

Penn State's 22nd Annual Symposium on Family Issues
Gender and Couple Relationships
October 13-14, 2014

In her 1972 book, *The Future of Marriage*, Jesse Bernard argued that, within each relationship, there exist two marriages, namely his marriage and her marriage. In other words, Bernard explained, women and men have fundamentally different experiences in their shared relationship. Bernard's review of the literature revealed that marriage had positive implications for men in domains ranging from employment and income to health and longevity, but that married women fared more poorly than both married men and single women. The institution of marriage would have a future, Bernard argued, but only if marriage relationships changed in ways that also supported women's health and well-being.

Fifty years after Bernard's volume was published we take stock of couple relationships—including how they have changed over this period of time. We also consider contemporary issues pertaining to gender in couple relationships, ranging from their structure—married, cohabiting, heterosexual and same sex unions—and their dynamics, including couple dynamics and parenting roles and their implications for men's and women's health and well-being. An issue we ponder throughout is the future of marriage, including whether and how social scientists can contribute to women's and men's ability to flourish in the context of what has been a fundamental social institution.

Monday, October 13, 2014 - Nittany Lion Inn Ballroom

8:00 – 8:45 Check in outside of Ballroom

8:45 – 9:00 Welcome and Opening Remarks

9:00 - noon - Historical Changes in Marriage and Couple Relationships

Age of first marriage increased steadily across the second half of the 20th century, as did rates of cohabitation. In 2013, more children lived with a single parent than a married one. Also by 2013, 16 states had passed legislation that allowed for same sex marriages and others are considering this step. This session will focus on the profound historical changes in marriage and couple relationships that have taken place in the US, particularly from the second half of the 20th century to the present. How have couple relationships changed in their structure and interpersonal dynamics? What factors, including political, economic, and psychological forces, may underlie these changes? What do current patterns suggest about the future of marriage as an institution?

Speakers:

Steven Ruggles, Regents Professor of History, University of Minnesota

Liana Sayer, Associate Professor of Sociology, University of Maryland

Stephanie Coontz, Faculty in History and Family Studies, The Evergreen State University

1:30-4:30 - Changing Work and Family Roles of Women and Men

Women with children began to enter the labor force in large numbers during the 1970s, and by 2000, the modal two-parent family in the US had two employed parents. Beginning in the 1980s, women's college completion rates began to exceed those of men, and by 2004, about 60% of the nation's college graduates were women. The 1990s saw the beginning of a trend toward wives earning more than their husbands, with possible implications for marital stability and dynamics. By 2010, women in the US labor force outnumbered men for the first time in US history. In this session, we consider the changing roles of men and women as economic providers for their families. What implications do changing work roles have for women's and men's family roles? For men's and women's health? For marital stability?

Lead Speaker:

Janet Hyde, Helen Thompson Woolley Professor, Gender and Women's Studies and Psychology, University of Wisconsin, Madison

Discussants:

Kathleen Gerson, Professor of Sociology, New York University

Maureen Perry Jenkins, Professor of Psychology, University of Massachusetts Amherst

Kevin Roy, Associate Professor of Family Science, University of Maryland

4:30-5:45 - Reception for all attendees – Faculty Staff Club

Tuesday, October 14, 2014 - Nittany Lion Inn Ballroom

8:30-11:30 - Men and Women as Parents

Research on men's role as parents was a novelty in the 1970s, and this early research showed that fathers and mothers differed in both the extent and nature of their parenting. Fathers' time spent with children increased across the second half of the 20th century, whereas mother's remained stable, even in the face of dramatic changes in their labor force involvement. Men and women also differ in the circumstances of their involvement such that the couple relationship appears fundamental to men's but not women's connections with their children. This session focuses on the changing parental roles of women and men. How do women and men differ in their orientations to and engagement in their parental roles? What factors promote and challenge men's and women's parental involvement? Can social policies and programs exert positive impact on men's and women's parental behaviors and involvement?

Lead Speaker:

Ronald Mincy, Maurice V. Russell Professor, Social Policy and Social Work Practice, Columbia University

Discussants:

Natasha Cabrera, Professor of Human Development, University of Maryland

Rachel Connelly, Bion R. Cram Professor of Economics, Bowdoin College

Corinne Reczek, Assistant Professor of Sociology and Women's, Gender & Sexuality Studies, The Ohio State University

1:00 – 4:00 - Gender Differences in the Health Benefits of Marriage and Couple Relationships

Marriage is associated with physical and mental health, longevity, and positive health behaviors. Yet, consistent with Bernard's early analyses, contemporary research continues to show that men benefit from marriage more than women do. This session will focus on gender differences in the health benefits of marriage. How does the gender gap vary across health outcomes, among various racial-ethnic groups, and by marital quality? Have these patterns changed over time? What can we learn by examining the health benefits of marriage among same-sex couples or heterosexual cohabitation? To what degree are marriage benefits a consequence of selection of healthy individuals into marriage, and does this process vary by gender?

Lead Speaker:

Debra Umberson, Centennial Professor in Liberal Arts and Sociology, University of Texas-Austin

Discussants:

Chalandra Bryant, Professor of Human Development and Family Science, University of Georgia

Ted Huston, Amy Johnson McLaughlin Centennial Professor, Emeritus, University of Texas at Austin

Karen Lincoln, Associate Professor, School of Social Work, University of Southern California