**Unit 3: Who’s Playing What Role?**

**Role expectations**

* In every marriage/common law relationship, individuals come to the relationship with expectations of their own that will need to be expressed, accommodated, or eliminated.
* People report greater satisfaction with their relationships when it meets their expectations of what a relationship should be like, and how their partner should treat them.
* The ***stimulus-value-role theory*** explains role expectations in relationships as a process. First, partners are chosen based on the attractiveness of their physical appearance.  Then values are assessed, and if the role attitudes are compatible a relationship develops. The partners share responsibilities.
* Conflict can arise when one individual’s expectations are contrary to the others, or when individual roles do not align with perceived society standards. Contemporary society still expects individuals to conform to stereotypes: for example, women who choose not to have children are often considered selfish and unfeminine.  Media stereotypes in TV, movies, and advertising continue to portray men as professional workers, and women as homemakers and mothers, reinforcing the traditional gender roles of intimate relationships.
* A cultural gap exists between contemporary role expectations in the workforce, and traditional role expectations in the home. This gap can be a source of stress and guilt related to role expectations: in our society, women are held more responsible than men for the well-being of their children. Role expectations about the domestic division of labour have become one of the most contentious issues in contemporary relationships.
* **Where does conflict between role expectations start?**

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**Make your own Notes on:**

* 1. Gender issues
  2. Traditional roles
  3. Non-traditional roles

**Gender Issues**

* The family’s children affect the sex-role behaviours of all family members.  The number, gender, and distribution of children influence the parent’s sex roles.  Fathers of daughters act in “more masculine” ways than fathers of mixed-sex children.  Same-sex siblings act out more traditional sex-roles than mixed-sex siblings.
* **True or False: the gender of children affects their parents’ sex-role behaviour.**

**Traditional Relationships**

* Historically, men participated more in traditional “women’s role” responsibilities. During the pre-industrial and early industrial eras, men cared for their own children in large extended families. However, the concept of childhood then was different than the modern idea: children were expected to begin contributing to the family at very early ages. Families were both production and consumption sites. Out of economic necessity, men and women shared labour roles both inside and outside the home, as families were largely rural, agricultural units. Role expectations associated with gender were minimal during this time.
* Industrialization reduced women’s roles in the market economy, as well as the equality of their partnership with their husbands.  The nuclear family developed out of the need to be mobile, in order to move as work became available.  Each person in the smaller family unit had a specialized role.  Men, and often children, participated in paid labour outside of the home.  Women were restricted to domestic labour inside the home.  A power inequality developed, as women’s labour no longer had an economic value attached to it. Women were expected to fulfill their responsibilities out of emotional motivations for their husbands and families, rather than for the labour’s market value. Their work became unpaid and undervalued.
* **Conflict theory** blames this disparity of power for marital relationship dissatisfaction. Today, partners in traditional marriages often act out conventional roles established during the Industrial Revolution; the husband works outside the home, and the wife cares for their children and house, and works only part-time, if at all.  This traditional arrangement is an exchange of financial support by the husband for domestic services by the wife.  In traditional relationships, the female’s role is one of a nurturing child bearer.  A woman in Canadian society has been expected to become a wife and mother, raise her children, and manage her family. Conversely, a man’s role has been to provide for, and protect, his family as a husband and father.  This division of labour based on gender has contributed to our society’s enduring sex-role stereotypes.  In traditional relationships amongst older couples, husbands experience greater marital satisfaction when their wives are emotionally independent and undemanding of their attention.  Wives consider their marriage successful when they feel that they are valued by their husbands, and can rely on them for emotional support.
* **Historically, men and women (have/have not) always participated in sex-type roles?**

**Non-Traditional Relationships**

* The traditional family is rapidly becoming a minority situation in Canada.  Single-parent families, extended families, and families with same-sex partners are all becoming the norm in our contemporary culture.  In many families, the father as the primary wage earner may not even be present. For many reasons, including by choice or economic necessity, women may be the primary or sole breadwinners. Less common than single-mother households are homes that are headed solely by the father. Together, variations on the traditional family model are more common than the stereotypical image of a nuclear family. While some young adults today still fulfill traditional role expectations, conventional roles are becoming less common, as more women enter the work force, and return to it after beginning a family.  Women who participate in the work force benefit from increased self-esteem, status, resources, and health. In contemporary relationships, both men and women pursue relationships more for personal fulfillment and companionship than to as a vehicle for economic security.
* The **family-systems theory** accounts for marital satisfaction as a result of the reciprocity in the marital relationship. In households where both partners are employed by choice, both parents may share traditionally male and female responsibilities, such as child care and household chores, enacting shared roles.
* In dual-career roles, the division of labour is more equitable, or is contracted outside to housecleaners, nannies, and daycares.  Partners who are economically independent of each other tend to have a more balanced power dynamic.  Decisions are made jointly. Husbands who have less-traditional expectations of marriage tend to report higher degrees of satisfaction with their relationships, probably because they are sharing responsibilities with an appreciative spouse. Regardless of the type of relationship, the benefits of marriage still favour husbands.
* Feminist theorists observe that women still spend more time on household tasks than their partners.  In many families, there is a myth of equality: husbands agree with their wives that they should do more, but don’t actually spend any more time on household responsibilities. Women in households with an unequal division of labour tend to become unhappy, depressed, and stressed. The most dissatisfied wives are young mothers who work outside the home in addition to being responsible for the majority of the household chores. The presence of children requires significant changes in the marital routine, and it is typically the mother who accommodates these needs. For example, maternity leave is taken far more frequently than paternity leave. As a result, they report less satisfaction in their marriage. The injustice of this inequality is now more frequently recognized than before, but has not yet resulted in true equality.

**Role negotiation**

* More than sex, money, or paid work, couples fight most about household responsibilities, especially childcare.  How a couple addresses these issues can determine the success or failure of the relationship.  Marital satisfaction among women with non-traditional expectations is most affected by this labour inequality.  An imbalance between work and family responsibilities can result in overload, culturally-induced stress, and spill-over.
* Marital discord can be addressed with frequent, sincere communication about role expectations and responsibilities.  Ideally, the couple will have discussed their expectations prior to formalizing their relationship.  In reality, many couples do not explicitly address the division of household labour, but automatically assume stereotypical patterns of responsibility for traditionally “male” or “female” chores.  However, even couples who have participated in premarital counselling benefit from ongoing communication and adjustments during the lifecycle of their relationship.
* Over the course of the marital lifespan, numerous adjustments are necessary.  Partners may accommodate changes to their relationship by negotiating new roles.  Retirement is one normative event that is frequently an opportunity for change in role expectations later in the relationship.  Spouses may take on responsibilities that previously belonged to their partner, out of choice or necessity.  More leisure time, illness of a spouse, and caring for aging parents may all be life events that motivate a change in dynamics. Creating a balance between work and family requires connections between the relationship partners, and between the employer and employee.  However, some sociologists, like Arlie Hochschild, theorize that work becomes a haven from family responsibilities.  Even when accommodations like flex-time or job-sharing are available, people choose not to take advantage of them.
* While families are not corporations that can be managed according to a business model, there are numerous strategies for establishing balance between work and family responsibilities.  Creative organization of work and household responsibilities, according to the family’s needs, is one method of coping with the multiple demands of work and home. Some families chose to resolve role conflicts by avoiding or reducing them.  Having fewer children, relying on extended family members, lowering expectations for household chores, contracting out housework, and utilizing employment accommodations such as on-site daycare, are ways of negotiating more satisfactory conditions.  Not all options are available or feasible for all families, who often need to be ingenious to balance what can become a “juggling act” of responsibilities and obligations.

**Homework:**

* Go onto Youtube and find/watch a recent household product commercial. Once you have finished watching the commercial answer the questions listed below. Be sure to include the title of the commercial on Youtube and the link.

**Commercial Questions:**

* To whom in the relationship is the product directed?
* Who is likely to make the decision about buying the product or service?
* How might have this product been advertised in the past? Has it changed at all?
* How do these products/services advertisements reflect or contradict roles within the family today?