Disconnects: Expectation and Experience in Intimate Interpersonal Relationships

Kristen Jenkins Hark

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DISCONNECTS: EXPECTATION AND EXPERIENCE IN INTIMATE INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

A Dissertation
Submitted to the McAnulty College & Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By
Kristen Jenkins Hark
December 2014
DISCONNECTS: EXPECTATION AND EXPERIENCE IN INTIMATE INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

By
Kristen Jenkins Hark

Approved 22 August 2014

Calvin L. Troup
Associate Professor of Rhetoric
(Committee Chair)

Janie Harden Fritz
Professor of Rhetoric
(Committee Member)

Richard L. Thames
Associate Professor of Rhetoric
(Committee Member)

James C. Swindal
Dean, McAnulty Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Ronald C. Arnett
Chair, Department of Communication & Rhetorical Studies
ABSTRACT

DISCONNECTS: EXPECTATION AND EXPERIENCE IN INTIMATE INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

By
Kristen Jenkins Hark

December 2014

Dissertation supervised by Calvin L. Troup, Ph.D.

In the latter part of the 20th century and early 21st century, egalitarian views regarding gender communication have been dominant in the theory and practice of intimate interpersonal communication (IPC). During the same period research continued to report that the healthiest and most satisfying relationships fit within patterns of traditional marriage. Traditional intimate relationships tend to enact complementarian practices regarding gender roles in intimate IPC. This raises the question how might an exploration of a minimalist complementarian view that informs traditional relationships assist in sustaining healthy intimate IPC today?

In the literature concerning the health of intimate relationships, namely marriage and cohabitation, scholars report an emerging sense of decline. In broad terms people are reporting that their expectations and experience in intimate communicative relationships
do not align. As a result the viability of family lives and structures are at stake. Studies from a variety of fields connected to intimate communication now intersect at the disconnect between expectation and experience. Three points emerge as we focus on this misalignment: (1) Concern for quality of intimate communication puts IPC literature at the center of today’s public conversations about intimate relationships, (2) we see a phenomenological disconnect emerging between what people expect to experience and the actual experience they have within that lifestyle, and (3) the seriousness of the problem invites study from multiple perspectives within intimate IPC.

The conventional egalitarian perspective acknowledges biological differences but puts greater emphasis on cultural and social constructs related to femininity and masculinity. However recent neuroscientific studies suggest a biosocial role, involving biological and social factors that should be received as interactive and not dichotomous, making clear that both culture and biology are substantial contributors to femininity and masculinity.

Neuroscientific research detailing significant differences between female and male brains suggests we should expect differences in female and male communication patterns. And as IPC literature shows emerging concerns about the decline of sustainable intimate communication we see an invitation for perspectives that consider biosocial understandings. A complementarian view may be one such perspective given it is a view common to a variety of narrative traditions seeking to account for fundamental differences between women and men, both historically and in the present moment.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the two who kept me learning and working.

JPH: Ephesians 3:20

AGP: As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens his friends.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The writing of this dissertation has been one of the most significant academic challenges I have ever had to face. Without the support, patience and guidance of the following people, this project would not have been completed. It is to them that I owe my deepest gratitude.

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- My parents who always know that nothing is ever normal or easy. Newton said, “If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.” You are giants among men.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

IPC—Interpersonal Communication

NMP—National Marriage Project

AddHealth—National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health
CHAPTER 1

In the latter part of the 20th century and early 21st century egalitarian views regarding gender communication have been dominant in the theory and practice of intimate interpersonal communication (IPC). During the same period research continued to report that the healthiest and most satisfying relationships fit within patterns of traditional marriage. Traditional intimate relationships tend to enact complementarian practices regarding gender roles in intimate IPC. This raises the question how might an exploration of a minimalist complementarian view that informs traditional relationships assist in sustaining healthy intimate IPC today?

This chapter establishes the interpersonal opportunities for enriching the conversation of difference between women and men as a defining feature of intimate interpersonal relationships. By clarifying some of the differences between women and men and then communicating those differences, we level the playing field. To do this requires that we understand both women and men are affected by ambiguity surrounding intimate relationships.

This chapter will attempt to show (1) a measure of women’s and men’s expectations for intimate relationships; (2) identify actual experiences with those relationships and non-relationships and (3) point to the disconnect of expectation and experience by looking at how changing social norms affect conceptions of roles for womanhood and manhood in intimate interpersonal communicative relationships.
Simply put, women and men have great difficulty understanding and appreciating the value of each other’s expectation. People have the tendency to meet the needs that they value, not those of the other. Thus, unintentionally, we waste effort trying to meet the wrong needs. Because the expectations and needs of men and women are often very different, the ability to communicate well those priorities and expectations becomes exceedingly important. As we look toward expectations and priorities for intimate relationships and the subsequent experiences, it is imperative to bear in mind that this project concedes that not all women and/or men fall into the proposed statements, nor will all agree with what is stated, possess the same desires, experiences, or expectations.

Ambiguity in the playing field—the current landscape emerging adults are working with when attempting to build intimate relationships—is influenced by postmodern shifts, both societal and cultural. These shifts are also influential on both women AND men, as is the lack of clear definitions of terms central to building a relationship. Unfortunately, left undefined, certain terms like that of ‘appropriate’ behavior are unquestionably linked to the decline in sustainable intimate relationships (Baucom et al., 1996; Epstein & Eidelson, 1981; Baucom & Epstein, 1990).

However, the use of a baseline serves a major function of providing individuals with a sense of order in the world; and furthermore they can also go beyond explaining what the world actually is to proposing how the world should be (Baucom & Epstein, 1990, p. 60). Looking for widespread agreement, baselines help explain what is ‘typical’ and are critical as they provide a roadmap to guide appropriate behavior (this is why there is a problem emerging—there is no clear definition of ‘appropriate’ behavior). Basic research about marriage has demonstrated that a couple’s assumptions and standards
about marriage and committed relationships directly correlate to relationship adjustment (Baucom et al., 1996; Baucom & Epstein, 1990; Epstein & Eidelson, 1981).

This adjustment is often the result of expectations/desire for relationship to succeed. This adjustment also ties to communication. For over three decades scholars have written of interpersonal communication and how communication within relationships regulates the breadth and depth of knowledge shared (Altman & Dalmas, 1973; Dindia & Allen, 1992), reduces uncertainty about the persons in the relationship (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Duck, 1976, pp. 127-47), and negotiates the roles and rules of and within the relationship (Bem, 1974; Phillips & Metzger, 1976; Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967). There is no question that communication is of utmost importance to a relationship; that we should then be honest in our communication seems to be something that does not need to be explicitly stated, however, the ongoing disconnect between expectation and experience says otherwise.

The current landscape from which relationships are built and experienced is shifting in powerful ways. With claims like “13 is the new 18”, “30 is the new 20”, communication confusion creates a conundrum for emerging adults. Regnerus and Uecker (2011), along with Jeffrey Arnett (2004), suggest that a population of emerging adults is on the rise as children are being pushed into adolescence earlier by peers, parents and the marketplace. And as much as it might appear they would become adults faster as well, they do not. Thus, young adults [ages eighteen through twenty-nine years of age] become stuck in a “holding pattern” for numerous years, through college and careers, until marriage, children, career responsibilities and/or simple maturation causes them to recognize a true adult status (Regnerus & Uecker, 2011).
However, according to the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) we are seeing, on average, less wooing, less dating, shorter relationships, increasing sexual partners, longer cohabitations and less marrying.\(^1\) Why? Simple supply and demand. Using the approach of social psychologists Roy Baumeister and Kathleen Vohs, sexual economics consistently shows that men have a greater and yet less discriminating appetite for sexual encounters. On average men desire sex more than women and the key thing to note is that women are not making them work for it… making the ‘market price of sex’ very low (Baumeister & Vohs, 2004; Regnerus & Uecker, 2011).\(^2\) Assuming this basic, business-like model toward emerging-adult relationships bespeaks an exchange perspective (Regnerus & Uecker, 2011, p. 100). Brooks (2007) well captures the essence of this phenomenon, pointing to this group’s sexual and relational patterns:

Now young people face a frontier of their own. They hit puberty around 13 and many don’t get married until they’re past 30. That’s two decades of coupling, uncoupling, hooking up, relationships, and shopping around. This period isn’t a transition anymore. It’s a sprawling life stage, and nobody knows the rules. Once, young people came a-calling as part of courtship. Then they had dating and going steady. But the rules of courtship have dissolved. They’ve been replaced by ambiguity and uncertainty. Cell phones, Facebook, and text messaging give people access

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\(^1\) National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) is the largest and most extensive data set available about American young people. It is a panel study that allows tracking over time for changes in respondents’ attitudes and behaviors. Add Health is directed by Kathleen Mullan Harris, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Information can be accessed at: http://www.cpc.unc.edu/addhealth

\(^2\) This particular study used data gathered from college age young adults.
to hundreds of “friends”. That only increases the fluidity, drama and anxiety.

Laura Sessions Stepp’s groundbreaking work *Unhooked* shows how ‘hooking up’ is not the isolated act of a promiscuous few, but indication of a large cultural shift (2011, p. 5). Through her work with the *Washington Post* she became aware of startling trends of middle school sexual activity, beginning with her 1998 coverage of a middle school oral sex ring. The school happened to be her son’s, making the importance of investigation personal. As she began interviewing and researching the sexual patterns of young people, she found that the new sexual landscape has been designed by young women, “to the delight of guys who no longer have to work very hard for girls’ attention or their bodies” (Sessions Stepp, 2011, p. 6).

The culture of the hook-up is most easily defined by the fact that one can be ‘unhooked’, or without any type of commitment immediately after sexual gratification. The effort that many young people put forth to remain uncommitted ironically shows how much they long for attachment of some kind. Hooking up is not easily defined. It can consist of kissing, fondling, oral sex, sexual intercourse, or any combination of the former. The 2000 College Women’s Study (CWS), commissioned to explore the hook-up phenomenon, surveyed 1,000 emerging-adult women from over 200 four-year, co-ed campuses. Three out of four respondents agreed with the statement that a “hook-up” is “when a girl and guy get together for a physical encounter and do not necessarily expect anything further” (Glenn & Marquardt, 2001).
The one common factor of the hook-up is that feelings are discouraged and both parties know that they can walk away at any time without compunction (Sessions Stepp, 2011, p. 27). This cultural shift in sex is, in great part a power play—do not act like you care, so that if it does not work, you do not look weak. And if you do not risk anything, you do not really lose anything; being afraid of disappointment, leads to a lowering of expectations that has no resonance with love (Regnerus & Uecker, 2011, pp. 155-6). The sexual economics theory prompts us then, to think far more broadly about the resources that the average young woman values and is attempting to acquire in exchange for sex—things like love, attention, status, self-esteem, affection, commitment, and feelings of emotional union (Regnerus & Uecker, 2011, p. 53).

**Expectations In Intimate Relationships**

The difficulty in understanding and appreciating the value of women’s and men’s expectations is often a direct result of poor interpersonal communication. Lori Heyman Gordon and Virginia Satir, preeminent family psychotherapists, posit “the landscape of intimacy is littered with relationships destroyed by hidden expectations and assumptions.”3 These expectations and assumptions communicated alleviate many forms of miscommunication. Basic beliefs or expectations about what the nature of the world and one’s place in it “should be” are seen as the primary cause of marital problems, as well as other kinds of intrapersonal and interpersonal problems.

In 1828, expectation (expectatio) was defined by Webster as ‘the act of expecting or looking forward to a future event with at least some reason to believe the event will happen.’ In 2013, Webster’s definition for expectation altered to ‘a belief that something will happen or is likely to happen.’ Note that the change includes a loss of reason for the

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belief. This change is not unimportant; clearly the disconnect between expectation and experience shows a lack of reflective discourse.

Expectations are partially built on previous experiences and if one is without experience, where do other assumptions and expectations come from? From one’s peers, whose landscape is in turn often shaped by other peers; their conversation surrounding the discursive landscape of intimate interpersonal relationships is littered with reference to media reinforcements. Malcolm Gladwell, in his book, *The Tipping Point* (2000), points out that small changes in a population become trends or ‘tip’ as a result of cultural prompts, many of them subtle. Consider Jamie, one of the young women interviewed by Stepp in *Unhooked* who shared that when she would brood over boys she would watch “reality” TV shows about dating such as *The Bachelorette* and take heart at the show’s crop of gorgeous men eager to squire women around (2011, p. 44). Very often the purveyor of knowledge is society, albeit in subtle ways, often showcasing a sexual or romantic script that the young emergent-adult would like to experience (Brown, 2009).

As emerging-adult women and men begin to learn about intimate relationships, love, communication, and commitment, it emerges that those shaping this education are perhaps at best, not qualified and at worst, detrimental. Judith Harris, author of *The Nurture Assumption* (2009), explains that influence comes by way of the peer group, delivered according to group socialization theory. The ability to recognize the avenue of hidden, faulty, or unrealistic desires and expectations makes reflection possible; this project intends to help one take pause and consider the complex realm of sustainable, committed intimate relationships. Consider this conclusion from the hit film, *He’s Just Not That Into You*:
Girls are taught a lot of stuff growing up. If a guy punches you he likes you. Never try to trim your own bangs and someday you will meet a wonderful guy and get your very own happy ending. Every movie we see, every story we're told implores us to wait for it, the third act twist, the unexpected declaration of love, the exception to the rule. But sometimes we're so focused on finding our happy ending we don't learn how to read the signs… how to tell from the ones who want us and the ones who don't, the ones who will stay and the ones who will leave. And maybe a happy ending doesn't include a guy, maybe... it's you, on your own, picking up the pieces and starting over, freeing yourself up for something better in the future. Maybe the happy ending is just... moving on. Or maybe the happy ending is this: knowing after all the unreturned phone calls, broken-hearts, through the blunders and misread signals, through all the pain and embarrassment you never gave up hope [that you can find him].

We might presuppose that the majority of women and men echo this sentiment in their hope to find a satisfying, sustainable intimate relationship. Another safe assumption might be that women and men expect their partner to love them reciprocally and that each will change throughout the relationship.

As Annis and Gray investigated profuse research consisting of self-help conversations, online testimonials, and therapeutic conversations, two interesting ideas began to emerge. The first concerns a central theme of women’s expectations—that women have a great ability to see a man’s potential, and this can be a weakness, as men
may never live up to this potential; that the hopes a woman can have towards a man changing or being able to fix him in order to fulfill this potential can often result in both parties experiencing an unfulfilling relationship. In essence, women tend to marry a man because of his potential and expect him to change (Annis & Gray, 2013; Gordon & Frandsen, 2001; Gray, 1992/2012).

The second theme concerns men’s expectations—that men anticipate women staying the same as when first they met and were dating; this entails in some variation, to always look beautiful, be available for sex at any given moment, maintain approximately the same weight and figure and be fun, kind and loving. In essence, the need for this certainty propels them to ask the woman to marry him so that what he experienced in the beginning can last forever (Annis & Gray, 2013; Gordon & Frandsen, 2001; Gray, 1992/2012). These two themes, one organic and one inorganic, seem to be at odds; we see tension or a push-pull dialectic emerging. An example that wittily captures this dialectic is found in the film The Story of Us. Composed of vignettes through the ups and downs of a 15-year marriage, the film highlights unspoken expectations of a wife and husband regarding their hopes and experiences throughout their relationship.

Found consistently throughout interpersonal communication, the dialectical approach embraces ongoing contradictory tensions between consistency and inconsistency and between stability and instability (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 2). By highlighting these similarities and differences in women’s and men’s expectations we can more easily see the need for more clearly established standards or priorities. Harley’s Perceived Order of Difference (2002), listed below as Figure 1.1, offers a brief
introduction of some key differences between women and men and their relational priorities or standards:

**Women’s Needs/Priorities versus Men’s Needs/Priorities**

Affection *versus* Sexual fulfillment

Intimate conversation *versus* Recreational companionship

Honesty and openness *versus* Attractive spouse

Financial support *versus* Domestic support

Family commitment *versus* Admiratio

Figure 1.1 *Perceived Order of Importance* outlining difference in relational needs.

Through the *Perceived Order of Importance* Dr. Willard Harley found that women, *on average*, choose affection, intimate conversation, honesty and openness, financial support and family commitment as their top five priorities and needs for a sustainable, healthy emotionally intimate relationship. The first two, however, far exceed the other three. Out of the ten emotional needs reported in Harley’s *Perceived Order of Importance* men, *on average*, choose sexual fulfillment, recreational companionship, attractive spouse, domestic support, and admiration as their top five to be met in order to sustain a healthy, intimate relationship. Though, like the ranking of women’s standards, the first two far outweigh the others.

It is interesting to note that both women’s and men’s top priorities intersect with the other—for example, it stands to reason that a woman receiving affection and engagement through intimate conversation is far more likely to be interested in meeting
that man’s top need for sexual fulfillment and be engaged in spending recreational time with him. However, conversely, a man will most likely feel affectionate toward the woman who enjoys spending time with him recreationally and meeting his need for sexual fulfillment. This is plausible because of complementarity.

In a healthy relationship men are not expressly saying ‘I will be affectionate as payment for you participating in recreational activities’. However, they tend to be more affectionate during those recreational times—often this is a more relaxed context—than in a work or business centered context. Gottman established that one key thing people do not realize is that a good sexual relationship emerges from affection and respect and humor toward one another in very small moments of every day interaction. This suggests an atmosphere of reciprocity. James Harper, endowed professor at Brigham Young University posits that “interactional synchrony” is usually a better pattern than reciprocity in marriage. Interactional synchrony occurs when husband and wife learn each other’s rhythms and modify their behavior to fit those rhythms—similar to a familiar dance partner. However, we need to keep in mind that the learning comes from inside the intimate relationship rather than outside.

When we look at expectations for intimate relationships, we often take measure of outward influence and voice, often from societal norms, thus unwittingly taking part in untruths. How so? Take for instance the example of pornography. Pornography is at its highest use within the demographic of emerging-adults (Buzzell, 2005). A common

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4 John Gottman, transcript of a chat with CNN.com's chat room after his appearance on Beyond the Mind on CNN International; June 10, 2001 at 3 p.m. EDT. Available at: http://www.cnn.com/COMMUNITY/transcripts/2001/06/10/gottman/

5 James M. Harper, MFT, Ph.D., is Director of BYU's School of Family Life. This information was taken from part of the Honorary Martin B. Hickman Outstanding Scholar lecture, March 2, 2000. Full lecture available at www.fhss.byu.edu. Accessed Feb 2014.
presumption in society and the media is that men respond more strongly to visual sexual stimuli than do women. Pornographic magazines and videos directed at men are a multi-billion dollar industry while similar products directed towards women are difficult to find (Rupp & Wallen, 2008). In its male version, pornography almost always contains multiple partners and is extremely visual.

As for the female version, I submit that the closest similarity for women is the romance novel or film. Though perhaps less visually graphic, it is no less mentally; perhaps it seems less real and therefore more identifiable as fiction. The irony lies in the fact that male pornography is easier for everyone to identify the truth that no real women are like that—that is why men often prefer it [pornography] to real women (Regnerus & Uecker, 2011, pp. 94, 98; Carroll et al., 2008). Because there is no work or risk involved—no need to put yourself ‘out there.’

In one of the most rigorous and reliable studies of online porn use and norms, researchers interviewed 813 emerging-adults (ages eighteen-twenty-six) from six colleges and universities (Carroll et al., 2012). Two out of three men agreed that porn use was acceptable, while fifty percent of women agreed. However, on usage of porn, the genders differ significantly with eighty-six percent of men interacting with porn at least once a month, while sixty-nine percent of women reported no porn use at all. This study reflects the Internet as both sex educator and sexual activity stimulator, while the direction of influence leans toward what could be or should be acceptable (Brown, 2002; Regnerus & Uecker, 2011, ch. 3).

Along the same line, women unconsciously participate in the same untruths; romance novels and/or films do not have real men in them either, but this is more

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6 Adapted from a Kinsey Institute study.
nuanced. The reason most women reject pornography is that they know they cannot compete with fiction and the reasons most men reject romantic comedies is because they recognize those characters are not real men. Author Naomi Wolf (2003) recognizes this remarking “for two decades, I have watched young women experience the continual “mission creep” of how pornography—and now Internet pornography—has lowered their sense of their own sexual value and their actual sexual value.” So the common factor or question becomes, how can an ordinary member deliver in an intimate relationship?

Unfortunately because sex is often used as means to a desired end, rather than a fulfillment of the desired end, [that of the intimate relationship], intimacy is quickly becoming a lost art. Anyone can ‘get laid’, or hook-up, and many do, but research actually points toward a desire, held by women and men, to be loved on an intimate—knowledge, not sexual—level. It is important to note that these sexual desires do not equal relational expectations.

Desiring sexual passion and variety is not new, but understanding that those desires give way to long-term expectations becomes more difficult as emerging-adults put adulthood on hold, liberated from the need to ‘become an adult’. There are expectations that society has attempted tried to liberate women and men from: that women want to be sought, and that men want to pursue. The sexual revolution does not undo these last desires, though it seems liberation from the old, set patterns always means progress. However, liberation in this arena can often muddies the water and make finding and maintaining a healthy, sustainable intimate relationship that much harder.

In the long run, almost every person expects to be married within their lifetime, while also producing a family, in whatever combination that may look like (Rubinson &
DeRubertis, 1991). To be quite frank, not many women and men sit around and hope that at the end of their life they have had more sexual partners than anyone else, or that their fondest memory is the co-ed at the frat house. It sounds foolish when placed in that perspective, so why are emerging adults living as though marriage will just happen somewhere down the road, and as though there is no preparation required for a lasting, sustainable healthy relationship? In the words of one interviewee, “two feet firmly planted is better than hopscotch,” but hopscotch is easier (Sessions Stepp, 2011, p. 287).

Because emerging adults esteem the idea of marriage, yet set it apart as inappropriate for their age, waiting until marriage for a fulfilling sex life seems foolish (Regnerus & Uecker, 2011, p. 170). So, creating a satisfying, intimate committed relationship is not a priority for the emerging adult. Jeffery Arnett, the developmental psychologist of emerging adulthood, notes that a committed relationship does not seem to hold much value early on:

Finding a love partner in your teens and continuing in a relationship with that person through your early twenties, culminating in marriage, is now viewed as unhealthy, a mistake, a path likely to lead to disaster. Those who do not experiment with different partners are warned that they will eventually wonder what they are missing, to the detriment of their marriage (2004, p. 73).

With earlier sexual activity and later marriage emerging adults face over a decade of sexual activity without serious commitment. Sexual activity in this manner, what scholars refer to as serial monogamy, is often housed within a relationship of some type,

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7 College Social Life Survey (CSLS) – see research design in England, Shafer, & Fogarty, 2007.
though the levels of commitment vary greatly (Regnerus & Uecker, 2011, pp. 23, 51, 81, 133). Thus far, we have shown that (1) women and men have distinct priorities and perspectives concerning relational success and (2) peers and societal shifts hold sway on relational expectation and experience. Next, we look toward interactions and exchanges that emerge through research regarding expectations for future successful, committed relationships.

Researchers Don Baucom at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Norm Epstein at the University of Maryland have identified three major areas concerning expectation for the way things “should be” in intimate relationships (Bauom et al., 1996):

1. **Boundaries.** How rigid or permeable is the relationship? How much independence is OK between partners? How much shared-ness/distinctness exists in the relationship?

2. **Investment.** What level of commitment is present? How much time and effort does each partner feel the other should be putting forth for the good of the relationship?

3. **Control and Power.** Who makes which decisions? Is power shared equally? If so, how?

Baucom and Epstein’s research brings forth an illuminating truth: that essentially the differences in each partner’s standards are less of a problem than each of them being dissatisfied with the ways their own standards are or are not being met. Thus, the main problem is not the difference of the people in the relationship but working out an agreeable method of meeting each other’s expectations (Baucom & Epstein, 1990; Epstein & Baucom, 2002, ch. 5).
It is important to note that high expectations are a good thing—unambiguous ones are not. Epstein and Baucom found that couples that create and keep high expectations of the relationship show a higher success rate and a higher rate of happiness with the relationship than those who let expectations slide. However, certain factors, like a self-focused perspective on life or an inability to meet demands can stress a relationship, regardless of high expectations. The old adage of one living up or down to another’s expectations shows itself to be true. Lowering our expectations merely increases the probability of a less satisfying relationship (Epstein & Baucom, 2002; Gottman, 1995).

Finally, it is not as crucial to for each person in the relationships to hold the same expectations as it is for each person to do their best to try to meet the important and realistic desires of the other (Baucom & Epstein, 1990, pp. 178, 394). Thus, the idea of “should be” is directly tied to what “is” or “is not”. Expectations, grounded in past and present experiences, are organic and lead us in our understanding what women and men are experiencing in intimate relationships.

Experiences In Intimate Relationships

A guiding assumption concerning experience is that we develop characteristic ways of behaving in the context of our interactions and relationships with others, revealing that the character of our intimate relationships is shaped by those adaptations (Erikson, 1963; Prager, 1995). In other words, expectations and the associated behaviors, shape subsequent interpersonal behavior in intimate contexts. Experience is comprised of these behaviors, these interactions of intimacy. Because interactions with others affect how we as individuals adapt to needs, concerns and desires, Prager proposes that some of
the most important contingencies that we adapt to come from intimate relationships; hence, the importance of reflecting on and through those experiences (1995, p. 74).

The idea that needs and priorities affect our intimate communicative interactions is another influential area of experience. Whether voiced or not, concerns and expectations hold extreme influence over our intimate relationships. Often women and men forego actively pursuing gratification of their needs or concerns by under-utilizing verbal clarity and over-exercising mind-reading—an thoroughly researched and oft-used dysfunctional expectation that leads to disappointment in actual experience (Eidelson & Epstein, 1982; Gottman, Notarius, Gonso, & Markman, 1976; Jacobson & Margolin, 1979). And it is the availability/ability of each partner to address these concerns that is based on previous experience; therefore what we attend to and perceive about our relationship is selected through our interpersonal schemas.

Schemas are sets of expectations about current interpersonal situations that are based on generalizations from previous experiences and they affect the way we think, feel and behave in any given intimate situation (Mischel, 1993; Prager, 1995, p. 75). We tend to expect what we previously had the opportunity to learn, making assumptions based on our history. And, when in personal history, there are people or situations that were the source of heartache, resentment, anxiety, etc. then any similar action by a partner in the present often serves as a reminder.

By reflecting on our schemas and clarifying some of the differences between women and men and then communicating those differences, we level the playing field. In intimate interpersonal relationships, everyone wins and everyone loses. No one remains
unscathed. However, the terms of contemporary sexual relationships favor men and what they want in relationships, not just despite the fact that what they have to offer has diminished, but in part because of it (Regnerus, 2011 Regnerus & Uecker, 2011, p. 52).

This is one area in which men are very much in charge: premarital heterosexual relationships. Mark Regnerus (2011) makes the observation that what many young men wish for—access to sex without too many complications or commitments—carries the contemporary day. If young women were more fully in charge of how their relationships transpired, we would be seeing, on average, more impressive wooing efforts, longer relationships, fewer premarital sexual partners, shorter cohabitations, and more marrying.

It is almost as if emerging-adult women have done a cost (resources required) versus benefit (sex/false intimacy) analysis and casual wins; they think they have found the best bargain—sexual permissiveness in the form of the hook-up. Perhaps one could say there are benefits, as there is no time lost or taken from studies or career, their ‘investment,’ or parental investment, is secure and as they think, there is plenty of time to get married and have children. But hooking up leaves young people with no skills to navigate a healthy, committed relationship—one that requires responsibility, work and trust, and perhaps most importantly, more than just their own wants. Patty, an interviewee in Unhooked states, “a lot of people’s goals, though they won’t admit it, is to have a great love. But they won’t say it because it’s the twenty-first century” (Sessions Stepp, 2011, p. 137). Research shows that men are just as unsatisfied with hooking up and multiple partners as women are… it just takes men longer to recognize and verbalize this discovery (Sessions Stepp, 2011, p. 285; Waite & Gallagher, 2001).
A life-enriching vision of intimate relationships is the goal [of most people]. Do hookups help provide that? Does postponing marriage, and/or children? Love may be a basic desire, but loving well is something to be learned. Stepp (2011, p. 31) notes that emerging-adult women chose a communicative vocabulary [concerning relationships] that gives them maximum freedom and none of the guilt: there are not boyfriends and girlfriends, but hanging out or hooking up…i.e., “friends with benefits”. No one actually goes on dates, but they are “dating” someone. They “talk to” someone but do not have meaningful conversations and “seeing someone” can often mean they are open to other relationships. Harvard University psychologist Mark O’Connell says that “there’s always been a lot of sex in college; it’s the quality of sex that’s changed… it’s increasingly disconnected” (Herrman & Rackl, 2005; Reimold, 2010, p. 102; Stepp, 2011, p. 32). Who is reminding emerging adults that while freedom is liberating, it is not free and life with no boundaries is often one lost to real meaning?

Sex should be a natural outgrowth of a relationship. However, because of the pressures of young adult life—successful college careers, athletic careers, internships, jobs and resume building, most young women and men cannot fathom devoting time to finding and working on a loving, satisfying, intimate relationship. So, a no-strings-attached policy is born, however, research shows that for most women, the strings are what makes sex good (Campbell, 2008). True intimacy involves opening up to someone on a deeper level than normal society is privy to see and that is not an easy task, especially with no role model or guidance for that intimate connection. Courting and dating were the best, most influential (in both public and private) methods used for support and guidance.
Thus, we see that the shift of the balance of power has been a long time coming; in the courtship tradition of the late nineteenth and early 20th century, mothers arranged eligible young men to visit their daughters. There was no ‘going out’ and the relationship grew in the setting of the family home. Moving into the 1920’s, ‘going out’ became an option as families were often living in crowded living conditions, making it more difficult for men to ‘come calling’. Thus, women left their own comfortable realm of the home and shifted dating into the outside world. Beth Bailey, author of From Front Porch to Backseat: A History of the Date, is a social historian who work chronicles courtship, the decline of ‘calling’, the subsequent replacement of ‘dating’ (Bailey, 2004).

Bailey posits that the 1920’s change from courting at home in the presence of family to ‘going out’ shifted the balance of power from the woman to the man. He provided transportation, paid for dinner and entertainment—often with the implication that the woman ‘owed’ sexual favors to the man. In a sense, dating required men to assume control and the women to act as the dependent (Bailey, 2004, p. 29). This held true through the 1960’s and when the Pill became legal, sexual mores would be profoundly changed and a sexual revolution of some sort would be almost inevitable (Murray, 2013, pp. 10, 157).

Women’s liberation at this time meant the freedom to have a sexual appetite (and act on it) like men did. Feminists like Freidan and Steinhem spoke up and brought a needed conversation to the forefront, but in the words of Laura Sessions Stepp, “feminism has never spoken with one voice,” indicating that the feminists of the 1980’s eschewed the extreme position taken [from the second-wave feminists of the 1960’s] about sex. Power in one’s private life did not necessarily have to look like power in
public life; sexual experimentation was valuable but in the context of meaningful, mutually respectful and yes, loving relationships (Stepp, 2011, pp. 154-5). Third-wave feminist writer, Naomi Wolf (2003) wonders if we have not gotten the order of sex and relationship mixed up:

Why have sex right away?” a boy with tousled hair and Bambi eyes was explaining. “Things are always a little tense and uncomfortable when you just start seeing someone, “ he said. “I prefer sex right away just to get it over with. You know it’s going to happen anyway, and it gets rid of the tension.” “Isn’t the tension kind of fun?” I asked. “Doesn’t that also get rid of the mystery?” “Mystery?” He looked at me blankly. And then, without hesitating, he replied: “I don’t know what you’re talking about. Sex has no mystery.

This casual remark captures the dwindling expectations for a serious, committed relationship, or at least the intended duration is expected to be shorter. In a pithy statement Stepp posits: “sex in fact is a Rorschach test for how we treat all people—casually or with care” (2011, p. 17).

Whereas assumptions involve an individual’s beliefs about how things actually are, ethics or values and expectations involve personal beliefs about the characteristics that an intimate relationship and the partners involved should have (Baucom & Epstein, 1990; Baucom, Epstein, Sayers, & Sher, 1989). Partners then use these ethics or values to evaluate whether each person’s behavior is appropriate and acceptable, in response to what they believe “should be”. The earlier referenced areas of (1) boundaries, (2)
investment and (3) power and control, provide a useful guidepost for better understanding intimate relational experiences; because countless experiences exist, culling the factors by which we research them is helpful.

**Boundaries.** Beginning with the ethic of boundaries, we see that providing healthy boundaries can help to create some sense of normality and predictability. And, while Baucom, Epstein, Rankin, and Burnett’s findings (1996) show that standards for minimal boundaries are significantly associated with greater marital satisfaction, they also demonstrate that those minimal boundaries need to also be distinct. Problematic issues concerning boundaries around a couple’s intimate interpersonal relationship are not limited to intrusions of other people. They also may occur because of an individual’s involvement with a job, hobbies, or other activities that exclude the other partner.

Boundaries are, in a sense, nebulous and fluid. Because of this organic state, they can be difficult to define and maintain. Often boundaries are not defined until *after* the intimate relationship experiences difficulty in this area. As Buss points out “because categories are not sharply demarcated… they blend into adjacent ones, thus love may blend in and out of liking, lust, friendship, affection, or passion” (1988, p. 109). Intimacy is a natural concept, thus follows that the boundaries of intimacy are fuzzy and organized around central and peripheral concepts (Hegelson, Shaver, & Dyer, 1987; Rosch, Mervis, Gray, Johnson, & Boyes-Braem, 1976).

One key boundary that a couple must define is the one *around* their relationship, regulating the degree to which they will interact with, and be influenced by, the environment (Epstein & Baucom, 2002; Minuchin, 1974; Todd, 1986). This boundary around the couple is often abused in the realm of privacy. The couple’s interpretation of
this breakdown is key to the experience they will have within the relationship; for example, Karen complaining to her parents about Glen’s behavior will often be interpreted by both parties as a lack of respect and trust within the relationship (Epstein & Baucom, 2002, p. 170).

Structural family therapists have argued that a crucial task facing the intimate interpersonal relationship is the establishment of their identity as a unit, relatively independent of their families of origin and other people (Minuchin, 1974; Nichols & Schwartz, 2001; Todd, 1986). Boundaries are the process that can help a couple establish a clear identity. For example, a husband and wife might decide that arguments need to stay between the two of them; that if one is to complain about the other, it must be to each other. This decision or boundary communicatively set early in the relationship can circumvent many problems in the future.

Finally, boundaries most often refer to the degree of togetherness versus autonomy between partners in intimate relationships (Epstein & Baucom, 2002, p. 226). From small, seemingly insignificant boundaries, like specific time devoted to talking about work at home to larger, more critical ones like monogamy, boundaries set the parameters for growth and development of sustainable intimate relationships.

**Investment.** Erikson (1963) posits that the need for intimacy becomes a conscious preoccupation during the young adult period, while expressly stating that, “no one automatically emerges from the young adult years having successfully cultivated one or more intimate relationships” (p. 264). Through this preoccupation with finding a long-term intimate romantic partner, Erikson proposes that adults require three things in order to form a robust investment in intimate relationships: (1) a capacity for commitment
without fear of ego-loss, (2) a capacity for depth, to share and air differences, and (3) a capacity to maintain individuation, while fusing with another (p. 264).

Unfortunately these three requirements for sustainable investment in an intimate relationship are often absent or less than mature. It is no secret that often one partner is more invested in the relationship than the other; that divergent investment can be linked to divergent motives. On the socioevolutionary and sociocultural front, Buss suggests that women are attracted to signs of status, willingness and ability to invest, ambition and commitment and therefore are more likely to pursue men who show signs of investing in long-term, enduring, monogamous relationships (Buss, 1994; Buss & Schmidt, 1993).

Men, on the other hand, are attracted to women showing signs of fertility, such as youth, physical attractiveness, physical health and fidelity (Buss, 1994; Buss & Schmidt, 1993). Cultural factors, like status disparities between females and males, sex-role socialization and media messages reinforce similar patterns of behavior (Clark & Lewis, 1977; Kemper, 1990; Russell, 1984; Stock, 1991). These motives, at odds with one another, create a pattern for investment that is not reciprocal.

The area of investment often focuses on the likelihood of a future together. Expectation about the future of a relationship is important for understanding the trajectory of the relationship. Sociologists have argued that the ways in which individuals frame, or perceive, a situation have implications for their behavior (Goffman, 1967). Consequently, perception and prediction of future events can be self-fulfilling if individuals modify their actions according to their expectations (Waller & McLanahan, 2005). It is this modification of actions that lends itself to what people experience – and the likelihood that one’s actions are not non-manipulative. It comes as little surprise that
in intimate interpersonal relationships one partner is often more dedicated or invested in the relationship than the other.

Therapists in clinical practice commonly see couples who experience conflict and distress concerning mismatches or conflicts in the two individuals’ motives. For example, relationship problems in which one person has a need for more intimate interaction than the other are well documented in the clinical literature and conflicts in this area can be over differences in partners’ levels of investment in achieving career success, a higher standard of living, and other goals (Epstein & Baucom, 2002; Jacobson & Christensen, 1996; Johnson, 1996). For example one partner possessing a much stronger achievement motive than the other may lose respect for the partner with less drive leading to a decrease in involvement.

Lack of investment, or disengagement involves subjective, internal experiences as well as overt behavior. An individual lacking investment has stopped trying to fulfill his or her personal needs within the relationship and has reached a state of acceptance that the partner is not a viable source of gratification (Christensen & Shenk, 1991; Epstein & Baucom, 2002). This can lead to a shift of investment, with one partner begins to look outside the relationship toward another person, hobby, job, event, etc. Gottman, in reviewing research on couples’ disengagement, or lack of investment (1999, p. 24), concluded that “most marriages end with a whimper, the result of people gradually drifting apart and not feeling liked, loved, and respected.”

Two major forms of investment, or ways that the partners can give to their relationship, are expressive and instrumental. First, partners can engage in expressive behaviors that signify caring, concern, affection, and love. Expressive behaviors focus on
the emotional aspects of a relationship, of helping a partner feel loved, cared about and
valued. Second, partners can engage in positive, instrumental behaviors or task-oriented
acts that help to maintain the relationship (Baucom et al., 1996). Because these steps
require a greater focus on the other, they also require more investment.

**Power and control.** The arena of power and control refers to collaborative
versus individual efforts toward accomplishing tasks and solving problems—common
behaviors involved in exercising power and control within the couple’s relationship. A
second notion related to power and control is “maintaining the status quo” (Epstein &
Baucom, 2002, pp. 54, 178). The less powerful person in the relationship must push for
what he or she wants, while the more powerful person might withdraw to maintain
control over the relationship.

So, why does it seem some couples’ behavioral interactions are marked by
frequent battles for control while other couples tend to share power in a relatively easy
manner? For example, two individuals may have equally strong levels of motivation to
exercising power over their relationship and environments, but each may have learned
different ways of exerting power. Reactions to power and control often end in
defensiveness and/or “stonewalling” and both have long-term detrimental consequences
for a relationship (Gottman, 1994). Exertion of power, whether outright or subtle, hails
back to past experiences, triggering present emotions. For example, the extent to which a
child learns to accept and respond to authority is largely determined by how the parent
uses power in the parent-child relationship.

Because emotion is more closely linked to power and control than to other areas
of the relationship, partners show emotions in their attempts to control or gain a sense of
closeness to, distance from, or power over their partners (Baucom & Epstein, 2002, p. 103). The central goal of the power motive is experiencing one’s impact on and control over aspects of one’s environment, including significant others (McAdams, 1985). Often the overall balance of power seems to be determined by one partner’s dominance in key situations rather than by the outcomes of routine daily decision making. Control, on the other hand, has a slightly more negative connotation, and is more closely linked to the methods by which a partner exerts or attempts to exert control. The actual past or anticipated experience of having one partner restrict the other’s freedom, achievement, or control leads an individual to avoid close intimate involvement.

Past environmental experiences can still affect an individual because of the power related to those experiences, and that we as individuals use them to determine expectations. So far we have not developed new ways of responding to them. Guerrero and Andersen (1998, p. 66) suggest that intimate relational partners have the power to deposit ‘rewards’ into the relationship, which ultimately makes the relationship more enjoyable and satisfying, but this requires the ability to communicate about relational patterns clearly and reflectively. Likewise, research indicates that individuals are more satisfied in relationships that provide for their autonomy and individually oriented needs, communicated early with the relationship (Baucom et al., 1996; Rankin-Esquer et al., 1997).

Power and control are not limited to physical power or decision-making, but are often most clearly seen there; communication is fertile ground for coercive behavior or manipulation of situations within the relationship. For example, individuals taking responsibility for describing his or her subjective experiences will use “I” statements to
clearly state what her or his own thoughts and emotions are, during and concerning situations, while statements beginning with “You…” tend to utilize accusation and thereby elicit defensiveness instead of connection. These communicative coercive power plays can be minimized by partners distinguishing between aggression and assertion in intimate interpersonal interactions; noting positives and negatives in conversation, avoidance of absolute terms such as “always” and “never” and being able to focus on one topic at a time (Baucom & Epstein, 1990; Guerney, 1977; Hahlweg et al., 1984).

Unfortunately, changing communication styles does not resolve the “problem” of a dysfunctional relationship—it merely addresses the side effect of a much larger problem. Why are some people defensive and why are some unable to take criticism? Because power has become too fluid a concept; in the postmodern home for example, power does not reside wholly with the parent, but has become a shared power between parent and child. Postmodernity offers parents that have relinquished their power and control of the home by becoming friends instead of parents. In their haste and desire to “understand” and befriend their child, they forfeit the right and privilege for teaching and discipline that allows the child space to grow and become the best they can be.

This loss of power, communicative and relational, blurs the boundaries that make space for intimate interpersonal growth. Similar to gardening or pruning, growth must be restrained, tamed and trimmed at times, in order for better, more healthy and hearty growth to appear. A garden unrestrained is a wild thing, unruly and much more difficult to take care of after years of neglect. A simple explanation, but one that accurately captures a small piece of the emergent disconnect between expectation and experience. A quote by Harry Stack Sullivan (1953, pp. 370-71) does well in summing up the
importance of balancing expectation and experience with future intimate relational success:

All the factors entering into the vicissitudes of self-esteem… are wholly a matter of past experience with people… if experience is definitely unsuited to providing competence for living with others, at particular levels of development, the probabilities of future adequate interpersonal relations are… reduced.

**Disconnect Between Experience And Expectation**

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the lack of a clear definition of ‘appropriate’ behavior is unquestionably linked to the decline in sustainable intimate relationships (Baucom & Epstein, 1990; Baucom et al., 1996; Epstein & Eidelson, 1981). Though I alluded to the cultural shifts concerning courting, dating and hooking up, a brief overview of the societal shifts regarding intimate interpersonal relationships from the early 1900s through and following the sexual revolution can assist in clarifying the current playing field.

In the United States through the 1950s, fulfillment of and through societal roles yielded the majority of self well-being (Montgomery, 1988, p. 347). Moving into the 1970s, scholars noted an increasing importance on interpersonal sources of happiness—healthier relationships, meaningful relationships, and quality friendships (Brehm, 1992; Sennett, 1977; Stewart, 2012). Soon, another shift started to emerge that initiated a change in male and female roles—combining that of role-fulfillment and importance on interpersonal sources of happiness—second and third wave feminism.
Simply defined, second wave feminism closely links to women’s empowerment and differential rights. Betty Friedan’s 1963 best-selling expose, *The Feminist Mystique*, opened up the heretofore hidden plight of the bored housewife to people everywhere; essentially beginning what we now term ‘second-wave feminism’. Her potent words showed second wave feminism as denigrating the housewife and glorifying the career woman and Freidan’s sentiment that those who married young abandoned their ambitions did not allow space for those on whom that ambition still rested.

Alongside Freidan’s early work was the public release of Envoid, the first birth control Pill, allowing women for the first time, complete and secret control of their fertility and consequently their sexuality. Closely following was the 1966 creation of the National Organization for Women (NOW) and Steinhem’s *Ms.* magazine followed shortly thereafter with its first stand-alone issue appearing in 1972. A year later, *Roe v. Wade* would legalize abortion throughout the country, effectively reshaping political and moral ground.

Throughout the 1970’s and 1980’s the sexual revolution gained power and offered much political movement for women. Academically female and gender studies programs were born and psychological research moved toward awareness of women and women’s studies. Nature versus nurture became a forefront battle in the academic realm, as did evolutionary and sociocultural studies.

Camille Paglia, academic and self-proclaimed dissident feminist, gives the story of attending a 1970 feminist conference held at the Yale Law School, where she had a disillusioning close encounter with the celebrity feminists, Kate Millett and Rita Mae Brown. “Any appeal to biology was denounced as reactionary heresy” and Paglia offered
that the real-life consequences of this wholesale exclusion of biology from contemporary social thought continued to multiply. “Second-wave feminism has been habitually guilty of a callous, and to me, counterproductive denigration of motherhood” (2013). In her view, these ideological excesses bear much of the blame for the current cultural decline. By denying the role of nature in women’s lives, she argues, that feminism has become a “denatured, antiseptic” movement that falsely promises that women can “have it all” (Weiss, 2013).

Third wave feminism demonstrates movement beyond equity and difference (which characterized early second wave feminism) and moves toward embracing ambiguity, diversity, and multiplicity on a larger global scale with a focus on individualism (Henry, 2004; Kroløkke & Sørensen, 2006; Wood, 2011). These postmodern shifts affect societal and cultural conceptions of roles for womanhood and manhood in intimate interpersonal communication.

Widely discussed as difficult to define, third wave feminism directs women and men to *Bitch* magazine, much like second-wavers referenced *Ms. Bitch*, for example, advocates “thinking critically about every message the mass media sends; it’s about loudly articulating what’s wrong and what’s right with what we see” (Jervis & Zeisler, 2006, p. 263). In the newly published *bitchfest: Ten Years of Cultural Criticism from the Pages of “Bitch” Magazine* (Jervis & Zeisler, 2006, pp. xxi-xxii), the editors argue that “anyone who protests that a focus on pop culture distracts from ‘real’ feminist issues and lacks a commitment to social change needs to turn on the TV—it’s a public gauge of attitudes about everything from abortion … to poverty … to political power. … The world of pop culture is … the marketplace of ideas.”

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8 Italicized emphasis mine.
And many agree. Pipher (1994, p. 205) posits that America, as a pluralistic culture with contradictory sexual paradigms, does not have clearly defined and universally accepted rules about sexuality, and while Snyder (2008) states young women today face a world colonized by the mass media and information technology, *Bitch* editors Lisa Jervis and Andi Zeisler (2006, p. 51) point out, however, that no one really sees herself reflected: “Most of us looking to celluloid for a reflection of ourselves will be sorely disappointed, no matter what our gender (even if we see ourselves as pretty standard males or females.”

Wendy Shalit, author of the counter-cultural text *A Return to Modesty* (1999), proposed the book on the terms that there was a new response to how polarized the debate about sex had become—“that people need to listen, really listen to the unhappiness of young adult women and see that after patriarchy and its rules and codes of conduct is taken off the table [for blame], what is left is a society which has lost its respect for female modesty” (p. 10). Where once parents, teachers and church influenced the growth and development of young adults, society and peers now form the backbone of child and teen development.

It is my presupposition that morally muddled principles and an increase in self-importance has help create a widening gap between what women and men expect and experience in intimate relationships. Why the muddled morality and loss of selflessness? There is not a quick, easy answer and there is not a quick, easy remedy. However, the Baconian principle of knowledge is power helps us see that there is a history, broken down, blurred and moderating the boundaries around intimate relationships and
unfortunately, in its wake, none have been re-forged. We pay for that loss now, years after the sexual revolution started... well, a revolution.

I propose that one of the key reasons for the disconnect or misalignment begins at home. Young people, freed from the stricter moral code of the baby boomer generation (pre-sexual revolution) are now the 20- to 30-year-old emerging adults. A large majority of research regarding marriage, cohabitation, child-bearing, and those type of “growing up” issues are being written about this emergent-adult; why people are waiting longer to marry, why cohabitation is at its highest point ever, why the hook-up generation is having issues with commitment. Discrepancy between ideals and reality has been linked to decreased relationship satisfaction and increased relationship distress (Fletcher, Simpson, Thomas, & Giles, 1999, p. 76).

Thus, it is this presentation of the ‘ideal’ as ‘typical’ that arguably makes media influential and thus potentially harmful. According to numerous cognitive theory perspectives, media depictions can serve as a source of unrealistic and unhealthy relationship beliefs and ideals because they socialize individuals into believing that unrealistic depictions are in fact representative of relationships in reality and are therefore applicable to their own relationships (Bandura, 1999, 2002; Brown, Steele, & Walsh-Childers, 2002; Johnson & Holmes, 2009). Here is a brief example: Television shows like Gossip Girls, aimed at teenagers, showcase bitchy, cunning girls who “aren’t afraid to get what they want”, whether it be morally proper or not (Shalit, 1999, pp. 81-82), and in 2005 Desperate Housewives was ranked the number one show for viewers between the ages of nine to twelve (English, 2005; Shalit, 1999, p. 10).
In a sense, the sexual revolution has done for women and men what the sexual permissiveness of the hook-up culture does for emerging adults—offers a false freedom. Rather than offering or opening up choices, it says what was once acceptable is no longer and to choose what once was is inhibited and stifled. In other words, emerging adults now not only have the choice to sleep around, but if they do not, they are seen as ‘lame’, repressed, or old-fashioned. We are faced with a narrative in which words like acceptable or moral or good no longer have a synonymous meaning. Women who want to marry have children and perhaps stay at home rather than pursue a career are seen as prescribing to an outdated mold, and while feminism is meant to empower women to have a choice, how ironic that the choice appears to have been taken away.

Paglia and Hoff Sommers posit that women have been cheated by feminism; women now spend their best, healthiest childbearing years buried in years of higher education, after which they assume that they can find love and children. In a lecture given just seven months ago, Paglia (2013) makes plain the idea that to make young women feel like they are less because they want to marry and have children is exactly what empowering women should be against and that those claiming to support women’s rights must adapt to a more humane recognition of biologic needs and patterns.

Canary, Emmers-Sommer, and Faulkner (1997) suggest that gender effects on sexual behaviors are relative and may result solely from social pressures and culturally dictated gender roles. They argue that the ‘cultural’ perception holds that women emphasize feelings, while men emphasize sexual activity. Culture emerges and teaches in the most intimate areas, linking factors like sexuality, intimacy, and gender and nature with personal values and standards. Wood and Eagly (2002) emphasize the importance of
separating culture from biology, suggesting that women and men conform to culturally accepted gender roles. The Wood/Eagly model asserts that gender differences change depending on the situation and the cultural context. Additionally, they suggest that women and men may exhibit stereotypical gender differences depending on how much they identify with the traditional gender roles of sexual restraint for women and unrestraint for men (Perrin et al., 2011; Wood & Eagly, 2002).

Unfortunately, sexual freedom brings bondage that many never foresaw. In early 2000, A Return to Modesty broke open a hornet’s nest by bringing to light the resultant problems of young women being liberated from the ‘old rules’. But the old rules were ‘less shackles than guideposts’; the young do not feel liberated but lost without them; in other words being told, “do whatever you want!” is unhelpful to adolescents still trying to figure out what they want (Devlin, 2008; Shalit, 1999, 2008). Now the children of the baby boomers become adults and the resultant teachings or lack of them play a huge role in the expectations and experiences for intimate relationships. To ignore the sexual side of intimacy would be a grave oversight, as would the thought that communication simply means talking. Ignorance is not bliss.

Willard Harley (2002) posits that ignorance greatly contributes to the failure of meeting each other’s needs and expectations. Simply put, men and women have great difficulty understanding and appreciating the value of each other’s expectations (p. 15). People have the tendency to meet the needs that they value, not those of the other. Thus, unintentionally, we waste effort trying to meet the wrong needs. Because the expectations and needs of men and women are often very different, the ability to communicate those priorities and expectations becomes exceedingly important.
Look for a moment at HBO’s hit series, *Sex and the City*. Aired from 1998-2004, it remains one of the most watched television shows among young women. However, the clothes and experiences are, the women from *Sex and the City* inhabit a world so glamorous that glosses over reality. The storyline centers around a quad of women, 30+ years old, whose friendship remains strong, though the men in their lives cycle through at an alarming rate of speed. The characters, Carrie, Samantha, Charlotte, and Miranda seem free and happy with casual sex, but throughout the seasons they admit they are not, that they want love and intimacy and someone to know them. Ever on the quest for ‘real love’, they are not willing to do the work, and so the cycle begins again…

This pop culture example brings to light the fact that relationship expectations cannot be directly linked to relationship quality. And why is this? Because often partners are unaware they expected something until they recognize they are not receiving it. Expectations in relationships are conditioned by our previous experience. Classic complaints like, “You just cannot please a man!” “or “Who knows what women really want?!?” reflect hidden expectations that have never surfaced to the point where they could be discussed, examined, discarded or kept.

This is why honest, reflective intimate communication is so very important to a sustainable, healthy relationship. One relational self-help website pithily notes these hidden expectations by stating “men expect women to stay the same while women expect men to change.”9 If women are looking for potential and not actual reality in men’s behavior, they miss what is right in front of them. If men see a woman doing all of the right things in the attempt to secure the relationship, they are led astray by missing the

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9 Retrieved from http://www.ascendedrelationships.com
real person, focusing instead on the behaviors. Thus, both are disconnected from actually experiencing what they expect.

Charles Murray, author of *Coming Apart* (2013), captures the fundamental importance of intimate relationships:

People need intimate relationships with other, but intimate relationships that are rich and fulfilling need content, and that content is supplied only when humans are engaged in interactions that have consequences. …All of these good things in life—self-respect, intimate relationships, and self-actualization—require freedom in the only way that freedom is meaningful: freedom to act in all arenas of life coupled with responsibility for the consequences of those actions. Knowing that we have responsibility for the consequences of our actions is a major part of what makes life worth living (p. 285).

As this chapter shows, the methods for seeking intimacy and keeping it are tenuous at best. For Gilder (1993), the differences between the sexes are the single most important fact of human society. Acknowledging these differences and taking responsibility for communicating choices, expectations and experiences creates a new conventional wisdom. Because the expectation and needs of women and men are often very different, the ability to communicate those priorities becomes more and more important in the changing landscape.
CHAPTER 2

In the previous chapter we explored developing trends among emergent-adults concerning intimate interpersonal relationships. By documenting the fact that people have a real desire and expectation for intimacy, we can also see that those expectations are or can be continuously frustrated; thus, when emergent-adult women and men enter into a relationship, those relationships do not meet their expectation for human intimacy. In examination of emergent-adults’ expectations about committed relationships, what materializes is that many have the ‘ends’ of marriage in future sight, though the ensuing path for experience in intimate interpersonal relationships has undergone a cultural shift.

The rise of sexual activity without intimate relationship has become more prevalent. This takes a variety of forms, from the bar scene with ‘dancing’ pantomiming sex in public to friends with benefits to sexual encounters known as hookups. Identifying these different forms of sexual activity provides current, relevant knowledge, but the common thread is sexual activity without intimate relationship—what Sessions Stepp describes as personal alienation as sexual activity continues. Data agrees: one national study found that among eighteen- to twenty-nine-year-olds, only slightly more than a third were in committed relationships (Pew Research Center, October 7 & November 18, 2010). However, the best data estimate available suggests that 84 percent of unmarried Americans between the ages of eighteen and twenty-three have already had sex.\(^{10}\) Thus, we can safely accept that more than one-third of eighteen- to twenty-nine-year-olds are sexually active outside of committed relationships.

\(^{10}\) National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG)—online at www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/series/sr_01/sr01_042.pdf; College Women’s Survey (CWS)—see Glenn & Marquardt, 2001; College Social Life Survey (CSLS)—see England, Shafer, & Fogarty, 2007.
Numerous broader sociocultural factors contribute to perceived decline of intimate interpersonal communication, regardless of rates of sexual activity, such as expressive individualism, unrestrained sexual freedom, gender role changes, as well as economic and educational factors, and many others. High levels of divorce, births to unwed parents, and fragile unions afflict the less educated in the United States, with unprecedented numbers of children now growing up without a mother and father in a healthy, stable relationship. Such family instability correlates markedly with academic failure, economic immobility, and emotional distress (Wilcox, 2010).

These sociocultural factors can lead to greater instability, creating a downward spiral for relationship stability. Another contributing factor is the current fluctuation of public attitudes about the institution of marriage. According to a Pew Research survey in 2010 (Pew, November 18, 2010), nearly four in ten Americans say marriage is becoming obsolete. Yet the same survey found that most people who have never married (61%) would like to do so someday.

Data have shown that Americans are developing increasingly favorable attitudes toward nontraditional marital and family values and behaviors, such as cohabitation, divorce, remaining single, and sexual activity outside of marriage (Whitehead & Popenoe, 1999). Americans are also expressing more egalitarian views toward gender roles in marriage, thus we hold competing cultural models (Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001). For example, the word “marriage” taps a reservoir of positive sentiment as does the phrase “individual freedom”… there is strong support for marriage on one hand and a “postmodern penchant for self-expression and personal growth on the other” (Cherlin, 2009, p. 4). The United States seems to value a committed marriage for its security and
stability, yet believe that those individuals in an unhappy marriage should be allowed to end them.

Andrew Cherlin, the Benjamin H. Griswold III Professor of Sociology and Public Policy at Johns Hopkins, states that there are factors contributing to this turbulence of the American family—frequent marriage, frequent divorce, more short-term cohabiting relationships. These factors create a flux, a coming-and-going of partners on a scale seen nowhere else (2009, p. 5). The trait, then, that differentiates American relationships is movement—on and off of the carousel of frequent transitions and shorter intimate interpersonal relationships. I believe that Alasdair MacIntyre would link this current “movement” trait to two key elements: emotivism and individualism.

This chapter will look at Alasdair MacIntyre’s work *After Virtue*, a text in which he offers a ‘disquieting suggestion’—that modern society has become disconnected as individualism flourishes. The intersection of MacIntyre and intimate interpersonal communication becomes a philosophical lens enlarging the conversation and inviting space for consideration of alternative interpersonal communicative views. Because MacIntyre requires enquiry be undertaken with the acknowledgment of the historical rootedness of our ideas, methods and results, his work allows space and order to deliver a more accurate rendering of the truth.

Alasdair MacIntyre’s *After Virtue* assists our understanding of a postmodern framework by highlighting emotivism, individualism and the need for a narrative virtue structure. Because his oeuvre is extensive and the text of *After Virtue* grounds this project, I will first introduce MacIntyre and his work, then move toward hallmarks of postmodernity, highlighting emotivism and individualism, terms central to this chapter.
The next portion of the chapter will look past individualism and emotivism, to the subsequent need for a narrative virtue structure, allowing MacIntyre’s work to function as an interpretive framework to help make narrative sense about research and research trends related to the health and decline of intimate IPC. Finally, the last section of the chapter will introduce The National Marriage Project (NMP), which acts as a clearinghouse of research regarding patterns of divorce, cohabitation, marriage and family.

**Alasdair MacIntyre**

Alasdair MacIntyre is Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Contemporary Aristotelian Studies in Ethics and Politics (CASEP) at London Metropolitan University and an Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at the University of Notre Dame. One of the most influential thinkers in contemporary ethical and political philosophy, his works include *After Virtue* (1981), *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (1988), *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (1990), and *Dependent Rational Animals* (1999). His most recent book *God, Philosophy, Universities* (2009) is a selective history of the Catholic intellectual tradition. Preeminently known for his work with virtue ethics, MacIntyre’s philosophical approach works to reclaim moral rationality without falling into relativistic or emotivist reasoning.

Alasdair MacIntyre’s most acclaimed work, *After Virtue*, is a scholarly exposition that explains his vision of the danger of ignoring praxis, while suggesting that the Enlightenment was a failed project and that we have lost our teleological compass. Therefore, we find competing narratives in Postmodernity, each having its own compass. MacIntyre (2007) explains that “emotivism,” a practical and philosophical plight, is used
to explain decision-making centered on one’s “preference, expressions of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character” (p 12). Emotivism turns us away from thoughtful, grounded, knowing, action. Therefore, examining practical applications of the philosophical is crucial.

Alasdair MacIntyre bridges abstract traditions and abstract theories by appealing to objectively grounded virtues, narratives, and the intelligibility of action depending on narrative continuities (Hauerwas, 2007). And while Murphy (2003) holds that MacIntyre’s work points toward two distinct areas (1) as a systematic inquiry into the defectiveness of modern social, cultural, economic, and political institutions and (2) in positioning the limits of emotivism and the heart of moral crisis (p. 2), it is MacIntyre’s ability to connect the philosophical to the practical that provides a hermeneutical entry point.

MacIntyre begins *After Virtue* by stating that the Enlightenment was a grand failure and he calls into question the abandonment of Aristotelian tradition; particularly the concept of teleology and the replacement of tradition with reason (2007, pp. 118-9; 1988, p. 7). He invites inquiry into social scientific explanations, predictions, and claims of control in human behavior throughout the idea of relationships and focuses on constructing context for the precepts of moral judgments, one he describes as lost (2007, pp. 88-108; 1978, pp. 83-4). This loss, or deprivation results in social and moral changes—leading to a modern moral predicament that calls for tradition. Tradition then enables constraints on self-knowledge (2007, pp. x, xi). It is this use of social prediction and social change that makes MacIntyre’s work quite applicable.

**Postmodern Framework**
Alasdair MacIntyre’s *After Virtue* assists our understanding of a postmodern framework by highlighting emotivism, individualism and the need for a narrative virtue structure. Postmodernity is not an era but rather recognition of a multiplicity of eras. Thus, in order to provide a robust understanding of MacIntyre’s contribution, this next section will first identify some hallmarks of modernity—emotivism and individualism—and then follow with a section on reclaiming narrative.

In a communication framework, postmodernity recognizes a multiplicity of standpoints, a plethora of “petite narratives” (Lyotard, 1979, p. 60). Within a story, agents and ideas are embedded within given frameworks and these stories can stand side by side. Postmodernity, defined by Jean-François Lyotard, is “part of the modern,” where rules are no longer what they once were (1979, p. 79-81). In other words, the rules are only being established once the artifact, or work, is produced; this suggests that as such intimate relationships begin to create their own rules, once people establish what it is they want out of the relationships, rather than follow prescribed or traditional ones.

Alasdair MacIntyre (1967) explains that “social changes have not only made certain types of conduct, once socially accepted, problematic, but have also rendered problematic the concepts which had defined the moral framework of an earlier world” (p. 5). To the postmodern observer, it seems as if MacIntyre could be explaining the changes we are witnessing from Modernity to Postmodernity.

Postmodernity, according to Giddens (1990, pp. 22, 52), is a condition or a state of being associated with changes to institutions and creations and is widely known as related to social and political innovations. This connection between history, culture and reasoning is important to the narrative of covenantal relationships like marriage because
of the movement within postmodernity that works to understand multiple narratives operating within our world. MacIntyre discusses this idea by expressing what modern thought is missing, suggesting that he rejects the ideals that make up postmodernity. Relativism for example, highlights a shift in modern individualism where MacIntyre’s complex theory of the priority of the social takes center stage in postmodernity (Murphy, 1997, p. 89):

In our society the acids of individualism have for four centuries eaten into our moral structures, for both good and ill. But not only this: we live with the inheritance of not only one, but of a number of well-integrated moralities. Aristotelianism, primitive Christian simplicity, the puritan ethic, the aristocratic ethic of consumption, and the traditions of democracy and socialism have all left their mark upon our moral vocabulary. [. . .]

It follows that we are liable to find two kinds of people in our society: those who speak from within one of these surviving moralities, and those who stand outside all of them. Between the adherents of rival moralities and between the adherents of one morality and the adherents of none there exists no court of appeal, no impersonal neutral standard. For those who speak from within a given morality, the connection between fact and valuation is established in virtue of the meanings of the words they use. To those who speak from without, those who speak from within appear merely to be uttering imperatives which express their own liking and their private choices. The controversy between emotivism and
prescriptivism on the one hand and their critics on the other thus express the fundamental moral situation of our own society. (MacIntyre, 1967, p. 266)

This connection of history to philosophy is important to study in tandem with morality, because MacIntyre believes that morality is inseparable from cultural heritage, and that different ways of reasoning—different ways of thinking are in constant conflict (Weinstein, 20003, p. iv). Thus, it is no surprise to MacIntyre that we hold competing cultural models regarding intimate interpersonal relationships.

I previously mentioned in this chapter that Americans seem to value a committed marriage for its security and stability and believe that those individuals in an unhappy marriage should be allowed to end them. To review the factors contributing to this turbulence of the American family—frequent marriage, frequent divorce, more short-term cohabiting relationships, we see these factors creating a flux, a coming-and-going of partners, on a scale seen nowhere else (Weinstein, 20003, p. iv). The trait, then, that differentiates American relationships is movement—on and off of the carousel of frequent transitions and shorter intimate interpersonal relationships. I believe that MacIntyre would link this “movement” trait to two key elements: emotivism and individualism.

**Emotivism**

As a theory of moral terms—communicating “good”, “bad”, “right”, “wrong”—emotivism expresses the speaker’s emotions about a topic with a bid to the audience to adopt the same emotional attitude towards that topic. MacIntyre describes this as an
‘interminable moral debate.’ He also recognizes that there are many diverse definitions of what ‘the best life’ for human beings is—therefore what is just, or good, or virtuous, and though many definitions are legitimate, none is or can be absolutely true. It follows that each of us is entitled to our own viewpoint on these matters, as well as entitled to choose the version of ‘the best life’ and the best moral code that we each individually prefer (Clayton, 2005).

In After Virtue, MacIntyre (2007, pp. 11-12) calls this point of view emotivism—the doctrine that all evaluative judgments and more specifically all moral judgments are nothing but expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character. However, emotivistic moral terms lack any reference to anything. Robert Bellah considers this same plight in his text Habits of the Heart, an elongated sociological explanation of what happens “after virtue.” Bellah et al. discuss problems that occur when the focus is on individuals themselves, thus limiting us in the formation of bonded communities (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swindler, & Tipton, 1985, pp. xii, 302). They also examine praxis of human community and how, in terms of emotivism, individualism is problematic.

MacIntyre spends some time in the second chapter of After Virtue tracing the historical lead-up to the beginning of emotivism. Though he establishes that emotivism advanced in Hume’s moral theory in the eighteenth century, MacIntyre states that it ‘flourished’ between 1903 and 1939. Why? MacIntyre attributes the rise to G.E. Moore, where, in his 1903 work, Principia Ethica (1903, p. 75), Moore pronounced ‘good’ as a non-natural property, incapable of proof or disproof and needing no evidence of reasoning presented in favor or disfavor (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 15). As Moore evaluated
actions solely on their consequences, his utilitarian stance allowed that any ‘whatsoever’ may be permitted under certain circumstances (2007, p. 15). Lastly, Moore’s suggestion that ‘personal affections and aesthetic enjoyments include all the greats and by far the greatest goods we can imagine’ proposed that friendship and contemplation of what is beautiful is almost the sole justifiable ends of all action (Moore, 1903, Section 113, p. 188; MacIntyre, 2007, p. 15).

This led to a communicative gap or disconnect between meaning and use of language, most likely originating in ethics being addressed apart from background. Therefore, Moore’s ethics may have sounded like people could identify the presence of a good, but were in fact doing no more than expressing their feelings and this ‘expression of preference’ conferred an objectivity that it did not in fact possess (2007, p. 17). MacIntyre rejects the emotivist assertion that the meaning of evaluative judgments such as “This is right” or “This is good” can be reduced to expressions of approval (Lutz, 2004, p. 82). Evaluative judgments may be used to express approval or disapproval but that is not what they mean (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 13). Because emotivism does not allow for reason-giving, it follows that:

(1) There is no difference between persuading someone to believe a moral statement (i.e., propaganda) and convincing someone that a moral statement is true with good reasons; (2) there is no difference between manipulating others to believe a moral statement and allowing them to evaluate the reason for it for themselves; (3) our own moral beliefs are grounded only in our own choice. MacIntyre presupposes that our society believes emotivism is true and that some characteristics that we expect in an emotivistic society bring fragmentation and
manipulation. To help understand emotivism, MacIntyre suggests that we understand what emotivism would look like if it were socially embodied.

Some key problems of emotivism are (1) that moral statements appear to be impersonal but expressions of emotion are personal and (2) that moral statements can be supported by reasons, but expressions of emotion cannot be supported by reason. Therefore, if moral debates are rationally interminable, people lack ways of building understanding across moral disagreements and to protect their sense of self, people are inclined to shut out different perspectives and to congregate in like-minded groups, resulting in social fragmentation. Emotivism can lead to people lacking a sense of place in the world. This lack of security opens people to easily perceive challenges to moral beliefs as challenges to ego or self-worth, creating an environment in which one says “if all of it does not come to me, or agree with me, then I am going to go home.”

Another characteristic of contemporary discussion about marriage and cohabitation is that, as MacIntyre might have predicted, they involve what seem to be interminable moral controversies. In a typical dispute, one side offers propositions based upon what seem to be ethically sound, moral arguments. The other opposing side urges entirely different policies using arguments that appear equally well-grounded. The likelihood that the two (or more) sides can locate common ground is virtually nil (Langdon, 1995). Taking it a step further the emotivist tendency assumes that if someone disagrees they are not simply wrong, but evil. This leaves no room for negotiation or a 60/40 understanding; either we get one hundred percent or the other person is ‘evil’ for taking it away from us.
As MacIntyre states, emotivism is “the doctrine that all evaluative judgments and more specifically all moral judgments are nothing but expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character” (2007, pp. 11-12).

MacIntyre offers a philosophically rich example here, by presenting three “characters”—the “Rich Aesthete”, “Manager” and “Therapist”. These characters “are those social roles which provide a culture with its moral definitions” and represent societal, cultural and moral ideals (2007, p. 31).

He connects these characters of modern life to emotivism—as moral representatives of culture and behavior guided by personal preference. Bellah et al. (1985, p. 39) add that MacIntyre’s representative characters are a kind of symbol—a way by which we can bring together in once concentrated image the way people in a given social environment organize and give meaning and direction to their lives.

The first character, the “Rich Aesthete”, whether woman, man or couple, lives for the more exciting and exotic pleasures of life. We see their images portrayed in expensive homes or in exotic holiday destinations, plastered over ‘Cosmo’ or on television dramas: women—glamorous and thin, men—aging, but with the obligatory trophy wife thirty years younger. Remember that MacIntyre is talking about the image as an icon. It is the image in the eye of society that embodies the “Rich Aesthete.”

Connect this character to the hook-up culture; it is not difficult to find the similarities. The Rich Aesthete—replaces the person interested in the doing of the work. The paradigm of aesthetic expression is the romantic lover who is immersed in his own passion (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 40); as Kierkegaard (1992, p. 521) characterizes it, it is the
attempt to lose the self in the immediacy of present experience. Now, this romantic lover immersed in his own passion looks more like an emerging-adult engaged in what feels good to them, without much thought for the other. It is an emotivist, individualist tendency and often, emerging adults engage in the unhooked culture due to the strength of the image.

Data from the Duke Women’s Initiative (2003), a year-long study of the attitudes and concerns of female students, uncovered tremendous pressure and relentless hyperactivity—all in submission to maintaining the illusion of perfection in multiple domains of life. Laurie, a sophomore at UNC-Chapel Hill, was remarkably honest about her attraction to the powerful image of modern womanhood:

I daily feel pressured to conform to a certain image. As a young woman, I am expected to be beautiful, thin, poised, elegant, respectful, educated, fashionable and mature. I should wear certain clothes, shoes and makeup. I also feel expected to know the latest fashion trends, gossip, and celebrity news. In respect to men and dating, I must be fun, flirty, sexy and exciting. These expectations and pressures are reinforced through magazines, television, movies, and friends… Together these structures mold the image of the perfect young woman and demand all to conform. Although I am aware of this superficial marketing technique, I still desire to look like the models in magazines and celebrities in movies. I realize that men are attracted to numerous qualities in women, but I want most to be beautiful and sexy. (Regnerus & Uecker, 2011, p. 116)
The strength of the image is powerful, an iconic objective emerging adults strive toward without truly counting the cost. MacIntyre’s good is not valued here as we are disconnected from a coherent narrative.

The second character, the “Bureaucratic Manager” is efficient at using resources and people to achieve his/her own aims and objectives. Such a person will be ruthless in taking steps needed to get the desired results. People and resources are dispensable to the Bureaucratic Manager. The only morality he/she observes is that of greatest return possible from efficiently collected resources. In other words, it is about winning or losing, not how the game is played. The Manager replaces individual ownership by focusing on using resources and people; when we think of steps taken to achieve desired results, without recognition of the other, we see correlation to Sessions Stepp’s alienated sexual activity. Stepp would assert that many young emerging-adults’ sexual activity is alienated from relationship, holding closely to the key defining characteristic—the ability to unhook from a partner at any time, without fear of reprisal (2011, p. 5).

The third character, the “Therapist” is well linked to the rise of commercial therapeutic value. Think of the number of cosmetics, bath products, and “spiritual” treatments, which claim to have therapeutic value, of blogs and social opportunities to share. Every product from lipstick to paper towels now tries to sell itself as being yet another palliative for a stressful lifestyle. The “Therapist”, in a sense, replaces the tradition of priest or pastor. Think of the increase in advertising rhetoric, “go on—treat yourself”, “have it your way” or “indulge yourself, you deserve it!” Society characterized by emotivism and individualism teaches us to value others less and ourselves more. Therefore, we need the “Therapist” to obscure the emptiness and meaninglessness of life
from us.

The language associated with the “Therapist” is therapeutic—discourse that lacks a narrative background to sustain the search for community (Arnett & Arneson, 1999, p. 256). By utilizing language specific to the individual, we center on self-expression and self-actualization, perpetuating an emphasis on the individual over community. The language associated with the “Manager” also lacks narrative background and focuses on successful completion of a goal, whatever it may be. Discourse for the “Rich Aesthete” centers on the next new and exciting experience/possession. Thus, these types of discourse foster and support individualism.

*Individualism*

Because Alexis de Toqueville’s *Democracy in America* (2003) first noted the case of American individualism, we begin with his definition of individualism as “a calm and considered feeling which disposes each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of his fellows and withdraw into the circle of family and friends; with this little society formed to his taste, he gladly leaves the greater society to look after itself” (p. 506). The reasons de Tocqueville gives for considering individualism to be a misguided judgment are both political and ethical: it allows for a greater possibility of oppression and diminishes virtues. The effect of individualism on morals/virtues seems worth considering, as there does seem to be a marked shift in our understanding of history. Have we traded a positive understanding of social responsibility where we mutually assist and instruct each other, for a negative one that we ought not interfere?
As referenced earlier, MacIntyre (2007) stated emotivism is “the doctrine that all evaluative judgments and more specifically all moral judgments are nothing but expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character” (pp. 11-12). Robert Bellah addresses this same plight in Habits of the Heart, an elongated sociological explanation of what happens “after virtue” (MacIntyre, 2007, p. xii). By their discussion of problems that occur when the focus is on individuals themselves, Bellah et al. demonstrate that we are thus limiting ourselves in the formation of bonded communities (MacIntyre, 2007, pp. xii, 302). In discussing praxis of human community and how, in terms of emotivism, individualism is problematic, Bellah et al. also speak to how American personal identity oscillates between competitive individualism at work and expressive individualism in personal life (MacIntyre, 2007, pp. viii, xi, 47).

This incommensurability of the individual with community is driven by an environment in which one says “if all of it does not come to me, or not all agree with me, then I am going to go home.” Taking it a step further, the emotivist tendency assumes disagreement is not simply wrong, but evil. This leaves no room for negotiation or a sixty/forty split understanding; either we get one hundred percent or the other person is evil for taking it away from us.

In other words, individualism can be characterized by self-righteous assumption. Alexis de Toqueville felt that individualism is likewise dangerous to society, as people will tend to exclusively attend to their own affairs. Both he and MacIntyre suggest that when a large segment of the population is isolated and indifferent to the welfare of those
around them, they become unwilling and finally unable to band together to prevent oppression, because they are so exclusively attending to their own needs.

So how does individualism actually affect currently held ideas about intimate relationships? First, we look to current data concerning intimate interpersonal relationships: We have a picture of emerging adults as interested only in hooking-up and hanging out. But many emerging adults become serious and committed to a partner and a substantial minority chooses to marry during their college careers. The reality is that more and more young women and men are ambivalent, at best, about their sexual encounters. While the hook-up/unhooked culture seems to liberate and empower, the effect is in a sense, cornering. Today’s younger generation learns quickly and learns well that the norm is to be casual about sex—even though so many of them do not fit this ‘norm’ (Frietas, 2013).

It is important to note that however individualism focuses on self, it does not innately foster self-worth, or a commitment to self-established virtues enabling the emerging-adult to stand alone. A brief example of how individualism most likely creates pressure to follow the established norms: The aforementioned Women’s Initiative study revealed that while men [eighteen- to twenty-five-year-olds] feel pressure to wear certain kinds of clothes and adapt their bodies to certain ideals, they felt more freedom to resist these pressures without consequences. However, women who flout the norms often remove themselves from the social mainstream, whether voluntarily or not (Duke, 2003).

Thus, the moral crisis of our time, as MacIntyre sees it, is how individualism causes one to stand above human history—to stand above an established narrative as if somehow the narrative does not have an impact on your life; to stand above community
as if the community does not have an impact; to stand above tradition. Consequently, I believe MacIntyre would say that the distinctive pattern of multiple partnerships related to the unhooked culture is related to a central place in American culture—both marriage and a kind of individualism that emphasizes self-expression and personal growth.

What scholars call utilitarian individualism—the self-reliant actor, the rugged individualist—has long served as an ideal, but the form we look at here is that of ‘expressive individualism’ (Cherlin, 2009, p. 9). Here, before moving forward, it is important to note that as this project works through problems in intimate interpersonal communication, I will repeatedly use the term ‘expressive individualism’ referring to the concepts of ‘individualism’ and ‘emotivism’ put forth by MacIntyre. In interpersonal communication sometimes the terms emotivism and individualism can be used in numerous ways, so in order to keep consistency I will not often use the more general terminology. Developed during the twentieth century, this type of individualism is about ‘finding yourself,’ personal growth, getting in touch with your feelings, and expressing your needs. For instance, in the language of personal preference (emotivism) or expressive individualism, you can justify leaving a marriage because it no longer meets your needs.

Cherlin is the first to use the term “deinstitutionalization” and he best defines it as “the weakening of the social norms that define people’s behavior in a social institution such as marriage” (2004, p. 848). For centuries, there were powerful norms that guided people’s actions with regards to sexuality, courtship, and marriage. With strong norms about marriage, people know a lot about what is expected of them and there is a taken-for-granted notion about how to behave. So it is easier to form and sustain marriage; even
the relationally challenged can ‘get by’ if they know enough to follow the rules and hold realistic expectations. However, these norms or social rules for marriage have eroded rapidly over the last fifty years due to a number of changes. Cherlin (2004) cites Americans’ love affair with expressive individualism, unrestrained sexual freedom, gender role changes, and affluence as some of the biggest contributors to the deinstitutionalization of marriage.

Under current defaults [of emotivism and individualism] there is no good way to address this interpersonal relational disruption, this disruption of intimacy. People can engage in sexual activity based on sexual preference and what they want, but they cannot sustain an intimate committed relationship based on principles of emotivism or individualism. Because these current defaults cannot aid in sustaining intimate interpersonal relationships, we ask MacIntyre what the solution might be or look like. As Bellah et al. point out, the movement of American personal identity fluctuates between competitive individualism at work and expressive individualism in personal life (MacIntyre, 2007, pp. viii, xi, 47). So, we look to MacIntyre and ask what we need in order to flourish as humans… and according to MacIntyre, the answer is to develop narrative, virtues of independent practical reason and virtues of acknowledged dependence.

**Narrative**

Modern moral philosophy has understandably and rightly placed great emphasis upon individual autonomy, upon the capacity for making independent choices. MacIntyre argues that the virtues of independent rational/practical reason need to be accompanied by he calls acknowledged dependence. For MacIntyre (and Aristotle), the virtues consist
of justice, courage, truthfulness, self-discipline and the like. He believes that we need these virtues to enable us to become independent practical reasoners (MacIntyre, 1999, p. 120).

Take for example, a characteristic of contemporary discussion about marriage and cohabitation is—as MacIntyre might have predicted—that they involve what seem to be interminable moral controversies. In a typical discussion, one side offers propositions based upon what seem to be ethically sound moral arguments. The other opposing side urges entirely different policies using arguments that appear equally well-grounded. The likelihood that the two (or more) sides can locate common ground is virtually nil (Winner, 1995). This incommensurability calls for a narrative ground. After Virtue echoes with the idea that to generally adopt a stance on the virtues will be to adopt a stance on the narrative character of human life... as life embodies a story with successes and failures and how those success and failure are understood (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 144).

Working dialectically, Alasdair MacIntyre calls us to remember that we cannot live without narrative structures. He explains that we make sense of our world with narrative: a category that includes autobiography, history, doctrine, myth, and scientific theory, etc. When one of these narratives fail, when we find that we are wrong about ourselves and our relationships, our history, the nature of God or the structure of the world, we may plunge into a period of uncertainty and confusion, an epistemological crisis (Lutz, 2004, p. 5). Because narrative is comprised of individuals and their influence on one’s story, interpersonal relationships figure heavily into the construction of one’s narrative.
In his book *The Tasks of Philosophy* (2006, p. 6), MacIntyre explains that narrative requires an evaluative framework in which good or bad character helps to produce unfortunate or happy outcomes. He dedicates an entire section to epistemological crises and dramatic narrative and answers the question “What is one to do when one’s narratives fail?” His answer is central to his overarching philosophical approach:

When an epistemological crisis is resolved, it is by the construction of a new narrative which enables the agent to understand both how he or she could intelligibly have held his or her original beliefs AND how she or he could have been so drastically misled by them. The narrative in terms of which he or she at first understood and ordered experiences is itself now made into the subject of an enlarged narrative… (p. 5)

The recognition of experience, reflected upon and thus ordered, provides a place for expectations to be solidly grounded. Because *After Virtue* is about rival interpretations of historical events and rival ways of judging action we see an even greater application to current shifts in marriage and cohabitation (Lutz, 2004, p. 7). Lutz makes MacIntyre’s idea here a bit clearer by stating that virtues flow from differing conceptual schemes, then as those conceptual schemes are extended through time and history, MacIntyre (2007, p. 222) calls them “traditions.”

So, why and how do traditions inform or influence intimate interpersonal relationships? Think hermeneutically—traditions progress or fail to progress in terms of their ability to make sense of the world, to predict the unexpected and to guide human action reliably in pursuit of the goods of communities (Lutz, 2004, p. 7). MacIntyre (2007) gives a clear-cut explanation of this interpretation:
The story of my life is always imbedded in the story of those communities from which I derive my identity. I am born with a past; and to try to cut myself off from that past, in the individualistic mode, is to deform my present relationships. The possession of an historical identity and the possession of a social identity coincide. (p. 221)

History, especially twentieth-century history, teaches us that the quest of the good can be derailed by error and ideology, by lack of discipline and by cowardice. If a human life is to maintain intelligibility, if it is to maintain its distinctively human quality, virtues are needed—to overcome the harms, dangers, temptation and distractions which we encounter and which will furnish us with increasing self-knowledge and increasing knowledge of the good (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 219).

There is undoubtedly some good news along with the bad news in these changes. Some norms have doubtless made it harder to build a mutually satisfying emotional connection. And economic changes have made it harder to begin a family for the less educated. But the point is, as Cherlin (2004) notes, “individuals can no longer rely on shared understanding of how to act. Rather they must negotiate new ways of acting” (p. 848). Courtship and marriage customarily had pretty clear sets of rules to live by. Now, we are finding this much less the case. Moreover, marriage used to be at the very core of how we organized society; nowadays, not so much. Marriage is just one way that people choose to order their lives, and society is becoming more accommodating of the many different ways people “do” family today.
It can be detrimental to intimate relationships to fail to understand history—specifically, the history of past intimate interpersonal relationships. The introduction of a large set of demographic effects in the third wave of National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) and a measure of the earlier wave outcomes, suggests that the number of lifetime sexual partners appears to affect emotional health largely through earlier indicators of emotional health. In other words, a significant share of the emotional problems incurred from having previous partners happens early on in the emerging-adult life course. These long-term effects may not go away, since we can see their association with present emotional health models, but the damage was done earlier, when those partnerships were formed, or more likely, when they were ended (Add Health; Regnerus & Uecker, 2011, ch. 5).

Consequently, social identity and historical identity matter. MacIntyre would offer that in these modern times, our behavior is somewhat controlled by the social situations in which we find ourselves, suggesting that it is through a narrative that one finds him/herself merged within a rule-bound community. He explains, “behavior is only characterized adequately when we know what the longer and longest term intentions involved are and how the short term intentions are related to the longer. Therefore, we are writing a narrative history” (2007, p. 208).

Unfortunately sexual relationships in emerging adulthood, often removed several years from more enduring relational commitments like marriage, tend to wrestle with the subject of security—because intention is ambiguous. Data concurs: emerging adults who

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11 National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health). Waves 1 and 2 of the study were carried out while the respondents were in high school. Wave three tracked those respondents through ages 18-28. The working wave-3 sample size is 11,729. Available online at http://www.cpc.unc.edu/projects/addhealth.
engage in shorter and more frequent sexual relationships exhibit lower self-esteem and more guilt than those who are either abstinent, or sexually active only within the confines of a sustained romantic relationship (Paul, McManus, & Hayes, 2000). Thus, in order to make sense of sexual activity and the subsequent effects on behavior, MacIntyre offers up authorship and ownership of our personal stories.

When MacIntyre discusses narratives in *After Virtue*, he does so to suggest that one is always coauthor of his or her own story, but that he or she is also under certain constraints. And we can see a central thesis begins to emerge: “man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal. [. . .] through his history, a teller of stories that aspire to truth” (2007, p. 216).

MacIntyre explains how the individual is the subject of the narrative—think of the sense of self, or selfhood. “I am the subject of a history that is my own and no one else’s, that has its own peculiar meaning” and second, correlatively “I am not only accountable, but I can ask others for an account, I am part of their story, they are part of mine” (2007, p. 218). Therefore we can safely assume that MacIntyre would not be surprised that sexual activity, and especially sexual activity alienated from intimate relationship, would leave a mark that follows through the life course. This means our practices matter. MacIntyre proposes that “the good life for man” is found not only in relation to practices but *in* them, as they connect longitudinally to “selfhood, a concept of a self whose unity resides in the unity of a narrative which links birth to life to death as narrative beginning to middle to end” (2007, pp. 220, 205).

Tradition, a key component of narrative according to MacIntyre, holds families and communities together. A person is part of a family who will inherit a “moral starting
point” (2007, p. 220). The thought of one’s past influencing one’s morals is contrasted with the postmodern individualism ideal “I am what I choose to be.” Thus, just as people learn sexual behavior, they also learn lots of other things. And with the movement of the carousel increasing in frequency, they increasingly learn that relationships are tenuous. Their own sexual histories reflect it. Movement and mobility in general, for whatever reason, makes this mentality more possible and more plausible.

How would MacIntyre offer solution? By exercising virtue. He posits that we strengthen traditions and keep those traditions from disappearing, whereas a lack of virtues corrupts traditions. Intimate interpersonal relationships consist of practices—communicative practices, practices of virtues, practices of intimacy, practices of failures and successes—embedded in history. This history that becomes ours is “generally and characteristically embedded in and made intelligible in terms of the larger and longer history of the tradition through which the practice in its present form was conveyed to us” (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 222). So, this narrative phenomenon of embedding is crucial to a living tradition, a coherent narrative and a sustainable search for the good life regarding intimate interpersonal relationships.

**Conclusion**

So far we have seen MacIntyre address moral disruption in a society ‘after virtue’ by outlining two key theories—emotivism and individualism—and then offering a constructive solution in establishing a narrative virtue structure. These three areas tie directly to cultural indicators and trends in today’s intimate interpersonal relationships.
MacIntyrean narratology and enquiry provides hermeneutic entrance into the breakdown of sustainable intimate relationships and corresponding social science research that addresses the current or emerging problems and/or trends regarding femininity and masculinity, as related to intimate relationships. MacIntyre argues that morality is inseparable from cultural heritage and that different ways of reasoning, different ways of thinking are in constant conflict—it is this use of praxis in incommensurability that informs interpersonal communicative relationships (Weinstein, 2003, p. iv).

Moving MacIntyre’s philosophical work into practical everyday interactions is praxis. Therefore engaging this project’s question concerning intimate communicative relationships needs the praxis of virtue ethics tied to the given historical moment—it yields an important part of moral narratives that are neither anachronistic nor relativistic. MacIntyre offers the picture of critical insight and perspective to understand vantage points and attentiveness to multiple philosophical positions (Arnett & Holba, 2012, p. 39). Thus, his work opens up the National Marriage Project (NMP) to discover (1) petite narratives in a time of contention, (2) a place to stand in postmodernity without the burden of saying how one ought to live, and (3) how loss of tradition affects shifting trends.

The National Marriage Project contributes analyses of solid, trending research concerning current intimate relationships and the decline of/health of marital relationships. In their analyses, the National Marriage Project draws upon interdisciplinary research, grounding their work in a broad foundation of scholarly
literature. The purpose of the National Marriage Project’s research is to participate with published research, not counteract research surrounding marriage and its trends.

The current social trends regarding intimate relationships are important in many respects, to understand historicity, past history, shifting traditions and values, as well as sexual values. It is important to see that sexual values themselves do not simply evolve. Instead, sexual values and other ways of relating are taught and learned. They reflect the grand narratives that animate our lives and our shared cultures and economic realities; the National Marriage Project helps bring them to the forefront.

Personal stories are more than just chronicles or histories—they have sets of characters, plots, and scripts. MacIntyre (2007) succinctly states, “stories are lived before they are told” (p. 212). The work of the National Marriage Project and its focus helps to uncover the role those stories have in shaping how people make decisions about intimate committed relationships. Statistical analysis is important and the work of the National Marriage Project is thorough and as people pursue career goals, get married, get divorced, decide to cohabit, they are not simply a collection of variables, but people living out petite narratives.
CHAPTER 3

One of the things we see emerging in the narrative contention of this historical moment is a misalignment and disruption of expectation and experience. This chapter provides an interpretation of material related to social science research, assembled, composed and analyzed through the National Marriage Project (NMP). The NMP’s attentiveness to discourse on intimate relationships helps us to understand the intensity of this disruption by highlighting research regarding the changing landscape of intimate relationships at social, cultural, and generational levels.

Typical MacIntyrean thought views this changing landscape through a lens that sees things functioning narratively while also seeing that things function through structure and intimacy. This robust relationship between social structures and social roles frames a strong relationship between motive and action and person and belief (Beadle & Moore, 2006). When we look at intimacy as it is historically rooted, we can see things happening because of this robust relationship between actor and belief and values; therefore we can see changes develop in intimate communicative patterns more easily than we might see them develop in business communicative patterns.

This directs our attention to marriage as one example of an historically grounded, social practice, allowing us to realistically see MacIntyre’s assertion that certain narrative structures need be in place. Therefore, a deeper understanding of the relationship between social order, cultural constructs and the history of each plays into highlighting our need for narrative structure. In this context we understand marriage as a structure in which intimacy can emerge than rather than marriage as equivalent to intimacy. In other words, from MacIntyre’s perspective human beings can engage in intimacy outside of marriage.
and they are not identical. One thing the NMP teaches us is the kind of intimacy in
marriage is different than intimacy that emerges outside of the structure and because of
the nature of this structure of marriage—it is impossible to recreate it outside of structure
of marriage.

**National Marriage Project**

The text, analyses, and research of the National Marriage Project assist us in (1)
identifying societal shifts concerning intimate relationships, namely marriage and
cohabitation, (2) questioning compelling cultural patterns in interpersonal and family
narratives, and (3) considering the generational aspect of expectation versus experience in
intimate relationships. The NMP contributes analyses across the spectrum of solid,
trending research concerning current intimate relationships and the decline of/health of
marital relationships.

Founded in 1997, by Dr. David Popenoe and co-directed by Dr. Barbara Dafoe
Whitehead, the National Marriage Project, formerly housed at Rutgers University, now
resides at the University of Virginia under the direction of Dr. W. Brad Wilcox, assistant
professor of sociology.

**National Marriage Project Mission Statement**

The NMP announces its biases through its mission statement and goals:12

*The National Marriage Project (NMP) is a nonpartisan, nonsectarian,
and interdisciplinary initiative located at the University of Virginia. The
Project’s mission is to provide research and analysis on the health of
marriage in America, to analyze the social and cultural forces shaping*

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12 [http://www.nationalmarriageproject.org](http://www.nationalmarriageproject.org)
contemporary marriage, and to identify strategies to increase marital quality and stability.

Pursuant to its mission, the NMP has five goals:\(^{13}\)

- **Publish The State of Our Unions**, which monitors the current health of marriage and family life in America;
- **Investigate and report on the state of marriage among young adults**;
- **Provide accurate information and analyses regarding marriage to journalists, policy makers, religious leaders, and the general public—especially young adults**;
- **Conduct research on the ways in which children, race, class, immigration, ethnicity, religion, and poverty shape the quality and stability of contemporary marriage**; and
- **Bring marriage and family experts together to develop strategies for strengthening marriage**.

It can be discerned directly from major discourse in the founding of the NMP as well as within the continuing work of the NMP, that the NMP is committed for—on its nonsectarian grounds—to not only to analyze marriage but advocate recognizing marriage as a major contributor to societal flourishing and social capital. This project understands that the NMP holds a bias that marriage, from a civic perspective, is a good thing for society.

\(^{13}\) [http://www.nationalmarriageproject.org](http://www.nationalmarriageproject.org)
According to numerous studies, in the latter half of the twentieth century, divorce presented the most significant threat to marriage in the United States (Cherlin, 1992; National Center for Family and Marriage Research (NCFMR), 2010; National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI), 2005; National Marriage Project & Institute for American Values (NMP&I), 2010; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (US/HHS), 2009). From Judith Wallerstein’s twenty-five-year landmark study, *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*, to Barbara Dafoe Whitehead’s ground-breaking *Atlantic* article, “Dan Quayle Was Right”, changing cultural trends were charted and following the ‘divorce revolution’ of the 1970s, divorce became the number one reason undermining the quality and stability of families (Cherlin, 2004; Wilcox, 2011). Widespread interest in the subject of intimate interpersonal relationships goes well beyond the NMP, and the numerous organizations and conferences\(^{14}\) that have since formed have significant impact on research available. A wide variety of perspectives have enriched the depth of breadth of research available. The work is not limited to academic scholarship (Amato, 2000; Amato, Booth, Johnson, & Rogers, 2007; Cherlin 2004, 2009; Davis, 1985; Fowlers, 2003; Gottman, 1994; Hawkins 2013; Nock, 1998, 2005; Nock, Sanchez, & Wright, 2008; Stafford & Canary, 1991; Tannen, 1990) but has expanded to the ongoing publication of many best-selling, popular books (Chapman, 2010; Gilder, 1993; Gottman, 1994; Gottman & Silver, 1999; Gray, 1992/2012; Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg, 1994/2010; Parrott & Parrott, 1995/2006; Regnerus, 2007, 2011; Tannen, 1990).

\(^{14}\) Association for Couples in Marriage Enrichment; Center for Marriage & Family; Coalition for Marriage; Family and Couples Education; Gottman Institute (www.gottman.com); Institute for American Values; National Institute of Marriage (http://nationalmarriage.com); National Marriage Project (www.nationalmarriageproject.org).
With such growth in the contemporary discussion of intimate relationships, there is an incommensurability that can emerge during discourse, and this incommensurability calls forth MacIntyre’s concept of narrative ground. He explains that we make sense of our world with narrative, a category that includes autobiography, history, doctrine, myth, and scientific theory, etc. These patterns emerge longitudinally, as narrative is learned through both study of and praxis within a specific culture or subculture. The NMP then offers space to see the power of narrative or lack of it, by explicating the implicit, everyday practice of narratives. Their data and analyses of emerging trends surrounding intimate interpersonal relationships helps us understand the vital nature of narrative in everyday, lived experience.

Social and generational patterning indicates movement toward acceptance of nontraditional family forms and the subsequent shift of ‘nontraditional’ family definitions shows a clear impact on societal norms (Weitzman, 1985; Whitehead & Popenoe, 1999; Hymowitz, Carroll, Wilcox, & Kaye, 2013). The NMP explores the causes and consequences of this revolution in family life throughout their extensive research; especially the ways that delayed marriage, ‘complex households,’ and the retreat from child-centeredness is connected to the welfare of emerging-adults, their children, and the nation as a whole (Whitehead & Popenoe, 2008; Wilcox, 2011). MacIntyre’s description of how we live off of the power and direction of a given narrative—while wholly unaware of it—shows us that by failing to teach the background narrative, we fail to give direction to everyday practical action.

The NMP examines the changing landscape of intimate interpersonal relationships at the social, cultural and generational levels, confronting challenges facing
marriage in Middle America and providing constructive ways for improving the health of marriage as an American institution (Marquardt, Blankenhorn, Lerman, Malone-Colon, & Wilcox, 2012; NMP&I, 2010; Whitehead & Popenoe, 2008). In their analyses, the NMP draws upon interdisciplinary research, grounding their work in a broad foundation of scholarly literature. The purpose of the NMP’s research is to participate with published research, not counteract research surrounding marriage and its trends. The NMP helps rectify gaps in intimate communicative literature\(^{15}\) by using these related constructs of attitudes about marriage, personal values regarding marriage, and social norms about the institution of marriage (Wilcox, 2011).

If one has expectations of intimacy and those expectations are misaligned with experiences then what we see is that one’s practices are not in alignment with one’s expectations. We must realize this is not as simple as saying sexual activity is the problem—the phenomenological perspective on intimacy that drives this project is this disruption between expectation and experience. No matter what economic or religious background or where people are in society, this disruption is a common factor and as such it invites people into understanding the substantial concept of intimacy in society and within their own narratives.

For example, if we look at marriage in terms of religious narratives: an Islamic marriage, a Christian marriage, a Jewish marriage, a Hindu marriage, or a dowerest marriage—we see that they are all a little different because they grow out of different narratives. The question is does MacIntyre provide a context in which we see narrative

\(^{15}\) Commitment and trust, arguably two of the most crucial components of a healthy marriage, are commonly left out of most studies examining the quality of marriages. Blaine Fowler found that other measures, such as marital conflict, are covered widely in the literature, while measures of marital attitudes and values seem to be underrepresented—for more, see Fowler, 2003; Stafford & Canary, 1999.
decline as allowing for fragmentation that replaces community narratives with individualism; my answer is yes—we see emotivism emerging in cohabitation and fragmentation. The real concern is the space between some form of marriage grounding a narrative structure out of which intimacy grows and the contrast to one in which people create their own. This ultimately means that alternatives to marriage lack narrative ground, not that these alternatives are new narrative bases.

Thus, in interpreting the NMP, we must understand that the NMP begins with biases and that those biases come from narrative perspective historically informed by norms that are civic and not societal, including governmental, economic and religious aspects. As the NMP looks at the world and society in regard to intimate interpersonal communication, they are assembling research that is not necessarily for or against their own narrative perspective. In trying to help us describe this narrative as it relates to marriage and marriage-related narratives we see three themes develop through the work of the NMP: 1) delayed marriage, 2) retreat from child-centeredness and 3) complex households.

These three themes contain current trends and statistics associated specifically with each theme, however the themes are each deeply intertwined. The first, delayed marriage, sheds light on the increase toward unmarried cohabitation—the status of couples who are sexual partners, not married to each other, and sharing a household—while illuminating some reasoning behind this shift. The second theme, the retreat from child-centeredness, speaks to the recent move of children off of center-stage in the household. The third theme, complex households, offers insight into family structures, the decline of fatherhood, rise of stepfamilies and single-parenthood, etc.
Delayed Marriage

The age at which men and women marry is now at historic heights—27 for women, and 29 for men—and is still climbing. The age at which women have children is also increasing, but not nearly as quickly as the delay in marriage. The 2013 NMP report Knot Yet (Hymowitz et al.) explores the positive and negative consequences of these two trends, their economic and cultural causes, and how these affect emerging adult-women, men, their children, and the nation as a whole.

While in most cultures, women have typically married in their teens and men a few years later, people in the United States and other Anglo countries have been notable for their leisurely approach to settling down. In 1900, the median age of marriage for women in the United States was a little over 23 and for men, around 26. In the past several decades, however, emerging adults have been pushing marriage into even later years, taking us into entirely new demographic territory.16

The National Marriage Project’s Knot Yet looks beyond popular understandings of contemporary twentysomething life to explore how delayed marriages in America affects emerging adult-women, men and their children as well as some of the reasons behind this shift. Later marriage cannot be called breaking news nor can it be described as simply good news or bad news. Over the last four decades the age for tying the knot has risen steadily for all educational and socioeconomic groups.17

Although many women and men have been postponing marriage to their late twenties and beyond, they have not left-off childbearing at the same pace. In fact for

17 Data from the 2010 June Current Population survey
women as a whole, the median age of first birth (25.7) now falls before the median age of first marriage (26.5). This phenomenon is called the Great Crossover after the “crossover” phenomenon first documented in 2012 by the National Center for Marriage and Family research (Arroyo, Payne, Brown, & Manning, 2012). These dramatic changes in childbearing are closely linked to economic status, with little to no crossover for college-educated women who typically have a first child more than two years after marrying.

The 2013 NMP report, Knot Yet, co-sponsored by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, The Relate Institute, and the NMP, shows us the new face of the Great Crossover: twentysomething women. According to Knot Yet, unmarried twenty-something mothers are more common than teen mothers. The report details that by age twenty-five, forty-four percent of women have had a baby, while only thirty-eight percent have married. By the time they turn thirty, about two-thirds of American women have had a baby, typically out of wedlock. Overall, forty-eight percent of first births are to unmarried women, most of them in their twenties. Among women with college degrees, twelve percent of first births are to unmarried women. However, for those with less than college degrees, the percentages are much higher (Hymowitz et al., 2013).

Among those women with high school degrees and perhaps some college education, fifty-eight percent of first births are to unmarried women. Among high school dropouts, eighty-three percent of firstborn children are born to unmarried women. For these women, an economic recession and a struggling job market have already hindered  

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upward mobility, but out-of-wedlock childrearing only further reduces their chances of prosperity and flourishing.

Figure 3.1 *The Great Crossover*

Figure 3.1 contains two trend lines, one showing the median age at which women marry, the other the median age at which women have their first child. Around forty years ago, as women began putting off their wedding vows, they also postponed having children at about the same pace. But after several decades, that was no longer true. Women’s postponement of marriage kept soaring while their postponement of childbearing took a more leisurely climb. About twenty years ago, the two trend lines
crossed, putting the age of first birth before the age of first marriage for American women as a whole.¹⁹

Unsurprisingly, men of all classes have also become members of the delayed marriage movement.²⁰ Some might see marriage delayed as proof that young people, being especially open to change, think marriage is obsolete, or that as emerging adults they do not believe in the institution anymore. This is not true. The large majority of young adults say they hope to marry someday. In the final quarter of the twentieth century, the number of high-school seniors who believed they would wait five or more years after high school to get married grew significantly.²¹ But as the NMP points out about eighty percent of emerging-adult women and men continue to rate marriage as an “important” part of their life plans; almost half of them describe it as “very important.” In fact, in 2001–2002, thirty percent of twenty-five-year-old women wished they were already married, on top of the thirty-three percent who were. For men, it was comparable—nineteen percent wished they were married; another twenty-nine percent were married.²²

Among the least economically privileged, this crossover happened decades ago as part of a dramatic—and well-publicized—rise in unmarried pregnancy. Digging a little deeper, we see that what the NMP calls “Middle American” women—that is, moderately educated women with a high-school degree and perhaps a year or two of college—are playing a leading role in the trend. They make up more than half of the young women in

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the United States, and though they are following in the footsteps of their more educated sisters in postponing marriage, they are not adopting their strategy of delaying parenthood. Thus, the crossover here has been rapid and recent (Hymowitz et al., 2013).

Figure 3.2 indicates that in 1970, only about six percent of births to Middle American women in their twenties were to unmarried mothers; by 2010, it had risen to fifty-two percent—a stunning increase.

Kay Hymowitz, William E. Simon Fellow at the Manhattan Institute and co-author of the 2013 Knot Yet report, tells us to think of the Great Crossover this way: “It marks the moment at which unmarried motherhood moved from the domain of our poorest populations to become the norm for America’s large and already flailing middle class” (p. 19).

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23 According to the 2012 Current Population Survey, 54 percent of women aged twenty-five to twenty-nine have a high-school diploma or some college, 37 percent are college educated, and 9 percent have less than a high-school diploma; likewise, 59 percent of men aged twenty-five to twenty-nine have a high-school diploma or some college, 30 percent are college educated, and 11 percent have less than a high-school diploma.
Culturally, emerging adults are increasingly coming to see marriage as a “capstone” rather than a “cornerstone”—something that comes after things are in order rather than providing a foundation for adulthood (Cherlin, 2009; Hymowitz et al., 2013). This leaves the emerging-adult to occupy a foggy middle ground, somewhere between actively seeking parenthood and actively preventing pregnancy (Kaye, Suellentrop, & Sloup, 2009). Americans of all classes are postponing marriage to their late 20s and 30s for two main reasons—one economic and the other cultural (Hymowitz et al., 2013). Good jobs for less-educated Americans are hard to come by and jobs that do support a middle-class lifestyle require more training and education, thus emerging adults are taking longer to finish their education and stabilize their work lives.

While we see the model of individualism on the rise, the cultural model of marriage seems to be waning as observers mistakenly think that marriage is fading away (Cherlin, 2009, p. 28). The rise of individualism has been one of the master trends and development of Western society over the past few centuries. Bellah et al. in Habits of the Heart (1985), an influential book on individualism and commitment in American life, distinguish between two types of individualism; they called the older form “utilitarian individualism” and newer form “expressive individualism” (p. xiii, 27, 32-33). Think of the former as self-reliant and independent, seeking material success in the professional world and the latter as emphasizing the development of one’s sense of self, the pursuit of emotional satisfaction, and the expression of one’s feelings.

Until the past half-century, individuals moved through a series of roles (student, spouse, parent, breadwinner) in a way that seemed more or less natural. Cherlin’s example from The Marriage-Go-Round (2009) points out that cultural changes, though
subtle, create strong differences in the trend of marriage; until the past half-century
“getting married was the only acceptable way to have children and young people often
chose spouses from the same neighborhood, church or school. But now you cannot get a
job at the factory that your father and grandfather worked because overseas competition
has forced it to close, so you must choose another career. You get little help from
relatives in finding a partner, so you sign on to an Internet dating service and review
hundreds of personal profiles…” (p. 29).

As other lifestyles become more acceptable, one must choose whether to get
married and whether to have children. One develops one’ own sense of self by
continually examining one’s situation, reflecting on it, and deciding whether to alter their
behavior as a result. People pay attention to their experiences and make changes in their
life based on those experiences if they are not satisfied. They expect to continue to grow
and change throughout adulthood thus embodying expressive individualism.

Accordingly, emerging adults are putting off marriage—and the evidence is
strong that they are putting it off, not writing it off—for a number of reasons. Marriage
has shifted from being the cornerstone to the capstone of adult life (Cherlin, 2009, p. 29).
No longer is marriage the foundation on which young adults build their prospects for a
future of prosperity and happiness, they first move forward now toward financial
independence and self-realization. Truly it is not difficult to understand this move,
especially as MacIntyre understands how social identity and historical identity matter.

MacIntyre would offer that in these modern times, our behavior is somewhat
controlled by the social situations in which we find ourselves, suggesting that it is
through a narrative that one finds him/herself within a rule-bound community. He
explains, “behavior is only characterized adequately when we know what the longer and long-term intentions involved are and how the short term intentions are related to the longer. Therefore, we are writing a narrative history” (2007, p. 208).

This narrative of delayed marriage within emerging adulthood shows marriage as still important, but now optional: people can start relationships or have children without it, and data concurs (Cherlin, 2009, p. 7). In real terms, the total number of marriages fell from 2.45 million in 1990 to 2.11 million in 2010. Much of this decline—it is not clear just how much—results from the delaying of first marriages until older ages, as the median age at first marriage went from 20.3 for females and 22.8 for males in 1960 to 26.5 and 28.7, respectively, in 2011. Other factors accounting for the decline are the growth of unmarried cohabitation and a small decrease in the tendency of divorced persons to remarry. Finally, U.S. Census data indicates that the retreat from marriage has accelerated in the wake of the Great Recession.\footnote{U.S. Census Bureau, \textit{Statistical Abstract of the United States}, 2001, Table 117; \textit{Statistical Abstract of the United States}, 1986, Table 124; and \textit{American Community Survey}, 2010, Tables S-1201 and S-1251; available at http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml.}

What can be said through all of the data is that research does not provide consistent evidence that cohabitation helps couples prepare for sustainable marriage.\footnote{For a full review of the research on cohabitation, see Smock, 2000; Popenoe. & Whitehead, 2002.}

Retreat From Child-Centeredness

The presence of children in America has declined significantly since 1960, as measured by research of fertility rates and the percentage of households with children. Other indicators suggest that this decline has reduced the child-centeredness of our nation and contributed to the weakening of the institution of marriage (Marquardt et al., 2012).
Throughout history, marriage has been and provided an institution for procreation and rearing children. It has provided the cultural tie that seeks to connect the father to his children by binding him to the mother of his children. Researchers show that on average, Americans are now having fewer children.

In the 2012 *State of Our Unions* report, the NMP notes that in 2011 [the latest year for which complete information is available], the American “total fertility rate” (TFR) stood at 1.89, below the 1990 level of 2.08 and slightly below two children per woman. This rate is below the “replacement level” of 2.1, the level at which the population would be replaced through births alone, and is one of the highest rates found in modern industrialized societies.\(^{26}\)

The changing marriage culture has also played a role in the retreat. Remember that neither the capstone model, nor the soul mate ideal, nor the popular culture subscribes to the notion that marriage and children are a package deal (Whitehead & Popenoe, 2001). And having grown up in a world where rising rates of divorce and non-marital childbearing separate marriage from parenthood, emerging-adults are more inclined to take the view that marriage and parenthood are not necessarily connected, compared to previous generations.

The Fog Zone, a study by the *National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy*, finds seventy percent of emerging-adult men and seventy-seven percent of emerging-adult women (age eighteen to twenty-nine) think “it is OK for an unmarried female to have a child” (Kaye, Suellentrop, & Sloup 2009, p. 56). At the same time, according to a Pew Research Center report (2007), the number of adults who see children

\(^{26}\) The TFR in Italy, Poland, and Spain is 1.4; in Japan and Germany it is 1.3; in South Korea it is 1.2; and in Taiwan it is 1.0. See Social Trends Institute, *The Sustainable Demographic Dividend* (Barcelona: STI, 2011): 32.
as essential to a happy marriage declined markedly in just twenty years, from sixty-five percent in 1990 to forty-one percent in 2007. The same report asked Americans to choose “which is closer to your views about the main purpose of marriage”—a lifetime union of two adults for mutual happiness and fulfillment, or for bearing and raising children? Sixty-five percent chose the former and only twenty-three percent, the latter.

The long-term decline of births has had a marked effect on the household makeup of the American population. It is estimated that in the mid-1800s more than seventy-five percent of all households contained children under the age of eighteen (Coleman, 1990, p. 588, Figure 22.4). One hundred years later, in 1960, this number had dropped to slightly less than half of all households and in 2011, just five decades later, only thirty-two percent of households included children.27 Thus, in this historical moment adults are less likely to be living with children, that neighborhoods are less likely to contain children, and that children are less likely to be a consideration in daily life. It suggests that the needs and concerns of children—especially young children—may gradually be receding from our national consciousness (Marquardt et al., 2012).

One effect of the weakening of child-centeredness correlates clearly to divorce and the NMP’s careful analysis of divorce statistics shows that, beginning around 1975, the presence of children in a marriage has become only a very minor inhibitor of divorce (slightly more so when the child is male rather than female) (Heaton, 1990; Morgan, Lye, & Condran, 1988; Waite & Lillard, 1991). This is a dramatic turn from the traditional cultural belief that a family should stay together ‘for the sake of the children.’

So, how does this retreat from child-centeredness move America toward complex households? Family scholars Naomi Cahn and June Carbone, authors of *Red Versus Blue Families* (2010) give this helpful explanation on their blog for the Roosevelt Institute, “For approximately two-thirds of the population that does not have a college degree, an increasing number of men do not have the steady, adequate-paying jobs that allow them to provide the foundation for a successful family life, nor are working class men who feel like failures in the job market prepared to play roles backing up their wives and children” (2012). As a result, lower-income women are increasingly giving up on men and marriage.

Because marriage is becoming just another way that people choose to order their lives, society is becoming more accommodating of the many different ways people “do” family today. America’s contemporary tendency toward expressive individualism (as defined earlier (Bellah et al., 1985)) combines with the carousel metaphor to suggest a view of intimate relationships or partnerships as continually changing as each partner’s inner-self changes. And it also suggests that commitments to spouses and partners are personal choices that can be, and perhaps should be, ended if they become unsatisfying. And having children is now less likely to keep a couple together. The concept of individualism is overshadowing children and their place in the home and for the first time children seem to be moving out of center stage.

**Complex Households**

As the contemporary tendency toward expressive individualism suggests change and personal choice unfettered by family obligations, it also suggests that commitments
to spouses and partners are personal choices that can be, and perhaps should be, ended if they become unsatisfying. This leads to what Barbara Whitehead calls “expressive divorce”—women and men judging the success of a marriage not by their material standard of living or how well they raise their children but rather by whether they felt their personal needs and desires were being fulfilled.

Cherlin expresses this thought by laying out four elements emphasized in this culture of individualism:

- One’s primary obligation is to oneself rather than to one’s partner and children.
- Individuals must make choices over the life course about the kinds of intimate lives they wish to leave.
- A variety of living arrangements are acceptable.
- People who are personally dissatisfied with marriages and other intimate partnerships are justified in ending them. (2009, p. 31)

These four elements connect to the idea of deinstitutionalization—the best word to describe why Americans are struggling so much to form and sustain healthy marriages and why we need a more robust knowledge if we are going to alleviate the problem. Yet it is important to note that what is been called the divorce revolution cannot be captured in demographic trends alone.

In the history of American divorce the last third of the twentieth century marks a time of profound discontinuity and rapid change. Dafoe Whitehead explains the time of change as also establishing a “cultural faultline of American divorce, one that can be drawn somewhere in the mid-to-late 1960s. Before that time, divorce was contained within a system of marriage and subject to its jurisdiction. After that time, divorce moved outside the government of marriage and established his own institutional jurisdiction over family relationships. Before the mid-1960s, divorce was viewed as a legal, family, and
social event with multiple stakeholders; after that, divorce became an individual event defined by and responsive to the interests of the individual” (1997, p. 44; Goode, 1993, p. 139).

Thus, creating a direct correlation to MacIntyre and Bellah’s expressive individualism, we see divorce moved from the domain of the society in the family into the inner world of the self. Also, at the same time divorce breaks free from its place within a marriage system and establishes itself is an independent institution governing the lives of parents and children. This movement charted out describes two separate but closely related migrations.

Deinstitutionalization and complex households have a more intimate connection that might first appear. There are more partners involved in the personal lives of Americans than in the lives of people of any other Western country (Cherlin, 2009, p. 5). This changing marriage culture leads to growing instability in American family life. In other words, contemporary adults, emerging-adults and children are more likely to live in what scholars call “complex households”, where children and adults are living with people who are/were half siblings, step-siblings, step-parents, step-children, or unrelated to them by birth or marriage (Haskins & Sawhill, 2009; Wilcox, 2011).
The National Survey of Family Growth (Figure 3.3) indicates nearly forty percent of cohabiting, emerging-adult parents who had a baby between 2000 and 2005 split up by the time the child was five; that is three times higher than the rate for emerging-adult
parents who were married when they had a child. The cohabitants were also more than three times more likely than married parents to move on to a cohabiting or marital relationship with a new partner if the relationship did break up.\(^{28}\)

Marriage delayed may have some other emotional and social downsides. Emerging-adult women and men who are unmarried—be they single or cohabiting—report more drinking, more depression, and lower levels of life satisfaction than do their married peers.\(^{29}\) And unfortunately, for the household, this holds true for parents as well, indicating that cohabitating and single parents—both women and men—are generally less satisfied with their lives and more depressed than married parents.\(^{30}\) These personal choices begin to exhibit external effects; researchers now view family instability as one of the greatest risks to children’s well-being (Bzostek, McLanahan, & Carlson, 2012; Fragile Families, 2006).

The statistics surrounding children and their success at childhood is negatively impacted by an upbringing within a complex household. According to the National Marriage Project’s analysis of 2011 and 2012 social science data concerning complex households, children are less likely to thrive in cohabiting households, compared to intact, married families (Wilcox, 2011, p. 7, Fig. 3). Children in cohabiting households do significantly worse on many social, educational, and psychological levels, than do children raised in intact, married families. Those in cohabiting households do almost as

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\(^{28}\) The instability associated with cohabitation illustrated in Figure III is partly a consequence of the fact that cohabiting couples have less education and income than their married peers. But even after controlling for socioeconomic differences, children born to cohabiting couples are significantly more likely to experience the dissolution of their parents’ relationship, and to be exposed to a new romantic partner in the household—see the NMP’s Knot Yet, p 9-11.


\(^{30}\) NMP’s analysis of the American Community Survey, 2008-2010.
poorly as children living in single-parent families. And when it comes to abuse, “recent federal data indicate that children in cohabiting households are markedly more likely to be physically, sexually, and emotionally abused than children in both intact, married families and single-parent families” (Wilcox, 2011).

These complex households have firm connections to the themes of delayed marriage, the retreat from child-centeredness, and the legacy of divorce. So, what is the cost of these complex households? One NMP report entitled Why Marriage Matters pulls together findings from eighteen scholars and their research and contends that children living in cohabiting households do not do as well socially, educationally and psychologically as children living in intact married households (Wilcox, 2011). The authors point to a lack of stability in cohabiting relationships as one of the culprits: couples cohabiting and raising a child are more than twice as likely to break up before their child turns twelve as their married equivalents. That lack of stability—defined as the rotation of parent-like figures who transition in and out of children’s lives—is tied to school failure, behavior problems, drug use and loneliness. The effects are especially evident in children who experience several of these transitions. And as noted earlier, the carousel effect almost ensures that they will experience numerous transitions.

Yet, as the NMP points out unmarried adults—including single emerging-adults who make up about half of unmarried parents—are by definition unsettled. This tenuous place means that whether parents or not, single emerging-adults are interested in finding new romantic partners—and that means that the complex carousel continues. Cohabiting couples who have a child in their twenties and then break up, often also go on to have
another partner or partners (Bzostek, McLanahan, & Carlson, 2012). These children have to find their way through the muddled relationships with step-parents, step-grandparents, step-siblings, and half siblings, often sacrificing a close bond with their own fathers at the same time.

And most researchers agree that on average, whether because of uncertainty or absent fathers or both, children of unmarried mothers have poorer outcomes than children growing up with their married parents (Amato, 2005). Data alone cannot answer a response to the Great Crossover, nor can it answer the negative economic and cultural feedback loop, but it does assist us in understanding the playing field emerging adults are working with. Likewise, the carousel effect almost ensures that they have or will experience numerous transitions and these transitional experiences directly affect their expectations for intimate relationships.

**Conclusion**

The work of the National Marriage Project identifies economic, legal, and cultural questions that need to be addressed in order to help make marriage more realizable for today’s emerging adult—the vast majority of whom say they want to be married. The realignment of marriage and parenthood can make family life more stable. And the three themes of delayed marriage, retreat from child-centeredness and complex households illuminate kinds of radical fragmentation—not a complete societal change. There is a significant subset of people fully engaged in traditional marriage.

Likewise, we see a large proportion of marriages that fail. These marriages inevitably vary: they include marriages where one partner leaves and others where a

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31 This statistic refers to those couples having children in their twenties then breaking up: almost two-fifths of them in the first five years. Retrieved from http://sf.oxfordjournals.org/content/90/3/817.full.pdf+html
partner is left. In some cases, partners are abandoned and are not desirous that the marriage should end; others simple cite irreconcilable differences and both parties agree. In yet other cases, partners are unfaithful and even though there is love, one does not feel like one can stay.

Thus, it is vitally important to notice that the NMP reinforces the fact that many people believe institutionally in marriage and would not be part of the divorce culture, yet are divorced—thus demographically part of the divorce culture, yet narratively they are not. Understand that MacIntyre would expect this narrative contention—he knows that there can still be strong commitment within/without narrative framework and that it does not make sense to say that Americans have given up marriage.

The key contention surrounding marriage is the move to capstone, rather than cornerstone—something that comes after things are in order rather than providing a foundation for adulthood. The institution of marriage is fundamental to American society and the NMP was founded and designed to provide research and education to revitalize this institution (Hymowitz et al., 2013). This contention of capstone and cornerstone translates well the NMP’s work to the disconnect of expectation and experience.

Consider that on one hand, the move of deinstitutionalization provides us with unprecedented freedom to create deep, romantic relationships that satisfy our individual needs and circumstances rather than force that everyone into the same box. Not surprisingly then, on the other hand, we have raise the bar on marriage; it is now supposed to be a kind of super-relationship that meets all of our needs and creates the emotional satisfaction we desire as expressive individualists (Cherlin, 2004 Whitehead & Popenoe, 2001). We are coming to recognize that the more freedom surrounding intimate
relationships, the more potential for misunderstandings, disagreements and tension, not to mention unrealistic expectations that lead to dissatisfaction and disappointment.

When these factors combine with the American cultural proclivity to expressive individualism we see a contemporary reality emerge; we have extremely high expectations for intimate relationships and marriage and those expectations are hard to meet. As mentioned in earlier chapters, the courtship and dating system in America has shifted, broken down making it more difficult to approach marriage and intimate relationships, and in many ways especially difficult to approach it without a lot of baggage. Cherlin’s carousel metaphor serves to remind us of the changing landscape surrounding intimate relationships.

This growing misalignment of expectation and experience brings forward a need for paths to smarter intimate interpersonal relationships and smarter marriage. Accordingly we need more robust knowledge of the changed and changing reality of contemporary intimate interpersonal relationships and how this affects the institution of marriage. By establishing interpersonal opportunities for enriching the conversation of difference between women and men, by clarifying some of those differences and then communicating those differences, we level the playing field, reducing the ambiguity surrounding intimate interpersonal relationships. Thus, the praxis of interpersonal communication and the similarities and differences in women and men’s expectations for intimacy—can have significant impact on the sustainability of intimate relationships.
CHAPTER 4

As we have seen in the previous chapter a contemporary tendency toward expressive individualism combines with Cherlin’s carousel metaphor to suggest a view of intimate relationships or partnerships as continually changing as each partner’s inner-self changes. The research and work of the National Marriage Project (NMP) suggests emerging adults are putting off marriage—and the evidence is strong that they are putting it off, not writing it off—for a number of reasons. Marriage is simply shifting from being the cornerstone to the capstone of adult life (Cherlin, 2009). No longer is marriage the foundation on which emerging-adults build their prospects for a future of prosperity and happiness, they move forward now toward financial independence and self-realization. We have less difficulty understanding this move if we view MacIntyre’s understanding of how social identity and historical identity matter.

The importance of identity is a strong link in the chain of change and personal choice in regard to intimate committed relationships. Often unfettered by family obligations, the move toward expressive individualism also suggests that commitments to spouses and partners lean toward personal choice rather than a communal and societal sense of covenant. In discussing praxis of human community and how, in terms of emotivism, individualism is problematic, Bellah et al. also speak to how American personal identity oscillates between competitive individualism at work and expressive individualism in personal life (MacIntyre, 2007, p viii, xi, 47). Thus, as mentioned through the previous chapters, these elements connect closely to the idea of deinstitutionalization.
It is crucial that we grasp, philosophically and ontologically, the relationship between deinstitutionalization and individualism. Bellah et al. (1985, pp. xii, 302) discuss problems that occur when focus is on individuals themselves; therefore limiting us in the formation of bonded communities. And what scholars call utilitarian individualism has served as an ideal, in the form of the self-reliant actor and the rugged individualist (Cherlin, 2009, p. 9) … however, the form we look at here is the form MacIntyre is concerned with: expressive individualism. Mentioned thoroughly in chapter two, expressive individualism first developed during the twentieth century, as concern with finding oneself, personal growth, and getting in touch with one’s feelings, and expressing one’s needs took center-stage. How might expressive individualism be articulated in intimate relationships? Put simply, in the language of expressive individualism—coupled with emotivism—one allows justification for leaving a marriage because it no longer meets one’s needs.

MacIntyre would offer that in these modern times our behavior is somewhat controlled by the social situations in which we find ourselves—suggesting that it is through a narrative that we finds ourselves emerged within a rule-bound community. This is why deinstitutionalization, the weakening of social norms that define people’s behavior, can be detrimental to the narrative fidelity of intimate relationships (Cherlin, 2004, p. 848). Throughout history powerful norms have guided people’s actions with regards to sexuality, courtship, and marriage; with strong norms about marriage, people know a lot about what is expected of them and there is a taken-for-granted notion about how to behave. Thus, it is easier to form and sustain marriage, especially if one knows the rules and holds realistic expectations.
However, as social science research and the NMP have shown, these norms or social rules for marriage have eroded rapidly over the last fifty years due to a number of changes. Cherlin (2004, p. 848) cites America’s sexual permissiveness, gender role changes, and affluence as some of the biggest contributors to the deinstitutionalization of marriage. And when these factors combine with the American cultural proclivity to expressive individualism we see a contemporary reality emerge—that of the “super-relationship.” Because the move toward deinstitutionalization provides us, on one hand, with unprecedented freedom to create deep, romantic relationships that satisfy our individual needs and circumstances, we should not be surprised then on the other hand, to see that we have raised the bar on marriage. It is now supposed to be a kind of super-relationship that meets all of our needs and creates the emotional satisfaction we desire (; Cherlin, 2004; Whitehead & Popenoe, 2001). Thus, we have extremely high expectations for intimate relationships and marriage and those expectations are hard to meet.

Other evidence of the effects of expressive individualism on intimate relationships include delayed marriage, a retreat from child-centeredness and complex households. The first theme, delayed marriage, is widely prevalent with the median age at which men and women marry now at historic heights—27 for women, and 29 for men—and is still climbing (Humowitz et al., 2013). Though it stands to reason that that it may be easier to weave two lives into one when marriage occurs earlier than it is when emerging adults have a longer history of independent living, they are not making an earlier move toward commitment (Hawkins, 2013, p. 137). Research shows there are many voices abetting emerging adults in their delay to the altar; one study finds that most emerging adults report that they want to be married by age twenty-five, but that their parents think it
should be a little later… to discover ‘who you are first’ (Willoughby, Olsen, Carroll, Nelson, & Miller, 2012).

Nevertheless many emerging adults have thoroughly internalized the cultural message that they should postpone marriage and enjoy their freedoms during their twenties, that freedom is often not so free and easy Regnerus & Uecker, 2011, chs. 4 & 5; Smith, Christofferson, Davidson, & Herzog, 2011, ch. 4). The book Lost in Translation (2011) by Christian Smith and his colleagues documents, through the voices of emerging adults, the painful and constricting harms associated with their sexual freedom. The regrets, real hurt, grief, anger, and confusion often associated with sexual permissiveness is more often than not, kept in the dark; though these emerging trends regarding intimate committed relationships begin to bring them to light as expectation and experience disconnect.

The retreat from child-centeredness stems from presence of children in America declining significantly since 1960, as measured by fertility rates and the percentage of households with children. Other indicators suggest that this decline has reduced the child-centeredness of our nation and contributed to the weakening of the institution of marriage (Marquardt et al., 2012). To see the historical movement related to child-centeredness, consider that in the mid-1800s more than seventy-five percent of all households contained children under the age of eighteen (Coleman, 1990, p. 588, Fig. 22.4). One hundred years later, in 1960, this number had dropped to slightly less than half of all households and in 2011, just five decades later, only thirty-two percent of households included children.32 Life without children is becoming the more common social

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32 U.S. Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1964, Tables 36 and 54; 1980, Tables 62 and 67; 1985, Tables 54 and 63; and 1994, Table 67; Current Population Reports, “America’s Families and
experience for a growing percentage of the adult population. This is not suggesting that America is anti-child, but that American society is changing in ways that make children less central to our common lives, shared goals and public commitments (Whitehead & Popenoe, 2008).

Concerning complex households, researchers now view family instability as one of the greatest risks to children’s well-being. According to the National Marriage Project’s analysis of 2011 and 2012 social science data concerning complex households, children are less likely to thrive in cohabiting households, compared to intact, married families (Wilcox, 2011, p. 7; Fig. 3). Children in cohabiting households do significantly worse on many social, educational, and psychological levels, than do children raised in intact, married families. Those in cohabiting households do almost as poorly as children living in single-parent families. And when it comes to abuse, “recent federal data indicate that children in cohabiting households are markedly more likely to be physically, sexually, and emotionally abused than children in both intact, married families and single-parent families” (Wilcox, 2011, Fig. 3). And these statistics are being heeded; more and more contemporary programs have been established upon seeing value of integrating marriage and relationships, parenting, co-parenting, and establishing responsible fatherhood education (Holmes, Cowan, Cowan, & Hawkins, 2013; McHale, Waller, & Pearson, 2012).

Just as these themes connect expressive individualism to the changing structures of American society, Giddens might call expressive individualism a progressive differentiation, a result of evolutionary advance (Giddens, 1992). I believe MacIntyre
would agree to the progressive differentiation as it moves toward too much individual concern and its ability to limit the possibilities of community. Stories about “us” form communities, especially within the household and intimate interpersonal relationships, while demands to attend to “me” or “my” needs do not (Arnett & Arneson, 1999, p. 263). This language of expressive individualism does not promote a narrative sense of community, but widens the gap between expectation and experience.

How might MacIntyre ask us to constructively view this misalignment in intimate relationships? By asking us to think about what it means to shift from an emotivist, expressive individualism rooted in postmodernity to an understanding of self through narrative. Historically positioned, the late 1980s into the 1990’s brought forth a kind of widespread diffusion—and subsequent influence—of the theories of poststructuralism and postmodernism in American culture (Smith et al., 2011). Though beginning as academic theory postmodernism moved through the humanities and social sciences in American colleges and universities, changing the narrative paradigm of the emerging-adult.

Thus, by the time postmodernism reached America, it had become a “simple-minded ideology presupposing the cultural construction of everything, individualistic subjectivism, soft ontological antirealism, and absolute moral relativism” (Smith et al., 2011). MacIntyre would see this evident in the emerging-adult culture as well, as he calls out expressive individualism and emotivism as part and parcel of the paradigmatic shift from modernity to postmodernity.

Smith et al. succinctly capture this shift from modernity to postmodernity: “What belonged to ‘the modern’ was condemned: epistemological foundations, certainty, reason,
universalism, the self, authorial voice, the nation state, colonialism, the Word, etc. And all that was thought to be postmodern was celebrated: uncertainty, difference, fluidity, ambiguity, multi-vocality, self construction, changing identities, particularity, historical finitude, localism, audience reception, perspectivalism, and more” (Giddens, 1991, ch. 1; Smith et al., 2011, p. 15). These postmodern descriptives convey desired autonomy and separation from narrative, especially in relation to self-determination and the ‘reflexive project of self’ (Giddens, 1991, pp. 185, 189).

MacIntyre explains that we make sense of our world with narrative, a category that includes autobiography, history, doctrine, myth, and scientific theory, etc. He invites us to remember that we cannot live without narrative structures. Accordingly, when one of these narratives fail, when we find that we are wrong about ourselves and our relationships, our history, the nature of God or the structure of the world, we may plunge into a period of uncertainty and confusion, an epistemological crisis (Lutz, 2004, p. 5). Because narrative is comprised of individuals, their personal history, expectations and sociocultural limits, interpersonal relationships figure heavily into the construction of one’s narrative.

The narrative of the emerging-adult is characterized by intense identity exploration; a focus on self, feelings of being in transition, caught in-between, instability and a sense of possibilities and opportunities. These are also often accompanied by “large doses of transience, confusion, anxiety, self obsession, melodrama, conflict, disappointment, and sometimes emotional devastation” (Smith et al., 2011, p. 15). These adjectives, these descriptions of the emerging-adult narrative carry over to intimate interpersonal relationships in strong, definable ways, specifically in relation to role.
These postmodern shifts affect societal and cultural conceptions of womanhood/femininity and manhood/masculinity in intimate interpersonal communication. Montgomery (1988, p. 344) posits that a society’s ‘personality’ grows out of day-to-day interpersonal transactions. And when placed in contention with postmodern expressive individualistic tendencies, MacIntyre (2007) would assert that we can only begin the enquiry of choosing a narrative structure through the vantage point of relationship with tradition. Thus, a narrative is linked to a social and intellectual history, lending role a place in narrative structure (pp. 401-2). As interpersonal transactions yield more ambiguity regarding female/male conceptions or feminine/masculine definitions, ambiguity emerges in intimate relationships. The concept of role, defined as ‘a socially defined set of expectations with rules for permissible and obligatory behavior governing a relationship’ helps show that our expectations for relationships are set by social definitions (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1983, p. 18).

MacIntyre’s narrative approach offers space for examining current trends in intimate relationships and the sustainability of those relationships by addressing choice-making in individualism. For instance, the trend of delayed movement toward full adulthood—culturally defined by the end of schooling, a stable career, financial independence, and new family formation—shows emergent and current habit of individualism (Arnett, 2011; Smith et al., 2011, pp. 14-16). To more clearly navigate MacIntyre’s approach to narrative we ask and answer the question “of what story or stories do I find myself a part?”

This inquiry is followed by secondary questions such as, “What am I to do?” or “What is my role?” (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 216). These secondary questions are best
answered by first looking at the relationship of narrative to self and role. MacIntyre’s understanding of narrative allows self and role to come together through the *telos* narrative of the biosocial approach. Kass (1985) puts it yet another way, that a narrative consisting of “a biology and psychology that recognized more than sex and survival would enable us better to discern those activities and attainments whose realization would be humanly fulfilling” (p. 347).

As MacIntyre points to understanding ourselves through narrative, he points to “the humanly fulfilling” as understanding role in relation to *telos*; this can offer a place for better understanding of female and male differences based on a biosocial ground. The biosocial perspective—nuanced beyond a sheer cultural or biological view of humanity—is additive, thoughtful and conducive to good thinking about intimate communicative relationships. Narrative helps to bring alignment into the area of intimate relationships thus enabling us to better discern an alternative understanding—the biosocial approach to intimate interpersonal relationships. What does a biosocial approach contribute as a narrative that propels understanding through story and a well-aligned rather than misaligned, approach to expectation and intimacy?

**The Biosocial Approach**

This chapter presupposes certain key concepts: that the vast majority of human beings are biologically clearly female or male and that again in the vast majority of cases, the sex identity adopted by the individual by society, as well as the sex identity adopted by the individual, corresponds to the person’s biological sex. This project is concerned with the development of people who are unambiguously members of one gender category.
or the other. Sex-based differences in biology will be referred to throughout this project as *sex differences*.

There are numerous words and definitions that enter the realm of the biosocial: gender, sex, gender roles, social, biological, etc. and a few key definitions will help lay out a clear framework of each as they relate to this chapter and research. In regard to gender, note that gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women. Likewise, gender stereotypes are closely linked to traditional social roles and power inequalities between women and men (Eagly, 1987).

Roles associated with gender often follow alongside these gender stereotypes. Gender roles—shared beliefs about the traits of women and men—often track the division of labor because people infer these traits from their observations of the sexes’ behaviors. Wood and Eagly (2012) assert that gender role expectations, which tend to be “consensual within cultures, influence behavior through proximal social, psychological and biological processes, whereby (a) other people encourage gender-typical behavior and individuals conform to their own gender identities and (b) hormonal, reward, and cardiovascular mechanisms enable masculine and feminine behaviors.” Related categorical terms are “female” and “male” for sex categories, while “feminine/femininity” and “masculine/masculinity” are gender categories.

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34 For more on the cardiovascular differences between women and men see: Vick, Seery, Blascovich, & Weisbuch, 2008.
The term sex refers to the biological and physiological characteristics that define men and women.\textsuperscript{35} The National Academies Press defines *sex* is the classification of living things, generally as female or male according to the reproductive organs and functions assigned by the chromosomal complement and *gender* as a person self-representation as female or male, or how that person is responded to by social institutions on the basis of individuals gender presentation (National Research Council, 2001, Introduction). Gender is shaped by environment and experience. In their discussion of these issues, Eagly and Wood define the term *sex* by its common-language meaning of male and female categories: “Either of the two main categories (male and female) into which humans and many other living things are divided on the basis of their reproductive functions; (hence) the members of these categories viewed as a group.”\textsuperscript{36} Also, Eagly and Wood (2011) define the term gender as “meanings that individuals and societies ascribe to these categories” (pp. 64. 758-767).

According to fundamental biology females and males are created differently and equitably as biology assigns separate functions to the female and male human. We can, at certain times, act as though this is prejudicial rather than biological, binding rather than freeing. It is perhaps a result of expressive individualism and seeing ourselves as masters of our own destinies that we forget—“ultimately we are subject to the biological imperatives of our own bodies” (Moir & Jessel, 1991, p. 8). Thus, the biological and physiological components of sex difference play a huge role throughout life, relationships, expectations, roles, experiences, etc. There are some facts that, no matter


\textsuperscript{36} Oxford English Dictionary Online 2011.
how sexually liberated we will ourselves to be, cannot be circumvented—that women and men are created differently.

Biosocial, according to Webster’s dictionary is defined as: of, relating to, or concerned with the interaction of the biological aspects and social relationships of living organisms.\(^{37}\) So, how does the biosocial perspective relate to the differences between women and men? Most commonly, the biosocial approach treats the psychological attributes of women and men as emergent given the created and evolved characteristics of the sexes, their developmental experiences, and their situated activity in society (Wood & Eagly, 2002, p. 1). The biosocial perspective supports sex differences as deriving from the biological—physical specialization of the sexes, especially the female reproductive capacity and male size and strength, along with influence from the interaction between the sexes linked to the economic, cultural and societal structure of societies (Wood & Eagly, 2002, p. 1).

Moir and Jessel open their text, *Brain Sex* (1991), with the idea that one hundred years ago, a statement of the differences between women and men—whether in aptitude, abilities or skills—would have been a statement “yawningly obvious” (p. 9). However, today, that statement would be the beginning of heated argument. Why the change? The truth about differences between men and women seemed to truly become a hotbed of interest in and through the sexual revolution atmosphere of the 1960s and 70s, releasing an ideology that “dismissed psychological sex differences as either mythical, or if real, non-essential” (Baron Cohen, 2003, p. 10). As Dr. Moir suggests if there were proven differences in the ability between women and men, then it is intellectually dishonest for anyone to deny those differences (Moir & Jessel, 1991, p. 9). Beginning with the initial

premise—that there are scientifically and clinically demonstrable differences between the brains of women and men—Moir began the arduous task of analyzing enormous amounts of already existing neuroscientific research, acting as a sort of clearinghouse for neurological sex difference research.

The Realm Of Biological Influence

The differences between the sexes are rooted in the differences in the physiological structuring and wiring of their respective brains coupled with the differences in the hormones circulating through those different brains. Think of hormones as “mind altering”—especially as there are no other bio-chemicals that come close to the power of hormones. Thus, differences in the structuring of the brain start in utero (during gestation) and from the very earliest stages of development the sexes are being differentiated from each other in very profound ways. And it is important to note that the differentiation cannot be effectively overcome or negated by upbringing and societal and cultural conditioning. During puberty, the final development of the brain takes place and the various hormones reach very high levels in the bloodstream and “at the time of puberty, two very different type engines are switched on and they run on very different fuels” (Moir & Jessel, 1991, p. 9).

The “two different fuels” are hormones, estrogen and testosterone. The significance of each differs in function as well as distinct timing related to their importance. Why do they make such a difference between female and male development? Hormones determine the distinct female or male organization of the brain as it develops in the womb. An identical sexual identity is shared for the first few weeks after conception and we know the story of genetic chromosomes; the “coded-blueprint” of our
unique characteristics and that an X chromosome from mother and an X chromosome from father will be the formation of a female baby, while a Y chromosome from the father will yield a male baby. However, the birth of difference happens in utero, at around six weeks, at which time testosterone is either produced (male baby) or not (female baby) and sexual identity is developed.\(^{38}\)

Embryonic male babies are exposed to an enormous dose of male hormone at the critical time when their brains are beginning to take shape. At this time, the hormones are four times the level experienced throughout the rest of boyhood until adolescence. At this same time, for embryonic female babies, not exposed to male hormones, the brain stays ‘female’, as it is unorganized on any specific sexual line. Once the pattern was researched and scientifically established that there is critical interplay between hormones, the brain and behavior, the next step in neuroscience research found a connection between physical differences in the structure of the brain.

Rather than give a lengthy explanation of each difference found I will provide a generalization: male hormone alters the way in which the brain network (hypothalamus, cerebral cortex, nerve cell network, etc.) is laid down; when testosterone is present, the pattern is male and when absent, the pattern is female (Baron Cohen, 2003; Moir & Jessel, 1991; NRC, 2001). Neuroscientific research also notes that in the early days of scientific gender curiosity the belief was that biology had a comparatively minor influence on our behavior and attitudes. The assumption was, that in terms of our minds, we were born sexually neutral, a kind of blank slate on which our parents, our teachers, and the expectations of society would write their determinant messages. We often find

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that who we are, our minds, our bodies and our behaviors are often so tightly wrapped up together that it is difficult to pry them apart. Thus, neuroscientific research is undertaking the prying apart for us and we are finding that the benefits far outweigh the negatives.

Simon Baron Cohen’s work in neuroscience establishes that we are born with brains that result in two distinctly different ways of focus, thinking and approaching the world. He differentiates between the male and female brain through significant neuroscientific research and puts forth this simple formula (2003, p. 1):

- High testosterone = male brain = systemising = task focus
- Low testosterone = female brain = empathising = social focus

Though Baron Cohen admits that many people first react by believing this theory to defend existing inequalities in opportunities for men and women in society, he asks and through his research persuades, that this theory can be used progressively and that differences can be celebrated rather than feared. The two central claims of the theory of essential sex difference coincide with numerous other neuroscientific studies (Kimura, 1987, 1999; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974; Moir & Jessel, 1991; Reinisch, 1981).

It is known that the left side of the brain deals predominantly with verbal abilities and the detailed orderly processing of information; speaking, writing, and reading are all largely under the control of the left-hand side of the brain (Kimura, 1996, 1999). The right side of the brain is the headquarters for visual information; thus responsible for taking in ‘the big picture’, basic shapes and patterns. It deals with spatial relations, abstract thought processes and some of our emotional responses (Kimura, 1996, 1999). The left side of the brain controls the right-hand side of our bodies and vice versa.

However, through landmark research by Herbert Landsell (1964, p. 550), it was
determined that language and spatial skills are controlled by centers in both sides of the brain for women; but in men such skills are much more specifically located—the right side for spatial skills and the left for verbal ones.

- **Systemising:** Cohen defines as the drive to analyze, explore and construct a system. He says: “The systemizer intuitively figures out how things work” (2003, p. 3). This is the sort of mind that invents things or builds things; the sort of mind that makes rules and creates order. For example, could this be why men so love ritual and ceremony?
- **Empathizing:** is making sense of an individual’s behavior and has an intuitive understanding of the fluctuation moods and how it affects social interaction. Cohen (2003, ch. 1) speculates that the superior language ability in women may exist because of her stronger empathizing ability. Thus, the female is more likely to be the social glue of our communities, whereas the male is more likely to be the builder of social structures.

As more and more scientific research reveals the mysteries of the brain differences and the processes by which they become more different, we know beyond speculation and prejudice that differences exist and are en process establishing why. Accordingly, we are called to recognize the assumption of difference as natural and free from guilt. A place where science and the social meet is also closely related to the differences between female and male—they are related in their disagreement. As scientific developments point to clear-cut sex differences, the political currents tend to deny that such differences exist. This confusion is felt throughout development and socialization. A more profound understanding of “the body” would refute the unnatural

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39 For a review of studies from the 1960s and 1970s demonstrating that the male brain is more asymmetric than the female brain, particularly with regard to language functions, see McGlone, 1980. For a more recent update using next-generation technology, see the paper by Gur & Turetsky, 1999, Fig. 3, p. 4068).
and so-called humanistic claims that intelligence or gender specific roles have no biological basis and are strictly human or cultural creations.

How does expressive individualism impact science or the presuppositions of difference between the sexes? Kass (1985) argues that,

we [society] on the other hand, with our dissection of cadavers, organ transplantation, cosmetic surgery, body shops, laboratory fertilization, surrogate wings, gender change surgery, “wanted” children, “rights over our bodies”, sexual liberation, and other practices and beliefs that insist on our independence and autonomy, live more and more wholly for the here and now, subjugating everything we can to the exercise of our wills, with little respect for the nature and meaning of bodily life. (p. 296)

This living for self in the here and now causes us to ask how the biological effects communicative ability? Cognitive and communicative abilities can be subdivided and considered in any number of ways. Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) delineated three general cognitive domains demonstrating sex differences: verbal, quantitative, and visuospatial abilities. Despite the fact that these can be assessed differently and have conflicting results, a reasonable consensus has emerged relating sex differences to specific patterns of cognitive function.

In general, women most often demonstrate an advantage in verbal abilities—particularly verbal fluency, speech production, the ability to decode a language, and spelling, perceptual speed and accuracy, and fine motor skills, whereas men frequently show an advantage on tests of spatial abilities, quantitative abilities, and gross motor
strength (Hampson & Kimura, 1992; Moir & Jessel, 1991; Hampson, 2002). Again, the
goal is not to provide an exhaustive review of behavioral sex differences but to illustrate
just a few of the definable differences, especially those related to communicative
behaviors.

Although it is often stated that females demonstrate better verbal abilities than
males, it is important to note, as Halpern (2000) has, that “the term verbal abilities is not
a unitary concept. The term applies to all components of language usage: word fluency,
which is the ability to generate words—both in isolation and in a meaningful context—
grammar, spelling, reading, writing, verbal analogies, vocabulary, and oral
comprehension. The size and reliability of the sex differences depends on which of these
aspects of language is being assessed” (pp. 93-4). Sex differences have been
demonstrated for some but not all of these verbal abilities; however, when there is a
difference, it invariably favors females.

Quantitative abilities refer to a heterogeneous group of abilities; depending on the
specific ability tested, males or females will have an advantage. For example, males seem
to outperform females on tests of geometry, measurement, probability, and statistics as
well as on tests of spatial and mechanical reasoning (Moir & Jessel, 1991; Stones,
Beckmann, & Stephens, 1982; Stumpf & Stanley, 1998). Some have suggested that the
male advantage in quantitative abilities reflects the male’s use of visuospatial approaches
for problem solving. In contrast, females perform better on measures of calculation and
also on tests in which the problem requires much reading. Males demonstrate an
advantage on tests of visuospatial ability (Halpern, 2000; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974).
This refers to the ability “to imagine what an irregular figure would look like if it were
rotated in space or the ability to discern the relationship between shapes and objects” (Halpern, 2000, p. 98).

Sex differences of importance, both cognitive and physical, occur throughout the life span, although their specific expression varies at different stages of life. The chronology of difference moves in sequence: some differences originate in events occurring in the intrauterine environment, where developmental processes differentially organize tissues for later activation in the male or female (NRC, 2001). In the prenatal period, sex determination and differentiation occur in a series of sequential processes governed by genetic and environmental factors. During the prepubertal period, behavioral and hormonal changes manifest the secondary sexual characteristics that reinforce the sexual identity of the individual through adolescence and into adulthood. Hormonal events occurring in puberty lay a framework for biological differences that persist through life and contribute to the variable differences in males and females (NRC, 2001).

The ability to recognize and appreciate from a reproductive standpoint that females and males possess different attributes has been long standing. Only more recently have we begun to look more deeply into both the similarities and differences between women and men, as well as between girls and boys, with respect to the structure and function of other organ systems. Though this chapter focuses more on the neurological systems and the subsequent connection to communication and behavioral differences, there is considerable research surrounding chemical differences as well as the cardiovascular differences, with examples of sex differences in the control of coronary function, blood pressure, and volume.
One such chemical difference concerns the chemical oxytocin. Oxytocin is a chemical produced naturally in every human brain that induces relaxation, relieves stress and promotes an overall feeling of well-being. It reduces blood pressure and stress/anxiety (cortisol levels) in both sexes but particularly so in women. It is well established that oxytocin promotes social bonding and that oxytocin levels are higher in women than men, the main reason being that oxytocin interacts with the sex hormones already present in our system (Churchland & Winkielman, 2012; Rolls, 2014). The female hormone estrogen stimulates oxytocin production and enhances its effect, hence its lower levels in men because the male hormone testosterone inhibits oxytocin production and limits its action.

Oxytocin levels rise at touch both physical and emotional. Thus, its direct link to sexual pleasure, rising with sexual desire in both sexes and peaking at orgasm creating the “after glow” of serenity and closeness that happens after orgasm. The effects of this release of oxytocin affect females and males differently (Rolls, 2014). In women, it creates a desire for post-coital talking and cuddling—in men, a drowsy effect. This chemical release, however, does not last as long in men as his testosterone, also high at orgasm, destroys it swiftly (Moir & Jessel, 1991; Reinisch & Sanders, 1995).

At the core, few people are surprised that women and men can differ physiologically. At the very least, males produce testosterone and females produce the sex hormones estrogen and progesterone. What has become evident, with respect to the cardiovascular system and biochemical make-up, is that the differences and similarities involve more than the sex hormones, per se. As research explains, it is essential to realize that every cell has a “sex” thanks to the presence of either an XX or an XY chromosome;
that this sex is manifested in the womb, and that, beyond behavioral differences, pre-pubertal differences exist between the cardiovascular systems of boys and girls (Huxley, 2007).

The Realm Of Social Influence

Social structuralists typically acknowledge the importance of some genetically mediated sex differences. “Physical differences between the sexes, particularly men's greater size and strength and women’s childbearing and lactation, are very important because they interact with shared cultural beliefs, social organization, and the demands of the economy to influence the role assignments that constitute the sexual division of labor within a society and produce psychological sex differences” (Eagly, 1987; Wood & Eagly, 1999).

Social perceivers often essentialize the traits of women and men by regarding them as inherent in the biology or social experience of women and men. Wood and Eagly (2012) note that one way in which gender roles guide behaviors is through the “anticipated or enacted social consequences of conformity or nonconformity to others’ expectations” (p. 81). Thus, the awareness of the most likely reactions from other channels us into gender-stereotypical behavior. Likewise, the freedom to escape from these expectations allows us to behave less stereotypically.

There is considerable research concerning the communicative traits or styles of women and men, in regard to social roles. Tannen’s research on gender differences in the
area of nonverbal communication demonstrates for example, that women in Western business cultures seek eye contact and watch people’s faces seeking cues for approval or disapproval. Men can interpret this behavior as a sign of insecurity rather than a skill of observation and assessment. However, the same research indicates that men position their bodies in conversation differently than women, turning sideways or standing shoulder to shoulder in contrast to face-to-face. This male body language can seem a demonstration of lack of interest to women who desire face-to-face connection (Tannen, 1990).

In social structural accounts, women and men are differently distributed into social roles, and these differing role assignments can be broadly described in terms of a sexual division of labor and a gender hierarchy. “This division of labor and the patriarchal hierarchy that sometimes accompanies it provide the engine of sex differentiated behavior because they trigger social and psychological processes by which men and women seek somewhat different experiences to maximize their outcomes within the constraints that societies establish for people of their sex” (Beall & Sternberg, 1993; Canary & Dindia, 1998; Eagly, Wood, & Diekman, 2000; England, & Browne, 1992). Sex differences in behavior thus reflect contemporaneous social conditions.

Regarding roles I hope to articulate the distinction between equality between the sexes (i.e., status) and distinction between roles of the sexes. Thus, I submit that a status of male or female is identical, but that roles are distinct and complementary and that different roles may be part of hierarchies, but a role hierarchy is not the same entity as status hierarchy. In other words, the status of a woman and a man is always identical—created equal—but within roles, a hierarchy can and may exist or not. Women are not
complementary, but a wife is. Brother and sisters do not hold complementary roles, but rather hold equal status as children.

The determinants of the distribution of women and men into social roles are myriad and include the biological endowment of women and men. The sex-differentiated physical attributes that influence role occupancy include men’s greater size and strength, which would give them “priority in non-mechanized warfare and in jobs involving certain types of strenuous activity, especially involving upper body strength” (Eagly & Wood, 1999, 2011). Also important in relation to role distributions are “women’s childbearing and in many societies their activity of lactating for long periods of time; these obligations would give them priority in roles involving the care of very young children and conflict with roles that require extended absence from home and uninterrupted activity” (Eagly & Wood, 1999). Thus, physical sex differences in interaction with other variables influence the roles held by men and women.

How are these differences reflected in the intimate interpersonal relationship of marriage and family? Moving chronologically, these distinctions start as early as birth. In the NMP’s review of research by the Father Involvement Research Alliance (Winquist Nord & West, 2001), they demonstrate that babies with more involved fathers are more likely to be emotionally secure, confident in new situations, and eager to explore their surroundings. And as the children grow, they are more sociable and ready to start school than children with less involved fathers. At school, children of involved fathers do better academically, have less behavior problems and are less likely to experience depression. For example, a study by the United States Department of Education found that children of highly involved fathers were forty-three percent more likely than other children to earn
mostly As and thirty-three percent less likely to repeat a grade (Winquist Nord & West, 2001.

According to the Father Involvement Research Alliance review, girls with involved fathers have higher self-esteem and are less likely to become pregnant in their teens, while boys with involved fathers show less aggression, less impulsivity, and more self-direction (Allen & Daly, 2007). As emerging adults, children of involved fathers are more likely to achieve higher levels of education, find success in their careers, have higher levels of self-acceptance and experience psychological well-being. Adults who had involved fathers are more likely to be tolerant and understanding, have supportive social networks made up of close friends, and have long-term successful marriages.

How does a father’s influence differ from a mother’s? Fathers and mothers have unique and complementary roles in the home, much like husbands and wives. “Fathers encourage competition, independence, and achievement. Mothers encourage equity, security, and collaboration.” Research related to parental and marital investment suggests that over time females and males develop different psychologies related to their distinct investments in mating and parenting, with men oriented more toward succeeding in mating and women oriented more toward succeeding in parenting.

Bjorklund and Jordan (2013) also suggest that women’s and men’s distinctive biological endowments and psychological orientations, evolving over time in connection with their distinctive reproductive strategies, also translate into different strengths when it comes to intimate relationships and parenting. Fathers, for instance, can translate their orientation toward “aggression, power, and dominance” into the protection of their

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daughters and – as a consequence – girls that grow up with their fathers are more likely to
delay sexual activity and childbearing.

Mothers, in turn, can translate their superior ability “to regulate their emotions” to
establish a strong attachment with their children; in turn this attachment provides their
children with a secure emotional base for navigating the emotional and social challenges
of life. Research data also points out that particular socio-cultural conditions favor higher
levels of both paternal and maternal investment and that a complex portrait of intimate
relationships suggests many areas of overlap between women and men, wives and
husbands and mothers and fathers (Bjorklund, & Jordan, 2013; Bjorklund & Pellegrini,
2002; Parke, 1996, 2013). These areas of difference and a range of biosocial reasons help
to account for the similarities and differences we find among today’s women and men

Because women and men engaging in intimate interpersonal relationships need to
consider internal dynamics as well as the external shape of their relationship, it serves
useful to negotiate roles and responsibilities with the ability to alter expectations
regarding partner contributions and distinctions. Women and men bring similar talents to
relationships, even while they typically retain distinctive gendered orientations. Hence, a
‘neotraditional’ set of arrangements characterizes the lives of most married women and
men, mothers and fathers in America. “‘Neo’ in the sense that husbands and fathers are
doing much more childcare now than they did forty years ago; most wives and mothers
work and most married parents endorse egalitarian gender role attitudes. But they are also
“traditional” in the sense that most mothers do not work full-time, mothers still do

41 Ross D. Parke is Distinguished Professor Emeritus of psychology and the director of the Center for
Family Studies at the University of California, Riverside.
significantly more childcare than fathers, and most married mothers indicate that they would prefer to work part-time or stay at home” (Marquardt et al., 2012; Wilcox & Kline, 2013; Wilcox & Nock, 2006).

Many women in the last thirty to forty years have been brought up to believe that they are or should be, ‘as good as the next man’, and in the process they have endured acute and unnecessary pain, frustration and disappointment. And when we look at the division of labor and see that there is still a significant divide in the number of women in leadership positions in the ideal world of power-sharing, women can feel like they have failed. But as Moir and Jessel (1991, p. 6) posit, they “have only failed to be like men.”

Accordingly, as Kass and MacIntyre ask us to consider our teleology, they would call attention to welcoming the complementary differences between women and men; asking women to contribute their specifically female gifts rather than striving for a surrogate masculinity. Biology and teleology can assist in recognizing the appreciation that sex has different origins, motives and significance in the context of female and male brains—especially as related to intimate interpersonal communicative relationships.

When we considers sex differences, we must also remember that females and males “inhabit” different cultures and that some behavioral sex differences are more marked when people are in social groups than when they are alone. Thus, questions about sex differences concern not just differences between individual females and males but also differences between female and male cultures (Maccoby 1998). Though the biosocial is an amalgamation of biological and social influence, it would be remiss to act as though these two areas of influence are without differentiation. There are numerous factors—cultural, parental, religious, political, familial—that play roles difficult to
enumerate yet one stands out as we see a narrative emerge through the biosocial approach: teleology.

**Consideration Of Teleology**

As eminent physician and professor emeritus Leon Kass\(^2\) notes: “under the reigning orthodoxy of modern natural science, thinking about the teleological side of nature is often discouraged. Instead, we are encouraged to forego explanations in terms of final causes (ends, purposes, or goals) or to ask about the “why” or “what for” rather than the “how” of things”, or even “wonder at all or just notice the seemingly purposive activities of all living things” (Kass, 1985, p. 250). Emptying discourse surrounding the differences between female and male of teleological concepts can be problematic and another example of MacIntyre’s Disquieting Suggestion.

As MacIntyre puts it in his *Phi Sigma Tau* Lectures: “Abstract these conceptions of truth and reality from [their] teleological framework, and you will thereby deprive them of the only context by reference to which they can be made fully intelligible and rationally defensible.”\(^3\) Abstraction from biological essentials is in essence abstraction from what women and men are created to be. MacIntyre asks that we rightly understand “there is a fundamental contrast between man-as-he-happens-to-be and man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-essential-nature…” If, as Moir and Jessel put it, we are a blank slate for cultural inscription (man-as-he-happens-to-be), we directly overlook the essential biological creation (man-as-he-could-be) leading to greater disconnect between expectation and experience.

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\(^2\) Leon R. Kass, M.D., is the Addie Clark Harding Professor Emeritus in the Committee on Social Thought and the College at the University of Chicago and the Madden-Jewett Chair at AEI.

\(^3\) MacIntyre’s lectures were published in 1990 as *First principles, final ends, and contemporary philosophical issues.*
MacInyre, in his Aristotelianism, asserts that ethics rely wholly on the teleological idea that human life has a proper end or character, and that human beings could not reach this natural end without preparation. Thus, the problem of the post-Enlightenment subjective philosophies. “There are precepts (biology and sociocultural) that instruct us how to move from potentiality to actualization, how to realize our true nature, and to reach our true end” (Hauerwas, 2007). In order to create greater alignment in intimate interpersonal communication, we need the biosocial narrative. “To defy them (the precepts) will be to be frustrated and incomplete, to fail to achieve that good of rational happiness which it is peculiarly ours as a species to pursue” (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 63).

Kass (1985) brings together the consideration of social influence seen as primary and how erosion of the biological fundamental can have enormous consequences on female and male intimate relationships:

Technologies and their scientific underpinnings threaten to erode the existence or at least the meaning and human significance of many of the naturally given boundaries, attributes, and relations that frame and structure human life—birth, father, mother, child, gender, lineage, embodiment, selfhood and identity, health and normality, aging, and death. What for example, does “mother” mean—and what can and should it mean for human affairs—if one woman donates the egg, another houses it for insemination, a third host the transferred embryo and gives birth to the baby, the fourth nurses it, a fifth rears it and a sixth has legal custody? And how is male distinguished from female: Is it by genotype (XX or XY), or external genitalia, or psychological outlook, or sexual preference,
or even none of the above because gender can be “reassigned” through reconstructive surgery? (p. 10)

Conclusion

MacIntyre’s understanding of erosion of narrative ground connects to what Kass calls out: “the erosion of these natural boundaries and definitions is both cause and effect of the much broader erosion of limits: the absence of any clear standards to guide the use of the enormous new powers” (1985, p. 11). This creates, in a time of narrative contention, a place where everything is in principle open to interpretation or invention. “Because all is alterable, nothing is deemed either respectably natural or unwelcomely unnatural, nothing and principal better or worse. Here lies the deepest danger of the new biology: limitless power—both unlimited in its extent and without clear limits or standards to guide its use” (Kass, 1985, p. 11) What MacIntyre would call for here is a deep need for narrative ground emerging through a greater and more robust understanding of our teleology.

Our expectations for intimate relationships are set by social definitions as well as experience. In more than just intimate contexts, roles in relationship tend to be complementary rather than egalitarian, as the meaning of the relationship grows from being in a complex relationship with another human being (Hendrick, 1988, p. 429). Therefore, it makes sense to revisit the equal status that women and men in intimate communicative relationships, as well as the equitable differences. The subsequent call for greater multiplicity of perspectives invites us to consider additional viewpoints that might
open up our thinking about roles women and men hold as wives and husbands and mothers and fathers in intimate interpersonal communication.

The biosocial approach to gender perspectives suggest that within intimate communication, complementary and reciprocal roles deserve consideration (Eagly, 1987; Eagly, Wood, & Deikman, 2000). For instance, understanding the biosocial perspective on gender development of roles brings better alignment to the disconnect between expectation and experience in intimate relationships (Maccoby, 2000; Sax, 2005; Wood & Eagly, 2002). The biosocial approach yields a more textured understanding of neuroscientific research exploring differences between women and men (Baron Cohen, 2003; Legato & Tucker, 2004; Maccoby, 1998).

The best argument for the acknowledgment of differences is that doing so would probably make us happier. The appreciation, for instance, that sex has different origins, motives, and significance in the context of the male and female brains, might make us better and more considerate husbands and wives. Likewise, the understanding that the roles of the father and mother are not interchangeable might make us better parents. Men and women could live more happily, understand and love each other better, organize the world to better effect, if we acknowledged our differences. (Moir & Jessel, 1991, p. 8)

We, as women and men, could then build our lives on the “twin pillars of our distinct sexual identities” (Moir & Jessel, 1991, p. 6). The strength of this understanding provides
solid ground through the alternative narrative of the biosocial. The aspect of difference between women and men is an interdisciplinary one, creating it a kind of cross-cultural communication, requiring compassion, flexibility and patience as we bring different philosophical notions of what questions to ask and how to go about answering them.

MacIntyre helps us to think about what it means to shift from an emotivist, individualistic view to understanding ourselves through narrative. He points to narrative and the need for understanding role in relation to *telos*; assisted through understanding female and male differences based on a biosocial ground. The biosocial perspective—nuanced beyond a sheer cultural or biological view of humanity—is additive, thoughtful and conducive to good thinking about intimate communicative relationships. An improved understanding of self through *telos*, narrative constitution, and the biosocial approach can lead to an applied virtue ethic in intimate interpersonal communication—a minimalist complementarian perspective.
CHAPTER 5

The coordinates of role and narrative, along with biosocial understandings of difference in women and men, suggest that a minimalist complementarian perspective can better align expectation and experience in intimate interpersonal communication. The chapter pursues a thorough understanding of minimalist complementarianism for intimate interpersonal communication, intended exclusively for private, intimate contexts.

In the previous chapter we see that roles associated with gender often follow alongside gender stereotypes, while gender roles often track the division of labor because people infer these traits from their observations of the sexes’ behaviors. Wood and Eagly assert that gender role expectations, which tend to be “consensual within cultures, influence behavior through proximal social psychological and biological processes, whereby (a) other people encourage gender-typical behavior and individuals conform to their own gender identities and (b) hormonal, reward, and cardiovascular mechanisms enable masculine and feminine behaviors (Huxley, 2007). In the previous chapter, neurological differences and reproductive differences as well as biochemical and circulatory differences were outlined and though reproductive differences are more noticeable the created, biological spectrum of difference bears close examination.

Complementarianism obviously suggests a different interpretation and point of view than the conventional wisdom today, which most often suggests that any complementarian social system is intrinsically unequal. For instance, the sexual division of labor itself is said to create sexual asymmetry and female subordination (Rosaldo & Lamphere, 1974). A different view is that “the sexual division of labor maybe fundamental to the genesis of sexual stratification, but it does not automatically lead to
female subordination” (Schlagel, 2006, p. 25). The data presented here supports the latter view—that sexual asymmetry is not automatic in a society or workplace or a household with a complementary sexual division of labor. Even though differential access of men and women to certain public roles existed in the past, present and may still exist in the future, nevertheless this access can be balanced, facilitating gender equity in minimalist complementarian households.

It is important to make plain or articulate the key distinction between equality between the sexes and distinction between roles. Thus, I submit that the status of female or male is identical, but that roles are distinct and complementary and that different roles may be part of hierarchies, but a role hierarchy is not the same things as status hierarchy. In other words, the status of a woman and a man is always identical—created equal and equitable—but within roles a hierarchy can and may or may not exist. Women are not complementary, but a wife is. Brother and sisters do not hold complementary roles, but rather hold equal status as children. The minimalist complementarian narrative provides an alternative for some inadequacies related to status and role for women and men—located intimately—and further research can only open up discoveries of, and explanations for a whole range of human conceptual and behavioral possibilities.

Theories used to account for sex and gender differences need to be grounded in empirical fact. Research should not be built around questions that lead us to find dominating men and submissive women, cultural devaluations of women's work, and inequality in the statuses and roles of women and men. Of course research concerning gender roles may in some instances reveal inequality of statuses and roles between women and men, but in other instances, it can reveal dyadic, complementary, and
reciprocal interactions between women’s and men’s roles. In intimate relationships the significance lies in roles and women and men moving into roles, those of wives and husbands, mothers and fathers.

In previous chapters we looked at the historical standpoint of expressive individualism and asked how MacIntyre might respond to this question: “how might a narrative view of the biosocial differences between women and men offer an alternative to intimate interpersonal communication and egalitarian orientations?” The answer we might offer is by understanding role in relationship to self, intimacy, and telos; roles in relationship often tend to be complementary rather than egalitarian, as the meaning of the relationship deepens from simply being in a complex relationship with another human being (Hendrick, 1988, p. 429). Therefore, it makes sense that revisiting the roles that women and men hold in intimate communicative relationships and the subsequent call for greater multiplicity of perspectives invites us to consider additional viewpoints that might open up our thinking about roles of women and men in intimate interpersonal communication.

The reality is that women have been significantly oppressed, both publicly and privately. Thus, we need first to acknowledge this oppression and secondly, recognize that an attribute of this oppression is an oversimplification of the complementary distinction. As I address intimate interpersonal relationship, the pivot point rests on maintaining a vital sense of reciprocity. It is hard to maintain hierarchy with genuine reciprocity or complementarity without genuine reciprocity. Maintaining sense of oneness is difficult if the primary aspect of complementary nature is a one up or one down perspective.
Because the biosocial approach to gender perspectives suggests that within intimate communication complementary and reciprocal roles deserve consideration, we see that the model of complementary or reciprocal social roles can be applied to marriage as the emergent place for role identity or role reciprocity (Parsons & Bales, 1956; Eagly, 1987; Eagly, Wood, & Diekman, 2000). As we continue to move ahead there is a persistent problem of misalignment and we need a better idea of how that might be put into practice. Understanding the biosocial approach to gender development of roles can create a greater connection between expectation and experience in intimate relationships (Parsons & Bales, 1956; Eagly, 1987; Sax, 2005, Wood & Eagly, 2002).

Biosocial views seem to suggest a complementary narrative of women and men based on (1) women and men as equal and image bearing: bearing the *imago Dei* [formed in the image of God] (Knight, 1985; McLaughlin, 2012; Piper & Grudem, 2012, pp. x, xv) (2) both equal, equitable and beneficial differences existing between men and women (Eagly, 1995; Moir & Jessel, 1991; Wood, 2011), and—given *imago dei* and given the reality that there are some equal, equitable and beneficial—then (3) these three distinctions point to distinct and varied contributions that men and women can bring to better align to expectation and experience.

Thus, through the work and research of the National Marriage Project (NMP) and related scholarship, we more thoroughly understand what women and men can bring to intimate interpersonal relationships in person and thru communication that aligns intimacy and the expectations associated with it. And while some metaphors are helpful, the biosocial perspective goes much deeper than delineating men and women as the pop culture metaphors of Gray’s *Mars and Venus* (1992/2012) and microwaves and slow
The distinct offerings that women and men bring to the table—garnered from the biosocial approach—allow space for conversation regarding complementarianism. For instance, we might think that in an intimate relationship feminine courage expects to be different from that of masculine courage, but we also note that it might look different—complementarianism brings different strengths to virtue structures and what becomes cultivated are roles and practices that correspond with the contributions that each sex can bring to intimate interpersonal relationships.

As suggested previously in this dissertation, this complementary perspective can be particularly useful within faith communities that hold to certain presuppositions and effectively can be a corrective for the static sex role perspectives that also are found with these traditions. For instance, a complementarian view may be publicly appropriate within faith communities that practice male leadership as a confessional community. However, McLaughlin could and most likely would argue that because of the public arena of faith communities women can and should be able to lead in these communities and as such, complementarianism in intimate relationships still applies.

The intimate interpersonal relationship grounded in the household is marriage—the relationship in life that could most benefit from a complementarian approach. And while Elliot offers a distinction between public and private that captures well a minimalist complementarianism, she would agree with McLaughlin’s assertion that women have a legitimate right to be leaders in public, outside of the church. Because this work is nonsectarian, and does not work from only those presuppositions, we can

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acknowledge that the misalignment of expectation and experience is not only found in these kind of relationships.

This project aims for a minimalist view, rather than a maximalist view, of complementarianism—while still remaining open to broader application. Because egalitarian views are dominant in framing intimate interpersonal relationships today, an understanding of complementarity, particularly in a minimalist way, requires more careful and robust treatment, including its connection to virtue structures. Bok (1995) would submit that a minimalist foundation helps us (1) avoid the imposition of values, (2) find a common ground and (3) ultimately look toward a reality tempered by the historical moment of today, rather than an abstract wish for a better tomorrow (Arnett & Arneson, 1999). In order to pursue the minimalist view and its application to a broad scope of people, this project obviously acknowledges that complementarianism will not work for everyone. Working on the widespread experience of misalignment in intimate interpersonal relationships, a more robust understanding of complementarity is offered through a carefully refined virtue structure.

I submit that the refinement lies in the careful understanding of what typical expectations are for intimate interpersonal relationships. The emerging postmodern question for intimate interpersonal communicative relationship lies in the disconnect between what men and women expect from an intimate interpersonal relationship and what they actually experience in an intimate interpersonal relationship. As individuals collect data from their past experiences and interactions with another person, they are constructing expectations about future relationships (Chelune, Robison, & Krommor, 1984).
Chelune et al. construct a definition of intimacy emphasizing expectation and the cognitive aspects of intimate experience; if the ‘experience data’ collection is based on a purely sociocultural view of sex differences—without the biological—people enter into intimate relationships with a false data set. Thus, experience seems misaligned—however, if we have a truer understanding of how women and men are created and how that difference is equitable and complementary as we approach roles of husband and wife, mother and father, we gain terrific insight… allowing for well-aligned, sustainable intimate relationships.

The differences in women and men’s communication are distinct and solidly researched. Gender-related patterns in romantic relationships are apparent in the ways that women and men approach intimacy, initiate different kinds of intimate communication interactions within their relationships and overall approach communication regarding their intimate relationship much differently (Gottman, 1994; Helgeson, Shaver, & Dyer, 1987; Rubin, 1983, p. 240; Tannen, 1990). By understanding that these differences are organic and fluid, we can see the flexible orientation of a complementarian narrative—and acknowledge that minimalist complementarianism recognizes that some of the differences in roles between women and men in intimate relationships as “essential,” while others are not. But what each relationship will look like is different; this alternative approach of complementarity is not a technique, a method or a set of rules, but rather an attempt to reflect on seeing realities within a complementarian perspective.

Often it seems as though the question of difference suggests an either/or perspective—egalitarian perspectives are flexible, while complementarian perspectives
are fixed. Can we rightly ask if virtues are gendered: Is magnanimity feminine and meanness masculine? Is generosity the province of men and avarice the province of women? Of course not. So, when we introduce real flexibility, support and adaptability into intimate relationships, we see a need for an alternative approach. And so we go back to how we question MacIntyre and his concept of narrative: “how might a narrative view of the biosocial differences between women and men offer an alternative to intimate interpersonal communication and egalitarian orientations?” This question is why pursuing a minimalist complementarian narrative for intimate IPC may be important.

**Complementarian Narrative**

The coordinates for women’s expectations in intimacy are articulated through a few key suppositions: (1) women want or expect certain things to be in place: (2) platonic relationships would not and do not represent the expectations for women and intimacy; and (3) that women’s expectations are not predicated primarily on whether they are married or not. So, how are these coordinates reflective of women’s expectations in intimacy?

For example, women desire and expect commitment before intimacy. Women use sex in trying to obtain commitment; they want their expression of commitment to be more than sexual relations. When they engage in sex on these terms, they hope that physical intimacy will be reciprocates by personal intimacy and commitment. But that expectation is rarely met in experience. Though sex is often the very means women use in trying to obtain commitment, there is a disorientation that occurs when women feel pressured to engage in sexual relationship prior to commitment. The tendency is for women to think that their expression of commitment by physical openness will be
reciprocated by commitment and not just sexuality. However, this is not often the experience. From an interpersonal communication perspective we presuppose that actual intimate communication is not yet accurately reflecting or representing the nature of the relationship, as intimacy cannot be mature if no commitment is in place.

How then is intimacy met for a woman? A complementarian narrative might say that if women want to have alignment in terms of expectations concerning intimacy, intimacy needs to be mature and commitment needs to be in place prior to sexual relations. And typically the conventional terms of cohabitation do not meet that standard. Nor does casual sex, nor do platonic relationships. Thus, offering compelling accounts of the sources of misalignment between expectation and experience allows place for a minimalist complementarian narrative.

In the text, A Return to Modesty, Shalit (1999) proposes a new response to how polarized the debate about sexual permissiveness had become—that people need to listen, really listen to the unhappiness of young adult women and see that after patriarchy and its rules and codes of conduct is taken off the table [for blame], what is left is a society which has lost its respect for female modesty. Research agrees, citing the vast difference between women and men and the requisite cost of sex, especially as the cost of sex is shown to be very low for emerging-adult men.

First, take the speed with which emerging-adult men say their romantic relationships become sexual: thirty-six percent add sex by the end of the second week of exclusivity; an additional thirteen percent do so by the end of the first month. A second indicator of cheap sex is the percentage of emerging-adult men’s sexual relationships—
thirty percent—that do not involve romance at all: no wooing, no dates, no nothing. Finally, significant numbers of emergent-adult women are participating in unwanted sex—either particular acts they dislike or more frequent intercourse than they would prefer or mimicking porn. This links directly to sexual economics and women’s “erotic capital” that can still be traded for attention, a job, perhaps a boyfriend, and certainly all the sex a woman may want, but it cannot assure love, intimacy and lifelong commitment (Baumeister & Vohs, 2004; Hakim, 2011).

Thus, arguing for a complementarian narrative does not subordinate female expectations for intimacy to male expectations for intimacy, but presents in turn a better argument for women retrenching and retaining control in initiating intimate relationships—one that is not hierarchical but instead is based on creating actual intimacy rather than equating mere copulation with human intimacy. Regarding this area of control, it is interesting to note that Regnerus and Uecker (2011) make the observation that one area in which emergent men are very much in charge is premarital heterosexual relationships, stating that what many young men wish for—access to sex without too many complications or commitments—carries the contemporary day. The rhetorical turn emerges when we understand that if young women were more fully in charge of how their relationships transpired, we would be seeing, on average, more impressive wooing efforts, longer relationships, fewer premarital sexual partners, shorter cohabitations, and more marrying going on.

As noted earlier, the shift of the balance of power in intimate relationships has been a long time coming. Throughout the courtship tradition of the late nineteenth and

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45 National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health).
46 Catherine Hakim, of the London School of Economics, receives credit for the term “erotic capital.”
47 National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health).
early 20th century, mothers arranged eligible young men to visit their daughters—here women are retaining control of initiating intimacy, with their expectations and desires ruling. There was no ‘going out’ and the relationship grew in the setting of the family home. As Bailey (2004) moves us chronologically through the 20th century we see [in the 20s and 30s] ‘going out’ becoming an option as families were often living in crowded living conditions, making it more difficult for men to ‘come calling’. Thus, women left their own comfortable realm of the home and shifted dating into the outside world—and into the hands of men.

Sessions Stepp (2013), Shalit (1999), and Simon (2012) agree by offering through their texts, outcomes of the subordination of female patterns to male patterns by telling emerging-adult women that casual sex based on the male model actually hinders their capacity for intimacy with men. Looking squarely at the damage caused by sexual permissiveness can help clear the way for celebrating the appropriate role of sexuality in intimate interpersonal relationships; by taking a careful look at the current trends and generational shifts shaped by conceptions of sexuality, we see it differs greatly from a committed covenantal ideal. Simon asserts that enlightened sexism claims women have gained social and economic equality with men and now being able to ‘have it all’ means not only career success and a happy family if she wants one, but the freedom to use her body and sexuality to get men to lust after her. Enlightened sexism celebrates the empowerment of women and is underpinned by the ability to view sex as commodity (Douglas, 2010; Simon, 2012, p. 139).

A complementarian narrative could offer the emerging-adult woman a sense that feminism and empowerment are not based on a question of their right to act like men, or
the desire to. Rather, it is the opportunity to choose whether to do that, based on what
they—and not a man or even their best friend—know what is right for them, regardless of
the implications, or expectations of society and peers. They [emerging adult-women]
would hear that being equal does not mean being the same, but brings forth a robust
equity. Being equitable means being able, as men are able, to choose their expectations
and hopes for intimacy in a way that is consistent with their values (Sessions Stepp, 2013,
p. 292). A complementarian narrative would offer the distinction of being equitable, to
embrace the differences.

It is a naïve sort of feminism that insists that women prove their ability to
do all the things that men do. This is a distortion and a travesty. Men have
never sought to prove that they can do all the things women do. Why
subject women to purely masculine criteria? Women can and ought to be
judged by the criteria of femininity, for it is in their femininity that they
participate in the human race. And femininity has its limitations. So has
masculinity.” This is what we’ve been talking about. To do this is not to
do that. To be a woman is not to be a man. To be married is not to be
single—which may mean to not have a career. To marry one man is not to
marry all the others. A choice is a limitation. (Elliot, 1976, p. 75)

A minimalist, nuanced view of the complementarian narrative preserves us from an
oversimplification of overall sameness in public and private. The choices that face
women and men’s intimate relationships are textured and many, thus we see Because the
goal is to offer an alternative communicative approach to intimate interpersonal
relationships, I focus on the roles within sustainable intimate relationships—wives and husbands, mothers and fathers. And by constructing a view of complementarianism through a good/better/best structure we see multiple approaches that are workable, doable, and in the best cases desirable. An oversimplification of either/or is avoided by understanding how fixed and/or flexible complementarianism or egalitarianism can be. We could, for example, conclude that a flexible egalitarian position, though textured to understand the equality of women and men is not as good as complementarianism because egalitarian expectations do not harmonize as well with biosocial realities.

Likewise a complementarian narrative could offer the emerging-adult man a sense that feminism and empowerment are not threats to the masculine self or a loss of male entitlement, but rather an opportunity for men to flourish and succeed in their masculinity, engaging deeply into relationship. John Gottman, professor emeritus of psychology at the University of Washington observes:

I believe the emotionally intelligent husband is the next stop in social evolution. This does not mean that he is superior to other men in personality, upbringing, or moral fiber. He has simply figured out something very important about being married that the others haven’t—yet. And that is how to honor his wife and convey his respect to her. It is really that elementary. (Gottman & Silver, 1999, p. 109)

The complementarian man values the influence and insight of his partner allowing communication without insecurity. He can offer respect and emotional connection
because he understands his role. As does she; much like a job well done is one in which one knows what is expected of them, so goes the relationship well done. A healthy home base allows for flourishing in other areas of life.

**An Open Space for Complementarianism**

Interpersonal communication is central to intimacy and intimate relationships. The way two people interact when they first meet can either ignite or extinguish hopes of future relationships (Davis, 1973). Patterns of a couple’s communication is associated with what partners think about each other, how they generally behave toward each other, and how they feel about their relationship (Duck, 1994; Fitzpatrick, 1988; Gottman & Levenson, 1998; Knapp, 1984; Noller, 1984; Sillars, Roberts, Leonard, & Dun, 2000). Their patterns of intimate communicative interaction can determine whether or not the intimate relationship continues; communication not only reflects feelings and expectations within the relationship, but it also defines it (Duck, 1994; Gottman, 1994; Knapp, 1984).

For example, in their extensive examination of communication theory, sex and gender literature, Dan Canary and Tara Emmers-Sommer (1997) offered the following conclusions regarding sex and gender differences. First, women, compared to men, express a greater range of emotions, such as sadness, fear, love, happiness, and anger. Women are also more inclined than men to disclose personal information, such as their personal opinion or details of their personal history. Compared to men, women are more likely to use touch to convey feelings of closeness; these feelings could be sexual in nature, but not necessarily. Interestingly, women are more likely to exercise power strategies than men.
Compared to men, women are more likely to engage in manipulative behaviors and to exercise negative and confrontational conflict behaviors. Finally, women are more likely than men to enact self-disclosure behaviors, engage in loyalty toward their partner and relationship, and enact task-sharing in an effort to maintain their relationship. The authors also found that women, even in dual-career couples, tend to do the lion's share of the household chores and childrearing duties. Thus, communicative differences do exist between women and men; however, the extensive literature on sex and gender differences indicates that the differences are far outweighed by the similarities.

As we examine the communicative interaction within intimate relationships, it is important to acknowledge that the research and theory offered here is by no means comprehensive. The effort here is to include the theoretical findings that capture the spirit of intimate interpersonal interaction in couple types. Thus, I will focus on Fitzpatrick’s typology.

Fitzpatrick is credited with the establishment of couple types, as she developed a typology for characterizing married couples that reflects variations in the patterns of behaviors and beliefs reported by partners (1977). Her model focuses on the associations between partners’ ongoing patterns of interaction and marital satisfaction and using the Relational Dimension Instrument (RDI), Fitzpatrick identified three couple types: traditional, independent, and separate. It is important to consider the couple types for three key reasons: First, embedded within the couple types are demonstrations of adherence to gender roles. Second, couple types relate to how spouses respond in conflict situations, which, third, holds implications for couple communication patterns and for the satisfaction/dissatisfaction of the relationship.
Traditional couples are defined as those having relatively conventional ideological values about marriage; interdependent, non-assertive, and sharing time, space, leisure together. Independent couples hold nonconventional values about relational life, they do not make assumptions about roles within the relationship and have difficulty negotiating a daily schedule. They also maintain separate physical spaces and tend to engage in, rather than avoid conflict. The third type, the separate couple lean toward ambivalence. They hold conventional orientations toward marriage by nonconventional orientations toward individual freedom. They are assertive and have less companionship and sharing than the other couple types.

**Traditional couple-types.** Men and women who are traditionals are highly interdependent and emphasize doing things together versus autonomously. Traditionals hold traditional gender role beliefs (e.g., the woman takes the husband's last name when married) and hold the stability of the relationship in high esteem. Traditionals use positive communication behaviors during conflict (e.g., discuss issues keeping the relationship in mind, not using threats), tend not to argue over petty issues, but do openly engage about salient issues.

**Independent couple-types.** Independents value both connection and personal autonomy. They actively discuss many aspects of their relationship and hold nontraditional beliefs about relationships (i.e., do not espouse the belief that the "man is in charge.") Independents actively engage in conflict over minor and major issues, argue for personal positions, and offer reasons for accepting
their positions rather than rely on a one-up/one-down solution by virtue of gender.

Separate couple-types. Separates, unlike independents or traditionals, are not interdependent and avoid interaction, particularly conflict. Separates are likely to withdraw or give in during early stages of conflict because active engagement in conflict involves interaction and a degree of interdependence. However, when separates do engage in conflict, the interaction can be quite hostile.

Figure 5.1 Interpersonal Communication Couple-Types (Fitzpatrick, 1988; Witteman & Fitzpatrick, 1986)

The irony or paradox lies in the fact that while interpersonal communication research says separate and independent couple-types are progressive, interesting and often even desirable, research bears witness to the continuing fact that the traditional couple-type has more successful intimate relationships (Fitzpatrick, 1977, 1988; Gottman & Levenson, 1988, NMP, 2012). People embracing traditional feminine and masculine roles and holding patterns of traditional couples, are able to effectively practice the ‘traditional’ patterns of marriage, which are highly satisfactory. From the communication perspective a complementarian approach reflects itself in what the National Marriage Project terms the ‘neotraditional’ relationship—this relationship
produces higher levels of satisfaction and intimacy in terms of communication patterns rather than role expectations.

It is true research posits that relationships where traditionally masculine men are paired with a traditionally feminine women tend to be less successful, or are, as Ickes (1993) states, “far from optimal.” This is due to our lack of ability to truly understand changing gender roles and embrace them and by enforcing boys and girls, young men and women to enact the traditional ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ characteristics and communication styles, we set them up for failure. As they begin an intimate relationship they enact these ‘traditional gender roles’ in the early, formative stages and as the relationship progresses, it becomes more and more unsatisfying to hide the fact neither party is happy with their role. I do not disagree with Ickes on the fact that relationships where traditionally masculine men paired with traditionally feminine women tend to be ‘far from optimal.’

However, I believe there is a view not yet taken into consideration: perhaps it is not the roles that are the problem—but that emerging adults feel as though the ‘traditional roles’ should not fit—that there is a societal expectation for them that they cannot obtain or meet by holding those gendered roles. In the previous chapters research is shown to document the fact that most emerging adults—women and men—are being encouraged to wait, find themselves, be financially stable and complete the sowing of wild oats before commitment. Yet, in doing so, we forget the principle of at some point, reaping what we sow. When we focus on expressive individualism, how much harder is it then, to break away from self-focus and offer and give to the other in intimacy? The cost of expressive individualism is much higher than simply delayed marriage or a retreat from
childcenteredness—it is a narrative grounded on self, standing above others that offers little alternative toward establishing a sustainable committed relationship.

Viewing the complementarian model within the marital household narrows our understanding, allowing true reflection on how it functions within the family. As we examine the circumstances of intimate communicative relationships, we identify factors that impinge or enhance the sustainability of the intimate relationship. In *Coming Apart*, social analyst Charles Murray (2013) speaks to the more affluent—those getting married and having children—of failing to “preach what they practice”, thus losing the opportunity to teach and learn a more robust narrative and break the cycle:

The new upper class still does a good job of practicing some of the virtues, but it no longer preaches them. It has lost self-confidence in the rightness of its own customs and values, and preaches nonjudgmentalism instead. They don’t want to push their way of living onto the less fortunate, for who are they to say that their way of living is really better? It works for them, but who is to say it will work for others? Who are they to say that their way of living is virtuous and others’ ways are not? (p. 293)

What Murray is suggesting is seemingly common sense teaching: to get an education, get married, and have children—in that order—regardless of demographics. If research has proven for over three decades that children (who grow up to be the adults of America) fare far better in a household of married parents, why does it seem this is not being encouraged and touted?
There is no fact that has been established by social science literature more convincingly than the following: all variables considered, children are best served when reared in a home with a married mother and father (Byrd, 2004). David Popenoe summarizes the research nicely: “social science research is almost never conclusive, yet in three decades of work as a social scientist, I know of few other bodies of data in which the weight of evidence is so decisively on one side of the issue: on the whole, for children, two-parent families are preferable to single-parent and step-families” (1996, p. 176). Children navigate developmental stages more easily, are more solid in their gender identity, perform better; in academic tasks at school, have fewer emotional disorders and become better functioning adults when they are reared by dual-gender parents (Byrd, 2004; Cromwell & Leper, 1994; Popenoe, 1996; Wilcox, 2011). This conclusion, supported further by a plethora of research spanning decades, clearly demonstrates gender-linked differences in child-rearing are protective for children—in other words, men and women contribute differently to the healthy development of children.

Research has repeatedly supported the conclusion that children of parents who are sex-typed are more competent (Baumrind, 1982), and that the most effective parenting is highly expressive and highly demanding (Baumrind, 1991). Byrd (2004) insists that the type of parenting matters, “highly expressive, instrumental parenting provides children with a kind of communion characterized by inclusiveness and connectedness, as well as the drive for independence and individuality.” These essential contributions to the optimum development of children are virtually impossible for a man or woman alone to combine effectively (Cromwell & Leper, 1994; Wilcox & Kline, 2013). The social perspective is undeniable—children learn about female-male relationships through the
modeling of their parents. And parental relationships provide children with a model of marriage—whether good or ill. Marriage is the most meaningful relationship that the vast majority of individuals will have during their lifetimes, hence the importance of establishing a minimalist complementarian narrative within the household of marriage—a place of unduplicated influence.

We cannot understand modern marriage unless we grasp this central fact: “The women getting, and staying, married are the most economically independent women in the history of the nation. Independence, rather than dependence, underpins the new marriage” (Reeves, 2014). Traditional marriage does need to be turned on its head, though not by acting as if past narratives are not important, but rather by attentiveness to the needs of today. If women and men were able to sustain intimate, committed interpersonal relationships and research proved that more relationships were lasting and healthy because of the changing tide concerning gender roles, sexual permissiveness and the modern family, that would be one thing. But it does not. Research is proving that emerging-adult women and men—the backbone of society—are floundering. They remain ‘adolescents’ because they do not feel capable or prepared, to begin a marriage or a family. They lack a sense of self, though they focus on it more than any other generation.

American marriage is not dying, but undergoing a kind of metamorphosis, stimulated by the virtual disappearance of low-skilled male jobs as well as change in the economic and social status of women. The decline of sustainable intimate relationships is, I believe, tied to a cycle that emerges from the sexual permissiveness of the 1960’s and 1970s and moves through the feminist response of the same time period emerging on the
other side of the 2000s with data that is not encouraging. There is a greater lack of fathers in America now than at any other time in history. Fatherlessness is at the core of this decline, but dig deeper. Why? Because men are vital. What they bring to the proverbial table cannot be brought by women.

A pattern of irresponsibility has resulted in an astonishing state of fatherlessness, a state that has consequences far beyond those we are now seeing evidenced in research. Fatherlessness brings with it a host of baggage: a loss of ground, ground for integrity, ground for solid values, a foundation of ambiguous morality, and a less than concrete confidence in self. This lack of confidence results in young people making decisions without counting the cost, without viewing the future as something to be trained for, without the courage to stand for what they believe is right, or even figure out what they believe. We commonly understand that what we do can cost us, but often we forget that what we do not do also has a cost.

So, taking a look at what women and men have to contribute to intimate relationships is helpful here. Wilcox and Nock (2006) assert that organizing work and family and household along egalitarian lines can predict a higher level of marital quality and stability. The gender model of marriage suggest that husbands and wives are happier when they take a gendered approach to marriage, with wives specializing more in nurturing and husbands specializing more in breadwinning (Maccoby, 1998; Rhoads, 2004; Wilcox & Nock, 2006).

Richard Reeves, policy director for the Center on Children and Families at the Brookings Institution, argues that marriage has been refashioned along largely egalitarian lines. Reeves (2014) writes that feminism and economic change have “dealt fatal blows
to the traditional model of marriage” where “husbands bring home the bacon and wives cook it.” He names a new marriage model—the high-investment parenting (HIP) model. In this model, both wives and husbands tackle family life in an egalitarian spirit, “recasting family responsibilities, with couples sharing the roles of both child-raiser and money-maker” — as the dominant model of married family life for the 21st century.

It is worth pointing out that consistent with data, the majority of married parents prefer a traditional or neo-traditional work-family strategy where the mother takes the lead in nurturing and the father takes the lead in providing for the family (Amato, Booth, Johnson, & Rogers, 2007; Maccoby, 1998; Wilcox & Kline, 2013; Wilcox & Nock, 2006). And couples that reverse this pattern—that is, nontraditional couples where wives outwork their husbands—are significantly more likely to have husbands who are unhappy and considering a divorce. Therefore, consistent with the gender model of marriage, women and men enjoy happier, healthier marriages when they avoid nontraditional work-family strategies.

Regardless of the cultural requirements for types of marriage, whether egalitarian, nontraditional or neo-traditional, separate or independent, the most important thing to consider is the fixedness or rigidity of the narrative. Often it seems as though the question of difference or approach suggests an either/or perspective—egalitarian perspectives are flexible, while complementarian perspectives are fixed. I would like to suggest that both complementarian and egalitarian models in rigidity are undesirable and do not offer a path to healthy, sustainable intimate relationships. And while having a communicated approach may offer some benefits because the expectations are articulated, it is the manner of the approach that matters.
Egalitarian models are generally characterized [as mentioned earlier and more thoroughly in chapter one] by wives and husbands equally sharing day-to-day decisions, tasks, chores, bills, parenting, et cetera. At first glance this model seems the most desirable as society often aims for a fifty-fifty split between women and men. We could call this model the good, yet not the best. However, this model, fixed and rigid, can be the worst if it does not allow space for each partner to excel in their giftings and/or their natural tendencies. Complementarian models, most often associated with religion, may also be the worst kind of model, if stifling and unyielding towards personhood; what wife would want to submit to authority of a husband who thinks she has no place to speak? The harshness of these two models are their commonality.

Yet, there is a better approach. Creation has at its very core a fundamental theme of polarities—rule and submission, power and passivity, generativity and receptivity just to name a few. Representative of these interactions is difference, interlocking opposites—this is the base for complementarity. By understanding difference as organic and fluid, we can see the flexible orientation of a complementarian narrative—and acknowledge that minimalist complementarianism recognizes that some of the differences in roles between women and men in intimate relationships as “essential,” while others are not. But what each relationship will look like is different; this alternative approach of complementarity is not a technique, a method or a set of rules, but rather an attempt to reflect on seeing intimate interpersonal realities within a complementarian perspective.

Complementarity is readily observable in differing parenting styles of mothers and fathers. Not only are fathers’ styles highly complementary to the styles of mothers, but research indicates that the fathers’ involvement in the lives of children is essential for
optimal child-rearing (Cromwell & Leper, 1994; Popenoe, 1996; Wilcox & Kline, 2013). For example, complementarity is provided by mothers who are flexible, warm and sympathetic, and fathers who are more directive, predictable and consistent. Rossi notes that mothers are better able to read an infant’s facial expressions, handle with tactile gentleness, and soothe with the use of voice, while fathers tend to emphasize overt play more than caretaking (Rossi, 1987). This play in various forms among infants is critical for later development. Wilcox notes that a father’s input differs from a mother’s in at least four ways: playing, encouraging risk, protecting, and disciplining.48

Research done by Utah State sociologist Jeffrey Dew and W. Bradford Wilcox, director of the National Marriage Project, indicates that the ratio of maternal to paternal primary child care among married parents fell from 5.6 in 1975 to 2.2 in 1990s and has since stayed there.49 This means that about sixty-nine percent of child-care among married couples is done by married mothers today, a figure that parallels the most recent estimate of the division of child-care offered by the Pew Research Center. Pew estimates that married mothers also do about sixty-eight percent of the housework. There is a continuing divergence in the meaning of and carrying out of the day-to-day intimate relationship.

Similar patterns can be found when it comes to the amount of time that married fathers and mothers devote to the paid labor force. Married fathers are responsible for about sixty-five percent of their households’ hours in the paid labor force (thirty-nine hours per week), while wives perform thirty-five percent (twenty-one hours per week),

48 Wilcox quoted in Reeves, 2014.
49 W. Bradford Wilcox is director of the National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia and a senior fellow at the Institute for Family Studies. This is adapted from an article that appeared at www.family-studies.org. See also Wilcox & Kline, 2013.
according to the Pew Research Center (2013). Unsurprisingly, married fathers also take the lead when it comes to breadwinning; in 2012 married fathers earned about sixty-nine percent of their families’ income, according to data from the American Community Survey\textsuperscript{50}, and this pattern has been fairly constant since the ‘Great Recession’.

Research related to parental and marital investment suggests that over time males and females develop different psychologies related to their distinct investments in mating and parenting, with men oriented more toward succeeding and mating and women oriented more toward succeeding and parenting. Bjorklund and Jordan (2013) also suggest that men and women’s distinctive biological endowments and psychological orientations, which evolved over time in connection with their distinctive reproductive strategies, also translate into different strengths when it comes to relationships and parenting.

Fathers, for instance, can translate their orientation toward “aggression, power, and dominance” into the protection of their daughters and – as a consequence – girls that grow up with their fathers are more likely to delay sexual activity and childbearing (Bjorkland & Jordan, 2013). Mothers, in turn, can translate their superior ability “to regulate their emotions” to establish a strong attachment with their children; in turn this attachment provides their children with a secure emotional base for navigating the emotional and social challenges of life (Bjorkland & Jordan, 2013).

Research data also point out that particular socio-cultural conditions favor higher levels of both paternal and maternal investment and that a complex portrait of intimate relationships suggests many areas of overlap between women and men, mothers and

\textsuperscript{50} American Community Survey—found through analysis of the NMP at http://www.nationalmarriageproject.com. Available at: http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml.
fathers—some areas of difference and a range of biosocial reasons that help to account for the similarities and differences we find among today’s women and men (Bjorklund & Jordan, 2013; Bjorklund & Pellegrini, 2002, Parke, 1996, 2013). Because women and men engaging in intimate interpersonal relationships need to consider internal dynamics as well as the external shape of their relationship, it serves useful to negotiate roles and responsibilities with the ability to alter expectations regarding partner contributions and distinctions. This fluidity is a hallmark of complementarianism.

Over the second half of the 20th century, the United States saw widespread change in three distinct areas: women’s labor force participation, in the time that fathers and mothers diverted to their children, and in public attitudes toward the public and private roles of women and men (Bianchi, Robinson, & Milkie, 2007; Bradbury & Katz, 2005; Hakim, 2000, Wilcox & Kline, 2013). Women and men bring similar talents to relationships, even while they typically retain distinctive gendered orientations; the ‘neotraditional’ set of arrangements characterizes the lives of most married mothers and fathers in America.

Within the U.S. most married mother’s ideal approach to marriage and family tends toward the “neo-traditional”. Research shows that more than three-quarters of married mothers do not wish to work full-time: fifty-three percent prefer part-time work and twenty-three percent prefer to be stay-at-home mothers. This stands in marked contrast to married fathers: seventy-five percent of them think working full-time is ideal and thirteen percent prefer part-time work, according to The American Community Survey data (Parker & Wang, 2013). (See Figure 5.2).
Through data gathered and analyzed by and through the NMP, I posit that three key themes—providing space for an alternative minimalist complementarian approach—appear to develop:

First, many married mothers and fathers are structuring their modern families around a “moderately neo-traditional approach” to family life (Wilcox & Kline, 2013, pp. 12, 13, 272). Defined by Bradford Wilcox and Dew (2013, p. 272), this approach is “‘neo’ in the sense that fathers are doing much more childcare now than they did forty years ago; most mothers work and most married parents endorse egalitarian gender role attitudes. But they are also “traditional” in the sense that mothers still do markedly more childcare than fathers, most mothers do not work full-time, and most married mothers...
indicate that they would prefer to work part-time or stay at home” (Wilcox & Nock, 2006).

Secondly, there is an increasing heterogeneous approach in family/work arrangements as well as in ideal expectations for intimate relationships among today’s married families than in the past: “Significant minorities of couples organize their lives along traditional lines (he works, she stays at home) or along egalitarian lines (both work full-time and share child care and housework in fairly equal ways) (Taylor, Funk, & Clark, 2008; Wilcox & Kline, 2013). And thirdly, family-minded women are likely to place emphasis on finding and committing to men with decent employment prospects; the practicality of having a husband with a solid job can enable them to fulfill any aspirations they may have of part-time work, scaling back work hours, or leaving the labor force for a period of time, if and when children come along (Haltzman & DiGeronimo, 2009; Haltzman, Holstein, & Moss, 2007; NMP, 2012).

Eleanor Maccoby, the distinguished feminist psychologist, concludes her book, *The Two Sexes* (1998), by pointing out that:

It is probably not realistic to set a fifty-fifty division of labor between fathers and mothers in the day-to-day care of children as the most desirable pattern toward which we should strive as a social goal. We should consider the alternative view: that equity between the sexes does not have to mean exactly quality in the sense of the two sexes having exactly the same lifestyles and exactly the same allocation of time. (p. 314)
The minimalist complementarian approach recognizes the distinctive contributions of women and men and encourages women and men to draw on both their gender-neutral and gender-specific talents as they engage in intimate relationships. This approach allows women and men to embrace a degree of gender specialization, especially as it contributes to juggling work and family responsibilities. Wilcox and the NMP (Wilcox & Kline, 2013, p. 301) report finding that most couples are happy with at least a measure of gender specialization. It is key to note however, that shared responsibilities and shared parenting need not mean that men approach intimate relationships in precisely the same way that women do, nor should fathers approach parenthood in the same way as mothers do. It is in the recognition of difference that true equity has place.

**Conclusion**

For many of us, there is no longer a shared script when it comes to marriage, working family, and home life, though there is a continuing divergence. The sacrifices that come with intimate relationships and/or parenthood can be mystifying for adults who may have spent a decade or more living outside of a family structure and have grown accustomed to an adult, individual lifestyle. I believe that evidence regarding the biosocial perspective and the alternative of a minimalist complementarian approach lends heuristic value to intimate interpersonal communication studies.

I also hope reflection and consideration of these findings will help make intimate interpersonal relationships more sustainable and make the transition from the emergent-adults’ expressive individualism toward committed intimate relationship, easier and more enjoyable. The aim is to better navigate the critical transition into full adult intimacy and
sustainable relationships through a richer understanding of current trends, challenges, and opportunities through consideration of the biosocial differences of women and men. We gain valuable insight into creating and maintaining healthy, sustainable intimate interpersonal relationships by examining the evolutionary and biological underpinnings of women and men and considering from a social science perspective how intimate relationships are and are not gendered.

By offering women and men insight into gender differences in relationships, we provide women and men with a new appreciation of the unique contributions that they both make to the welfare of the intimate relationship. In Haltzman’s words: “efforts should be made to educate society at large, and parents in particular, that gender differences… are real, and rather than be extinguished or ignored, they should be embraced” (2013, p. 318).

Based on our understanding of the predominant forms of cohabitation, adults’ interpersonal intimacy is most commonly found in marriage. As we focus on sustainable intimate interpersonal relationships, the pivot point is maintaining a vital sense of reciprocity. Thus, it is very difficult to maintain sense of oneness if the primary aspect of complementary nature is a one up or one down perspective. The kind of complementarity in intimacy, advocated here as an alternative perspective, is more correlated to egalitarianism than to chain of command.

A large percentage of women, if they knew genuine reciprocity would characterize their intimate relationships, would not be concerned if it was egalitarian or complementarian—in fact genuine reciprocity may be more steadying in complementarian than in egalitarian relationships. Reciprocity directly correlates with
equity, as they both recognize difference. Equality, on the other hand, can be difficult to determine. It cannot truly mean that women and men are two halves of an hourglass. Jacques Barzun offers that superior and inferior can be determined only with respect to a single quality for a single purpose… men are incommensurable and must be deemed equal (2002). And while all men created equal holds in political arenas for a single quality for a single purpose, it is not desirable in intimate interpersonal relationships—a unique union of two unique people, made differently in order that they might become one. Perhaps Aristotle’s term ‘proportional equality’ fits better than equality, as we address equity and reciprocity within realm of intimate interpersonal relationships (1130b-1132b).

Consequently as we move from egalitarian toward the complementarian alternative, we see reciprocity as primary form of equity. Marriage represents a new level of mutual commitment and as women and men share lives, expectations, experiences and households they find a thread of communicative disconnect throughout. A minimalist complementarian approach reflects the fact that women and men complement each other in our equality, equity and differences, while also suggesting both equality and beneficial differences between women and men. This minimalist view applied to the intimate relationship of marriage holds that both women and men are equal in status and have different and complementary roles as wife and husband, mother and father.

The work of this chapter’s focus on the biosocial is to suggest a complementary narrative of women and men based on (1) women and men as equal and image bearing: bearing the *imago Dei* [formed in the image of God] (Knight, 1985; McLaughlin, 2012;

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51 Best quoted in Elliot, E. *Let me be a woman.*
Piper & Grudem, 2012, pp. x, xv); (2) both equal, equitable and beneficial differences existing between men and women (Eagly, 1995; Moir & Jessel, 1991; Wood, 2011), and—given *imago dei* and given the reality that there are some equal, equitable and beneficial—then (3) these three distinctions point to distinct and varied contributions that men and women can bring to better align to expectation and experience.

This project is suggesting a kind of reorientation that does not result in one kind of technique or viewpoint or methodology. A complementarian perspective does not necessarily advocate for complementarian*ism*, but advocates trying to bring legitimate human experiences of intimacy into better alignment—to better align expectations of intimacy and experiences of intimacy for both women and men. What minimalist means is that people work this out differently as they work from different philosophical, theological, and political perspectives, and that a minimalisit complementarian view is hospitable to a number of those different kinds of perspectives.

Overall, this project, by employing inquiry from the perspective of rhetoric and philosophy of communication brings together a body of natural and social scientific evidence, interprets it through narrative understanding of what it means to be human, and shows the manifold ways that intimate interpersonal relationships are transformative events and should be part of larger narrative. These realities suggest that a minimalist complementarian viewpoint on intimate interpersonal relationships is merited.
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