

## **TRANSITION TO MARRIAGE: A LITERATURE REVIEW**

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*The effective design and successful implementation of programs that target the transition to marriage has been limited in the family life education field. Some researchers have called for more of a family life education focus on newlyweds. In order to expand our understanding of this important transition, a review of the existing literature on the transition to marriage would be a significant contribution to family life researchers and educators. The present article synthesizes the available information that is germane to our understanding of the transition to marriage by highlighting the salient intrapersonal, interpersonal, familial, and social developmental issues facing couples making the marital transition in order to conduct future research and design relevant family life education curricula.*

Surprisingly, there is limited data on a couples' first year of marriage, couples' preparation and readiness for marriage (Holman & Li, 1997; Larson & Holman, 1994), and how couples' relationships change as they progress through courtship and into marriage (Huston, McHale, & Crouter, 1986; Huston, Surra, Fitzgerald, & Cate, 1981). Thus, the design and successful implementation of programs that target newlywed couples have been lacking in the family life education field, although some researchers have called for more of a family life education focus on newlyweds (Mace, 1982).

In order to expand our understanding of this important transition, a review of the existing literature on the transition to marriage is a significant contribution to family life researchers and educators. Therefore, the present paper synthesizes the available information that is germane to our understanding of the transition to marriage. An additional goal is to highlight for family life educators some of the salient intrapersonal, interpersonal, familial, and social developmental issues facing couples making the marital transition in order to conduct future research and design relevant family life education curricula. Cate and Lloyd (1988) have indicated that courtships vary in their progression to marriage due to these developmental issues.

### The Transition to Marriage: A Developmental Task

There is a burgeoning body of literature discussing families in relation to their developmental phase, and in referring to marriage in developmental terms (Carter & McGoldrick, 1989). The family life cycle perspective addresses the nodal events related to the ongoing structural entrances and exits of family members using a framework of developmental transitional periods (Carter & McGoldrick; Duvall, 1971; Hill & Rodgers, 1964). A transition is defined as the passage from one ending state to another beginning state (Bridges, 1980). Although many family life cycle transitions like the onset to marriage, parenting, and retirement are normative and anticipated, previous researchers have suggested that the individual and the

family system can still experience a great amount of stress and difficulty in managing these transitions (Carter & McGoldrick; Hadley, Jacob, Milliones, Caplan, & Spitz, 1974).

Marriage qualifies as a life cycle transition that is both normative and anticipated, and yet, has the potential to be highly stressful (Boss, 1988). According to McGoldrick (1989), becoming a couple is one of the most complex and difficult transitions of the family life cycle even though it is often perceived as the least complicated and most joyous. This romanticized view of the transition to marriage may contribute to a couple's lack of adequate preparation and subsequent difficulty and distress during the transition. Many people consider marriage as the unimpeded, blissful joining of two individuals. However, Carter and McGoldrick (1989) have suggested that marriage really represents the merger of two entire systems combining together in developing a new, third family system.

### Intrapersonal Developmental Issues

Intrapersonal issues like personality characteristics, attitudes, beliefs, values, marital expectations, and degree of idealization significantly effect an individual's and subsequently a couple's transition to marriage.

Personality Characteristics. Personality researchers and theorists have indicated that the development course of an individual's personality may have genetic origins and predispose an individual's personality to remain the same or deteriorate over the life span (Reiss, 1995). Costa and McCrae (1988) have reported that data of many longitudinal studies has indicated that "aging itself has little effect on personality" (p. 862). Regardless of personality etiology, numerous studies have found that the absence and/or presence of positive/negative personality characteristics affected the stability and satisfaction outcomes of marriage (Vargha, 1992-1993). Marriage to a similar other promotes consistency in the intraindividual organization of personality attributes across middle adulthood (Caspi & Herbener, 1990).

Botwin, Buss, and Shackelford (1997) and Holman and Li (1997) reported that newlyweds' personalities do play an important role in the courtship/mating process with marriage partners selecting mates with similar personality characteristics to their own ideals. Similarity allows for more familiar patterns of communication, empathy, and understanding (Antill, 1983; Buss, 1984; Kurdek & Smith, 1987; Lesnick-Oberstein & Cohen, 1984). Cate and Lloyd (1992) found that individuals who were psychologically healthy (i.e., emotionally stable) were more likely to be maritally satisfied than those individuals who were psychologically unhealthy. Kurdek (1991) stated that discrepancies in reported personality scores of newlyweds influenced their reported levels of marital quality. Holden (1991) indicated that personality priorities that were almost exclusively complimentary (i.e., opposite) rather than symmetrical (i.e., similar) related to the subsequent pursuit of marital therapy of couples.

Kim, Martin, and Martin (1989) and Levine and Henessy (1990) found that personality factors differentiated stable from unstable marriages. Stable marriages were more similar in intelligence, protension, radicalism, tender-mindedness, mutual trust, acceptance, enthusiasm, and genuineness. Personality factors that reduce the likelihood of stability and satisfaction have included the lack of warmth and extraversion (Levine & Henessy); passive-aggression (Slavik, Carlson, & Sperry, 1998); borderline pathologies (Paris & Braverman, 1995); bipolar disorders (Peven & Schulman, 1998); feelings of insecurity, unfairness, depreciation, and powerlessness (Begin, Sabourin, Lussier, & Wright, 1997); disagreeableness, emotional instability, inconsiderateness, and physical abuse (Botwin et al., 1997; Kosek, 1996; Shackelford & Buss, 1997; Vargha, 1992-1993); chemical abuse (Leonard & Jacob, 1988); depression (Cohan &

Bradbury, 1997; Davila & Bradbury, 1997; Fals-Stewart, Birchler, Schafer, & Lucente, 1994; Katz, Beach, Smith, & Myers, 1997); neuroticism (Karney & Bradbury, 1997; Russell & Wells, 1994a; Russell & Wells, 1994b); tension, anxiety, worry, and suspicion (Craig & Olson, 1995); hostility, defensiveness, and aggression (Heyman, O'Leary, & Jouriles, 1995; O'Leary, Malone, & Tyree, 1994; Newton, Kiecolt-Glaser, Glaser, & Malarkey, 1995); and negative affectivity leading to negative attributions (Huston & Vangelistic, 1991; Karney, Bradbury, Fincham, & O'Sullivan, 1994).

Attitudes, Beliefs, Values, and Expectations. Differences in personal attitudes, values, and beliefs can cause stress in the new family system (Carter & McGoldrick, 1989), particularly if the couple does not possess the resources to manage differences. While forming a new family subsystem, couples may experience differences in needs and values over issues like: family leadership, gender, loyalty, money, power, sex, privacy, and children (Betcher & Macauley, 1990; Fitzpatrick, 1988; Holman & Li, 1997; Kalmykova, 1983). In addition, Storaasli and Markman (1990), indicated that problems related to communication, sex, and leisure activities show significant increases in intensity in the period between premarriage and parenting. Wamboldt and Reiss (1989) indicated that couple identity was best achieved in a shared couple paradigm with consensus and agreement on the valued aspects of the relationship. Johnson and Booth (1998) found that marital quality was due largely to the dyadic perceptions of the relationship processes rather than the perceptions of personality stability.

National polls show that what people consider to be very important in marriage (i.e., love, sexual fidelity, and the ability to talk about feelings) has been fairly similar over the past two decades (Roper Organization, 1990). Larson (1988a; 1992) and Larson and Holman (1994) suggested that a person's beliefs about marriage and how marital satisfaction was achieved might significantly affect one's expectations and readiness for marriage. Karney et al. (1994) found that negative spousal affectivity contributed to the negative attributions one makes about self, spouse, and marital relationship.

Expectations for marriage are often in sharp contrast to the realities of what it takes to create a satisfying marriage. Where do these expectations come from? The formation of marital role expectations and attitudes about marriage begins in childhood and develops throughout a person's life. Sager (1986) explained that expectations are rooted in our family patterns with the yearning to create or recreate the love, closeness, and nurturance that may or may not have been experienced with original caretaker(s). Additionally, McGoldrick (1989) and Marlar and Jacobs (1992) stated that family myths and attitudes about marriage were passed down to successive generations consequently making the transition to marriage proportionately smoother or more difficult for couples in succeeding generations.

The socialization processes of childhood shape and formulate gender-related attitudes and beliefs that, in turn, create marital behavior patterns that may contain a variety of traditional and/or non-traditional elements (Duck, 1993; Huston & Geis, 1993; Otto, 1979; Stinnett, 1969; Thoits, 1992). Social mores perpetuate the traditionalist myth that in marriage men should be in a superior, hierarchical position (e.g., older, more educated, more sexually dominant, more income-generating power) (Carter & McGoldrick, 1989; Schwartz, 1994). The cultural ideal for the wife of the 1990s includes maintaining a second shift by caring for the husband, children, and house, while also earning an outside income and never asking for more for herself (Hochschild, 1989). Bielby and Bielby (1989) stated that women were more concerned with family and marital roles than with their work or occupational roles, whereas men placed greater importance on work roles than on family and marriage roles. However, traditional assumptions about

marital and social responsibilities often do not reflect marital and social reality thereby creating disagreements over the establishment of spousal roles within the marriage (Bader & Sinclair, 1983; Huston & Geis; Schwartz).

Ganong, Coleman, and Brown (1981) and Salts, Seismore, Lindholm, and Smith (1994) asserted that females held more favorable attitudes toward marriage and were more egalitarian in their marital role expectations than were males. Carter and McGoldrick (1989) suggested that although women tend to anticipate marriage with enthusiasm, epidemiological data have revealed it has not been the most advantageous state for them. Craddock (1983) and Schwartz (1994) reported that couples who shared congruent attitudes and egalitarian expectations of marriage reported significantly higher levels of marriage satisfaction in the areas of personality issues, communication, conflict resolution, leisure activities, spousal role consensus, personal habit tolerance, and family and friends. Obviously, how gender roles are translated into spousal roles is a complex and pervasive process for contemporary couples.

Many couples may have experienced premarital relationships that were often filled with utopian fantasies and myths that their marriage and marriage partner would be perfect (Crosby, 1985). Couples soon realize that they must reconcile their dreams and illusions of marriage or the ideal relationship with the reality that there is no perfect match, which often leads to disappointment and frustration or what has been termed postmarital disillusionment (Arond & Pauker, 1987). According to Larson (1988a), gender and individual level of romanticism affected beliefs about marriage. Larson's research indicated that women believed in myths to a lesser degree than men, and those with romantic attitudes and views believed in myths more than those who were less romantic.

### Interpersonal Developmental Issues

Interpersonal developmental issues such as (a) the relational issues of love, intimacy, commitment, affection, sexuality, and communication patterns and skills (i.e., handling anger and managing conflict, decision-making and power); (b) the familial issues of familial interactions, boundary-making, differentiation, triangulation, fusion, family constellation, and parental and sibling approval of spouse/marriage; and (c) the social issues of social integration and work and family demands can significantly impact a couple's transition to marriage.

Relational Issues: Love, Intimacy, and Commitment. One important expectation of the contemporary companionate marriage model is that married partners will meet each others' need for love, intimacy, and affection. Kelley and Burgoon (1991) reported that failure to fulfill one's partner's expectations about the intimacy in the relationship predicts marital dissatisfaction. Some individuals have a higher need for emotional intimacy than others and, therefore, must discuss and come to an understanding of the degree of intimacy and the expression or language of love and affection used by their partner in their relationship (Tannen, 1990). According to Gottman (1995) and Holman and Li (1997), romance was the most important ingredient in the newlywed relationship and was kept alive by frequent interactions, spending time together, and openly disclosing one's thoughts and feelings. Individuals who admire, support, and are proud of each other in their respective endeavors and achievements openly express appreciation and build one another's self-esteem and fulfill emotional needs build a satisfying and enduring relationship (Bell, Daly, & Gonzalez, 1987).

An individual's ability to successfully commit to a marriage and a partner requires a well-developed identity, high self-esteem, empathy, and an assumption of permanence. According to Mace (1982), a successful marriage requires three things: (a) a high degree of motivation, (b) a

desire to make the marriage work, and (c) a willingness to expend personal time and effort to make sure it does. Sabatelli and Cecil-Pigo (1985) found that when both partners were participating equally in the relationship and when there was maximum interdependence, the couple was the most committed. Therefore, it seems that marital success is attainable if the commitment is mutual (Surra, Arizzi, & Asmussen, 1988).

Commitment is essential to the process of developing a marital relationship that endures (Mace, 1989). Commitments need to be made to the partner, to a belief in the importance of the institution of marriage, as well as to the willingness to invest in having a mutually gratifying marriage (Huston et al., 1981; Surra, 1987; Surra et al., 1988).

Relational Issues: Affection, Sexuality and Cohabitation. Bell et al. (1987) stressed the importance of physical and verbal affection in a couple relationship. In addition, the couple should dialogue and work out their differences concerning the frequency and variety of affection and sexual activity (Ammons & Stinnett, 1980; Crosby, 1985). Recent research indicates that couples may enter marriage with much more sexual experience than the typical newlyweds of the past. Given the rates of nonmarital sexual intercourse among adolescents (Mott & Havrin, 1988), it is not surprising that researchers have suggested that the majority of newlyweds have had sexual relations together before marrying. Arond and Pauker (1987) found in their study that a majority of the couples reported enjoying a sexually healthy relationship prior to marriage, but 25% of couples reported sexual dysfunctions were an issue for them within the first year of marriage. Also, James (1981) reported a substantial decline in coital rates during the first year of marriage, especially for couples who had no premarital intercourse. In addition, premarital pregnancy often precipitates early marriages and can lead to greatly increased stress, marital instability (Teti & Lamb, 1989), or even lower marital quality (Kurdek, 1991).

Cohabitation makes the transition to marriage much less of a clearly delineated turning point in the couple's life than in the past (McGoldrick, 1989). Twenty-five percent of the men and women who marry for the first time are cohabitating at the time of their marriage and 40% of couples who remarry cohabit prior to marriage (Ganong & Coleman, 1994; Glenn, 1991). According to Newcomb (1987), several possible effects of cohabitation upon a subsequent marriage have been proposed and examined (e.g., significantly lower measures of marital quality, Booth & Johnson, 1988; Thomson & Colella, 1992; significantly higher risk of marital dissolution, Balakrishnan, Rao, Lapierre-Adamcyk, & Krotki, 1987; Bennett, Blanc, & Bloom, 1988; Bumpass & Sweet, 1989; Gurak, Falcon, Sandefur, & Torrecilha, 1989; Teachman & Polonoko, 1990). DeMaris and MacDonald (1993) indicated the longer couples have lived together before marriage, the earlier disillusionment develops in the marital relationship.

However, there is some evidence that cohabitation may help couples prepare for marriage (Glenn, 1991). Cohabitation has been used as a screening device to test compatibility (Newcomb, 1987) and allowed for negotiation of relationship functions prior to marriage (DeMaris & Leslie, 1984). Cohabitation, much like engagement, prepared a couple for the realities of marriage and helped them think in terms of the couple as well as individuals. Consequently, Surra (1990) cited evidence that suggested that different cohabitation studies (e.g., Macklin, 1983; Booth & Johnson, 1988; Bumpass & Sweet, 1988) yielded different and sometimes contradictory results. Thus, the conclusion seems to be that the evidence thus far is unclear as to whether cohabitation contributes to an ultimately happy marriage.

Relational Issues: Communication Patterns. Relatively open and effective communication is essential for human growth and development. It also serves as the essential foundation for marital success and is the facilitating process for an enduring marriage that is

satisfying (Robinson & Blanton, 1993). Gottman (1995) indicated that communication could be productive or destructive to relationships as unhappy couples tend to criticize, disagree, complain, put down, and use excuses and sarcasm. Unrewarding communication patterns precede the development of relationship distress (Markman, 1979). In contrast, happy couples with marital stability and satisfaction were more likely to use active listening skills, agree, approve, assent, use laughter and humor (Fisher, Giblin, & Hoopes, 1982; Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1991), and possess character virtues of self-restraint, courage, and friendship (Fowers, 1998). Gottman (1995) has suggested that satisfied couples maintain a five-to-one ratio of positive to negative exchanges in interactions.

Gender also plays an important role in couple communication as there are gender differences in verbal and nonverbal communication with men tending to be more dominant in their interactions and women being more submissive (Tannen, 1990). O'Donohue and Crouch (1996) indicated individuals tend to hold stereotypes of gender differences that have not been supported in empirical investigations. However, they did indicate that gender does influence the amount of elicited conversation, utterance length, use of qualifying phrases, swearing and compliment style. Because men and women have been socialized to perceive the world differently, good couple communication is a challenge in any relationship. Tannen noted the importance of men and women recognizing and understanding the impact of "genderlect" on marital communication. Therefore, when couples fail to effectively communicate, poorly managed conflict is inevitable (Roberts & Krokoff, 1990).

Relational Issues: Anger, Conflict, Decision-making, and Power. Gottman (1995) indicated that marital anger and conflict were endemic forces and a challenge to be met rather than avoided as is often the case in the early years of marriage. Laughrea, Belanger, Wright, and McDuff (1997) stated that the anger intensity quotient among both spouses was closely linked. The inability to manage anger and conflict effectively leads to negative exchanges that can put a couple's marriage on a downward spiral (Bray, 1995; Gottman, 1995). Newton et al. (1995) found that newlywed husbands and wives experienced greater percentages of conflict and withdrawal when hostility and defensive personality characteristics existed within the marriage. Shackelford and Buss (1997) indicated that spousal esteem and disparagement negatively covaried with the frequency of conflict in the areas of jealousy, affection, and money. In fact, research on marital communication has found that unhappily married couples were distinguished by their failure to productively manage conflict and initiate communication repair activities (Gottman, 1995; Mace, 1989). Mace (1989), Murstein (1986), and Olson et al. (1989) suggested good conflict-resolution skills and communication skills were necessary in order for couples to be better able to cope with the stresses involved in the transition to marriage.

Heyman et al. (1995), Kelly, Huston, and Cate (1985), and O'Leary et al. (1994) found that premarital conflict and spousal physical aggression were precursors of marital conflict and violence which predicted the extent to which a couple was satisfied once they have been married for a few years. Arond and Pauker (1987) stated that newlyweds who fought less frequently and more productively rated themselves as happier in their marriages than those couples who fought more often. Houts, Robins, and Huston (1996) indicated that turbulent relationships were characterized by less well-matched partners, had more openly expressed negativity and greater relational ambivalence. In general, couples who were less well-matched and in relational distress were less accurate in their descriptions of each other and were less inclined to engage in behavior designed to enhance their relationship (Szarota, 1992).

Anger and conflict are the fuel of many power struggles (Dreikurs, 1953; Gottman, 1995). A couple's power ideology is established and negotiated in the early stages of relationship formation and is usually a reflection of the dances of power observed in the family of origin. Gottman suggested that the individual with less power in the relationship may resort to criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and/or stonewalling (i.e., disengagement) in order to resolve conflict. In contrast, the individual with more power in the relationship may become autocratic or use "bullying" behaviors. Blanton and Fox (1995) defined power in a couple relationship in terms of power bases. Personal power (i.e., the relative influence one has and another based on the nature of their personal relationship and the ability to exert authority through the relationship context) and positional power (i.e., influence gained through ascribed status, control of resources) have been traditionally gendered in their assignment. However, a newlywed couple who is more egalitarian in their relationship will likely resolve their conflicts through bargaining, reasoning, negotiation, or compromise and share power bases.

The role that power and decision making play in a couple's transition to marriage is also critical. According to Blumstein and Schwartz (1983), the question of how power gets distributed in a marriage used to be more clearly prescribed by society. Now, the contract is more complicated. Because of the re-examination of traditional gender roles, there are no clear guidelines for what domains (e.g., money, parenting, division of labor) are assigned for a husband and a wife.

For example, the division of labor within the household can be significantly impacted by the balance of power and the patterns of decision making the couple implores in their marital relationship. Both international and national data showed that in Western countries, men were performing slightly more housework and women were doing slightly less than in the past (Bielby & Bielby, 1989). However, overall, women are still assuming the major responsibility for most household tasks by doing 80% of the female dominated jobs (i.e., cooking and cleaning), as well as 37% of the male dominated jobs (i.e., yard work) (Abbott & Koopman-Boyden, 1981), which according to Olson et al. (1989) leads to a decreased level of reported marital satisfaction over time. Factors that might impact the division of labor in a newly-married household include: age at marriage, absence or presence of children, and employment history (Pittman & Blanchard, 1996).

Familial Issues. Familial interactions, influences, and issues are significant in a couple's successful transition to marriage. Theorists (e.g., Bowen, 1978) have indicated that family background factors can influence everything that people were, wanted to become, or do. According to McGoldrick (1989), good clues about a new couple's relationship can be found in the marital relationships of their parents, the couple's primary models for what marriage involves. The other basic model for spouses is their relationship with their siblings, their earliest and closest peers. It is in the family of orientation that an individual learns his/her earliest and sometimes most powerful lessons about intimacy, boundary, and structural relationship maintenance, distance/closeness, and develops positive perceptions of marriage that lead to relational health (Bray, 1995; Fine & Hovestadt, 1984; Larsen & Olson, 1989).

Familial Issues: New Boundaries, Differentiation, Triangulation, and Fusion. Establishing new couple boundaries, both between the couple and their families and within the couple unit itself, is a critical task during the transition to marriage. Newlyweds must place a higher priority on the relationship with their marital partner and individuate/differentiate with some of the close attachments they may have formed with parents, children, siblings, and relatives (Bowen, 1978; Bray, 1995; Mace 1989). Although this realignment of close

attachments may cause a great amount of resentment for all involved (Arond & Pauker, 1987), a couple must form a differentiated dyadic unit, define a new system, and accept the implications of the realignment in order to avoid an unhealthy enmeshed relationship (Bray, 1995; Carter & McGoldrick, 1989). Additionally, the family of orientation must accept and support these structural and emotional breaks or realignments (Minuchin, 1974; Holman & Li, 1997), particularly where important loyalties to one's family of orientation (i.e., financial dependence) exist that may prevent or impede the newly-established couple from achieving their needed independence.

The newly-married couple must also contend with the processes of triangulation and fusion as they make the transition into marriage. According to Bowen (1978) and Friedman (1985), the involvement of a third party (e.g., triangle) in a relationship as a way of diffusing some of the pressure and tension between the couple and can have a negative effect on the couple's relationship. Predictable triangles can occur in the renegotiation of parent/child, sibling, and grand-parent relationships which can serve both a healthy and hazardous function (Bray, 1995).

According to McGoldrick (1989), fusion is an additional challenge a couple must deal with as they make the transition to marriage. There is a vast difference between forming an intimate relationship with another person and using a couple relationship in an attempt to complete one's sense of self. The process whereby people seek to enhance their self-esteem in marriage is based on denying their "differentness" from their spouse. This assertion of their "one-ness" as a couple can result in severe distortions in communication in order to maintain the myth of agreement (Bray, 1995; Satir, 1967). Bowen (1978) suggested that there was a universal tendency to seek fusion as a function of an individual's lack of differentiation from his/her family of origin. Gender differences can influence the way in which fusion is experienced (McGoldrick). McGoldrick suggested that women have traditionally been raised to consider "losing themselves" in a relationship to be normal and express their fusion by maintaining pseudo-intimacy; whereas, men have traditionally been socialized to view intimacy as frightening. Rubin (1983) also stated that in marriage women are more likely to struggle with fears of estrangement and men with fears of ensnarement. Therefore, the critical goal of a new couple as they make the transition is to form a family that shares a sense of healthy interdependence rather than one that is totally independent or dependent.

Familial Issues: Family Constellation. Another important familial influence on the transition is the family constellation of both spouses. Theory has proposed that couples who married mates from complementary sibling positions enjoyed the greatest marital stability because they experienced fewer power struggles and were more comfortable in and familiar with interactional dynamics (Adler, 1978; Toman, 1976). However, Toman explained that those who married spouses from non-complementary sibling positions would have more demands and thus more adjustments to make in marriage. Related issues to family constellation include the spacing of siblings, the extent to which parents encourage cooperative, rather than competitive relations among siblings, and how gender differences and related issues were experienced. Stinnett (1969), however, found no empirical evidence to support Toman's notion of sibling position as an influence on perceived readiness for marriage. Greater empirical attention needs to be given to address this area.

Familial Issues: Parental and Sibling Approval of Spouse/Marriage. According to Aldous (1996), Cate and Lloyd (1992), and Larson and Holman (1994), parental approval or blessing of marriage was considered important and of value to individuals even after they have

left home and are on their own in constructing their own identity. Stewart and Olson (1990), in their study of engaged couples, found that if both sets of parents or only one set of parents were negative about the upcoming marriage, the majority of the engaged couples had low premarital satisfaction. In contrast, if both sets of parents were positive about the marriage, the majority of engaged couples experienced a positive premarital relationship. Holman and Olsen (1997) found that individuals with positive childhood relationships with mother and father were more likely to have high quality marriages. This was especially true for daughters. Regarding parental influence on mate selection, research has shown that the influence of mothers on mate selection is greater than the influence of fathers. Simultaneously, mothers' influence on sons is greater than on daughters, and fathers' influence on daughters is greater than on sons (Jedlicka, 1984).

In consideration of all the many factors influencing mate selection (e.g., parental influence, education, faith), the influence of siblings has been relatively unacknowledged. Sibling relationships are considered to be familial relationships with the greatest perpetual longevity. Sibling relationships are often the context for learning about issues of intimacy, sexuality, and courtship (Banks & Kahn, 1994). In closer examination of the nodal relationship events and roles (e.g., dating and courtship, choice of mate, decision to marry, bridesmaid or best man of the wedding party) associated with the transition to marriage, rarely will one find the influence of siblings absent. Siblings have long since provided supporting approval (e.g., sibling gossip) and/or disapproval (e.g., hazing, teasing) during these transitional periods (Adler, 1978; Goode, 1994; Toman, 1976).

Social Issues: Social Integration. Grover, Russell, Schumm, and Paff-Bergen (1985) proposed that those individuals who had a number of successful friendships, participated in a variety of social activities, and who were members of social organizations were better able to establish successful marriages than were those individuals who were more socially isolated. The relational aspect of marital readiness in the transition to marriage also includes the couple's emotional differentiation from their parents, their readiness for sexual exclusiveness, and their willingness to assume responsibility in the relationship (Holman & Li, 1997). The social support that individuals can draw from their interactive networks (Holman & Olsen, 1997; Milardo, 1986) both helps buffer them from stress as well as being a resource for coping with stress, even after one year of marriage. Supportive relationships also help provide a continuity in one's sense of individual identity during the marital transition (Surra, 1990). Interestingly, in cases where social network interference exists, relationship progress can become hampered, especially in couples whose relational commitment developed quickly and subsided during the engagement period (Surra, 1987).

Social Issues: Work/Family Demands. An additional context impacting a couple's transition to marriage is their balancing of work/family demands. Brunstein, Danglemyer, and Schultheiss (1996) found that husbands' and wives' satisfaction was differentially related to spousal support of relational goals and individual goals outside of marriage. Olson et al. (1989) reported that newlywed couples in their study indicated that work/family strains (e.g., new job/career, new job responsibilities) were the number one ranked stressors challenging newly-formed marriages. Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) had earlier found that individuals, particularly wives, reported increased levels of self-esteem, self-concept, and self-worth were positively correlated with employment. However, at the relational level, employment seemingly "spills-over" into the couple's leisure and recreational time, the development of couple intimacy, reducing energy levels, and subsequently increasing the stress levels of dyadic relationships (Arond & Pauker, 1987). Arond and Pauker explained that "love" and "work" have oppositional

goals with love reducing boundaries and work increasing boundaries. As a result, they found that 60% of newlyweds reported work/family attitudes had shifted since the onset of marriage. Early adulthood is a time in which both marital and work roles may be new and thus demanding. At times the demands from these two domains create stress.

### **Implications for Future Theory, Research, and Practice**

Because the transition to marriage and the complexity of its processes, this literature review was not an all-inclusive attempt to cover the entire breadth of the transition. However, we have identified the salient developmental issues that were most frequently reported in the literature, and as a result we have identified several areas that remain lacking in the literature.

First, much of the literature on the transition to marriage is anecdotal, thereby lacking the empirical data to refine concepts and theories used to explain the transition to marriage and all of its varied processes. Along with choices of education and career, social mores continue to suggest that selection of a life-long mate is one of the major developmental tasks facing young adults. According to Alfred Adler (1978), marriage is part of the three tasks (i.e., work, friendship, and love) that the human community sets for every individual. These three tasks, specifically marriage, are crucially important to the individual and society because neither can achieve fulfillment without successful attempts at dealing with the demands of these tasks.

Furthermore, researchers and therapists have confirmed that the condition of one's marriage has far-reaching implications for parenting, mental and physical health, and job satisfaction (Carter and McGoldrick, 1989). Therefore, greater empirical attention should be given to this important transition as this understanding would assist in ameliorating many of the deleterious effects (e.g., psychological distress, poverty, family violence, single parenting, abuse, marital conflict avoidance) resulting from marital conflict and demise (Bray, 1995).

Second, much of the research exploring issues like attitudes, expectations, and beliefs in the transition to marriage has used samples comprised of college students (Larson, 1988a; Salts et al., 1994; Intons-Peterson & Crawford, 1985; Fine & Hovestadt, 1984) who were anticipating the transition to marriage rather than actually preparing for marriage. Although there were some studies that used samples of couples who were engaged or preparing for marriage (Abbott & Koopman-Boyden, 1981; Craddock, 1983; Holman & Li, 1997; Sullivan & Bradbury, 1997), more research with couples actually making the marital transition is needed because these studies likely would give a more detailed, specific, and timely view of couple attitudes, expectations, and beliefs about marriage and partners. In addition, it is recommended that longitudinal, multi-trait, multi-method, and comparative cross-cultural studies on the transition to marriage be conducted (Larson & Holman, 1994).

Third, based upon our literature review on couple preparation for marriage, it became clear that effective premarital education was an area deserving more attention and that this education be made more readily available to the general public. Fowers and Olson (1986) and Senediak (1990) have indicated that the quality of the premarital relationship and the subsequent marriage can be enhanced through education. Although, several marriage preparation programs and premarital assessment instruments (e.g., FOCCUS (Markey, Micheletto, & Becker, 1985); PMIP (1984); PREP-M (Holman, Larson, & Harmer, 1989); PREPARE/ENRICH (Olson, Fournier, & Druckman, 1986) have been designed and implemented with positive outcomes (Larson et al., 1995), greater effort needs to be given to exploring the topics, formats, recruitment efforts, and delivery systems of interest to couples preparing for marriage (Duncan, Box, & Silliman, 1996; Silliman & Schuum, 1989; Silliman & Schuum, 1993; Silliman, Schuum, Jurich,

1992; Sullivan & Bradbury, 1997). Much of the wedding preparation a couple receives is obtained from commercialized, popular, “over-the-counter” self-help materials (i.e., magazines, books, and television). Unfortunately, in many instances, these methods are the only form of marriage preparation couples may experience, which for some, may be inadequate preparation. For example, women’s magazines featuring wedding preparation ideas and relationship tips are prevalent in our society; however, men’s magazines do not frequently feature or give the attention to the same issues. Such patterns establish and reaffirm the myth that women should think, plan, and dream about their weddings all their lives, while, men seemingly just happen upon this union of marriage needing no pre-planning or preparation. Education should also expand the learner’s awareness and understanding of the transitional needs of the opposite gender thereby avoiding a gender-biased educational vacuum of needs; therefore, education must be changed or be designed to meet these needs.

Family life educators must realize that as our society grows more complex so do the relationship needs of couples entering into marriage. Therefore, a more proactive approach to premarital education is encouraged including the implementation of premarital education programs offered in Family and Consumer Sciences classes in schools, in Extension programming, and through community education programs. These educational programs can be taught by those individuals (e.g., family life educators, social workers, and clergy) who have an understanding of relational dynamics and are capable of helping prepare individuals and couples identify and develop relationship awareness and readiness, relationship strengths and skills that secure a relationship foundation.

Fourth, we recommend that preparation program curricula should conduct premarital needs assessments in order to assist individuals/couples in developing greater awareness of self and partner, increase self-disclosure, enhance intimacy, and build relational skills and strengths with the ultimate goal of strengthening and enriching individual and relational well-being (Buckner & Saktson, 1985; Guerney & Maxson, 1990; Hanson, 1981; Hof & Miller, 1980; Larson & Holman, 1994; Sheek, 1984; Thomas & Arcus, 1992; Williams, 1992 ). Program objectives and learning activities should assist the individuals/couples in identifying “felt” needs (i.e., those expressed by the learner) and “ascribed” needs (i.e., those identified as important to know about by someone other than the learner) with regards to family of origin issues, like boundaries, differentiation, triangulation, and fusion, communication processes, conflict resolution skills, financial management, and sexuality issues, among others. Structured learning activities (e.g., role plays, genogram preparation, projection exercises, critical incidents, simulation games) that require high participant involvement and open the learner to the exploration, experimentation, and evaluation of new insights and behaviors have been most effective in bringing adult learners to a partial/full mastery of the stated objectives (Hall, 1971; Knowles, 1980).

Fifth, in order to increase couples’ interest in and participation in premarital education programs, these programs should be advertised using a variety of different sources like Internet sites, university and high-school classrooms, community and agriculture/extension programs, bridal shows and programs, and the public media (i.e., public service announcements). Through these various sources, recruitment efforts should be appealing to both men and women recognizing the influences of gender on the decision-making process to participate in educational workshops (Kieren & Doherty-Poirier, 1993).

Finally, we would encourage and solicit civil legislators and governments to join religious educators in becoming more proactive in their development of premarital and/or newly-

married programs for couples and also provide the necessary funding for pre-marriage preparation. Historically, clergy have been the gatekeepers of most wedding ceremonies as they perform 80% of the exchanged vows (Knox, 1985). From a prevention perspective, we know of no state and few religious organizations requiring or mandating premarital preparation as a prerequisite for obtaining a marriage license. Seemingly, states are willing to provide a marriage license to couples and perform or recognize a couple's preferred religious rite without guaranteeing educational or relational proficiency. Thus, we recommend a collaborative effort between a community of educators that includes familial, religious, and civil prevention help-givers capable of providing premarital references and resources to transitioning couples regardless of gender, race, economic status, education, or religion.

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