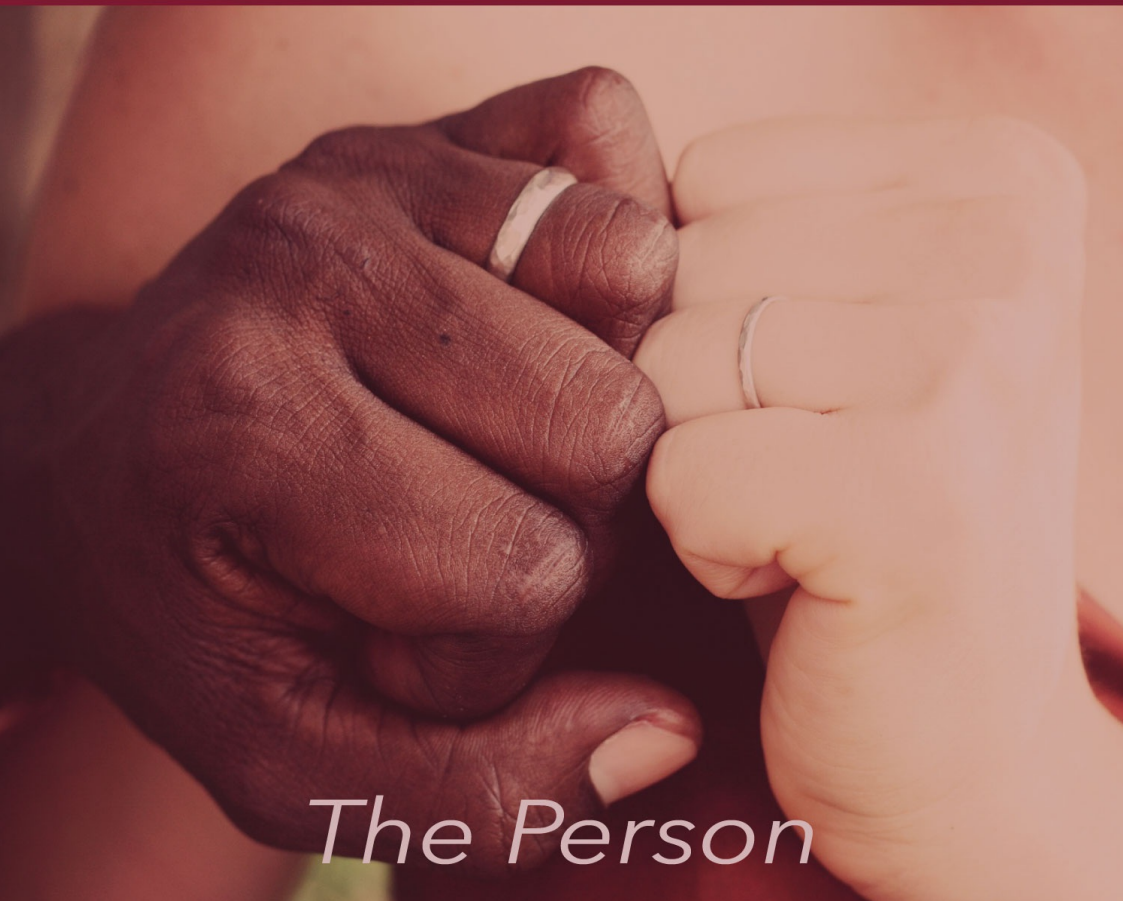
Theodore Lidz

Marital Choice



The Person

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From *The Person* by Theodore Lidz

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Marital Choice

The couple who are about to marry realize, as on few other occasions in their lives, that they are making a decisive commitment. The ceremony culminates their lives to that moment, and their choice of a partner is a resultant of their total experience. It marks the start of a new way of living and the achievement of a very different status in life. They are aware that their future happiness will depend in large measure upon the relationship being established. They may also feel, though they usually do not consciously recognize it, that the direction of their future personality development and their entire manner of adapting to life hang in the balance. While the marriage ceremony has been considered by some primarily as providing permission and social sanction for sexual intercourse, such views when not facetious are alarmingly superficial. The union that is formed changes, or at least should change, the ego structure of both persons, so that it henceforth concerns the direction and welfare of two lives rather than one; and new superego directives are taken over from the partner which together with id impulses and basic drives of the spouse will henceforth influence behavior. Along with the hazards and the need for realignment of personality functioning, the marriage brings with it new opportunities for self-fulfillment and completion.

The bride and groom have reason to experience anxiety for, as with any commitment, consequences must be accepted in advance. It is, however, a special commitment to intimate interdependence. In their relationships with their parents, they had no choice of the objects of their dependency, but now a voluntary choice is being made and the responsibility for consequences must be accepted. The potential sources of disturbance and danger are overshadowed by the recognition of marriage as a new source of strength and support. In finding an occupation or career, individuals gain solidity through the pursuit of a definite goal, by limiting their strivings, by taking into themselves the way of life, the roles and value systems that accompany it. In marrying, one gains a partner who shares and supports and upon whom one can rely, for the well-being of each is bound up with the fate of the other. Further, persons assume the pattern of living of a married person for which there are traditional directives, and they also acquire a definite place in the social system. Again further delimitations of the numerous potential ways of living have occurred; and while limitations may seem onerous, they also promote cohesiveness and can open

new ways of expressing one's potentialities.

The problems of marital adjustment and family living are of paramount importance in understanding the emotional difficulties of people, and cannot be considered separately from the choice of the partner. While this may seem a platitude, many marital problems are largely dependent upon the personality characteristics of one member which might well create difficulties no matter who was the spouse. One might consider, for example, a man who appeared to have made an excellent choice of a beautiful and very wealthy young woman who understood his difficulties with his own family and was willing to help him overcome a number of anxieties that interfered with his ability to work. However, even though his wife bore no noticeable resemblance to his mother, he was so fearful of all women because of his experiences with an overbearing, directive, and demanding mother, that any proximity to women that might lead to sexual relationships provoked intense anxiety in him. He could scarcely remain in the same house with his wife after supper, and was soon too removed from her to enable her to try to be helpful to him. Still failures of complementarity create many other problems.

It becomes apparent during the psychiatric treatment of many married persons that the choice of the spouse for neurotic reasons ties the individual to an untenable way of life which leads to the mobilization of deleterious traits and prevents the development of more favorable characteristics. While it is usually true that the partner selected fills some basic need and in some respects forms a suitable choice, the concept can be overemphasized, as will be considered later in the chapter. It is quite apparent that many people do not really know the person whom they are marrying and do not realize how greatly the partner's personality will influence their own. In considering marital problems, one is no longer concerned with an individual but with a dyad, and how the marriage works out relates clearly to the question of the partner selected. It must also be recognized, however, that even pathological needs may properly be managed if a suitable partner is selected, as when a woman who has a morbid fear of childbirth finds a man who wishes to be the center of his wife's life without any interference from children.

We wish to consider why people marry, whom they marry, and when, examining how the decision to marry and the choice of a mate fit into the pattern and sequence of the life history and influence further development. The emphasis upon the family as the primary socializing agency for the child

means that particular consideration must be given to the marital union that forms the milieu in which the children will be raised. There is also the practical everyday need of the therapist who, when he becomes aware of it, finds that marital problems often form a focal point in the unhappiness and the emotional disturbances that bring many patients to him. While patients at times come directly seeking advice about marital situations, more commonly the resultant distress has produced physiological dysfunctioning that creates symptoms or leads to displaced substitutive complaints. It is a common experience that the complaint of chronic backache in a woman may relate to her wish to refuse sexual relations that she finds repulsive; or the obesity that complicates a medical ailment depends upon the need for a person who feels starved for affection to gain satisfaction from overeating, etc. A man complaining of intractable headaches soon vents his rage which arises because he believes his wife married him only for his money and constantly expresses contempt for him because of his lower social status. He also expresses his feelings of hopeless frustration because she is unapproachable and unresponsive to his sexual needs, considering them an imposition and making him feel he is being indecent.

Although interest here does not lie in the pathological but the unfolding of the personality through marriage, any discussion of marital choice and adjustment must take into account shortcomings and failures, for these pertain to the majority of marriages rather than the exception in contemporary society. Although the majority outcome cannot be considered as the norm, it indicates the difficulties of attaining a satisfactory marital choice and adjustment. Approximately one out of three first marriages formed at the present time in the United States will terminate in divorce, if current divorce rates continue.[1] About half of the divorces will take place during the first ten rears of marriage and fortunately about one half before there have been any children. Such figures must not be taken as an indication that marriage is becoming less important. Ninety-six to ninety-seven percent of all Americans marry, and, of those who divorce, eighty percent will try again (Carter and Glick, 1970).[2]

Divorce rates in general reflect the ease of obtaining a divorce rather than the success or failure of marriage in general. On the other hand, they do not indicate the extent of marital unhappiness, for many marriages that formally remain intact are seriously disturbed. There are various figures concerning successful marriage and they are difficult to interpret. Perhaps the optimal estimate has been that somewhat less than twenty-five percent of marriages are fully satisfactory to both partners, but other studies cut the figure to anywhere between five and twenty-five percent. It has also been estimated that

considerably less than half are deemed reasonably adequate by the couple. Still such figures do not mean that many more marriages do not subserve some essential functions for both partners who might be even unhappier if unmarried or married to someone else.

MARITAL CHOICE: LOVE AND UNCONSCIOUS PROCESSES

The basis of marital choice in the United States today reflects the individualistic, democratic society in which decision and responsibility rest primarily upon the two persons who are marrying. While the reasons for the specific selection of a partner are elusive, the reason usually given and generally though not always believed is that they have fallen in love; and love is a state that has eluded philosophic and scientific definition throughout the ages. Freud (1914), like others, drew an analogy between being in love and being sick when he said that "this sexual overestimation [of the love object] is the origin of the peculiar state of being in love, a state suggestive of a neurotic compulsion," but he did not underestimate its importance, calling love "the highest form of development of which object—libido—is capable," and he defined normality in terms of the "ability to love and to work."

Falling in love is largely an irrational matter, dependent upon unconscious determinants that trail back into infancy. However, as has been noted in other connections, the unconscious processes may be more suited than intellectual assessments for drawing together the diffuse needs of an individual, the incoherent judgments of people, the feeling-tone memories, the pleasing and displeasing in the expression, vision, feel, smell of another, and many other such factors that enter into personal attraction. The intellect could scarcely cope with so many variables, even if they were consciously available to weigh. While the unconscious processes designate whom one loves, they are apparently less capable of judging properly with whom one can live in harmony. It is of more than passing interest that one of the most decisive steps in a person's life rests largely upon unconscious processes which are at best checked by logical appraisal of the chances for success or failure.

Anyone who has had the unpleasant task of suggesting to a couple who are prepared to marry that they at least postpone a marriage which seems unwise because of the serious emotional instability of one of them, has learned that reason has little chance against the erotically driven impulsion with its capacities to blind. It is also important to note that the choice of partners by the couples themselves on the

basis of romantic love forms a custom that is fairly unique to modern civilization and is probably more prevalent in the United States than anywhere else. Indeed, some authorities consider that romantic love in itself is a phenomenon of Western culture which only started with the troubadours, who even then were not singing of love in connection with marriage. Although ancient literature from many countries appears clearly to negate this theory and indicate that "love," whatever this connoted at the given time and place, has always tended to draw people together, and lead them to desire marriage, still it has usually not been a major determinant of marital choice: partners have been chosen by parents, by kin groups, according to prescribed relationship patterns, and for economic and social reasons.

There is little, if any, evidence that the contemporary freedom to select partners has led to happier marriages; but the functions that marriage seeks to fill today are vastly different and are not easily equated with marriage under different traditions. Attention here can only be directed to the con-tempo ran,' scene, with recognition that the nature of marriage and the way in which partners are chosen is an integral part of the society in which it exists. While young people in particular are apt to confuse a passionate attraction for mature love, it must be recognized that a number of young adults have become wary not simply of marrying early but of conventional marriage as a way of achieving happiness.

ALTERNATIVES TO MARRIAGE AND NUCLEAR-FAMILY FORMATION

Although in this chapter we are considering the influence of the choice of a spouse on personality development, it seems necessary to comment briefly on the choice of a type of marriage, or, as some would prefer to say, of the type of "bonding." Some persons, still a small minority, see no reason why they require the legal or religious sanction to live together, or why they should be impeded by legal ties if they decide to separate. Some wish to have their respective rights and privileges as well as the terms for separation or divorce in the form of a contract before entering into a "bonding" or marriage. Concerned about the isolation of married couples and families, a couple may decide to live as part of a group, with or without being married, in one of a variety of arrangements. They may live in a cooperative home in which household tasks, expenses, and child rearing are shared. Even though it is sometimes hoped that the group will live together and develop into something resembling an extended family, couples usually leave after a few years. Many find that whereas it is difficult enough to adjust to a marital partner it is still more difficult to adjust to living intimately with a number of couples. Many persons have joined

communes, not simply as a means of living with a partner or satisfying sexual needs with a group rather than a single person, but to form a small alternate culture which turns away from our highly competitive industrial society. They seek self-actualization through making the most of their innate abilities, enjoying social interaction in the group, eschewing future goals, eliminating sex-linked roles, and, perhaps, seeking sexual pleasure with various partners in various ways. Very few such communes have lasted long enough to permit their evaluation, particularly their effect upon children.[3] As many communes seek to form alternate cultures, if not a part of the counterculture, thee have difficulty in gaining the approval of the larger society, and in rearing children to live in the general society. Which, if any, of the variations of married life or alternatives to marriage can fill the needs that lead people to marry will not be considered here, but the consideration of why people marry and of the functions of marriage in people's lives may help the reader make such judgments.[4]

THE PLACE OF MARRIAGE IN THE LIFE CYCLE

The understanding of why people marry and, perhaps, the meaning of the intangible but very real and pertinent force of love appear to require a scrutiny of the place of marriage in the developmental sequence of a person and of the biological and social forces playing upon the young adults when they decide to marry. While we cannot hope properly to define love and explain why a specific person is selected, the whole process may be clarified if we view it in the total developmental setting rather than as an isolated phenomenon. The fusion of biological and social determinants demands attention, for reference to only the sexual drives or the societal functions of marriage leads to an inadequate and confusing view of the institution.

We have followed young adults as they achieved reasonable emancipation from parental control and started on a search for a way of life of their own. The unmarried young man and woman find themselves in anomalous positions in the parental home. They are adults, no longer requiring care or wishing to be children, but they are still members of the childhood generation. The attachment to the home derives largely from former needs and abiding affections, but the home is no longer the real center of their lives or the focus of their hopes and desires. The family must function as a unit and requires a leader, and it becomes increasingly likely that clashes will occur between the parents and the adult child who has different attitudes, goals, and desires. The erotic bonds and dependent needs that helped foster

harmony have been severed or negated. The path toward fulfillment as an adult does not lie in the parental home. In particular there can be no fusion of sexual and affectional needs or completion of generative desires within the family of origin. Emotional independence has been gained but freedom does not bring fulfillment, it simply opens the doors to permit the individual to seek it. Young adults are likely to feel at loose ends as part of a home in which they no longer fit: they are adults with few prerogatives, and without their own domain. Waiting will not suffice, for a son cannot inherit his father's family, or a daughter her mother's, though the desire to do so can gain the upper hand and lead to a frustrated life.

Usually the major attachments that provide direction to the person's life and the meaningful relationship now lie outside the family. There are a group of friends of the same sex who have common interests and with whom activities and confidences are shared. The occupation and activities related to it gain prominence whether a person is already started on a career or is still a student. The wish and need to satisfy and please the boss or teachers become as important as satisfying parental wishes. There are friends of the opposite sex who provide passing or more permanent companionship, partial or complete outlets for sexual drives, perhaps one or more trials at living with another in an intimate relationship, admiration that bolsters self-esteem, and from whom one seeks and may find affection and love.

The variations are manifold, but usually the peer group, including members of the opposite sex, forms the major source of interpersonal satisfaction. Customable for the man, and in recent decades for young women, life as an unmarried young adult is considered a period during which he or she can enjoy freedom before assuming the responsibilities and restrictions of matrimony. Adults who have been away from home during the transition from adolescence attending a university, employed in a different community, or in military service often find it difficult to return home to live. They move out of their family homes to establish their own quarters, alone or with a friend. Often this is a time of sexual adventure that is more direct and less hesitant than it was during adolescence and a time when sexual excitement and the challenge and intrigue of conquest become ends in themselves; or of living in serial monogamy to have real companionship until ready to marry. Others give up this period of freedom, having found the right partner with whom they may live while waiting to marry, or until they are certain they wish to marry. The freedom from parental edict permits a freer and more conscious pursuit of sexuality. The intensity and extent of the occupation or preoccupation with sexual conquests relate to

such factors as inability to tolerate loneliness, the need for physical contact to feel desired or desirable, and the search for reassuring experiences concerning sexual capacities, rather than to any quantity of sexual drive. The man may tend to experiment more because of the need to overcome residual fears of losing his individuation in an intimate relationship with a woman and of again becoming dependent on a woman, whereas the young woman is frequently more consciously appraising future husbands.

Of course, life as an unmarried adult may not exist at all, marriage following the closure of adolescence, or with the marital choice already made and simply awaiting consummation, and the period may terminate abruptly any time when the person falls in love and decides to marry. For some, the hesitancy concerning marriage may be overcome only as friends pair up and marry, leaving the single individual feeling out of place with friends whose major emotional investments now lie in their own homes and their young children. The pressures of parents and married friends, who feel that life can be completed only in marriage, increase. Loneliness becomes a greater problem and persons begin to wonder about their own rationalizations for not marrying. Even though living with a partner, persons are apt to feel very vulnerable without a permanent relationship. The partner may find a more attractive partner, educational or career needs may lead to separation; relationships between parents and the partner are somewhat tenuous—even if cordial, not those of family members;[5] and persons do not have the right to expect that their welfare is as important to the partner as the partner's own well-being, for they are not yet bound to a life in common. The entire social system pushes young men and women toward marital status, for the life of a single person, particularly for a woman, becomes increasingly limited. Motives other than romantic love gain more importance in the decision to marry and in the choice of a partner.

THE NATURE OF THE IMPULSIONS TO MARRY

The impulsion to form a lasting marital union rests upon the biological nature of humans and the requisite lengthy period of nurturance in the family setting. The two sexes are obviously different and have different biological functions and are suited to each other for satisfactory release of sexual tensions and attainment of the complete orgasmic pleasure on which nature through the evolutionary process has set a high premium to assure perpetuation of the species. Sexuality in itself, however, does not explain the institution of marriage nor does sexual attraction suffice as a reason why people marry. Sexual

gratification is scarcely considered a primary function of marriage in some societies, occurring independently of marriage, particularly for men, and it may be pertinent to marriage only in regard to procreation. Currently, for the majority of young adults the satisfaction of sexual drives does not wait upon marriage. However, it must be recognized that whereas much premarital sexual activity can provide release, excitement, and pleasure, it may not afford much emotional satisfaction and a sense of completion.

The desire to propagate, which may well have instinctual components, particularly in women, but which also arises in both sexes through the desire for a sense of completion through parenthood, more clearly fosters a reasonably permanent relationship. The children require protective nurturance for many years. As discussed in previous chapters, it is difficult for single parents to raise a child, and a child properly requires a parent of each sex. From the parents' standpoint, one of the major gratifications of having children is the sharing of the child and the child's development with another, and preferably with the other parent.

We have noted throughout the developmental process the preparation, which is often unconscious and unnoted, for males and females to fill divergent roles, to possess different abilities, and to focus on different interests. In all societies children have been reared in a manner that leads to a need for interdependence with a member of the opposite sex to cam' out properly the activities of life, particularly child rearing. Though the differences in the way girls and boys are brought up are diminishing, whether each sex will become essentially self-sufficient, and whether it will be deemed desirable, remains to be answered in the future. The differences extend beyond tangible matters to differing ways of regarding and relating to people, and to finding different sources of satisfaction so that neither a man nor a woman has a rounded approach and grasp of life alone. Although adolescents and, at times, young adults may be more at ease with members of their own sex whose ways are more familiar because they resemble their own, when adults become independent it is far more likely that a man and woman will complement one another and fill out each other's interests and needs than will a person of the same gender, quite aside from the sexual needs.

The incompleteness of the individual, however, is particularly telling because each person grew up as a member of a family in which tasks and roles were shared, which provided support during

immaturity and which formed a place where a person was accepted for affectional reasons rather than for abilities or achievement. During infancy and childhood intangible bonds to others were formed that provided warmth and security, and gave meaning to life. Within the family children could feel secure that their wellbeing was as important to the parents as to themselves. We have seen that the child starts life in symbiosis with the mother and gradually gains an independent self. The movement toward separation and increasing independence had always been ambivalent, containing an urge toward freedom for self-realization and a regressive pull toward dependent relatedness with its comfort and security. Throughout development there had been a strong impetus, largely unconscious, toward regaining a total relatedness with another person.

It has also been noted, particularly in the discussion of the resolution of the oedipal attachment, that the sensuous or erotic components of the relatedness to parents had to be frustrated within the family in order to foster proper independent development. The upsurge of sexual feelings at puberty not only remained unfulfilled but led to further movement away from the parents. A major aspect of development, the strong attraction to the parent of the opposite sex, after having been formed and having served a useful purpose, was frustrated and left hanging. It was sublimated and displaced, but unconsciously left a sense of incompletion that required closure. These structured hut unsatisfied longings and patterns provide the foundation for the later love relationships.

Young persons had to overcome a variety of feelings of inadequacy before being reach' to lose themselves in a total relationship again. The unconscious memory of the disappointing frustration remained in them. The boy needed to gain security against being overwhelmed and lost in a relationship with a woman. The forbidden incestuous connotation of sexuality had to be overcome in both sexes, the dangers of rivalry with parents set aside, and independence from parents achieved, 'lire independence from family, however, increases the feelings of incompletion and aloneness. The sexual drive, however, now is free to find expression and adds compelling moment to the forming of a new union which will more fully, sexually as well as affectionately, complete the strivings and pattern that had been forcible renounced in childhood. Persons who fall in love again transcend themselves, but this time as adults who can take care of another as well as be cared for. The welfare of the other becomes synonymous with one's own welfare. The libidinal strivings are again focused on a specific person but now they are reciprocated. Though the two persons are still physically separate, the act of falling in love forms a union

between them.

The libidinal drives play a major role in the finding of a love object. The passionate needs pervade intellect and color perception. The wish for the desired object transcends reality. It attaches to some desired and needed fragment in another person, to a physical characteristic or behavioral trait, and around it fashions the idealized person of one's desires. In a sense, every lover is something of a Pygmalion.

It is a time-worn adage that love is blind. It is blind in proportion to the intensity of one's needs. There is an old story told by Petrarch of a youth who fell in love with a one-eyed girl and was sent away by his parents who opposed the marriage. After he returned several years later, when he asked his former love how she had lost her eye during his absence, the girl replied, "I have lost none, but you have found yours."

What is the image the lover sees? Some trait produces a resonance of the primary parental love model. It may be quite apparent or because of residual incestuous fears be hidden under markedly different characteristics such as a different physical appearance or divergence of race or religion, a fairly common factor that has been termed "neurotic exogamy," because of the resemblance to the taboo against marrying persons from the same clan or village in many primitive societies.[6] Although an attempt by Hamilton (1929) to trace a similarity between marital partners and parents led to a negative conclusion, psychoanalytic work is more likely to uncover one. It is not always present or at least not observable even with careful scrutiny, and it would seem that women tend to marry a man more obviously related to the father than a man is likely to choose a wife resembling his mother. The person in love also sees an admiring person, noting in the *eves* of the other the devoted attraction which may well relate to the infant's fixation on the eyes of the loving and admiring mother. Lovers find someone who supports and increases their own self-esteem and turns the admirer into the person whose admiration and love they wish. While a person is desired who will complement the self, the loved one may be selected narcissistically in the image of the self whom one loves. However, the resemblance between spouses, which is often noticeable, is not this simple; as the choice is apt to fall on someone who resembles a parent; and as a person is apt to resemble a parent, the spouses may bear resemblances to one another. The choice of a love object seen as the source and possessor of total erotism which re-creates fantasy

images of adolescence is apt to be based on an evaluation even less close to reality than other types. There are, of course, many other specific determinants of the choice of the precise partner which are elusive and can be traced only in extreme instances when the determining factors are unusually clear.

Readiness for Marriage

In some respects the question of whom a person chooses to marry must be related to the question of when a person becomes ready to marry, for when conscious and unconscious preparation for marriage has been completed the proper person often mysteriously appears. While it is romantic to believe that true lovers will eventually meet though separated by continents, the facts show that twelve and a half percent of five thousand couples in Philadelphia lived at the same address prior to marriage and over fifty percent within twenty blocks of one another.[7] Proximity of residence is clearly a major factor in selection, while attendance at the same schools and churches accounts for another large proportion. The choice is basically not of one person from among the inhabitants of the world but from the relatively small number of persons met under favorable circumstances at a very specific time in life.

THE DEVELOPMENTAL HISTORY OF MARITAL CHOICE

The process of marital choice has a developmental history much like that of occupational choice and this history influences the outcome, for the choice may take decisive form at different stages in the process. The various phases have already been noted as we followed personality development from early childhood. The earliest choice is the incestuous wish to marry a parent which occurs before the child recognizes that the parent also grows older while he or she grows up, a choice retained until the resolution of the oedipal attachments takes place, when it is banished into the unconscious where it continues to exert its influence. There is a period when fantasy choices are fairly clearly parental substitutes, friends of parents, teachers, and the like, who can approximate a realistic choice as the child's age comes closer to that of the parental substitutes, as when a high school student falls in love with a teacher, or the student nurse with the physician who teaches her. Eventually, the possibility of marrying an older person who remains something of a parental figure becomes realistic. It is a common pattern of marriage in some countries where the woman marries an older, paternal man. More commonly, the adolescent moves from the fantasy of a romantic storybook ideal divested of sexuality to form a crush on

an older adolescent who is an idol of the peer group. During adolescence there may be considerable daydreaming of the perfect person one will find, and, for the girl, of a man who will pursue her and sacrifice himself for love of her. In late adolescence desirable sexual characteristics more clearly become part of the image.

Eventually fantasy choices give way to courtship experiences which involve the actual trying out of the suitability of potential partners. At present, the trying out starts long before actual courtship through the gaining of familiarity with members of the opposite sex and the sorting out of what types of persons one likes. In contrast to societies where the girl cannot go out unchaperoned, the courtship will usually include "going steady" or a period of living together as a trial of compatibility in consideration of future marriage, or simply as an experimental run. The couple may try out their sexual compatibility, unfortunately often under circumstances that are far from favorable. Even among those who live together sexual difficulties are fairly common. One or both frequently hide their lack of satisfaction from the other, trusting that the difficulties will eventually disappear as they often do; but where facilities are available many seek counseling, even though neither engaged nor married.[8] There may also be a preengagement understanding between the couple that is a semiformal consideration of future engagement and marriage. Such pledges accompanied by the exchange of significant tokens have varying degrees of meaning, but are more readily broken than a formal engagement which usually involves the meeting, if not the approval, of the two families.

With the achievement of adult status, repeated dating often assumes the significance of courtship. By then persons have had an opportunity to take stock, not only forming opinions concerning the type of spouse desired but also what sort of persons they are likely to attract. Who has shown serious interest provides some measure of prospects. Still, the chance meeting or unexpected interest of a person may upset fantasies, expectations, and self-assessment at any time. Thus a young woman of twenty who became engaged to a man twelve years her senior tried to explain her decision which was as unexpected to her as to her family. She said, "I had always expected to marry someone who I was sure would amount to something, but also liked to have fun, to go dancing, play tennis, and enjoy the things I did. Then suddenly he came along and asked me to go out with him. I didn't think I'd be interested and I wasn't sure I'd know how to behave with an older man. I made excuses several times until I didn't know what to say. Then on our first date I found I was comfortable with him and felt taken care of. It was clear he

wanted to get married. He isn't what I'd thought I wanted, he's just an insurance salesman and doesn't want to be anything else, he just wants to have a good home and a nice life. Still now I know I love him and want to be with him as I never wanted anyone before." Indeed, in falling in love seriously the young adult is apt to descend from romantic dreams to reality, but through falling in love he or she magnifies the reasonably prosaic choice into the most important and wonderful person in the world. The shift involves the more mature realization that the other need only be the most wonderful person in the world for the self.

THE ENGAGEMENT

The decision to marry is conventionally marked by the formal engagement. Although in some societies the engagement or betrothal is virtually a contract to marry, it currently forms a period prior to marriage that permits the couple to associate intimately and fairly constantly and to make certain that they are suited to one another. However, many couples now become very close and intimate to varying degrees without becoming engaged. An engagement for some still involves obtaining parental approval, but at present it often amounts to little more than telling the parents that they intend to marry and establishing a convenient date. Nevertheless, the decision brings realistic considerations to the forefront. The prospect of confronting parents with someone to whom they will certainly object gives pause and may even deter an agreement to marry. The compatibilities of the families, economic and geographical considerations, and desires to retain close relationships with parents may enter into consideration. Despite the insistence on self-determination by the couple, parental opinions as well as those of friends are often heeded and probably serve as a useful check against impulsive or inappropriate marriages.

The engagement is more than a trial period. It provides time prior to the definite commitment and the assumption of responsibilities to fuse interests and identities and for each to accommodate to the other in a movement away from the romantic attraction to a more conjugal relationship. It is usually a period of freer and more intense sexual activity, during which they may feel easier about obtaining contraceptive advice or sexual counseling.[9] Some couples, particularly younger ones, decide to wait until marriage to have sexual relations, which often makes the engagement period a difficult and frustrating time, for the sexual play and intense attraction heighten the desire for immediate consummation. When a couple evaluate their compatibility on the satisfaction of sexual relationships, or, as is now often the case,

on the woman's ability to have an orgasm each time they have intercourse—if not on the ability for both of them to experience simultaneous orgasms—difficulties are likely to ensue, for a good sexual adjustment frequently requires time, experience, familiarity, and confidence in the self and the partner.

It is clear from various sources that a reasonable engagement period safeguards against later divorce. Impulsive marriages without any waiting period are notably unsuccessful, which forms one reason why many states require a waiting period between obtaining a license and the actual wedding ceremony. Trends concerning optimal length of engagements cannot be clearly established. Some couples, particularly childhood sweethearts or college couples, may have a brief formal engagement though they have been informally engaged for many years. Three different studies indicate that the chances for excellent marriage adjustment are greatest when the engagement has lasted more than two years, but few advisors would suggest such prolonged formal engagements. As a survey of married college graduates indicated that about one third of the women and one fourth of the men had previously been engaged to another person, it is clear that engagements serve a useful purpose as a trial period (Burgess and Locke, 1945).

Aside from testing the compatibility of the couple, and permitting closer assessment by each of the other, the engagement also provides persons time to ascertain their own readiness for marriage. As the actual event approaches, concerns about one's ability to accept responsibility, about sexual competence, and about less conscious fears of genital injury promote anxiety. The narrow margin between anxieties which will blossom into incapacitation in marriage and those which will fade when the period of waiting is over may be difficult to assess. Those who approach the psychiatrist, clergyman, or marital counselor may wish someone else to make the decision for them, but usually they come too late for anyone to help them work through an adequate assessment of themselves and the partner, and only under extreme conditions can a third person assume responsibility. It is of interest that a notable proportion of those who break an engagement will break more than one.

VARIOUS MOTIVATIONS TO MARRY

There are many reasons for marriage and the choice of a partner other than falling in love. They may be ancillary and only contributory factors or they may be dominating motivations, adequate in

themselves; or they may, because of their force, almost preclude a lasting, satisfactory marriage. Some are clearly negative motivations in the sense that they cause a person to seek marriage in order to compensate for some unhappy life situation rather than because of strong desires for married life with the partner. It would be naive to consider marital and family problems on the assumption that the marriage arose through love, and without being ready to hear and understand what led each spouse into the unhappy bond. Yet, as with many other life situations, what might be favorable or unfavorable for the success of a marriage can rarely be stated in categorical terms, for the chances of success depend upon the balance of factors involved in the specific situation. Some reasons aside from love of the specific partner that enter to a greater or lesser degree into any marriage are the desire to have a home of one's own, to gain completion and complementation with a person of the opposite sex, to find sexual outlets and settle problems of sexuality, to have children, to gain security, to acquire status and a place in society. Yet each of these may contain distortions that will interfere with the relationship.

While the desire for a home of one's own properly emerges with the change in the young adults' relations with their families, it can also arise primarily as a need to get away from unhappiness in the parental home. The parents' quarrels, their domination, the breakup of the parents' marriage after the children have grow n, and countless such reasons can impel a young person to seek a spouse hastily. Statements that one hears from unhappily married people, such as "After that fight with my father, I would have married the first man that came along, and I suppose I did," may overlook the fact that the young woman seduced the first man she went out with and made him feel obligated to marry her. In a different context, the youth who is away from a small community for the first time, as for example after he is inducted into the army, feels intense loneliness without a home and may find a girl in the nearby town who behaves much more forwardly than any he knew before to be most desirable, and he cannot wait to marry her.

Sexual attraction and the impulsion of sexuality form a desired component of the decision to marry. Marriage not only provides an outlet for sexual expression but it permits a settling of sexuality so that finding a partner need no longer be a preoccupation or a constant occupation. Still, sexual need can lead to impetuous choice or unwittingly into a relationship that has few if any other virtues. The selection of a partner simply because of his or her sexual attractiveness to others not uncommonly derives from a need to gain prestige or bolster self-esteem through having an enviable partner. Anxieties concerning sexual

adequacy can lead to a marriage undertaken primarily to assure the self of one's adequacy as a man or woman, or occasionally simply to conceal impotence or homosexuality from the world. A young woman who has considerable guilt over masturbation and who has some intermittent concerns that she might be homosexual because she recognizes her competitiveness with men and her jealousy of their friendships with each other, starts having casual affairs. Before long she compulsively sleeps with any college classmate who makes advances to her. When she finds a passive young man whom she can dominate and with whom she assumes a masculine role in intercourse, she leads him into marriage in the hope that it will stop her promiscuity. She does not recognize that he seeks to marry her because of his need to find a boyish girl in order to feel aroused, and soon after marriage she resents being treated as a boy rather than a woman. A college professor finds that his homosexual interests are creating suspicion on the campus and seeks to shield himself. He selects a woman he meets at a religious conference whom he believes has no interest in anything but spiritual matters. His inability to tolerate any physical closeness becomes unbearable to the wife, particularly as she married largely to have children. Such conscious use of marriage for self-protection or for selfish motives is not a rarity among disturbed persons.

The wish for security and to have someone who will provide support financially and emotionally is not only an appropriate part of marriage but can be an acceptable reason in itself, particularly when it is openly or tacitly understood by both persons, as when a widower with children marries a woman who wishes a home and to make a home for someone. It is less favorable when a girl becomes so fed up with her work in a factory or with being the target for the foreman's expectations that she sleep with him that she decides that marriage to the young man she has been trying to avoid is preferable to the insecurities and burdens of unmarried life. Ambition also often takes precedence over other motivations; and sometimes it is the ambition of the parents rather than of the person who is marrying. After all, marriage for wealth, career, opportunity, or social advancement has the sanction of ages when such motives were considered natural and proper, with each family or individual seeking the best opportunity and with love a secondary factor. While such reasons in themselves need not be injurious to a good marriage, when they are clearly the dominant motive partners whose wealth or prestige is being acquired may all too readily feel unwanted for themselves, or the spouses may feel obligated to act deferentially.

The wish for children, too, can form a primary rather than an adjunctive reason for marriage, with the choice of the spouse a secondary matter, and may eventually leave the spouse feeling neglected after

the arrival of the child. A woman in her thirties who has had little opportunity to marry because she is contemptuous of men spends much time in fantasy about a son who will become a great musician such as she would have been if she had been born a male. She is intensely rivalrous with her sister, and when the sister has a child she attaches herself to a younger man and for the first time in her life becomes very seductive. The man's personality matters little except that she rightly feels she can lead him to the altar. Soon after the birth of the son this woman became very discontented with her husband's passivity and sought a divorce, feeling she had no need for him and resenting his attachment to her son.

Marriages are often enough precipitated by pregnancies, particularly in teenagers, only a small proportion of whom, as has already been pointed out, use reliable contraception, and who tend to seek abortion later in a pregnancy than older women. Reliable contraception and the availability of abortion lessen the need for such marriages, many of which soon end in divorce. However, in many instances the pregnancy only determines the time of a marriage between a couple who have already decided to marry or simply serves to chase away the last hesitancies of one or the other partner. Pregnancy has been a more or less customary—for one cannot say conventional—way for a girl to secure the man she wants but who avoids proposing or ignores her proposals. While surely leading to some satisfactory marriages when the girl knows her mind and perhaps her boyfriend's better than lie does, the resentment or shame over being forced to marry can place a lasting blight over a marriage.

The Hostile Marriage

The expression of hostility through the act of marrying forms a common source of disastrous marriages. It is usually as destructive to the person who is being hostile as to the relatively innocent partner who has become involved. The hostile persons use themselves as weapons for gaining revenge, wishing others to suffer because they suffer. In the process they become the targets of their own animosities. The most obvious instances are marriages on the rebound, after the desired partner rejects or marries someone else. The hasty step may be carried out in order to regain self-esteem by feeling wanted and needed by someone, but it usually contains the intention of showing the rejecting person that he or she is not needed; and it contains the fantasy that the true love will realize his error and dash in at the last moment and insist he cannot live without her. The hostility-over being rejected takes precedence over love and the person punishes the self for the hostility by making an inappropriate

marriage, in a sense wishing the true love to suffer because the person is unhappy. Even when hostility does not dominate the picture, the marriage made hastily, before the disappointment has been worked through and assimilated, leaves the person dissatisfied with the spouse, and often involved for years with fantasies of the first true love whom the spouse can never match. A young woman who married hastily primarily to get away from home after her fiancé was killed in combat, insisted on wearing the engagement ring from her first fiancé until the moment she entered the church for her wedding. She lived through her first pregnancy fantasying that the dead man was the father of her child.

A different type of hostile marriage involves the expression of diffuse antagonisms toward members of the opposite sex, often provoked by envy. The person marries a dependent person and seeks to treat a subservient spouse sadistically. The marriage takes the form of a misplaced triumph over the hated enemy. A young woman had been aggressively homosexual during adolescence and in her early adult years. Her homosexuality had been determined in large part by her envy of her brothers who were obviously preferred by her mother. She eventually learned she could seduce and dominate some men by being a sexual tease just as easily as she could dominate certain women. She married a masochistic man whom she constantly teased and belittled sexually and she gained pleasure in being able to humiliate him in sexually perverse acts. In a somewhat similar manner a man who was bitterly hostile toward his mother became a specialist in wooing man) girls until they seemed desperately in love with him and were willing to abase themselves sexually, and then rejected them. When he finally married he repeatedly stimulated and frustrated his wife sexually but expected her constantly to derogate herself and admire him.

Rescue Fantasies and Sadomasochistic Marriages

It may be useful to note the place of rescue fantasies in the choice of a partner, for they are particularly pertinent to the medical, nursing, and social work professions. Eliciting sympathy because of unfortunate life circumstances engenders in the other the fantasy that one can undo the harm and save the person from an unfortunate fate. A man feels impelled to rescue a girl from a home that is miserable because of an alcoholic father. He sees the girl's faults but believes that they are not really part of her and that he will change matters by providing love and care. Doctors are apt to confuse caring for patients with the desire to take care of them personally. A nurse may seek to marry a schizophrenic patient in the belief

that her care will cure him. Such desires may often grow out of a lack of security in one's own attractiveness or sexual ability accompanied by the feeling that he or she has a right to marry only if it is a sacrifice to save the spouse.

Some of the types of marital choice that we have been discussing in the past few pages are often designated as sadomasochistic. The spouses unconsciously select partners whom they can hurt and who, in turn, will hurt them. They may argue, quarrel, fight, repeatedly injure each other's self-esteem and be chronically unhappy, but because of the interdigitating psychopathology they could not live intimately in any other type of relationship—one might almost say could not be happy in any other sort of marriage. In most such marriages, a sadist does not select a masochist, but rather both are sadomasochistic in varying proportions. One may behave sadistically under certain circumstances, and the other under different conditions. Each has vulnerabilities which the other rapidly uncovers and uses as a target for barbs and sallies. Frequently each is preoccupied with hurting the other to get even. The patterns usually do not involve sadistic perversions, and need not include physical violence, and the sadistic pleasure can even be gained through moral righteousness. A fundamentalist minister brought his wife to a psychiatric clinic because of her drinking. It soon became apparent that the minister habitually and sanctimoniously caused his wife to consider herself a sinner because of her sexual desires, and because she had not been "saved" by an inner revelation as he had been. He had, indeed, treated her very much like a servant. The wife, in turn, hurt him and gained vengeance by being "ill" with "alcoholism," which she manifested primarily by attending services and church socials in an intoxicated state. Her behavior permitted her husband to feel even more pious and self-sacrificing because of his tolerance of her illness, which he dealt with, however, as if it were a visitation of Satan that marked his wife as selected for damnation whereas he had been elected for salvation.

Largely because of such sadomasochistic marriages, in which the conflict and hurt really serves the unconscious needs of both partners, there has been a strong tendency on the part of psychiatrists to consider that virtually all such marital choices serve some fundamental personality needs of the persons who make these seemingly unfortunate selections. The partners find their complementary mate intuitively; through their interaction during courtship; or perhaps most commonly because of resemblances to parents who had been involved in such sadomasochistic relationships throughout the person's childhood. Indeed, one may gain the impression that for some persons marriage means a

sadomasochistic relationship because of the homes in which they were reared, and that they seek a spouse who will fill the necessary role to create a marriage similar to those of their parents. Nevertheless, as noted earlier in the chapter, the concept that all unhappy marital choices serve the unconscious needs of the spouses can be overdone and applied inappropriately. The marital choice serves a purpose, but as we have been saying, there are factors other than unconscious needs that can lead into an unhappy marriage.

Young people, in particular, are apt to disregard the family of the intended spouse, insisting that they are not marrying the family. While this is true enough, it is also clear that one of the best indicators of a future happy marriage is whether or not the person comes from a stable and happy home. Divorce runs in families as much as certain hereditary illnesses. In a sense, of course, one is marrying the family insofar as the spouse is the product of the parents and the way in which he or she has been raised in the family.

The choice of the suitable partner clearly presents difficulties, and it has been possible only to indicate the importance of a suitable choice and some of the types of difficulties that commonly arise. The choice of the partner constitutes the major decision of a supposedly voluntary nature that can complement and alter the personality makeup and afford opportunities for self-completion before the production of a new generation. In contemporary society the marriage leads to the fusion of two persons necessary to produce offspring and to furnish the family milieu in which they grow up. While offering opportunities that should help them to mature, the decision and selection rest upon the outcome of each person's development in a family. They are impelled by sexual feelings and other needs for affinity. The frustrations of the oedipal bonds in the family of origin lead to the search for completion in marriage, and the marital choice is apt to reflect the many unconscious problems of the intrafamilial oedipal situation. It turns backward as well as into the future and thus is particularly prone to regressive or neurotic determination. It can include such motives as the effort to undo and redo childhood unhappiness; to live in the present in terms of infantile and childhood situations that are no longer appropriate; the holding of expectations from a spouse that are more suited to a parent; the search for narcissistic gratification as an admired child rather than wishing to share and to direct the marriage for mutual satisfaction. The entire matter of choice of a marriage partner is so closely linked with the entire personality development that the choice forms a distinctive measure of the total outcome of the process. Perhaps it was simpler when the decision did not rest upon the individual partners and less was expected of marriage and the

blame for its shortcomings did not fall so heavily upon the couple itself.

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Notes

1 The annual divorce rate reached a high of about eighteen per thousand marriages in 1946 and then fell to approximately nine per thousand in the late 1950s, but has been rising steadily in recent years and again approximates, and may now exceed, the post-World War II levels.

2 There has been an increase in the proportion of persons under thirty-five who are single since 1960, a change thought to indicate that people are now marrying a few years later than previously; but the change may reflect a slight diminution in the percentage of people who marry. In Sweden, which has often antedated American trends, first marriages decreased fifty percent between 1966 and 1972 and illegitimacy rose about twenty-five percent.

3 However, as noted previously, the survey reported in *Children of the Counterculture* (Rothchild and Wolf, 1976) indicates that in many communes the effects on children are disastrous.

4 It is, of course, limiting for persons to focus on self-actualization in the present, for a person's actualization usually involves "becoming" rather than simply "being," and it runs counter to the essential human attribute of foresight. A common problem in communes and cooperative groups of couples that is not inherent in the concept has been the tendency of many persons who

join such groups to wish to remain dependent. The difficulties in eliminating or radically changing gender-linked roles and personality attributes has been considered in previous chapters. Communes, of course, differ markedly from extended families, or primitive villages, because of the very different backgrounds of the members and the absence of kinship loyalties and bonds that start in early childhood.

5 Parents have difficulties in knowing how to relate to an offspring's "friend" and, unless communications between parents and child are unusually good, can be uncertain how their child wishes them to regard the relationship. It differs in many respects from that of parents-in-law to the child's spouse. They also have some problems in referring to the partner, difficulties that have given rise to such terms as my "sin-in-law" or my "daughter-out-law."

6 However, about three-quarters of the marriages in the United States in 1960 were between persons of similar national origins, and about the same proportion of Protestants and Catholics married within their faiths; a significantly smaller percentage of Jews married persons of other religions.

7 See J. Bossard, "Residential Propinquity as a Factor in Marriage Selection." The topic has been reviewed by A. M. Katz and R. Hill, "Residential Propinquity and Marital Selection: A Review of Theory, Method, and Fact." The figure given for similar address is higher than that found in other studies, perhaps because it did not take into account a tendency for engaged couples to move close to one another, even before the days when they were likely to live together.

8 Early difficulties in achieving sexual satisfaction and compatibility will be considered briefly in the next chapter.

9 Figures concerning premarital intercourse between engaged couples have become outdated and have been more a measure of the reliability of statistics gained from questionnaires than facts. A study made some years ago, in which members of married couples were separately asked whether they had engaged in premarital intercourse with the spouse, revealed that approximately fifty percent of the husbands, but only sixteen percent of the wives, had done so.