

For Richer or Poorer: Women, Men and Marriage

Janeen Baxter

In 1972 Jessie Bernard argued that women fared much worse in marriage than men. She suggested that in every marriage there are two marriages “his” and “hers” and his is much better than hers on almost every indicator – demographically, socially, and psychologically. Almost three decades later the issues raised by Bernard are still being debated. Waite and Gallagher (2000) have argued that all married people are happier, healthier and better off financially than unmarried people. Most recently, DeVaus (2002) claims that marriage reduces the risk of mental disorders for both men and women. Our paper addresses these issues. Using data from the Negotiating the Lifecourse survey we examine the relationship between marriage, gender and a range of social outcomes. We focus on two main areas – outcomes associated with the labor market and outcomes associated with the household. In particular we advance debates in the areas by examining the experience of de facto cohabitations separately from legal marriage. This enables us to examine the impact of the institutional status of marriage on outcomes as opposed to cohabitation more generally.