corroborated this finding, showing that when social power was manipulated such that one partner had greater expertise about the topic of conflict, the use of influence tactics was linked to expertise - not to gender. Men and women in similar power positions used the same strategies, with high-power individuals preferring persuasion, reasoning, and discussion.

In another line of work, Christensen and colleagues (see review by Eldridge & Christensen, 2002) investigated the demand-withdraw pattern of interaction during couple conflict. In this pattern, one partner seeks to discuss a relationship issue or problem and the other tries to avoid

the topic. Overall, women are more likely to be the pursuer and men the distancing partner. Although gender socialization may contribute to this pattern by encouraging women to be expressive and relationship-oriented, it is only part of the story. Other factors also matter. In a study of gay, lesbian, and heterosexual couples, Walczynski (1997) found that the demand-withdraw pattern was linked to the partners' perception of power in the relationship. The partner who scored higher on power was more likely to be demanding in conflict discussions. The nature of the conflict itself is also important (Eldridge & Christensen, 2002). The wife-demand and husband-withdraw pattern is common when the wife wants a change in the relationship and the husband does not. In contrast, when the husband wants a change, both husband-demand and wife-demand are equally likely to occur. In short, there is no simple way to characterize "men's" and "women's" styles of influence. A range of factors including the goal of the influence attempt, the partners' relative power and expertise, and individual differences in personality can all make a difference.

Marriage and Health

Satisfying personal relationships enhance the mental and physical well-being of both women and men. Research demonstrating this point has focused on heterosexual marriage and includes studies with a diverse array of self-report and physiological measures (see reviews by Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001; Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Compared with their unmarried peers, married individuals are less likely to die from such leading causes of death as cancer, coronary heart disease, stroke, pneumonia, cirrhosis of the liver, automobile accidents, murder, and suicide. To some extent, this marriage benefit reflects selection effects: Healthy individuals are more likely to marry and stay married. However, there is growing evidence that marital relations can themselves enrich and prolong life. Gender also plays a role, and we will consider two sex

differences in detail. First, the health benefits of marriage are greater for men than for women, as are the detrimental effects of divorce and bereavement. Second, the health consequences of marriage are more closely linked to marital quality for women than for men.

Why Men Derive Greater Health Benefits From Marriage Do Women

Evidence from diverse sources documents that husbands tend to gain larger health benefits from marriage than do wives. For instance, unmarried women have a 50% greater mortality than married women, but unmarried men have a 250% greater mortality than married men (Ross, Mirowsky, & Goldsteen, 1990). Three explanations merit consideration.

THE SINGLE LIFE

Waite and Gallagher (2000) argued that "the reason that getting a wife boosts your health more than acquiring a husband is not that marriage warps women, but that single men lead such warped lives" (p. 164). Indeed, single men are much more likely than single women to drink to excess, drive too fast, get into fights, participate in dangerous sports, and engage in other unhealthy and risky behaviors (Umberson, 1987). Single women, in contrast, lead relatively settled, healthy lives, at least compared with single men. In short, men's health may improve dramatically through marriage because men often start off so poorly. A longitudinal study of 6,000 families is illustrative (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Among singles, 8 out of every 10 women but only 6 out of 10 men who were alive at age 48 survived until at least age 65. In contrast, among the married, 9 of 10 men and women lived until retirement age.

HEALTH PROMOTION

Both husbands and wives benefit when a spouse attempts to protect their health (e.g., Umberson, 1992). However, women are more likely than men to engage in health-promoting activities by attempting to monitor and control their husband's health (Umberson, Chen, House, Hopkins,

& Slaten, 1996). Women generally possess greater knowledge than men about health-related issues and are more likely to monitor their own health status. Some married women extend these "social control" services to their husbands by discouraging drinking and smoking, cooking low-fat meals, scheduling medical appointments, and checking their husband's compliance with physicians' orders. In a study of married couples, 80% of men named their spouse as the primary person who tried to control their health, whereas only 59% of women listed their husband (Umberson, 1992]. Women, in contrast, were more likely than men to report that their friends and female relatives attempt to influence their health behaviors.

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Emotional support, defined as "expressions of care, concern, love, and interest, especially during times of stress or upset" (Burlinson, 2003, p. 2), has well-documented effects on physical and psychological health (Uchino, Cacioppo, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1996]. Men may benefit more from marriage than women because they rely on their wives as a primary source of emotional support and because women are good at giving the kinds of support that men want. Men typically name their wives as their sole or most important source of support and the one in whom they confide personal problems (e.g., Umberson et al., 1996). Women, in contrast, are more likely to turn to other female relatives and close friends for social support. Further, considerable evidence indicates that women are, on average, more skillful providers of emotional support than are men, providing messages that acknowledge, elaborate on, and legitimate their partner's concerns (e.g., MacGeorge, Clark, & Gillihan, 2002].

The Stronger Marital Quality-Health Link among Women Than Men

Women's health is more closely tied to the quality of their marriage than is true for men. In a comprehensive review, Kiecolt-Glaser and Newton (2001) presented evidence from dozens of studies showing that women's

physical health depends much more on the quality of the marriage than does men's. Across such diverse dependent measures as objective physiological responses, self-reported health, pain, and physiological assessments taken during marital interactions, marital quality was more strongly associated with health outcomes for women than for men. The gender differences in physiological reactions to marital conflict are particularly striking. For instance, even among a sample of relatively satisfied couples in stable and enduring marriages (lasting an average of 42 years), women's endocrine levels changed considerably more during conflicts than did men's (Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 1997). Most notably, these gender differences in response to marital conflict are at variance with broader physiological patterns of response to other types of acute stressors in which men show an elevated response.

In their review, Kiecolt-Glaser and Newton (2001) identified several gender-linked factors that may influence the greater association between marital quality and health outcomes for women than for men. First, women's interdependent traits and self-processes may make them more physiologically and psychologically responsive to the emotional quality of their marital interactions (Cross & Madson, 1997). Second, women's greater tendency to focus on others to the exclusion of themselves (referred to as "unmitigated communion") may increase their vulnerability to relationship stressors (see review in Helgeson, 1994). Third, the stress associated with wives' greater responsibility for household labor may contribute to pathways leading from marital functioning to health outcomes.

At present, systematic research on health among gay and lesbian couples is lacking. Given the current controversy about the merits of legalizing same-sex marriage, such research would be of great value.

Conclusion

In this review, we have identified six relatively well-documented differences between

women and men in intimate relationships. Despite claims that men and women value widely different characteristics in their romantic partners, research shows that both sexes want partners who are honest, trustworthy, and responsive. Men's tendency to seek youth and beauty and women's tendency to seek social status and resources occur against this backdrop of commonality. Men and women in heterosexual relationships appear to have similar standards for the ingredients in a good relationship, but men may be more likely than women to have a partner who meets their expectations. There is evidence that relationships are more central to women's lives than to men's, as reflected in women's greater tendency to have an interdependent self-concept, to report greater commitment in relationships, and to engage in more relationship maintenance behaviors. Turning to sexuality, gender differences in sexual interest, erotic plasticity, sexual compliance, and sexual aggression are well documented, as is women's preference for close relationships as a context for sexuality. In heterosexual couples, women continue to perform the majority of housework and child care, even if they work full time for pay. Today, most couples, both heterosexual and same-sex, describe their relationships as relatively equal in power. When heterosexual relationships are unequal in power, however, it is more often the man who is dominant. A satisfying close relationship can promote both psychological and physical health, but these benefits appear to be greater for men than for women. Although research on lesbians and gay men is limited, gender seems to be a more important determinant of relationship experiences than sexual orientation. Many similarities exist between lesbian and heterosexual women and between gay and heterosexual men. The one major exception concerns the division of family work, where same-sex couples typically share housework and child care to a greater extent than heterosexuals.

Does Jessie Bernard's (1972) characterization of "his" and "her" marriages stand up to several decades of empirical research?

The answer depends on one's perspective. Some researchers and social commentators - the gender maximizers - view human experience through a lens of difference. Others - the gender minimizers - point to the basic humanity of both sexes and emphasize points of commonality. In some measure, the maximizer-minimizer controversy results from attending to different aspects of human behavior and experience. In everyday life, men and women often do engage in quite different activities. Women are more likely to cook for their family, change diapers, or remind a partner to refill a prescription. At a more basic level, however, men and women are remarkably similar - both fall in love, form enduring attachments, suffer the pain of loneliness, and benefit from social support. Differences between the sexes are never either-or dichotomies, but rather matters of degree. The variability within each sex is often profound. Some men take pride in sharing family work responsibilities. Some women are sexual enthusiasts who enjoy recreational sex with casual partners. "His" and "her" relationships are, depending on one's perspective, both similar and different.

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