

## *Chapter 8*

# Women's Multiple Roles

## Achieving Satisfaction in Close Relationships

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### Chapter Summary



*Lisa is like thunder.*

Imagine what this sentence means to you. When you have an image of Lisa, what occupation is Lisa likely to go into? What kind of hobbies is Lisa likely to enjoy? And what type of household chores is Lisa likely to do?

At first blush, this example seems somewhat odd. The procedure uses similes (a figure of speech in which seemingly unlike things are compared) as a way to get at people's subtle stereotyping. Other combinations used by Ling-yi Zhou and her colleagues (2004) included: Gary is like a rainbow; Karen is like a butterfly; and Brian is like a mountain. These examples cross female and male names with feminine (rainbow and butterfly) and masculine (thunder and mountain) associations, resulting in both gender congruent and incongruent pairings.

Consistent patterns emerged for college students' projections, both in the United States and China. Woman-feminine and man-masculine matches were most commonly assigned to feminine and masculine activities, respectively. More interestingly, gender-typing trumped named sex so that when pairings were mismatched, expected occupations, hobbies, and chores were more likely to fit with gender-typing of the association (feminine or masculine) than the sex connoted by the name. Thus, our thunderous Lisa was more commonly pictured doing masculine activities.

This simple, although somewhat unusual, person perception study captures much of what we have covered so far in this text and will use in the remaining chapters. First, it's unlikely that many people would state outright that some activities are only for men or women. As we have seen, **sexism** today is much more subtle. Second, gender **stereotyping** persists. If it didn't, Zhou and her associates wouldn't find consistent patterns in their data. Although more sensitive, subtle measures may tap into this stereotyping and uncover **implicit attitudes**, more obvious measures often overlook it. Thus, we need to be prepared to find seemingly conflicting patterns, with some data suggesting similarities between women and men; other data, differences.

Third, as we have seen with implicit and **explicit attitudes**, this difference doesn't mean that one finding is necessarily truer than the other, but rather that each has its place in informing our understandings. We need to consider the meaning of our findings within broader systems of inequality, examining how both openly stated and explicit, as well as subtle and often unrealized, expectancies work to maintain or challenge power relations and the status quo.

Nowhere are these patterns more pronounced than in this chapter on multiple roles, friendships, romantic attachments, and caregiving. Repeatedly, we will see that the richest understandings are not simple but rather depend—depend on the measures we use, depend on individual and subgroup **intragroup diversity**, and depend on the specific **social context**.

## MULTIPLE ROLES

In this chapter and the next, we examine different roles held by women: friends, intimates, mothers, workers, students, adult children, and so on. We generally believe that the more roles one has, the better. A large-scale study of midlife American women and men

**Box 8.1**

A popular image of an employed mother pictures her as pulled by multiple roles. Top-selling women's and parenting magazines portray employed mothers as happy, busy, and proud in contrast to confused and overwhelmed at-home mothers (Johnston & Swanson, 2003).

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holding up to eight roles each documented that greater role involvement was related to enhanced well being—especially when individuals felt in control of their lives (Ahrens & Ryff, 2006). Yet we all have seen advertisements like the one in Box 8.1 that remind us of the costs of being a harried role juggler.

### *Burnout AND Enhancement?*

These contradictory images of time-panicked yet well-adjusted women reflect a tension between two competing views of multiple roles. On the one hand, the **scarcity hypothesis** predicts that holders of multiple roles will be vulnerable to role conflict. This conflict stems from two sources: **time-based conflict** (competing time demands from different roles) and **strain-based conflict** (when one role spills over into another). On the other hand, the **enhancement hypothesis** contends that multiple roles serve as buffers against undesirable consequences in any subset of roles (Crosby & Sabattini, 2006). For example, if things get rough at work, folks who can go home and find solace in strong family ties may be less seriously affected. In their extensive review of work-family research conducted across the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, sociologists Suzanne Bianchi and Melissa Milkie (2010, p. 712) concluded that much of this research “implicitly took a role conflict orientation.”

Not surprisingly, employed mothers report more role overload than employed fathers, commonly focusing on “time starvation” (Febbraro, 2003; Tiedje, 2004). Some of this difference may result from the different ways that mothers and fathers are expected to fulfill their parental roles. Bianchi and Milkie (2010) cite research linking men’s role fulfillment to being breadwinners; for example, dads are more likely to lose contact with their children when they cannot provide for them. In contrast, their review highlights that among women and men with similar jobs and family statuses, women report more work-family conflict; that the links between conflict with reduced well-being and compromised mastery are stronger for women than men; and that feeling a time deficit with children is associated with threatened well-being more so for women than men. Additionally, men are likely to cut back at work when they are experiencing on-the-job problems, whereas women will cut back whether problems originate at work or home. In sum, some of what it means to be a “good” father may be achieved by work itself whereas this appears not to be the case for mothers.

Additionally, Bianchi and Milkie (2010) point to the potentially cyclic nature of work-family conflict. Women may “opt out” of the workforce or assume part-time employment to reduce work-family stress, only to then limit their future employability and work options—trading immediate stress reduction for future stressors. They call for researchers and policymakers to take a more explicit life course perspective that includes understanding that there are periods in life that foster more and less work-family conflict.

For most of us, though, role conflict and enhancement co-exist. For example, in one study of 118 employed mothers of preschoolers aged 23 to 43 months (Rankin, 1993), most women described their lives as stressful—citing lack of time, child-related problems, and maternal guilt. At the same time, these women reported rewards, including personal benefits, financial rewards, and improved family lives as coming from their various roles.

Angela Febraro (2003) digs deeper into exploring the implications of each perspective. On the one hand, a scarcity perspective can scare women away from taking on too many roles and deny roles to women in the name of paternalistic protection (a form of **benevolent sexism**) (Crosby & Jaskar, 1993). On the other hand, the enhancement hypothesis opens up reasonable options for women to participate fully in the workplace and men in the home (Barnett & Hyde, 2001). The first limits women’s roles in ways that we have seen are sexist; but the second may ignore some costs associated with realistic time- and strain-based conflicts. Febraro resolves this contradiction by reorienting her focus away from individual women’s coping to structural changes that work to maximize enhancement outcomes and minimize scarcity ones. This moves our discussion from whether or not to take on multiple roles to the conditions that facilitate their effects. In other words, it encourages us to ask what supports we can provide to make multiple role juggling life-enhancing.

### *Role Quality and Meaning*

Simple role accumulation is not related to self-esteem, but role commitment is (Reitzes & Multran, 1994). A key factor then may not be the number of roles per se, but rather role quality. Grace Baruch and Rosalind Barnett (1986) define **role quality** as the balance of pluses and minuses associated with how one sees a given role. Not surprisingly, it is favorable role quality that Baruch and Barnett find to be positively associated with psychological well-being.

Furthermore, individual differences influence what people want from the roles they enact. Sharon Rae Jenkins (1996) tracked a sample of 118 women college seniors over the next 14 years of their lives. Those who were autonomous in defining their roles, and thus were less bound by conventional dictates, sought excellence in multiple roles with less role conflict. Feeling capable to handle one’s roles also is important: Women caregivers who felt competent to handle task demands reported less role-related stress (Franks & Stephens, 1992). Similarly, those women whose attitudes supported their role enactments exhibited enhanced well-being. Employed single mothers of preschool children reported strong psychological well-being when they believed that maternal employment does not harm children and perceived their childcare arrangements as high quality (Goldberg et al., 1992). In contrast, when new mothers’ employment status is not what they’d prefer, they are vulnerable to anxiety and anger (Klein et al., 1998).

Other research has focused on **role centrality**; that is, the personal importance of a role to an individual. A study of 296 women—all of whom simultaneously were a mother, wife,

employee, and parental caretaker—found that the greater the centrality of all four roles, the better was the woman's psychological well-being (Martire et al., 2000). For women who highly valued their wife role, stress related to that role (e.g., marital conflict) predicted life dissatisfaction. The same pattern was found for employment centrality. Interestingly, women who deeply valued mothering were *less* aversely affected by stresses coming from mothering. In another study of new mothers, long maternity leave was related to depression only for women with strong career centrality (Klein et al., 1998). In sum, the meaning and impact of roles is highly individualized, reflecting individuals' role commitment and centrality as well as the quality of each role (not simply the number of roles one takes on).

### *Individual and Structural Coping*

There also are individual differences in how people cope with multiple roles. Douglas Hall (1972) describes three different coping strategies, paralleling those found more recently (Tiedje, 2004). Women who use **personal role redefinition** change their own expectations and perceptions of their behavior. For example, women employing this strategy in response to work-family conflict may explore time management techniques in order to be more efficient; may try to minimize simultaneous overlap of roles (soccer on weekends only); may reduce their standards (living with unmade beds); may eliminate roles; and may rotate their attention. Overall, the way they cope is by adapting themselves.

In contrast, **structural role redefinition** focuses outward on changing structurally imposed expectations. Women employing this strategy may redefine a role by changing the activities required (e.g., reduce tasks at work); by seeking support from sources beyond themselves, including outsiders (e.g., housekeepers) and insiders to the role (e.g., one's spouse and children); by collaborating with role senders to redefine roles (e.g., encouraging children to accept sending store-bought, not homemade, cookies to school); and by integrating roles so that activities for one role contribute to another (also see Johnston & Swanson, 2006). The third strategy, **reactive role behavior**, doesn't really cope at all; rather, the user attempts to "do it all" ("superwoman").

The type of coping strategy used by women was related to their satisfaction with their career (Hall, 1972). Although most women used combinations of strategies, those who relied most heavily on reactive role behaviors were the least satisfied. Those who used strategies involving structural role redefinition were the most satisfied.

Tamao Matsui, Takeshi Ohsawa, and Mary-Lou Onglatco (1995) explored the structural role redefinition strategies used by 131 Japanese married employed women. They separated this coping strategy into two components: **work-role redefinition**, which involves altering work activities and expectations to meet family-role demands, and **family-role redefinition**, which focuses on changes in the family. Family-role redefinition was more typical of these women's coping than work-role redefinition, and spillover of work into family was more common than from family to work. This pattern is consistent with other research concluding that work interferes more with family life than vice versa, although simultaneous spillover into both spheres is possible, and this pattern may be less true in **collectivist** cultures like Hong Kong (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010).

Multiple roles do not lead inevitably to negative consequences if social supports are strong. Family supports come in two types, both of which reduce role stress. *Instrumental supports* from partners buffer the effects of parental demands on work-family conflict

(Matsui et al., 1995). Elizabeth Ozer (1995) found a woman's belief in her capacity to enlist the help of her spouse for childcare predicted both well-being and reduced distress. Actual responsibility for greater childcare produced the opposite outcomes. The influence of family supports extends beyond immediate partners to a full array of family members (Poole & Langan-Fox, 1992). For example, an unpredictable and ever-present stress for many families involves arrangements for sick children, and African American kin are more likely than White to provide this safety net (Benin & Keith, 1995).

*Emotional supports* focus on the “degree of commitment, help, and support family members provide to one another” (Moos & Moos, 1994, p. 1). Testing a model of women's work-family conflict, Karyn Bernas and Debra Major (2000) found that family emotional support significantly reduced women's family-related stress and hence the interference of family with work demands. Other research finds that partners' emotional support contributed to women's sense of mastery, which in turn produced favorable well-being (Martire et al., 1998). Similarly, women over 35 years old returning to college experienced less strain when they had high grade-point averages and the support of their children (Novak & Thacker, 1991). Thus, families need not be regarded solely as sources of conflict; rather, they can be sources of support as well.

Looking beyond these interpersonal and individual supports, *structural supports* can moderate the relationships between roles and strain. Globally, the International Labour Conference held in June 2000 recommends that maternity leave be at least 14 weeks long and include cash benefits of at least two-thirds of the woman's previous or insured earnings (reported in United Nations, 2010). In 2009, 85 of 167 countries met or exceeded the time minimum (with 141 having at least 12 weeks), and 73 (37 in developed regions) met or exceeded the payment guideline (United Nations, 2010).

In the United States, the 1993 Family and Medical Leave Act guarantees a minimum of 12 weeks of *unpaid* leave for childbirth, adoption, or sick dependents, from businesses employing over 50 people (thus covering 10.8% of American employers who employed 58.3% of all U.S. workers in 2000; U.S. Department of Labor, 2011). The United States (along with Australia, Lesotho, Papua New Guinea, and Swaziland) is one of only five countries worldwide that does not legislate paid maternity leave (United Nations, 2010). In 1998, Canada provided 17 to 18 weeks with 55% pay for 15 weeks; Japan, 14 weeks with

### Box 8.2

Which of the following statements was made by a mother and which by a father?

“I'm not here. I'm not watching my kids grow. I'm just getting pieces of their lives. I tell them I love them and hug and kiss them all the time, but I don't think that's enough. Maybe it's just being in the living room when they come in.”

“I've missed a lot of my daughter's after-school activities due to my work hours. For me it is stressful. I'm sure that it's important to my daughter that both of us show up to these things, and a lot of times I'm just not able to.”

*Source:* Adapted from R. W. Simon (1995). Gender, multiple roles, role meaning, and mental health. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 35, 182–194.

Answer: The first is from a woman; notice how diffuse her sense of “missing out” is. The second is from a man who describes exactly what he misses—after school activities.

60% pay; and commonly European countries, 14 to 18 weeks at 75% or more pay (with most at 100%) (United Nations, 2000). At the most generous extreme, Sweden offered 14 weeks of maternity leave, with 360 days paid parental leave followed by 90 additional days at a flat rate.

Provocatively, it may be possible for leave to be too long; there is some evidence that long leaves can discourage women's resumption of labor force participation, ghettoize women in deadend jobs, and expand the gap between women's and men's earnings (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010). On the other hand, there's more to consider about family-friendly supports than employment outcomes. For example, a program in Norway that paid parents to care for their young children increased not only parent-child time together, but also enhanced marital stability (Hardoy & Schone, 2008). An ongoing study with employees at one company, Best Buy, in the United States found that when workers had more control over their work schedule, they produced not only less work-family conflict but also better on-the-job workers (Moen et al., 2009).

Is part-time employment a structural solution for women juggling work-family demands? Kathleen Barker (1993) surveyed 315 employed women and found a mixed bag of costs and benefits. Benefits accrued in increased happiness and satisfaction at both home and work. The costs of part-time employment were felt at work, where part-timers reported exclusion from organizational (promotion), interpersonal, and skill-enhancement opportunities, as well as heightened job insecurity. (Think about what employers might do to reduce these costs.) Reduced hours *alone* are not sufficient to successfully balance work and family, and indeed more than half of women who switched to part-time, lower-paid employment actually worked the same workload as previously (Crittenden, 2001).

According to Bianchi and Milkie's (2010) review, two defining trends in the 21<sup>st</sup> century—the 24/7 economy and the increased flexibility during which and where paid work can occur—create further challenges to work-life balance. As for amount of work, long hours obviously create greater work-family conflict, but conversely, insufficient work can disrupt men's connections with their families as well as undermine the well-being of low-income families. As for job "resources," on the one hand, telecommuting has been linked to better child and family well-being, and having informal supports from co-workers and supervisors (even more so than formal supports) is associated with less work-family conflict. On the other hand, commonly cited work assets, such as flexibility, greater job authority, and self-employment, can also have downsides, such as heightened work-life interference.

In conclusion, multiple roles themselves do not guarantee either role burnout or enhancement. Differences exist in what individuals value and need, in the quality of their roles, in the meaning of roles in the context of their full lives, in how individuals cope with role demands, in the social supports that either value or devalue roles, and in structural supports that either facilitate or inhibit role enactment. It is these variations that ultimately determine whether women's multiple roles work smoothly together or interfere with each other. This evolving perspective, captured in thinking about **work-family role convergence**, takes us away from a simplistic and ultimately useless debate about whether multiple roles are "good" or "bad" toward a richer understanding of multiple roles as central to what all human beings need to find fulfillment (Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Gilbert & Rader, 2001).

## CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS

Understanding the previous overview about women's general role patterns, we can now move on to explore specific roles in women's close relationships: friendships, romantic attachments, and caregiving.

### *Defining Close Relationships*

Judith Worell (1988) describes the defining features of a **close relationship**: It is expected to endure over time and to provide an individual with respect, intimacy, caring, concern, support, and affection. **Romantic attachments** include all of this plus sexual passion, exclusiveness, and commitment. **Relationship satisfaction** refers to the degree to which we think and feel a relationship is living up to our expectations, preferences, and conceptualization of what a good, close relationship should be. Thus, how satisfied we are with a relationship depends, to a large extent, on what we expect from a relationship and how well we think our actual, enacted relationship measures up.

There is a substantial body of evidence that relationship satisfaction is positively associated with psychological and physical well-being (Worell, 1988). Supportive relationships enhance our responses to stress, our self-esteem, our feelings of self-efficacy, and our resistance to loneliness, depression, serious illness, and disability. The state of our close relationships also aligns with our general feelings toward life—happy people report having close and supportive relationships.

### *Gender or Stereotyping?*

Try the exercise in Box 8.3. Exchanges like this one describe two kinds of language, women's and men's (Henley, 1995), suggesting irreconcilable differences that ultimately disrupt connection. We usually can spot the stereotype when we see it in examples like the one in Box 8.3 (see the footnote below after reading Box 8.3).<sup>1</sup> Researchers find gender differences in how women and men deal with “troubles talk” in their friendships that are consistent with the patterns we saw here between M and P, but these differences are small, and they seem even smaller in contrast to much bigger **intragroup differences** across women and men (Michaud & Warner, 1997). Separating stereotyping from true gender differences is a major problem for researchers of friendships.

## FRIENDSHIPS

Interestingly, the common wisdom about friendships shifted during the 1970s from regarding women's as inferior to men's as superior (Wright, 1982). In a widely cited study, Mayta Caldwell and Anne Peplau (1982) concluded that women emphasized emotional sharing and talking in contrast to men, whose friendships revolved around shared activities. Con-

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<sup>1</sup>Gender-stereotyped analyses of the conversation above attribute M's statements to a woman and P's to a man, concluding that men maintain autonomy (and hence avoid accountability) in relationships, in contrast to women who seek consideration and understanding.



**Box 8.3**

Consider the conversation below between a woman and man trying to make plans for a dinner party. Which one is the woman, M or P, and which is the man?



M: The only weekend we seem to have free is October tenth.

P: That's the weekend of the tennis tournament.

M: Well, let's do it Saturday or Sunday evening.

P: Okay, make it Saturday.

M: Wouldn't you want to be free to go to the tournament on Saturday?

P: [Annoyed] I said Saturday, so obviously that's the day I prefer.



M: [Now also annoyed] I was just trying to be considerate of you. You didn't give a reason for choosing Saturday.

P: I'm taking off Thursday and Friday to go to the tournament, so I figure I'll have had enough by Saturday night.

M: Well, why didn't you say that?

P: I didn't see why I had to. Why do I have to explain every detail?

*Source:* Adapted from D. Tannen (1990). *You just don't understand: Women and men in conversations*. New York: Ballantine (pp. 158–159).

sistent with this reasoning, researchers found that women's friendships with women were evaluated as more rewarding, reciprocal, disclosing, and close than those between men (Parker & de Vries, 1993; Sheets & Lugar, 2005; Veniegas & Peplau, 1997), yielding a large difference in intimacy favoring women's friendships ( $d = -0.85$ ) (Reis, 1998). Not surprisingly, women who have high quality relationships with their peers also report lower psychological distress (Frey et al., 2006).

### *Gender Stereotyping*

These different images fit well with stereotyping of women seeking **communal** or expressive outcomes in their friendships, in contrast to men's **agentic** or instrumental desires (Morrison, 2009) and of men's friendships being more competitive (Singleton & Vacca, 2007). The impact of gendered stereotyping on images of relationships is further captured in studies showing that stereotypic femininity and masculinity are better predictors of relationship variables than gender itself (Aylor & Dainton, 2004; Basow & Rubenfeld, 2003; Reevy & Maslach, 2001).

These different images of women's and men's friendships widened the gap between the sexes, contributing to the notion that women and men cannot connect meaningfully. This stereotyping is perpetuated in our common wisdom about women's and men's fundamental miscommunications that we saw earlier in Box 8.3 (Tannen, 1990).

We know that gender stereotyping often exists for reasons beyond essential differences between women and men. Even looking back to Caldwell and Peplau's study, they presented evidence that women and men define intimacy similarly. Since then, extensive research concludes that both women and men believe that intimacy involves appreciation,



#### Box 8.4

How do you use your cell phone? Dafna Lemish and Akiba Cohen (2005) interviewed Israeli women and men and cleverly logged their calls across 5 days. Their actual usage patterns were very similar, mostly calling family and friends from similar locations. In contrast, their self-reported scripts about their usage revealed striking gender differences. Women highlighted the functionality of their cell and saw it as a means for others to reach them. Men viewed their cell as an extension of their body, described it as a technological toy that conveyed status, and valued the power it gave them to reach others. Both data sources tell us something about the behavioral similarity

of women and men, as well as their differential conformity to stereotypes of femininity (connection) and masculinity (status and control). Consistent with this interpretation, another study found that women were more likely than men to send images with their cell to further cement their connections with others (Colley et al., 2010).

warmth, and disclosure of personal feelings as well as shared activities (Reis, 1998).<sup>2</sup> Additionally, women and men describe similar **prototypes** for intimacy in friendships (Fehr, 2004), and both value partners with affectively oriented skills (Burlinson et al., 1996) and who disclose information (Clark et al., 2004). What women want then is what men want, making them more alike than difference stereotyping would suggest.

Furthermore, both women and men are capable of meeting this goal of intimacy. For example, Karen Walker (1994) conducted 52 in-depth interviews with working-class and professional women and men. Both her data and interviewees' perceptions described women sharing feelings with women and men sharing activities with men. However, when Walker elicited specific experiences in friendships, leaving stereotyping behind, a different picture emerged. Fully 75% of the men she interviewed detailed counter-stereotypic interactions. For example, one man described how he had exchanged details with his closest friend at work about their wives' sexual "courtship" preferences—one liked to be wined and dined and the other valued spontaneity.

Furthermore, there was a wide discrepancy between the activities they said they engaged in with their friends and how much they actually did. Similarly, about 65% of the women's actual friendship **scripts** did not conform to what they had recounted previously. These findings raise serious questions: (1) How much does what we expect for friendships shape our perceptions? and (2) To what extent are our expectancies influenced by gendered beliefs—in this case beliefs that women's and men's friendships are qualitatively different?

A laboratory study of women's and men's exchanges furthers this argument. Harry Reis, Marilyn Senchak, and Beth Solomon (1985) found that undergraduate men described social interactions that were less intimate than those reported by women. This difference held when participants were asked to write down narratives of two recent exchanges. Even when other raters didn't know the gender of the people involved in the written narratives,

<sup>2</sup>Although dwarfed by similarities, there are some gender differences in that (1) women mention talk more than men, especially in same-sex interactions; (2) men cite same-sex activities more, and women, more other-sex activities; (3) physical contact, including sexuality, is more central to men's descriptions of other-sex intimacy; and (4) appreciation is greater for male partners, be they same-sex for men or other-sex for women. Each of these highlights how interactions involve two people.

the men's narratives were deemed less intimate than the women's. So far, this fits with stereotyping. However, when participants and their best friends were asked to engage in an intimate conversation in the lab, both self-ratings and ratings by external judges showed no gender differences in the intimacy of the taped conversations. When the setting expressly called for intimacy, men were just as capable of being intimate as women.

Even expectancies about appropriate male behavior can vary across contexts. Mark Morman and Kory Floyd (1998) asked mostly White undergraduate men to imagine themselves in one of six scenarios with either a brother or a close male friend. The scenarios described either a public or private setting and either a neutral (just talking) or emotionally charged (positive = wedding or negative = funeral) exchange. Emotional openness was greater to a brother, in public, and in emotionally charged exchanges. It thus seems plausible to argue that the **social contexts** for men's expression of affection are just more limited than they are for women, rather than arguing that men are incapable of emotional expressiveness.

This insight leads me to believe that women don't corner the market on intimacy in their friendships. Indeed, women and men rate the quality of their same-sex friendships as comparable (Veniegas & Peplau, 1997). Does this mean then that women's and men's friendships are the same? Judith Worell (1988) cites women's disproportionate interest in popular self-help books devoted to understanding relationships and her own and others' experiences in psychotherapeutic practice as evidence that women hunger for information about close relationships. Differential interest, just like differences in stereotyping, does not necessarily signify differences in how relationships are realized, however. *Overall, there are more differences within than between the sexes in same-sex friendships* (Marshall, 2010).

In the remainder of this chapter, we take a fresh look at women's close relationships. Although it would be a disservice to both women and men to ignore differences in what they want from and how they enact their day-to-day relationships, we explore women's *relationships as they are* (rather than looking at how they contrast with those of men)—and with an eye toward understanding how women's satisfaction through their relationships can be maximized.

### *Friendships between Women*

Although women's friendships hardly come in "one size fits all," talk is the centerpiece of most women's friendships (Rose, 1995). Furthermore, friends may offer a safe haven for less inhibited expression. For example, women were videotaped while they viewed emotionally stimulating slides in the presence of either a stranger or a close friend. External judges, identifying the emotions expressed by the viewers, were more accurate for women viewing with friends, suggesting that women were more freely expressive in the presence of friends than strangers (Wagner & Smith, 1991). Women veer away from few topics in friendships, although this varies cross-culturally (for example, British disclosers regard fewer topics as taboo than do Chinese) (Goodwin & Lee, 1994). Generally, women tend to discuss family life, disclose political and religious disagreement, and be demonstrative by hugging or crying with a close friend. They spend time giving quality help to their friends, and they express empathy and sympathy in response to their friends' problems (George et al., 1998).

Fundamentally, women want intimacy and equality in their friendships (Veniegas & Peplau, 1997). Although anywhere from 7 to 57% of women report not having a close friend at some point in their lives (Goodenow & Gaier, 1990), the pattern of having a few close friendships, rather than gangs of acquaintances, tends to begin early for girls (Rose, 1995) and persist into old age (Johnson & Troll, 1994). Women generally look for all-purpose friends with whom they can relate across a variety of dimensions, rather than different friends for different needs (Barth & Kinder, 1988).

A pervasive characterization of women's friendships is that they include a variety of different forms of indirect aggression, such as gossiping and talking negatively behind a friend's back. Across two studies, Lauren Duncan and Ashi Owen-Smith (2006) explored various forms of powerlessness in college students' same-sex friendships. They found that individual differences in deference and lack of control in the relationship did not predict indirect aggression, but rather anxiety about one's status in friendships in general did. Specifically, the more women (and men) expressed fears of being negatively evaluated by their peers and wanted to be accepted by their peers, the more they engaged in indirect aggression. Thus, it appears that the "mean girls" image of young women's friendships is descriptive of only a few students' friendships, and it is *not* confined to "girls."

Suzanna Rose (2000) argues that drawing a clear line between friendship and romantic partners assumes a heterosexist (and possibly masculinist) perspective. For lesbians, this line is often murky. Obviously, lesbians draw female friends and lovers from the same pool of eligible contenders. Companionship typically is highly valued in lesbian partnerships and friendships, further blurring the distinction. Further consideration suggests that the line between friendship and romantic attachment may blur for heterosexual women with female friends as well, although the study of such bonding is often overlooked by researchers (Griffin, 2000). Thus, the division used in this chapter between friends and intimate partners may reflect the state of our research and culture more than the reality of women's close relationships.

### *"Cross" Friendships*

"Cross" friendships involve people of different types, such as cross-gender, cross-orientation, and cross-racial bonds. Although having diverse relationships is associated with heightened cognitive development (Galupo et al., 2010), these relationships openly violate a fundamental characteristic of most close friendships—similarity (Floyd, 1995). Given this, cross friendships are expected to challenge their participants.

Women (and men) have more cross-sex friendships if they believe that these friendships offer benefits beyond those afforded by same-sex friendships and if they hold more flexible gender-role beliefs (Lenton & Webber, 2006). Theorists have speculated that four challenges may confront women and men in close friendships: determining the type of emotional bond to be experienced in the relationship; confronting the issue of sexuality; dealing with equality within a cultural context of inequality; and presenting the friendship as just that, friendship (not romantic involvement), to relevant audiences (O'Meara, 1989). However, researchers conclude that few of these, or any other, challenges are reported by actual casual and close cross-gender friends (Monsour et al., 1994).

In one study of cross-orientation women friends (close for at least one year), Paz Galupo (2007) recruited and interviewed 20 pairs of friends in which one party identified as

either bisexual (7 women) or lesbian (13) and the other party as heterosexual. Fundamentally, these friendships looked like other friendships among women in that both parties emphasized talking with and supporting each other. However, only bisexual-heterosexual friendships shifted when the sex of the bisexual woman's partner changed. Although all the heterosexual women were aware of their lesbian friend's sexual orientation, only one bisexual woman shared this information with her heterosexual friend. Finally, bisexual-heterosexual friends were more likely to be integrated into each other's broader social lives than were lesbian-heterosexual friends.

Suzanna Rose (1996) explored obstacles to the formation of friendships between women of color and White women. Rose suggests that these relationships require a thorough analysis of racism as well as well-developed racial identities so that each party is secure in her own identity and open to exploring and valuing differences in that of another. Her research with a handful of existing cross-race friendships suggests that most are initiated by White women, who may dominate the relationship (Scott, 2004) and that work must be actively done to engender trust (Hall & Rose, 1996). Parallel patterns are found for friendships between physically challenged and able women (Fisher & Galler, 1988). The implications of successfully forging such bonds can be extended to diverse groups of women who may learn from these interpersonal exchanges how to unite at a broader level.

## ROMANTIC ATTACHMENTS

In her review of "partnering across the life course," sociologist Sharon Sassler (2010) highlights the wide range of heterosexual partnering options that now characterize relationships in the United States. "Individuals select from a veritable smorgasbord of romantic options, including entering into casual, short-term sexual relationships; dating as an end toward finding a long-term partner; entering into shared living with a romantic partner (cohabitation) as an alternative to living alone; forming a cohabiting union as a precursor to marriage; or living with a partner as a substitute for formal marriage" (p. 557). She concludes that even though marriage "remains among the most venerated of options" (p. 557), the "common thread unifying all relationships is a desire for intimacy—whether emotional or sexual" (p. 557)—and that the behaviors and goals associated with partnering typically change across the life course.

Given all this diversity, I need to narrow my focus here to romantic attachments. As we noted at the beginning of this chapter, romantic attachments encompass the same features as close friendships plus sexual passion, exclusiveness, and commitment. Judith Worell (1988) extracted three themes from popular self-help books devoted to women's relationships: Presumably women don't know what will make them happy in relationships (ignorance); women lack the skills or savvy to initiate and maintain satisfying liaisons (incompetence); and in heterosexual relationships, a polarity between women and men creates a rift between them that is difficult, if not impossible, to bridge (illusion). Interestingly, researchers find that the more exposed adults are to this popular media, the more dysfunctional and unrealistic are their beliefs about intimate relationships (Shapiro & Kroeger, 1991). Although Worell goes on to debunk this relationship stereotyping, its residuals often infiltrate our understandings of relationships.

### *Romance Ideology*

Before we explore becoming and being partnered, let's digress for a moment to consider our general beliefs about romance, or what researchers call our *romance ideology* (Rudman & Glick, 2008). These ideas of romance might include sentimentality, unrequited pursuit, and emotional caretaking (Korobov & Thorne, 2009) and include endorsement of thinking about a woman's male lover as "Prince Charming" and a "white knight," as protective, and as a hero—not just an "average" man (Rudman & Heppen, 2003). If you stop to think about these beliefs a bit more, you should recognize much of what we described as **benevolent sexism** in the previous chapter. Women are faithfully adored—just as they are in the valentines commonly selected by women (Gonzalez & Koestner, 2006), and men are "nice guys"—reflecting women's preferences for niceness (Urbaniak & Kilmann, 2006) and for men who express benevolently sexist attitudes (Bohner et al., 2010; Lee et al., 2010b). How could there be a downside to women holding such clearly romantic beliefs?

It turns out that there isn't a downside if we look at **explicit attitudes**; that is, the beliefs women openly express about romance (Rudman & Heppen, 2003). But assessing women's romantic fantasies with questions about Prince Charming might bring their actual relationships to bear, because who wants to admit that their partner doesn't measure up?

To get around this problem, Laurie Rudman and Jessica Heppen (2003) created an **implicit attitudes test** to tap into women's unacknowledged fantasies about romance. They found that the more implicitly romantic a woman was, the *less* likely she was to project high income, educational goals, and a prestigious job for herself, as well as express interest in being a group leader. In sum, these implicitly romantic women bought into the "glass slipper effect," relying on a man, not themselves, to fulfill the Cinderella fantasy of "living happily [or more to the point, successfully/agentically] ever after." Thus it seems that there is a pretty serious downside for women who harbor these types of (unrealistically) romantic images.

### *Becoming Partnered: Dating*

When researchers ask women and men to describe ideal romantic partners or to examine pictures or review vignettes, men rank physical attractiveness higher than women do, and women more strongly value earning potential, setting up the clash of values we often see exhibited on television dating games (Hetsroni, 2000). Paul Eastwick and Eli Finkel (2008) replicated this common finding—but they then went on to look more closely at the actual choices of women and men both during and after a speed dating event. No gender differences emerged in these behavioral data, and in fact, none of what people said they were looking for in an ideal partner or speed date predicted what actually inspired their preferences at the event. Not all that surprising to us by now as gender researchers is how poorly gendered expectancies and individuals' behaviors actually match up.

Because many romantic attachments are forged through the courtship process of dating, psychologists have studied the *first-date* expectancies and behaviors of heterosexual women and men. Mary Claire Morr Serewicz and Elaine Gale (2008) asked male and female college students to generate a list of what they expected to happen on a first date, varying who initiated the date (woman or man), the context of the date (keg party or coffee shop), and the relationship between the couple (acquaintance or friend). They then

analyzed these lists to identify consistent patterns (as evidence of shared scripts), gauge the amount of redundancy in the items listed, and compare scripts across the different variations in dates.

Interestingly, they found not only that dates are scripted, but also that these 21<sup>st</sup> century scripts aren't all that different from prior ones. Overall, these first-date scripts included 20 unique actions about which women and men agreed—most commonly including getting ready, picking up the date (by the man), paying (by the man), talking, walking/driving home (directed by the man), kissing, and making future plans. In addition to the general pattern that men controlled more of the elements of the first-date than women, women were more likely to discuss the date with others (both before and after), to show more cognitive complexity (less redundancy) in how they described dates, and to generally regard the date as more romantic (as opposed to sexual). In male-initiated dates, women expected a goodnight kiss, whereas in female-initiated dates, men expected sexual activities beyond kissing. Surprisingly, being a friend or acquaintance beforehand made no difference in the dating script, but the proposed activity did. More sexual behavior, more social networking with others, and less communication intimacy were expected at the keg party than at the coffee shop. Overall then, heterosexual first-dating has not changed much, and college students continue to have clear, well-scripted ideas about what these first dates should be like.

These scripts are so ingrained in our expectancies that they can be reproduced in the laboratory between strangers, and they are resistant to deviations (Gilbert et al., 1999). In a dating simulation, unrelated women and men undergraduates were paired and then asked to role play dating in either a conventional or unconventional context. In the conventional arrangement, the man was told to initiate the date and to later press for sexual intimacy; and the woman was directed to decline his sexual advances. Students were able to re-create this scenario without any trouble. The unconventional context required students to reverse roles, yet the dialogue that followed quickly fell into a conventional script. This study illustrates both the ease with which we use prescriptive dating scripts, as well as the difficulty of challenging these dictates.

Interestingly, there is a substantial amount of overlap between the actual dating scripts of lesbians and heterosexual women (Klinkenberg & Rose, 1994) and in what both groups find romantically attractive (Felmlee et al., 2010), extending to gender similarities in internet personal ads (Groom & Pennebaker, 2005). The most glaring differences point to closer equality in power, more affective/evaluative consideration, and a balance of active and reactive behaviors. Like heterosexual women, lesbians are nervous about their first date, but their preparation focuses more on cleaning up and meal preparation than on appearance. They are likely to engage in the same activities (talking, movies, etc.), but throughout the script, lesbians are more likely to contemplate how they are feeling and assess how things are going. Lesbians also note that they sometimes initiate sexual contact and assume the responsibility for enacting the date (e.g., picking up their partner). These last points suggest something about the power dynamics of dating (see Box 8.5).

### *Being Partnered*

Here, we explore relationship satisfaction in two types of partnerships, lesbian and heterosexual marital, recognizing as we noted above that marriage is not the only context in which romantic attachments are enacted. Undergraduate women's and men's descriptions



### Box 8.5

We generally don't think about dating in terms of power relationships between women and men. However, looking across what we just reviewed about heterosexuals' and lesbians' dating scripts and students' resistance to thinking about deviating from these conventional scripts, we shouldn't be surprised that dating men feel more powerful than dating women (Murstein & Adler, 1995), and men are more likely to be named the

more powerful party in a dating relationship (Felmlee, 1994).

In a fascinating recent study, Megan Yost and Lauren McCarthy (2012) explored the prevalence and motivations for heterosexual women to engage in a public sexual display (kissing another woman) at a college party. On the face of it, this behavior appears unconventional and empowering for the engaged women; however, further probing suggests that this may not always be the case. Although women reported a complex array of stories, almost all reported being pressured (largely by men), and the most common motivation women reported was to attract men's attention, especially when the party seemed controlled by men. This study, along with others (Nowatzki & Morry, 2009), raises intricate questions about when women's sexuality is empowering and/or objectifying.

of their ideal intimate partner were remarkably similar—valuing, in rank order, warmth, vitality, status, intimacy, and passion (Fletcher et al., 1999). Likewise, Judith Worell (1988) concludes that, despite popular portrayals to the contrary, women know exactly what they want: *intimacy* and *equality*. We'll see that relationship satisfaction is high to the extent that both these desires are met.

**Lesbians' relationships.** Natalie Eldridge and Lucia Gilbert (1990) conducted an extensive nationwide survey of 275 lesbian couples where both partners were employed full-time. Several patterns emerge from their data. First, relationship was largely *invisible* to outsiders, despite the facts that these women had been in their current relationship for an average of over 5 years, most lived with their partner, and 15% were raising children together. Sizable numbers did *not* tell employers (65%), coworkers (35%), fathers (over half), mothers (one-third), or neighbors and strangers (three-quarters). Coming out to people outside the relationship is unrelated to satisfaction within that relationship (Mohr & Daly, 2008), although lesbians (more so than gay men) report stress related to “outness” to family members (Todosijevic et al., 2005).

Second, despite lack of public acknowledgment of their bond, Eldridge and Gilbert found that *lesbian relationships were stable, enduring, and committed*, and that the women in them displayed high levels of self-esteem and life satisfaction. These data dispel stereotyping that lesbian relationships are fleeting, debilitating, and only sexual in nature, as well as opposite stereotyping of fusion (intense, singular over-reliance on the relationship; Hill, 1999). In addition, lesbian couples who share similar views about their sexual identity have higher-quality relationships (Mohr & Fassinger, 2006). Finally, a large-scale study of childfree lesbian, gay, and heterosexual married and unmarried couples as well as married heterosexual couples with children concluded that close intimate relationships, despite variability in their structure, work in similar ways (Kurdek, 2006).



Third, fully 13 of 14 psychological factors studied were associated with relationship satisfaction; the one exception was career commitment. When partners had divergent career commitments, relationship satisfaction was low. Couples satisfied with their relationship reported high levels of both attachment to their partner and personal autonomy. Relationships generally were characterized by heightened intimacy, especially *recreational* (common interests) and *intellectual* intimacy, with social intimacy lagging last (another potential casualty of secrecy). Couples also reported a clear sense of power or influence in their relationship.

*Equality of influence* is a central feature for satisfied lesbian couples. Lesbian partners value ideal equality more than do gay men, even though both partnerships are exempted from gender-role disparities (Kurdek, 1995). Compared to heterosexual couples, lesbian couples are more likely to use bilateral influence strategies where both partners participate, and it is these strategies that are associated with more favorable intimacy in both types of relationships (Rosenbluth & Steil, 1995). Psychologically intimate communication also distinguishes long-term lesbian partnerships from other types of enduring attachments (Mackey et al., 2000). Given these values, it is not surprising that lesbian couples tend to report performing an equal number of household tasks, unlike both gay male and heterosexual partners (Kurdek, 2007).

**Heterosexual marital relationships.** A long-standing conclusion asserts that men report higher levels of marital satisfaction than women (Kaslow et al., 1994), although as we might expect, there are individual variations marked more by personality than by gender (Robins et al., 2000). Love or intimacy is the cornerstone of marriage, at least in Western, individualistic societies (Levine et al., 1995), including a distinct self-disclosure component for women (Culp & Beach, 1998). Women's second desire in relationships, *equality*, may be a potent force that underlies marital satisfaction. Inequality, in both attitudes and behaviors, is related to lower marital satisfaction for women.

Egalitarianism in marriage is more commonly desired today than it was 40 years ago (Apparala et al., 2003), almost reaching levels of consensus among college women and men (Askari et al., 2010). Women who see themselves as equal partners in their marriage are more satisfied, in general, than traditional pairings and are less likely to use power strategies to get their way (Donaghue & Fallon, 2003).

This all seems quite simple: Women want equality, and positive attitudes about equality are associated with strong marital satisfaction. But what about behaviors? It's one thing to value equality, another to realize it. There is an extensive body of data using all kinds of measures that comes to the same conclusion: *women perform a disproportionate share of household labor* (excluding childcare).

For example, drawing on diary data collected from over 25,000 married U.S. women and men across 2003 to 2007, Liana Sayer and Leigh Fine (2011) compiled the average hours per day devoted to *core housework* (cleaning, laundry, cooking, and meal clean-up) and occasional housework (yard work, house and vehicle maintenance and repairs, and household paperwork).

Looking at core housework, how much time women spend varies by race/ethnicity, with Latinas doing the most (2.98 hours/day), followed by Asian American (2.33), White (2.02), and Black (1.81) women. In contrast, men's contributions did not vary significantly across races, ranging from 0.54 to 0.65 hours. As you can readily see from the hours listed,

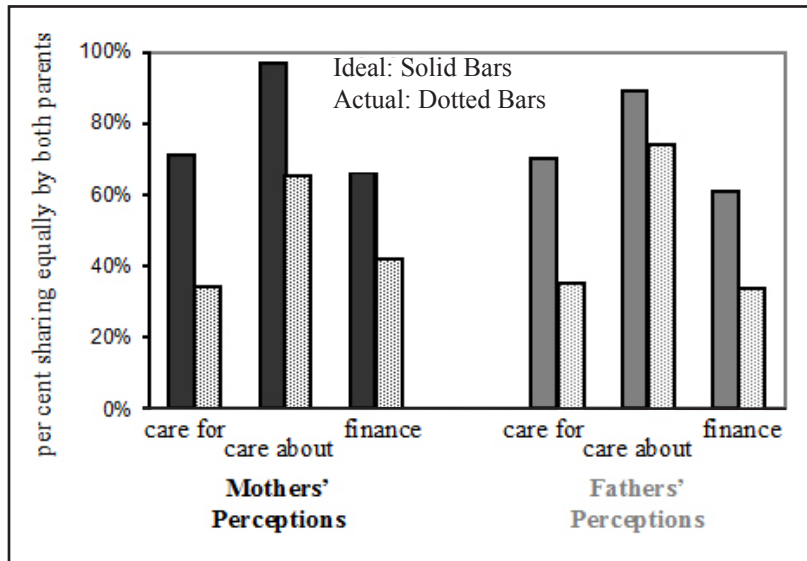


Figure 8.6

Telephone interviews with 234 married parents asked about their ideal and actual sharing in the caring for, emotional caring about, and financial support for their children (Milkie et al., 2002). The figure shows a consistent pattern whereby support for an egalitarian ideal outstrips the reality of actual equal sharing. Furthermore, the reports of actual behaviors not equally shared follow the stereotypes we'd expect with mothers doing more of the caring for (63%; 55%, as perceived by mothers and fathers, respectively) and caring about (34%; 19%) than fathers, as well as with fathers contributing more of the finances than mothers (39%; 60%).

a gender gap remains in women's and men's contributions, intriguingly varying across races. The widest gender gap is between Hispanic couples where women contribute 5.54 times than men, followed by Asian (4.12), White (3.16), and Black (2.79) couples.

Men consistently contribute more time to occasional chores (0.53 to 1.08 hours/day for men; 0.40 to 0.72, for women), but both the amount of time devoted to these chores and the gender gaps in contributions (ranging from 0.52 to 0.85 times more by men) are much smaller than what we saw for core tasks. Follow-up analyses document that these patterns remain unchanged when controlling for household income, education, employment status, parental status, presence of other household adults, age, region of the country, and weekend diary day.

Turning to time use surveys conducted globally, the United Nations (2010) concluded that women throughout the world contribute more domestic labor than men. These surveys estimate that women in developed countries average 5 hours/day on household labor, whereas men contribute less than 2.5 hours/day. By far the greatest daily time demand on women throughout the world involves meal preparation, with little participation from men.

Hold on a minute! We've heard lots about how men are doing more at home. The general pattern in time use studies is that women report doing less and men more, so that, at least in the United States and some other developed countries (United Nations, 2010), time

contributions to household tasks are converging (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010). For example, men went from reporting doing only 8% of the housework in 1965, to 20% in 1985 (Robinson, 1988), to a third in the 1990s (Bianchi et al., 2000). There is reason to believe that both conclusions are true: that gender gaps remain as revealed by diary studies *and* that the contributions of men are increasing while women's are decreasing.

Some of this apparent discrepancy may be accounted for by how accurately we all estimate our own contributions to household labor. Julie Press and Eleanor Townsley (1998) calculated a "reporting gap" by comparing self-report survey estimates with arguably more accurate diary data. Both women and men over-report—by 68% and 149%, respectively. This reporting gap appears to be influenced by social desirability. Nontraditional men, traditional women, women with children, upper-class egalitarian men, and poorer "supermoms" are the most flagrant over-reporters. These data should make those of us with egalitarian ideals pause to consider how "good" we truly are. Still, a real gap does exist: Using the diary data, Press and Townsley report that men contribute less than one quarter time (4.2 versus 18.4 hours) to weekly cooking, washing dishes, cleaning the house, and doing laundry.

Pulling these findings together, it is clear that modern family members value egalitarianism and try to portray their contributions as more balanced than diary studies, which actually catalogue activities, document. For those of us who would like to reconcile these differences by making our behaviors more consistent with our equal-sharing values, the central question becomes "Why does this gender gap persist?" In their review of 21<sup>st</sup>-century research on the division of household labor, Suzanne Bianchi and Melissa Milkie (2010, p. 708) concluded: "Despite the large number of studies, there emerged no dominant consensus on the most persuasive explanation for the persistence of the gender division of labor in the home." This conclusion is shared by other reviewers considering the same time period (Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010).

However, some explanations are ruled out by the data. As we saw in Sayer and Fine's (2011) diary study, gender gaps in women's and men's contributions persisted despite employment status, parenting status, the presence of other potential helpers in the household, and so on—ruling out the explanations that women contribute more because women have more time or contribute fewer other resources (e.g., income) to the family. Even being raised to do household chores as a child doesn't predict individual men's adult contributions, discounting domestic incompetence as an explanation (Penha-Lopes, 2006). What remains are explanations that focus on gender attitudes and the gendering of domestic labor and household roles as feminine.

The prospects for large-scale changes in this arena are bleak. Sabrina Askari and her colleagues (2010) surveyed 358 unmarried, heterosexual students and non-students about what percentage of work they ideally and actually expected to contribute to doing each of a variety of common household and childcare chores. *Ideally*, men wanted to do 47% of household chores and 47% of childcare, with women averaging 58% of both. This ideal gets close to a 50-50 split, but not fully. As for what they *expected*, the gap expands: men projected doing 45% of household and 47% of childcare chores; women, 69% and 70%, respectively. The gap between women's ideal and expected was significantly different; men's was not. Interestingly, women who wanted to do less ideally wanted a more family- than career-oriented partner, but, not expecting to find one, they then anticipated shouldering a greater domestic load.

In a second study by these same authors led by Mindy Erchull (et al., 2010), we get some further sense of why this discrepancy persists. Simply put, “she wants it more.” In this study with 466 college students, the typical man was described as wanting marriage and children less than the typical woman did. Furthermore, desire for marriage and children predicted expected chore involvement such that women (and men) who want it more, do more. The “principle of least interest” generally asserts that the person less interested in a relationship has more power, and indeed these findings fit with that interpretation.

Despite these discouraging prospects for massive change, Shannon Davis (2010) suggests that researchers turn to what we can learn from qualitative studies that explore the lives of albeit select exemplars of equal-sharing couples. For example, a portrayal of *egalitarian men* is provided by Kathleen Gerson’s (1993) study of 138 men from diverse social backgrounds. One-third of these men were with work-committed women with whom they shared economic and domestic responsibilities. Half these sharing men expressed egalitarian attitudes before becoming committed to their wives; the remainder developed these attitudes as a result of their commitment. But attitudes can take us only so far; the rest evolved. Some sharing men voluntarily veered away from high-pressure careers; others hit an occupational deadend. As work became less central in their lives, these sharing men became more involved at home. Involvement spawned further involvement because these men reaped benefits from sharing, including a strengthened marriage, bonding with children, increased influence at home, development of expressive qualities, and enhanced personal pride. An upward spiral of participation developed.

This portrait of equal-sharing men highlights both the importance and limits of attitudes. Indeed, couples with more flexible gender role beliefs and egalitarian attitudes do share more equally (Kroska, 2004; Stevens et al., 2006) as do fathers who espouse fewer beliefs in biological **essentialism** (Gaunt, 2006). However, roles and societal expectations about who fills them must change as well because, as we have seen from the very start of this book, we all are embedded within a larger system of gender inequality. Some of this change may rest on nurturing feminist attitudes in both women and men; for example, in Askari et al.’s (2010) study, women and men who endorsed feminist attitudes also ideally and actually expected to contribute more equally.

Other qualitative studies show that some Black men share housework when they define themselves as both caretakers and as breadwinners, as well as regard doing housework as part of being masculine (Penha-Lopes, 2006). Some Mexican American men who are less acculturated into U.S. culture contribute more, suggesting that “Americanized” versions of masculinity may suppress family connections (Coltrane et al., 2004). At least some women may regard housework as less central to their feminine identity as they age (Altschuler, 2004), and some women who out-earn their partner (even sole providers) may justify their domestic contributions as ways to protect their husband’s masculinity (Tichenor, 2005). As Shannon Davis (2010) argues, we may learn more about changing gender roles by looking at examples that succeed, shifting our research question from “Why do women do the lion’s share of housework?” to “When don’t they?”

Egalitarian sharing does not just happen in relationships; rather, it is actively constructed by committed and vigilant partners (Blaisure & Allen, 1995; Mannino & Deutsch, 2007). (We discuss this point further in Chapter 14.) Sandra Tangri and Sharon Rae Jenkins (1997) found that women who expect work-family conflict and prepare accordingly—by

asserting their career intentions with their spouse, by postponing childbearing, and by having fewer children—experience less marital conflict than those who fail to acknowledge potential problems. When it comes to being satisfied with intimate relationships, it seems that there is no bliss in ignorance!

## CAREGIVING

One of the most fundamental roles to the image of women is that of caregiver. In all likelihood, most women will assume the role of caregiver across their lifetimes—as a caregiver of children, partners, parents, friends, and neighbors, or through volunteer work. Women are expected to be caregivers (Mosher & Danoff-Burg, 2004), and women, more than men, expect to enjoy enhanced mood by both providing and getting help within the context of a relationship (Sprecher et al., 2007). After we briefly explore general patterns in caregiving, we will turn to childcare, including images of mothers and the still evolving image of the employed supermom and her use of nonparental childcare.

### *General Patterns*

With increasing life spans and with the balance of young to older people tipping in the direction of more elderly, caretaking needs for the elderly are on the rise (Etaugh, 2008). Women account for 71% of those devoting 40 hours or more each week to caring for aging parents (Gross, 2005). Care of aging parents can add strain and poor self-care to the lives of midlife women (Remennick, 1999). Additionally, midlife women are increasingly “squeezed” by taking care of both adult children and aging parents (Etaugh, 2008).

Looking at caregiving both inside and outside the family, women give about twice as much help in a month as men (Gerstel & Gallagher, 2001). Women provide about equally for their friends and parents; adult children command as much caregiving as these two groups combined. Men contribute to more volunteer groups, but this difference disappears for local community groups, suggesting that men have more official memberships than women, but women give more time to local groups. Further probing of these data reveals that employed women and homemakers perform practical, labor-intensive caregiving chores equally. Employed husbands help fewer relatives and friends and spend fewer hours than their similarly employed female counterparts. In addition, men defensively distance themselves more than women from others who need their help because of a serious illness or accident (Whitehead & Smith, 2002). In sum, caregiving, even outside of childcare, is expected to be, and is, “women’s work.”

Caregiving in all its forms provides invaluable social services and gratification to individuals, fundamentally enriching all our lives. Still, our understanding of caregiving would be incomplete if we didn’t acknowledge women’s disproportionate contributions and that the time and energy caregivers donate rarely, if ever, benefits them with anything exchangeable (Pratto & Walker, 2004). For this reason, caregiving does *not* confer power. Caregiving roles, such as mother (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004), are status characteristics, which we saw in Chapter 7 are linked to likeability and warmth but not to respect and competence. In fact, we might explore our resistance to thinking about caregiving, especially mothering, in status terms as an example of the power of our stereotyping of these activities.

## *Images of Mothers*

Turning to caregiving for children, childcare is considered so much a part of feminine stereotyping that the word we most frequently use to describe it is gender-specific: “mothering.”<sup>3</sup> People asked to make judgments about hypothetical post-divorce parental care awarded custody to whichever parent was described with feminine characteristics (Hoffman & Moon, 2000). Furthermore, when the tasks of “mothering” (waking up a child, making dinner, and doing homework together) are done by one parent, students are harsher critics of a non-contributing mother than father (Riggs, 2005).

The dominant cultural images of a “mother” are embodied in two configurations: (1) the traditional, full-time, domestic mother whose sole job is her family and (2) the employed mom with multiple roles—job, self, and family (“supermom”) (Thurer, 1994). A defining difference between the two images focuses on caregiving for children. Caregiving for children involves both **caring for** (serving the needs of or caretaking) and **car-ing about** (loving) children (Traustadottir, 1991). These two features define the traditional mom who provides both forms of caregiving for her children: She is: (1) *continually present* and (2) *exclusive* in that she is expected to be the primary, if not sole, childcare provider (Uttal, 1996). The “supermom” thus differs from the traditional one along both of these dimensions.

One of the most revealing ways to uncover our expectations about motherhood is to explore stereotype violations. Michele Fine and Sarah Carney (2001) do just this by closely examining court cases involving charges of “failure to protect.” For example, women have been charged for injury to their children at the hands of a man in the household, even when these women themselves are abused. A charge rarely leveled against men, these cases highlight women’s responsibility to care for and about children. Women with few resources and those who violate traditional expectations for women are assigned more responsibility and blame by the courts (and by researchers and mental health professionals; Womack et al., 1999). It seems it is women’s responsibility to police their homes and keep transgressions secret.

The underlying message here is not lost on other mothers. All mothers work hard at maintaining their image as “good” mothers by resisting temptations to talk about the downside of their experiences as mothers (Weaver & Ussher, 1997). Indeed, women commonly regarded as “bad” mothers—such as welfare recipients (Croghan & Miell, 1998), substance abusers (Baker & Carson, 1999), teen mothers (Shanok & Miller, 2007), and adoptive single mothers (Ben-Ari & Weinberg-Kurnik, 2007)—work especially hard at repositioning themselves as worthy mothers.

Researchers find a double standard of praise and criticism for mothers and fathers that also speaks volumes about stereotyping (Deutsch & Saxon, 1998). Mothers report being criticized for too much involvement at work and not enough at home, and they describe being praised for successfully combining work and family. Criticisms noted by fathers reverse those for mothers—chiding men for too much family involvement and too little at work. These patterns of external pressures work to discourage nontraditional transitions in family life.

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<sup>3</sup>A quick glance through *Psychological Abstracts* (PsycINFO) soon reveals that some research purporting to study “parenting” actually includes only mothers so that what really is being studied is “mothering.” I have found no reversal of this pattern; “fathering” is clearly meant to be gender-specific.

**Cultural variations in mothering.** Images of both traditional mothers and “super-moms,” like other global cultural stereotyping, incorporate class and racial/ethnic biases by assuming middle-class and White statuses. Very different images of mothering emerge within African American communities (Collins, 1994). Here, motherhood involves shared and sharing responsibility as African American mothers assume the mothering of others’ children and their community, as well as engage others in the mothering of their own biological offspring. The privatized view of mother described by dominant U.S. culture is contrasted with this more collective orientation in the African American community. Images of family structure in Latina/Latino families often exaggerate traditional images of mothers. These questionable stereotypes rely on simplified explanations involving machismo and submissive roles for women that fail to consider the flexibility of gender roles within families in response to outside forces (e.g., degree of acculturation, specific country of origin, and the availability and need for dual employment; Vega, 1990).

Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo and Ernestine Avila (1997) take a fascinating look at how Latina immigrant women who work as nannies and housekeepers in Los Angeles negotiate mothering their children who reside in their country of origin. They *care for* their absent children’s needs by giving them financial security and opportunities that otherwise would be beyond their reach and by monitoring and nurturing positive relationships with their on-site surrogates. These women *care about* their distant children by struggling to maintain lines of communication and emotional connection despite long distances and enduring separations. They report that they are proud of what they do for their children and that their children appreciate their sacrifices. Thus, these immigrant women actively construct caring for and caring about elements of mothering despite extreme violations of both continual presence and exclusivity.

**Who mothers?** In part, this basic question asks who does the caretaking chores for children in the home. Mothers average over 11 hours each week more childcare than fathers (Bond et al., 2003). Fathers were more likely to play with children than do the nitty-gritty tasks of caretaking, such as getting up at night (Laflamme et al., 2002). Surprisingly, the time mothers report spending with their children has not changed from 1965 to 1998 (5.8 waking hours per day; Bianchi, 2000).

No single event is more likely to change domestic contributions and role enactments between partners more than the introduction of a first child. Analyzing longitudinal data from 205 first-time and 198 experienced mothers and fathers, who were followed from 5 months into a pregnancy through the child’s first year, Sabra Katz-Wise and her colleagues (2010) found that both gender-role attitudes and behaviors became more traditional after the birth of the child. These changes were more pronounced for women than for men and among first-time compared to seasoned parents. Another study concluded that new parenthood does little to alter men’s working or home lives, whereas motherhood commonly increases women’s household contributions and reduces their employment hours (Sanchez & Thomson, 1997). Thus, parenthood fosters a gendered division of labor largely by reshaping women’s, not men’s, lives.

In fascinating interviews with eight Israeli lesbian couples with 1 to 3 children, Adital Ben-Ari and Tali Livni (2006) concluded that the addition of a biological child challenges the previous equality claimed by both partners. Because the child is legally designated as having a single mother so that the nonbiological mother has no legal ties to the child,

these different statuses create a hierarchical imbalance that favors the biological mother, affecting both their enactment of mothering (who makes decisions about the child), their relationship, and their standing in the community (we're now a family). One way that these women elected to level this imbalance was to be pregnant at the same time.

If we move beyond simple caretaking to the full responsibility of caring for and caring about, we ask: Can men “mother”? Barbara Risman (1987) surveyed 55 single fathers of children under 13 whose full-time caretaking resulted from widowhood, desertion, or the mother's disinterest in shared responsibility. Each single father, most of whom were White, was compared to a single mother, a married two-paycheck mother and father, and a married traditional mother and father, all of whom had a youngest child of about the same age. The dual-paycheck families were the most affluent; men tended to work in professional and blue-collar jobs, and women in clerical and sales positions.

Single fathering increased personal household responsibility dramatically; more generally, primary parents (whether women or men) contributed more. Single mothers, as well as traditional fathers (regardless of maternal employment), reported fewer affectionate displays with their children, in contrast to sharing parents of both genders. The best predictor of parent-child intimacy across all groups was **expressiveness**, as measured by the Bem Sex Role Inventory: more expressive (feminine-stereotypic) women *and* men were more intimate (also see Renk et al., 2003).

Risman's point is that “mothering” does not always break down along gender lines—not only women (nor all women) are capable of caregiving. Single fathers “mothered” in the sense that they did the same caretaking work as women mothers, and sharing fathers “mothered” in that they provided the same intimacy as sharing mothers. Also note that not all women mothered in the sense of caring about (intimacy). Thus, *caregiving may best be conceptualized as a role we enact*, rather than as a predilection that we are either born with or are socialized to develop as a function of our sex.

### *The Supermom and Nonparental Childcare*

The notion that men can “mother” challenges both primary dimensions of traditional images of women who are expected to be (1) present at all times and (2) primarily responsible. This leads us to consider the second, still evolving image of the employed supermom and the role nonparental childcare plays in the lives of employed mothers and their children. We begin with data on the prevalence of nonparental childcare and then go on to explore its meaning in women's lives as well as the psychological debate and findings about its effects on children.

**Prevalence.** Almost all American children are in the care of nonfamily members by the time they reach school age at about age 6,<sup>4</sup> and 63% of children under the age of 5 were in some form of regular childcare arrangement during a typical week (Smith, 2002). Most commonly, care is provided by a relative (41%), most frequently a grandpar-

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<sup>4</sup>Using data from the National Household Education Surveys conducted by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics, Stacey Bleleck (2008) estimates that 1.5 million American children were home-schooled in 2007, composing 2.9% of the school-aged population. Kamerman and Kahn (1995) reported that out-of-home care for 3- to 5-year-olds is almost universal in Europe, where day care is more fully subsidized.



ent (21%). When we think of nonparental care, we may picture a day care facility, but only 20% of children under age 5 attend these, with an almost equal percentage (17%) in the care of a nonrelative in their own home or at the provider's. Although both African American and Latina families state preferences for organized day care, they actually more commonly rely on family-based care, especially grandmothers (Johnson et al., 2003). Overall, nonparental care is statistically normative and ultimate inevitability for all but a handful of children.

**The meaning of nonparental care.** An insightful exploration of the meaning of childcare in employed women's lives is offered by Lynet Uttal (1996), who conducted in-depth interviews with a diverse sample of 31 employed women with preschoolers, toddlers, and infants. She identified three distinct patterns and related each to the core dimensions of traditional mothers' childcare: that is, (1) continued presence and (2) exclusive responsibility.

Women who regarded childcare as **custodial care** separated mothering (caring about) from custodial care (caring for) and retained exclusive rights to the former. They set sharp limits on what providers can and can't do regarding their child's physical, social, and moral development. They often checked in throughout the day to give specific directions and to make caregiving decisions. In this way, these mothers retained sole responsibility for mothering their children, like traditional mothers, but relinquished the traditional mother's provision of continued presence.

A small minority of women who viewed their childcare as **surrogate care** surrendered care to another because the conditions of their employment demanded more separation from their children than they deemed appropriate, or because they felt inadequate as mothers. For these mothers, the provider became the child's "real" preferred mother. These mothers challenged the traditional assumption that only biological mothers can "mother," but they embraced the traditional belief that continued presence is needed to fulfill the demands of true motherhood.

Mothers who embraced **coordinated care** regarded childcare providers as joint contributors to a child's development and well-being. Coordinated arrangements evolved around continuing discussions that sought to synchronize philosophies, values, and practices. Both parties learned from each other and enacted childrearing that was coordinated and consistent. In essence, they developed a cooperative alliance that challenges *both* dictates of traditional mothering, rejecting notions that mothers must be constantly present and exclusively responsible. Thus, although it may seem on the surface that all employed mothers are challenging traditional notions of mothering, only women who embrace a philosophy of coordinated care are fully doing so.

Summing up, we have seen that nonparental care of preschoolers is statistically normative, and that nonmaternal care, both by fathers and by childcare providers, may challenge basic tenets of the image of traditional mothers as the always present and exclusive providers of both care for and care about their children. When fathers provide both custodial and emotional care for their children, their similarity to women who mother discredits biological explanations of women as mothers, instead regarding motherhood as a socially constructed role that can be assumed (and rejected) by anyone. Similarly, when coordinated childcare providers act as extensions of parents in children's lives, traditional images of mothers are reframed and a more realistic picture of a "supermom" develops. One obstacle

to the further development of this alternative image of mothers is the often heated debate about the effects of nonparental care on children.

**Effects of non-maternal care on children.** Paralleling the always present and exclusive image of mothers is that of the ideal employee who is unencumbered by competing demands and is always available to the employer (Williams, 2001). These two images clash head-on with employed mothers, making non-maternal care a lightning rod for change on the domestic side of this formula. The implicit questions researchers have pursued speak to how politically charged this area is (Scarr & Eisenberg, 1993). The dominant ideology of the 1970s looked for damage to children (see Box 8.7), then shifted in the 1980s to evaluate the quality of care and individual differences among children.

A large body of research has focused on the emotional, social, and intellectual development of children as they relate to maternal employment. One meta analysis of 59 such studies compared maternal (no more than 6 hours of other-than-mother care per week) with supplemented care (Erel et al., 2000). No differences were found across multiple outcomes, including mother-child attachment and interaction, adjustment and well-being, social interaction with peers and with nonparental adults, and cognitive development. Only age of child's entry into day care was significant, such that the older the child, the more *insecure* the child's attachment.

A second meta analysis explored the relationships between maternal employment and children's achievement and behavior problems across 69 studies (Lucas-Thompson et al., 2010). Overall, there were no direct effects; however, variability in the data pointed to the operation of some **moderators**. For example, maternal employment during a child's first year appeared to benefit children challenged by single parenting or low income, whereas some negative effects arose in middle-class and two-parent families (possibly calling for more generous short-term leave policies). In contrast, maternal employment during the child's second and third years was consistently associated with higher achievement.

Bianchi and Milkie's (2010, p. 710) review of research covering the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century comes to the same conclusion: "The vast majority of studies of maternal employment showed either no or small effects on child outcomes... [In fact, one] area

#### Box 8.7

A contrived laboratory simulation, the "strange situation," labels children as emotionally secure or insecure based on how they react when reunited with their mother, who left them playing with toys in the presence of an adult female stranger (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Kids with employed mothers were somewhat more likely to be classified as insecure, some because they didn't react much to her return (appearing "avoidant"). Rather than using these data to indict day care, critics point out that there's little "strange" about this situation for children in day care who routinely separate from, then return to, their parents and whose apparent avoidance may just as readily be interpreted as independence (Clarke-Stewart, 1989; Hoffman, 1989).



where positive effects were increasingly reported was for young children in low-income families.” Interestingly, this review did point to some evidence about academic shortfalls for adolescent children who are charged with caring for younger children when their parents are absent. This last point may say more about having the resources to have appropriate care providers than anything about maternal employment per se.

## CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, we explored a multitude of roles that comprise people's interpersonal lives. We discovered that holding multiple roles can have both overload and enhancement consequences. Role enhancement is facilitated to the extent that each role is of high quality, fulfills needs in an individual's life, and is meaningful and valued. Coping with the demands of multiple roles is enhanced if structural role redefinition is used to redefine otherwise incompatible roles and if social and structural supports are strong.

Close relationships are expected to endure over time and to provide an individual with respect, intimacy, caring, concern, support, and affection. Satisfaction with close relationships is positively associated with psychological and physical well-being. Oftentimes when we consider the role of gender in close relationships, it is difficult to distinguish between genuine gender differences and the self-fulfilling consequences of gendered stereotyping. Although there is no universal recipe for attaining relationship satisfaction, we explored issues involved in working toward such satisfaction in women's friendships, romantic attachments, and caregiving.

An apparent gender difference in friendship patterns evolved in the 1980s suggesting that women share feelings and men share activities with their close friends. Although it is clear that these friendship patterns reflect gender stereotyping, the veracity of this difference is being challenged by recent research that shows men being as intimate as women in settings that call for intimacy. Turning to women's friendships, women seek intimacy and equality from their friends, although how these are realized varies according to the characteristics of friends, including matches and mismatches in gender, race, physical ability, and sexual orientation.

Heterosexual dating scripts reflect gender-typed roles, with men playing the more active and powerful role. Although lesbians' dating scripts parallel heterosexuals' in many ways, the former are characterized by more equality of power, less attention to appearance, and more attention to feelings. Lesbian relationships often are invisible to outsiders, yet in contrast to negative portrayals, frequently offer intimacy and equality in stable, enduring, and committed relationships.

Marital satisfaction is heavily influenced by issues of equality because women generally continue to shoulder the lion's share of domestic responsibilities. This imbalance spills over into caregiving relationships where women often provide a disproportionate share of care for children and other kin. Recent research suggests that the “caring about” part of caregiving, prototypically referred to as “mothering,” is not exclusive or universal to women. Furthermore, a new image of mothers is evolving that combines employment with mothering as parts of women's family responsibilities. This image can, but does not always, challenge traditional images of mothers as the always present and exclusive providers of childcare.

Public controversy surrounds debates about “supermom” images and nonparental childcare. Research has become increasingly complex, considering the full array of people involved, individual differences among them, the quality of settings, and the strength of social and structural supports. Broad overgeneralizations about “bad” day care have been replaced by an “it-depends” approach that seeks to understand combinations of factors that best promote an individual woman’s satisfaction and health. A clear theme that runs through all of these areas is that relationship satisfaction doesn’t come in “one size fits all,” nor is it something that one simply has. People do not just “find happiness”; rather, relationship satisfaction is achieved through persistent, everyday work.

## SUGGESTED READINGS

Febbraro, A. R. (2003). Alpha and beta bias in research on labour and love: The case of enhancement versus scarcity. *Feminism & Psychology, 13*, 210–223.

Angela Febbraro raises readers’ understanding of the meaning of scarcity and enhancement thinking about multiple roles within the context of how we think about gender differences overall.

Marecek, J. (2003). Mad housewives, double shifts, mommy tracks and other invented realities. *Feminism & Psychology, 13*, 259–265.

Jeanne Marecek follows up on Febbraro’s (2003) paper above by exploring the implications of scarcity and enhancement thinking. Taken together, these two papers will likely provoke deeper thinking about these issues, how they impact individual women’s lives, and the politics of the personal.

Johnston D., & Swanson, D. H. (2006). Constructing the “good mother”: The experience of mothering ideologies by work status. *Sex Roles, 54*, 509–519.

Deirdre Johnston and Debra Swanson interview 22 to 51-year-old women—who have full-time employment (30 women), have part-time employment (26 women), and are full-time homemakers (39 women)—about their images of the ideal mother, themselves as mothers, and what they could do to be better mothers. Each group has different ideas about what constitutes “good” mothering, encouraging readers to explore their own definitions.

Rudman, L. A., & Glick, P. (2008). Love and romance. *The social psychology of gender: How power and intimacy share gender relations*, pp. 204–230. New York: Guilford.

Laurie Rudman and Peter Glick do an excellent job in this chapter of laying out how women’s and men’s ideas about love and romance affect not only relationships but also the power dynamics of gender inequality.

Yost, M., & McCarthy, L. (2012). Girls gone wild?: Heterosexual women’s same-sex encounters at college parties. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 36*, 7–24).

Megan Yost and Lauren McCarthy give voice to women who have engaged in same-sex sexual displays at college parties in order to explore their motivations and goals, raising intriguing questions about women’s sexual empowerment and/or objectification and providing fodder for lively in-class discussions. A podcast interview with the authors is available at [pwq.sagepub.com](http://pwq.sagepub.com).

Beals, K. P., & Peplau, L. A. (2001). Social involvement, disclosure of sexual orientation, and the quality of lesbian relationships. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 25, 10–19.

Kristin Beals and Anne Peplau offer a data-based look at how social relationships affect the quality of lesbian relationships. The quality of their data analyses and literature review make this a good reading for a general audience.

Auchmuty, R. (2004). Same-sex marriage revived: Feminist critique and legal strategy. *Feminism & Psychology*, 14, 101–126.

Rosemary Auchmuty sets the stage for discussion about the uneasy relationship between heterosexual marriage and feminism and what same-sex relationships can model for all intimate partnerships.

Fine, M., & Carney, S. (2001). Women, gender, and the law: Toward a feminist rethinking of responsibility. In R.K. Unger (Ed.), *Handbook of the psychology of women and gender* (pp. 388–409). New York: Wiley.

Set within a broader discussion of the meaning of responsibility, Michelle Fine and Sarah Carney tackle the stereotyping violations of mothers who are blamed for failing to protect their children from abuse.