



Modern Couples?: Continuity and Change in Heterosexual Relationships

Jenny, Dr van Hooff

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Have heterosexual relationships become more intimate and equal over the past forty years? Simply put, this is the central question underpinning this book. Within the context of late modern social processes, including most notably individualization and detraditionalization, authors such as Giddens, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, and Bauman have come to focus on a posited transformation of personal relationships. This has culminated in a sociological debate over the nature of contemporary relationships, with proponents of change celebrating the emergence of an intimacy based on personal satisfaction rather than traditional obligations. Detractors reject this interpretation and instead lament what they consider to be the destruction of commitment and the demoralisation of personal relationships by the rise of individualism and consumerism. While these two entrenched positions have dominated the debate, a third, marginalised perspective has emerged, which questions the extent to which contemporary relationships have become detraditionalized, and emphasises evidence of continuing gender inequalities.

This book is essentially a qualitative empirical investigation of the changes and continuities posited within the debate, which evaluates existing work and details the findings of van Hooff's research into the relationships of two generations of heterosexual couples. It provides the reader with a grounded interpretation of the evidence, questioning to what extent lived reality has matched the rhetoric within contemporary relationships.

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