Chapter Nine

Married Young People's Sexual Relationships

Marital traditions in sub-Saharan Africa are diverse, but some broad patterns are common to many ethnic groups. Historically across sub-Saharan Africa, for example, it has been common for girls to first marry in their teen years, while men have often waited until their twenties (Caldwell, Caldwell, and Quiggin 1989; Caldwell et al. 1998; Żaba et al. 2009). Young women’s age at first marriage has increased since the introduction of formal schooling, in many cases shifting from marriage at puberty to marriage several years later, but age differences of 5–10 years between husband and wife are still not unusual. For example, the 2004–2005 Tanzanian Demographic and Health Survey found that 28 percent of 15–19-year-old women and 1 percent of 15–19-year-old men were married, compared to 76 percent and 35 percent of 20–24-year-old women and men, respectively (National Bureau of Statistics and ORC Macro 2005).

As discussed in chapter 3, traditional marriage amongst the Sukuma was based on family alliances and economic considerations, such as a potential spouse’s productivity or bridewealth (Cory 1953; Tanner 1955a; Varkevisser 1973; Abrahams 1981). Like most African ethnic groups, the Sukuma had a patrilocal tradition, meaning that a woman typically moved from her parents’ household to her husband’s upon marrying (Caldwell, Caldwell, and Quiggin 1989). Husbands and wives usually have had separate activities within their household, and largely socialized and worked with others of the same sex throughout the day. According to Sukuma custom husbands had the legally and socially acknowledged right to have extramarital sexual relationships (Cory 1953). Thus while a husband could divorce a wife on the grounds of her infidelity, a wife could not do the same if her husband took mistresses or other wives (Cory 1953).
In chapter 6 we addressed the role of love, and specifically romantic love, in unmanned youths' sexual relationships. Romantic love has often been identified as a precursor to companionate marriage, in which emotional intimacy is considered to be both the ideal foundation and the goal of marriage. Historically, anthropologists have found companionate marriage has not been common in sub-Saharan Africa, arguing that married individuals typically felt stronger bonds for their biological families than their spouses, although some have further stipulated that this is changing with modernization (Caldwell, Caldwell, and Quiggin 1989; Caldwell et al. 1998). Recently, however, some researchers have argued that emotional attachment in African marriages has been underestimated historically, noting, for example, that bridewealth itself can reflect strong sentiment (Hirsch et al. 2009; Smith 2009; Thomas and Cole 2009). As Thomas and Cole (2009, 22) argued:

> Despite . . . anthropological emphasis on rights and responsibilities, our evidence suggests that bridewealth has also included affective dimensions. For instance, one elderly Malagasy woman proudly told . . . how her former husband had “even paid a bull for her”—evidence in her mind not only of her productive and reproductive value, but also of how much that man had loved her.

Since the advent of the HIV epidemic, social scientists and epidemiologists have brought new scrutiny to marriage in sub-Saharan Africa, often through surveys of self-reported sexual behavior and health (e.g., Boerma et al. 2002; Mitsunaga et al. 2005; Hattori and Dodoo 2007; Benefo 2008; Anglewicz et al. 2010). Marriage frequently has been assumed to be protective for young adults, on the assumption that faithful married partners will not introduce new infections into a marriage, or transmit existing infections to others. Qualitative studies in some African settings have found some people strategically sought to reduce risk through marriage, including intentional selection of a low-risk spouse; communication to persuade a spouse to reform or to better understand personal risk; and divorcing a spouse who was likely to bring HIV into marriage (Reniers 2008). However, marriage may nonetheless involve relatively high risk for some individuals, particularly for women, because older, higher risk men often marry younger, lower risk women, and because extramarital sexual relationships may be common for men (Caldwell, Caldwell, and Quiggin 1989; Omorodion 1993; Ferguson et al. 2004; Helle-Valle 2004; Kimuna and Djamba 2005; Clark, Bruce, and Dude 2006; Parikh 2007; Jana, Nkambule, and Tumbo 2008; Smith 2009; Hirsch et al. 2009; Hageman et al. 2010).

While extramarital partnerships have been fairly well documented for men in sub-Saharan Africa, they have rarely been documented for women, particularly in rural areas. It is unclear whether African women indeed have
less extramarital sexual activity than men or are simply more intent on hiding it because of potential stigma and punishment (Gersovitz et al. 1998; Nnko et al. 2004). There is increasing evidence that at least a small proportion of married women engage in extramarital sexual relationships. For example, in the 2004–2005 Tanzanian Demographic and Health Survey, 22 percent of men and 9 percent of women who currently were married or cohabiting with a partner reported having had sex with a nonmarital, noncohabiting partner in the past twelve months (National Bureau of Statistics and ORC Macro 2005).

Polygyny, or the practice of a husband having more than one wife at one time, is more widespread in sub-Saharan Africa than almost anywhere else globally (Caldwell, Caldwell and Quiggin 1989). This is possibly maintained by substantial age gaps between spouses, limited emphasis on a strong conjugal bond, and a great pressure on widowed and divorced women to remarry quickly (Caldwell, Caldwell and Quiggin 1989). In recent surveys in Tanzania, for example, 11–12 percent of married men and 23–24 percent of married women reported that they were in a polygynous marriage (National Bureau of Statistics and ORC Macro 2005; TACAIDS et al. 2008). The vast majority of these marriages involved two wives only. Rural and/or less educated men and women were more likely to be in polygynous unions than others, as were relatively poor women (National Bureau of Statistics and ORC Macro 2005).

By definition, polygynous marriages consist of concurrent sexual relationships, but they may be lower risk for the individuals involved than other forms of concurrency, if no spouses have sexually transmitted infections and their sexual network is closed, that is, none of them have extramarital relationships (Research to Prevention 2009). However, one study found that polygyny involved a higher risk of HIV infection, both because polygynous men had more extramarital sexual activity than monogamously married men, and because polygynous households absorbed a disproportionate number of HIV-positive women as junior wives, for example, after widowhood (Reniers and Tfaily 2008). A review of polygyny in sub-Saharan Africa also found it was associated with accelerated transmission of sexually transmitted infections, when compared to monogamous marriages, because it involved concurrent sexual partners and it correlated with low rates of condom use, poor communication between spouses, and age and power imbalances (Bove and Valeggia 2009). That review also suggested that women in polygynous marriages experienced disproportionately high levels of anxiety and depression, particularly around stressful life events.

In contrast to these individual-level findings, at a population level HIV prevalence has been found to be lower in countries where the practice of polygyny is common, and within countries, lower in areas with higher levels of polygyny (Reniers and Watkins 2010). The authors of that study suggested
that, because HIV-positive women disproportionately join polygynous marriages, they are less likely to transmit HIV outside of their small, married sexual network and within the general population than if they remained unmarried. They also suggested that, even within marriage, polygynous HIV-positive women may be less likely to transmit HIV to their husbands than monogamously married HIV-positive women, because polygynous husbands divide their time between two or more wives and each wife is likely to have intercourse less frequently than monogamously married women.

Our study primarily focused on young people’s unmarried sexual relationships, but those relationships often led to marriage at a young age. In the 1998 MEMA kwa Vijana survey, for example, none of the primary school study population was married, but at the follow-up survey approximately three years later 3 percent of males and 29 percent of females had already married (Lutz 2005). Young women who had married were twice as likely to have HIV, herpes, and syphilis as young women who had never married (Lutz 2005). When the study population was surveyed again approximately six years later, 33 percent of males and 56 percent of females were currently married, and an additional 3 percent and 10 percent respectively were divorced (Doyle et al. 2010).

The next section will describe our qualitative findings on the process of marrying, relationships between husbands and wives, extramarital sexual relationships, polygyny, and separation or divorce for young people in rural Mwanza. Later in the chapter, we will discuss these findings in terms of sexual health risk, both within and outside of young people’s marriages.

FINDINGS

Of 63 Year 5–7 pupils who were randomly selected to participate in in-depth interviews at the beginning of our study, 2 of 29 men and 17 of 33 women were married when reinterviewed two to three years later. At that time one of the men and five of the women already had one child, and some other women were pregnant. In addition, all three of the women who were selected for interviews because they had been pregnant in 1998 were married and had two children in 2002.

For recent school leavers, the most common forms of marriage were either (a) formal engagement, when a man proposed to a woman’s parents and negotiated bridewealth (mahari or bukwi) in advance, or (b) elopement, when a couple ran away together and a lesser elopement fine (ngwekwe) was paid by the husband to the woman’s family after the fact. Formal Christian, Muslim, or Sukuma bukwilima weddings only happened in a small minority of
the marriages involving engagement. Occasionally, a young woman who recently had left school became married simply by moving in with a man after it became known that he had made her pregnant. In such cases the man either did not compensate her parents or paid them a traditional fine (nsango) for having caused a pregnancy out-of-wedlock. Once young women had been out of school for several years or longer, almost all marriages happened either by elopement or simply moving in together, as seen in case studies 2.3 and 2.4.

The Decision to Marry

Marrying and having children soon afterwards were almost universal life goals in rural Mwanza. Girls generally were expected to marry within two years of completing school. If they did not do so their reputations usually suffered and their families were likely to receive less bridewealth if they did eventually marry. Many girls may have liked the opportunity to continue in school and some experienced family pressure to marry soon after finishing, but most genuinely desired to marry soon after completing school. Young men instead generally wanted to become more economically independent before marrying, and their parents wanted this also. Notably, by the second series of in-depth interviews, the only male respondent to have married by choice soon after leaving school, rather than in reaction to a pregnancy, was more financially secure and prepared to support a wife than most recent school leavers, as he already had a productive cotton farm and a small bicycle parts business.

For both young men and women, marriage represented an important transition to adulthood and its anticipated independence, security, status and comfort. Sex also played an important part in the decision to marry, as a way to have unlimited and exclusive sexual access to a desired partner (particularly for men) and as a way to legitimately have children (particularly for women). Many young people married after having had varied and complicated premarital sexual relationships. Some reported looking forward to having one reliable, committed partner when they married, and a few expressed hope that mutual marital fidelity would reduce their sexual health risk.

Before marriage, when young men described a desirable sexual partner they often listed physical characteristics, such as a woman who was light-skinned or “somewhat fat.” When describing desirable qualities in a wife, however, most young men also mentioned a hard-working nature, politeness, and good behavior, such as sexual fidelity. One man explained, “With a girl of a certain type, you can only have a sexual relationship, you cannot marry her. To marry her is . . . not easy. It is neither good nor easy” [II-99-I-9-m].

Like men, young women often said that in addition to attractiveness a desirable husband was faithful and worked hard. Many young women also
valued a man with personal wealth, achievement, and status, such as owning a kiosk or being a community leader. The more gifts or money men provided in premarital sexual relationships the more desirable they usually were considered to be as potential husbands. The size and frequency of gifts was seen to reflect a man’s long-term ability to support a woman, and it was not unusual for a woman to marry a man primarily on this basis.

Although young men and women typically held such ideals about a future wife or husband, many couples married quickly and informally, before they knew one another well. Most married in-depth interview respondents reported that they had met their spouse for the first time about one month before marrying, regardless of whether they married by engagement, elopement, or simply moving in together. Case studies 2.1 and 2.3 provide examples of this. Often it did not seem necessary to know a partner well before marrying, but what was critical was for both individuals to be at a point in their lives when they wanted to marry. Compatibility of personalities was thought valuable but not essential, as the woman usually was expected to adapt herself to her husband’s personality.

Some young women were believed to have difficulty attracting a husband, either because they had bad behavior or because they were believed to have the condition known as damu nzito that was mentioned in chapter 6. Damu nzito reportedly was inherited from parents or inflicted by witchcraft; in either case, it was not believed to be caused by the woman in question and traditional medicine was considered the only way to treat it. For example, a researcher recorded that a 27-year-old married man “told me that the daughter of the African Inland Church pastor has good behavior and finished primary school [one year earlier] but no one has shown interest in marrying her. He said this is her bad luck, because she has damu nzito” [PO-99-C-2-1m]. Occasionally, men were also reported to have damu nzito, so that even if they married the couple separated soon afterwards.

We found almost no evidence of people who intentionally chose never to marry, with the exception of priests and nuns, and even some priests were known to maintain informal wives and children. A small number of individuals went through adulthood without ever marrying, but this was considered unfortunate by them and other villagers. The vast majority of young people who divorced also hoped to remarry and frequently did so within a few months.

Marriage by Engagement

In the second series of in-depth interviews with randomly selected respondents, half of the married women said that they became formally engaged to
a man before marrying him. Typically, the man met the woman’s father or another male guardian to propose marriage and negotiate bridewealth in advance, as described in case study 2.1. It was not unusual for a man to propose marriage in this way based on the recommendations of his friends and family, having had little or no prior contact with the young woman. A 17-year-old female Year 7 pupil provided the following explanation:

She said if an [unfamiliar] man comes to see his relative or friend in the village he will ask several people who is a suitable girl to marry. The man will then be told about a certain girl who people perceive to be good. He then goes to her home to talk to her parents. If they agree, then they proceed with other steps toward marriage. [PO-00-C-3-2f]

Young women typically had a say in accepting or rejecting marriage proposals, and it was not unusual for a woman to reject a suitor because she did not like him enough or she did not yet want to marry due to schooling, as shown in case study 1.4. However, if a young woman’s father or guardian approved of a suitor and wanted her to marry him then usually she would agree to it also. For example, a 16-year-old girl in Year 7 told a researcher “she will have no control over her marriage, and if a suitor comes to propose marriage and her father decides she should marry him, then she will” [PO-00-C-3-2f].

It was rare for a young woman’s father to try to force her to marry. In one example, a mother of two in her twenties strongly resisted her father’s insistence that she marry a wealthy, older, married man with whom she had had several sexual encounters. It was not clear whether the man had already paid her father bridewealth:

R: My father said, “Now you are going to get married even if it is by force, because I’m your parent.” ... After three days some village elders called me. They told me to marry that old man or else I should return his money back to him. ... Mm, I said, “Now how am I going to return back the money? Did I force him to marry me?” ... Then they called me there to my aunt’s place where my father said, “If you don’t want that old man to marry you, say it here before this gathering. And if you refuse to accept him, you should know that from today onwards I’m no longer your father.” [GDII-00-C-10-5f]

Ultimately this young woman conceded and allowed the man who wanted to marry her to stay with her while he was visiting her village. He had moved in with her two weeks prior to the interview.

Most of the in-depth interview respondents who reported having been engaged before marriage said that they had little or no wedding celebration. However, two women from different districts had a formal Protestant (African Inland Church) ceremony. In both cases the church required the couples
to be screened for infectious illnesses first. One of these women described how she came to marry her husband one month after meeting him:

R: When he saw me [the first time], he told me he wanted to marry me. I told him to come to my house and negotiate with my parents. And he did. They told him, “Go and prepare yourself and bring the bridewealth, so that you can have the wedding.” And he prepared himself. . . . [In addition to the church wedding] there were just many things, like there was a disco at home where people danced. [II-02-I-288-f]

The negotiation and payment of bridewealth or an elopement fine were critical steps in the marriage process. After such payment a husband was entitled to have sex with his wife, to make her pregnant (even if she wanted to use contraception), and to keep older children after divorce. In our study, the families of female in-depth interview respondents who married through engagement received Tshs 150,000 ($180) on average, but it usually came in the form of four to eight cows worth Tshs 20,000 ($24) each, plus additional cash. Some men were unable to pay most of the bridewealth immediately. In two of those cases the woman’s parents forbade her to move to the man’s household, although the couple was allowed to consummate the marriage and sleep together within her parents’ household while waiting for the outstanding payment.

Both participant observation and in-depth interviews suggested that formal traditional weddings had become uncommon in rural Mwanza. Only one of the 21 married female respondents—one of those selected for an interview because she had been pregnant in 1998—reported that she had had a **bukwilima** wedding. She was a single mother when she met her husband and they married one month later. She described the festivities: “My husband called three of his friends to come, and they invited others to my home. They came, and we slaughtered goats for them. They stayed for three days” [II-02-C-301-f].

Another rare example of a traditional wedding was provided by a Jita woman in her late teens who was married to a young fisherman. Before she met her future husband, his aunt had selected her as an appropriate wife for him. The couple then met and began a discreet sexual relationship, which continued for three months before they married. She explained the wedding process:

She said that after a [Jita] girl becomes engaged, and bridewealth of one bucket and a sheep is paid, the girl is kept indoors where she is trained by her aunt in married life and how to look after her husband, children, and guests at home. She is supposed to eat very little food during that time, so she would not need to go outside to use the latrine. She said that she herself felt so hungry after two weeks that she was dizzy when she was taken to the home of her
parents-in-law. On that day there was a big celebration. At night her husband collected her and took her to another house where they had sex. She said, nowadays the question of [proof of] virginity no longer exists. She said in the past a white bed sheet was spread on the bed on the wedding day, and if the girl was a virgin, blood would remain on that sheet but that was not done for her. [PO-01-I-7-5f]

Many rural young women reported wishing for a traditional wedding and envying the few who had one. However, few young women expected to marry in that way. For example, a 30-year-old single mother of two talked about a certain family she termed lucky as all girls in the family received marriage proposals and were formally married. She said that the girls got the proposals even before they completed primary school, and the suitors waited for them to complete. She added that the parents of these girls are said to be using traditional medicine to attract suitors to their daughters. [PO-00-C-3-2f]

Rural young men, in contrast, usually expressed relief that there was little pressure on them to have a formal traditional wedding because of the cost and complication involved.

Marriage by Elopement

Half of the married male and female randomly selected in-depth interview respondents reported that they had eloped (kutorosha or kulehya). When a couple eloped the girl or woman ran away from her parents’ household with her partner, sometimes hiding at one of his relative’s homes away from the village for days or weeks and then returning to his household to live, as shown in case study 2.2. One young woman’s elopement was typical. She finished Year 7 when she was 16 years old and met her husband for the first time the same month, when he was visiting relatives in her village. She explained that they eloped two months later:

R: We just agreed, just the two of us. I didn’t inform the people in my home. I left at night. Mm, I just left, just me. I didn’t tell anyone. [My husband] himself later brought the news to my family. Then my family went to his home. They didn’t say a word [to me], they just came to an understanding with my husband’s family. Then his family had to pay. [II-02-C-271-f]

Eloping was less costly and time-consuming than a formal wedding, and it did not require the active involvement and approval of both sets of parents, which was important for couples who feared parental opposition. A young woman’s father never knew of her plans to elope, but occasionally a young
woman’s mother did, particularly if the mother had already been aware of her daughter’s premarital sexual relationships and knowingly had benefited from the material exchange involved. Sometimes the man’s family helped him plan an elopement, and support from the man’s parents could be important if he still lived in their household. Nonetheless, during participant observation there were several examples of young men bringing wives into their parents’ household without forewarning.

Often elopement happened fairly spontaneously based on a couple’s appeal for one another and general desire to marry. Sometimes it was the direct result of a pregnancy or a different kind of scandal. For example, a 27-year-old man (Juma) who worked at a village milling machine told a researcher how a casual sexual encounter with a teenage girl (Nyanjige) led to serious charges which in turn led them to elope. Juma explained that he and a married friend had met Nyanjige and her sister at the milling machine and the girls had agreed to meet the men for sex the next day at an isolated spot out-of-doors. The next day the girls’ father discovered them in the act and the men ran away. The father beat the girls and immediately began legal proceedings against the men, accusing them of rape. The researcher recorded the outcome in his field notes:

Juma decided to convince Nyanjige to run away. . . . She agreed and he took her to a relative’s home in the district capital. [After three months], he came back to the village and . . . told the father that he had Nyanjige and intended to marry her. . . . The legal case against Juma had lost steam because the first witness [Nyanjige] was not present. The father accepted Juma’s proposal and they agreed on a date when he should come back to learn the [amount of elopement fine]. Juma arranged for Nyanjige to come back to the home of a friend, where they lived as husband and wife. [PO-99-C-2-1m]

The day after an elopement, a young woman might openly be welcomed and provided with a special meal by her husband’s family, or she might remain sequestered in his room for several more days before venturing out to be introduced formally to her husband’s parents. By the time a young woman’s parents learned of her absence and where she had gone, people widely assumed that she had consummated the relationship sexually and she was thus considered married. During one participant observation visit, for example, a 20-year-old woman eloped with a man in his early twenties. The next day the young woman’s mother and sisters found her and appealed to her to return home, but she refused by saying that she had become an adult when she eloped, implying that there was no going back to unmarried girlhood.

In some cases a girl’s parents reacted angrily to elopement, particularly if she was young, if the parents had expected to receive ample bridewealth, and/or if they disapproved of her partner. However, the act of eloping effectively
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forced their hand. Usually, the negotiated elopement fine was lower than what would have been expected in bridewealth. For example, the average ngwekwe fine reported by in-depth interview respondents was Tshs 80,000 ($96), about half of the average bridewealth. Ngwekwe fines also usually came in the form of cows and cash, such as three cows and Tshs 20,000 ($24). Like bridewealth, these payments sometimes were not completed until years after the marriage. For example, an African Inland Church pastor in his 60s reported that he was still waiting for payment of the elopement fine that had been agreed after his 20-year-old daughter married a man in his twenties 1–2 years earlier. He told a researcher:

After a long discussion they came to a compromise about the elopement fine but until now it had not been paid. Today he summoned his son-in-law to ask him whether he loves his daughter, and to tell him that if he does not, then he should bring her back to her parents’ home. His son-in-law said that he does love her and he plans to convince his father to bring the agreed amount next month. [PO-02-C-2-5f]

Marriage after Conceiving a Pregnancy

Some couples married after the young woman became pregnant, eloping without her parents’ permission as described above. Often, however, after the initial shock and upset related to an out-of-wedlock pregnancy, it sufficed for the man to take public responsibility for the pregnancy and to have the woman simply move in with him. Sometimes this involved payment of an nsango, especially if the young woman was in school or had recently left it when she became pregnant. Frequently, however, no payment was made.

Of the randomly selected in-depth interview respondents, the two wives and the one husband who reported neither engagement nor elopement said that they married specifically because they were expecting a child. In one example, when a young woman was asked how she came to marry, she replied:

R: Me? I just got married. . . . He made me pregnant, then he married me. . . . He told me, “Since I have made you pregnant, it is better that I just take you home.” And I agreed. . . . He told my parents, but they already knew. They had to agree [without compensation], since I was already pregnant. [II-02-I-257-f]

Case study 2.3 also provides an example of a young woman who married in this way, although she had been out of school and living independently of her family for a couple of years at that time. The other randomly selected respondent who married due to pregnancy reported that her family received Tshs 100,000 ($120) and a cow as the nsango.
Of the three schoolgirls who initially were selected for interviews because they were pregnant in 1998, only one married the man who she believed made her pregnant. The other two had their first babies and then married and had a baby with other men, one by simply moving in with him, and the other, as already mentioned, in a bukwilima wedding.

One of the two married male respondents reported that he had married because his sexual partner became pregnant. His partner secretly told him when she was three months pregnant and he then avoided her until she was six months pregnant, when her family came to notify him and his family formally. He explained why he initially avoided her, and how his own family reacted:

R: I thought her family would abuse me, because . . . it was not right [to have premarital sex], it is just like stealing. . . . So they do not permit us to do so. That is why I was so afraid when she said she was pregnant. But I was lucky when they came to tell my family about the pregnancy because I was not home. . . . When I returned I ate dinner with my family and afterwards my father said, “[Some visitors] say you have made a girl pregnant.” I said, “Where do they live?” He said, “I don’t know where they live—you are the one who used to go there.” Then my father said to my brother, “He is refusing to say where he went. Where did he used to go?” And my brother told them. They said, “Why are you denying it, when you know?” I kept quiet, not saying anything. [II-02-C-266-m]

Later, when this young man’s partner was eight months pregnant, he brought her supplies and stayed in her parents’ household for two weeks, sleeping with her in her room at night. At the time of the interview he had visited his wife only one other time, after her delivery some months earlier. Nonetheless he considered himself to be married to her. He explained:

R: [At her home] I sleep with her in the same house.
I: So they know that she is your wife?
R: Yes.
I: When did you officially get married, or when did people know that you were married?
R: Let me say it was when I went there [when she was 8 months pregnant]. . . .
I: Did you offer bridewealth?
R: No. . . . I just went there to take care of the pregnancy. . . . I would say becoming engaged and offering bridewealth is not done much anymore. . . . Maybe you live with your father, and you do not have any possessions at home. You could just stay like that waiting for your parents to tell you to become engaged to someone, but they will never tell you to do so. That is why people like me use a short cut, although I did not do so willingly. [II-02-C-266-m]
Sometimes young men considered it desirable to make an unmarried, out-of-school woman pregnant, not only as a demonstration of their virility but also, as the young man above noted, as a way to marry her without paying much compensation. For example, a 21-year-old man said that he would not mind making a girl pregnant, because “many boys become very happy when they do, because it becomes easy to marry the girl without paying a large amount of bridewealth” [PO-00-C-3-3m].

Once young women had been out of school and unmarried for one or more years, it was more common for them to become pregnant and then marry a man by moving in with him. Like the young men described above, some young unmarried women specifically sought to become pregnant in the hope that it would lead to marriage.

In all of the research methods there were also plausible accounts of women who publicly attributed a pregnancy to the sexual partner who they most wanted to marry, even though a different partner may have been equally or more likely to be the biological father. This practice was common enough for a woman or man involved in such an experience to report it in almost every participant observation village. Two examples:

R: When I realized I was pregnant I didn’t know who made me pregnant, because I used to go with many boyfriends. . . . I claimed that the baby belonged to a certain boy. That boy took me to live in his home, but I didn’t know that he was counting the number of months. Now after I gave birth he told me, “This can not be my baby, take it to its father.” I moved back home. [GDII-00-C-10-5f]

A visiting neighbor told [a 23-year-old single mother of two] that a certain man is claiming to be the father of her youngest child. The woman responded that she does not care, because several men have claimed this and she is the only one who knows who is the father of her child. She said that just because she had sex with them does not mean they made her pregnant. The two women commented that a woman can have sex with more than three boyfriends in one week, so if she becomes pregnant she assumes the one who provides her with the most money, soap and body oil is the father. [PO-99-C-5-2f]

Transition to Married Life

Young couples gained status and certain privileges and responsibilities when they married, for example, often moving from shared same-sex housing into a house of their own. The transition to married life involved the greatest change for young wives, as it often meant living in a new home with a largely unfamiliar husband and sometimes his entirely unfamiliar family and village. Young wives were expected to obey their husbands and their husbands’
parents, and often they had less freedom of movement than they had had when they were unmarried. An 18-year-old woman explained:

R: You see, when you are a girl you go to the market for a walk . . . The level of fun is high [Laughter]. But now that I am married, I need to ask permission. When you are refused, you can't go. Would you force your way? [Laughter]. . . .

I: If you decide to go to the market without asking for permission first, what would happen?

R: E-he! If he meets you when you have already gone to the market? It won't be good. It is okay if you have a husband who is not strict. He will just tell you, “You were wrong to do this and that.” But that is not typical. [II-02-C-329-f]

In another example, a 20-year-old woman explained why she did not attend ngoma events or discos:

R: My co-wife and I never go to them. We don't go to them at all.

I: Why don't you go?

R: Mm, we just don't go. . . . We have been forbidden.

I: Who has forbidden you?

R: Our husband.

I: Does he tell you why he has forbidden you?

R: He just wants us to stay home. [II-02-I-258-f]

For many young women, marrying meant not only building a new relationship with a husband but also with his parents and other family members when she began to live in their homestead. A young daughter-in-law typically held many domestic and farming responsibilities and had a subservient role amongst adults within a household. Many young wives seemed comfortable and satisfied with this role within their husband’s parents’ household, as seemed to be the case for the young woman described in case study 2.1, but some were not. A young wife complained about this during one participant observation visit:

She said that amongst Sukumas a married woman is expected to work very hard planting acres of food to feed her in-laws if necessary. She said that husbands can relax because they are sure their wives will feed them. In her case she has planted three acres of sweet potatoes and cassava, which she goes to the farm two times a day during the rainy season with her youngest child on her back. I had also observed her farming with her three-month-old child on her back. [PO-99-C-5-2f]
In another example, a 21-year-old mother of two reported that, after living with her husband’s parents for three years, she was happy when she moved to live with her husband in town:

She said that life with her husband is good nowadays, and she feels free and much happier after leaving the home of her parents-in-law and living in her own home with her husband. She said that it is difficult to live at the home of your parents-in-law and it needs a high degree of tolerance. She said she just thanks God for leaving without quarrelling with them, and that is why she feels happy when she comes to see them now. [PO-02-C-3-3m]

Some young married couples stayed with the husband’s parental home long-term, while others like the one mentioned above moved away, either within the village or to a more distant village or town to pursue a new livelihood. The status of those who stayed within a homestead typically grew over time as they cultivated their own agricultural plots in addition to the family’s, built small businesses, and increasingly contributed to the economic welfare of the homestead and family.

**Relationships between Young Husbands and Wives**

Above we described how many young married couples only knew each other for a month before marrying. However, even those who knew each other for longer usually only had had limited opportunities to spend time together before marriage, as described in chapter 6. Once married, couples also usually spent little time together in the course of their daily lives, for both economic and social reasons. Case study 2.1 provides one example of this. Men sometimes earned money away from home in fishing, mining, trade or other activities. Many wives did not have regular paid work but had primary responsibility for farming the family plot, as described above. Participant observation researchers occasionally observed married couples laughing together as they worked, but joint work was the exception rather than the rule and it usually was restricted to the most intensive periods of the agricultural cycle. Men also rarely assisted in domestic tasks at home, although they might help with certain chores, such as husking maize or shelling peanuts. As noted in chapter 3, men and women typically ate separate meals within a household. In public places, married couples rarely walked around together or chatted to each other. The notion of a married couple sharing leisure interests was culturally alien. Women rarely had leisure time, and when they did, the gendered segregation of activities made it unlikely that they would share it with their husbands. Having few household responsibilities, husbands usually chose to spend their free time socializing with other men. It was thus not unusual for
married young men to hang out with unmarried young men in the village center in the evenings, and to attend discos or video shows there.

Young married couples that seemed most content within their marriages typically described their spouses as well behaved, faithful, hard-working and reliable. However, the few husbands who sought out and enjoyed the company of their wives during the day were sometimes disparaged as having lost control and been subjugated by their wives, and the wives were sometimes suspected of using traditional medicine to bewitch their husbands. A 25-year-old married man provided one example:

He told me about a man who discovered that his wife had given him traditional medicine to make him obey her and just stay home. He said she got the medicines from a traditional healer and put them in his food and under his bed. The man said he discovered this after a traditional healer told him. . . . When the husband went home he found the medicine which his wife said was for her stomach problem. The couple then had a bitter quarrel and the husband decided to divorce her. [PO-02-I-4-1m]

At night, wives were expected to be sexually available to their husbands except in certain circumstances, such as when they were menstruating or they had recently delivered a child. After marriage a man usually did not provide money or gifts to his wife in exchange for a specific sexual encounter, but material support was still a very important part of marital relationships. In fact the most common reason why women were reported to have extramarital relationships, or to end a marriage, was inadequate financial support from a husband. Husbands typically provided the most for their wives early in a marriage. Long-term, wives often had to pay for many expenses and buy their own clothes, shoes, and body lotion.

Most young women were expected to conceive a child within a year of marriage so it was very rare for a couple to consider contraception before their first baby. After having one or more children some women did wish to practice contraception, particularly to space out their subsequent pregnancies. However, men typically did not wish to prevent conception within marriage, and women were expected to follow their decisions. Some wives claimed to follow their husband’s wishes while discreetly using female-controlled contraceptive methods, including traditional methods, Depo provera, or oral contraceptives. Our study found almost no reports of condom use within marriage, again because husbands did not wish to prevent conception but also because condoms were disliked in general. Condom use and other contraception use will be discussed in the next chapter.

If a wife refused to have sex with her husband or was discovered to use contraception against his wishes, this could lead to public conflict and di-
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Marriage. In one fishing village, for example, a young woman refused to have sex with her husband, a bar owner, after learning that he had been unfaithful. Her husband then beat her and she ran away to her parents’ home. A female researcher was present when the man went to the woman’s parents’ home to demand her return:

He told his mother-in-law, “My mother, you know the reason why I married my wife [for sex]. Now if she refuses when I am her husband, what do you think I should do?” . . . His wife complained very much that he had beaten her severely, but she promised to return to their home in the evening. . . . [Later] I asked him why he hit his wife, and he said, “She refused to give me sex, although she knows that I married her mainly for that. When I wanted to punish her, she ran away.” . . . He said that it is a wife’s duty to have sex with her husband. [PO-01-I-7-5f]

Physical abuse such as that described above seemed to be uncommon within marriage. When it did occur, it usually was not socially condoned and it could be considered adequate justification for a woman to leave her husband. However, there were occasional instances when a husband was considered justified in hitting his wife, such as when he had evidence that she was unfaithful.

Extramarital Relationships

In most participant observation villages there were first-person and third-person reports of many young husbands and a few young wives having secretive extramarital sexual relationships. Our data suggest that most men experienced at least one—and sometimes many—such relationships by the time they had been married for several years. Many of the sexual concurrency and mixing patterns described for young people’s premarital relationships in chapter 6 also applied to young people’s extramarital sexual relationships. For example, husbands reported being unfaithful primarily due to sexual desire and wives primarily due to economic concerns.

Secrecy was equally or more important in extramarital relationships than in premarital ones, especially for women. A 20-year-old single man explained how he expected to continue having multiple partners after marrying, but he clarified that he would be more careful to hide them:

R: [My sexual activity] will change a little after marriage, but not much. I will be with her at home and also with one from outside. Yes, but sex with those from outside will have to be done very, very carefully. . . . Mmm, I will only go after them occasionally, and not in haste. . . . because I will not care much about them, but I will care about the one I have at home. [II-02-C-261-m]
Fidelity seemed to be most common during the first months and years of a marriage, when husbands enjoyed novel, nightly sexual access to their wives, and wives often had their material needs met and were monitored closely within their husband’s household. Men sometimes began extramarital sexual relationships when they travelled, when their wives were in late pregnancy or were recovering from delivery, or simply when they desired a different sexual partner than their wife. As with the premarital relationships, a man’s extramarital affairs could take a number of different forms, including: one-off, spontaneous sexual encounters (for example, around a celebrative event); repeated clandestine, opportunistic encounters with a particular person; and semi-open, long-term relationships that might result in offspring and formal marriage eventually.

Many wives seemed to be aware of their husbands’ infidelity and this often led to conflict within the marriage, but if the couple did not separate then wives typically resigned themselves to it. One young mother of two described her ambivalent feelings:

She said she just wants to finish harvesting her peanut crop and then she will return to her parents’ home to clear her mind. She said her husband is becoming a nuisance and she wants to teach him that she gets very annoyed when he goes to sleep with other women. She said men are not reliable and when her husband started seducing her he was a nice person, so she had no desire for other boys. . . . She said nowadays he doesn’t care much for her, because she has become thin and her buttocks no longer shake when she walks. [PO-01-C-2-5f]

Women’s extramarital sexual relationships mainly seemed to consist of secretive, open-ended and sometimes long-term involvement with one or two familiar men, rather than one-off encounters with strangers. Such relationships could involve extended periods of no extramarital sexual activity, followed by an increase when a husband travelled and/or did not provide sufficient household support. Married women most often reported taking lovers to support themselves or their families, particularly if their husbands were drunkards, had travelled for extended periods, divided limited income between different households (as in polygynous marriages), or did not contribute sufficiently to a household for some other reason. These extramarital partners provided the woman with cash or needed goods, such as fish or other food to feed the woman and her family. If an extramarital partner gave a woman a gift that would make her husband suspicious, she might give it to a girlfriend to hide for her, and several women reported keeping such items for their girlfriends. There were also occasional reports of women who had extramarital relationships due to sexual desire. Again, this was disproportionately— but not exclusively— reported by women whose husbands were
sometimes absent from their household due to travel or another reason. In most villages, there were also rumors about women who took extramarital partners because they believed their husbands to be sterile and they wanted to have a child. Some men who believed their wives were infertile also did this but were relatively open about it, formally divorcing their wife, openly taking a junior wife, or having a semi-public relationship with a mistress.

While men sometimes were fairly open about their extramarital affairs, women were rarely so. If a woman was caught having an extramarital sexual relationship, her husband might beat her or divorce her, and if there was sufficient proof then her lover might also be fined. For example:

While at the kikome my informants talked about a certain man who has two wives but who still likes to have sex with other women. Last year he was caught in the neighboring village having sex with someone else’s wife. . . . The woman’s husband had said that he would be traveling away from the village for the night . . . but he came back early and caught them. The husband took the man’s clothes and shouted to call other people. The man was apprehended and the case was heard the following day. He was fined 4 cows, Tshs 30,000 ($36), and a bicycle. [PO-01-C-2-1m]

Despite possibly severe consequences, researchers occasionally observed married women who were somewhat open about having extramarital partners. One example was a woman in her early 30s (Tabia) who told a researcher of extramarital relationships she had had while married to her polygynous husband (Masele), a 59-year-old boat captain. The woman said that her husband knew about and tolerated her extramarital relationships, because she was relatively young and “still had warm blood.” She nonetheless tried to be somewhat discreet and actively hid evidence of her relationships from her husband, so as not to offend or upset him unnecessarily. This woman had been sexually involved with one of her extramarital partners, Christopher, for ten years. On multiple occasions, the researcher observed Christopher giving Tabia gifts or money, and heard them make arrangements to meet for sex later. Tabia gave several reasons why she chose Christopher as a sexual partner, including that he earned good money as a fisherman, he gave her many gifts, he attracted her physically and emotionally, and his wife and children lived in a distant village. The researcher recorded:

When Masele went on a trip recently Tabia got the opportunity to go to sleep at Christopher’s place. She said that Christopher had written her letters that made her body tingle with passion when she read them, compelling her to seek him out. She said, “There are letters, if you read them, your body loses strength.” . . . Tabia told me her lovers give her gifts, large fish, dagaa, and body oil or
lotion. Only very rarely do they buy her clothes or dresses, because she fears that Masele will ask her how she bought them. [PO-01-I-7-5f]

Tabia showed the researcher herbal “love” medicines that she placed in her vagina to promote her relationships with Masele and Christopher:

She said the medicine for Masele is intended to make him love her so that even if she makes a mistake he won’t beat her or chase her away. She also has medicine to make Christopher love her and forget his family, including his children.

... She explained, “As you are putting the medicine in [your vagina] you give it instructions, like, ‘This man will not hate me or leave me unless I get tired of him.’” [PO-01-I-7-5f]

Tabia also told the researcher about another extramarital relationship that she had had with a fisherman who was a friend of Christopher’s. Wives’ concurrent relationships seemed to be fairly common and somewhat acceptable in that particular fishing village, in contrast to most non-fishing villages. For example, when Tabia spoke with a girlfriend about another woman’s extramarital affair, they laughingly said, “That woman has no problem. Why eat dagaa every day? Sometimes you have to eat a little meat, have a little beer!” [PO-01-I-7-5f] As was found for premarital concurrency, extramarital sexual relationships seemed most common for both husbands and wives in the relatively heterogenous and mobile fishing communities.

Polygyny

According to Tanzanian law, a registered traditional marriage can have an unlimited number of wives, while a Muslim marriage can have no more than four, and a Christian or civil marriage can have only one. However, very few marriages of any kind—either monogamous or polygynous—were legally registered in rural Mwanza, and many men who identified themselves as Christian also had multiple wives. Polygynous marriages were common. Forty-one percent of the randomly selected in-depth interview respondents reported that their father was or had been polygynous at some point in their lives. Sixteen reported that their father had had two concurrent wives, eight reported three, one reported four, and one reported five. Eleven said that their mother had lived in a different household from her co-wives, while three said that she had lived with at least one co-wife. The other twelve respondents did not specify such family arrangements.

Similarly, participant observation researchers estimated that about one-third of marriages in study villages were widely perceived as polygynous, with the large majority involving co-wives living in separate households.
This did not include many marriages in which a husband had a semi-public extramarital relationship, but the woman did not seem to be perceived as another wife at that time.

There were several ways in which polygynous marriages formed in rural Mwanza. Sometimes a man who wanted an additional wife due to sexual attraction or a desire for more children simply moved her into his household and identified her as a junior wife, as in case study 2.4. Usually the new wife was younger than the man and his pre-existing wives. Often, she came from a relatively poor family, or she had already been married, had a child, or was considered an msimbe for other reasons, so her family did not expect much or any bridewealth. Frequently, marriages to junior wives happened informally, but occasionally a man formally married a junior wife and paid substantial bridewealth for her, particularly if she was young, had only recently left school, and had never been married or had a child.

Polygynous marriages in which the co-wives lived in separate households often came into being after a husband’s clandestine extramarital relationship with a woman in a different household evolved into a more openly acknowledged, long-term relationship. Over time, for example, a man might stop providing money or gifts in exchange for specific secretive sexual encounters and instead begin providing general and open support to the woman’s household. During that transition, the woman might come to be perceived as one of his wives, at least by some other villagers. This could happen gradually or quickly, as when a mistress became pregnant.

A gradual transition from having one to two wives was illustrated by a Muslim house builder and farmer in his 30s. During a first participant observation visit this man lived with one wife and eight children but he had discreet extramarital sexual relationships. For example, he confided in the researcher that he was anxious after having had a one-time sexual encounter with a woman on New Year’s Eve, because the woman “did not have good behavior” and might have infected him with a disease [PO-99-C-2-1m]. During the second participant observation visit one year later, the man took the researcher to visit the household of a woman he referred to as his “second woman,” a mother of three in her 20s with whom he had a one-year-old child. The man said that his wife knew about his relationship. Nonetheless,

because he has a wife, he says he cannot spend the night with the young woman. He said that he has sex with her until late at night, for example 11 pm or midnight, but afterwards he returns home. . . . He has not given any bridewealth for the young woman, but her mother respects him as a son-in-law because he has introduced himself as the father of the baby girl. . . . He has been given land to cultivate by the woman’s mother, and he has cultivated cotton there [for her and her daughter]. [PO-01-C-2-1m]
During the third participant observation visit this man explained that his relationship with the young woman had become more widely known in the village, and villagers had begun to see her as his junior wife. He said that his senior wife was initially angry but eventually came to accept the arrangement. At that time he increasingly was involved in his junior wife’s household, including sometimes openly spending the night there.

Polygynous men tended to be in their 30s or older. By that age they were more likely than younger men to have had an extramarital sexual relationship that resulted in pregnancy, and they were also more likely to have the income to support multiple households. While few young men had polygynous marriages, many young women were junior wives.

Co-wives in the same household often cooperated with one another, especially if both wives had been aware and willing when entering into the polygynous marriage. For example, one 19-year-old respondent who eloped with a young married man described how she and her senior wife shared their responsibilities within their poor household:

R: The difference [with my premarital life] is that I lived pretty well then. . . . Now it is just rough. . . . At present I have neither clothes nor soap. Not even kerosene. . . . I sold my goat and bought the clothes I am wearing, and my other set I bought when we sold some maize.

I: What about your co-wife, who buys for her?

R: She also only has two dresses, until we harvest more crops. . . . We work in shifts, every three days.

I: Where does your husband sleep during those three days?

R: With the other wife.

I: Have you had sex with him since you gave birth [two months earlier]?

R: We haven’t, [but] he still sleeps with me when it is my turn. [II-02-C-309]

Co-wives in the same household typically spent more time together than with their husband, as they shared many domestic and farming responsibilities. Some co-wives seemed to like one another and get along well, while others struggled with resentment and anger for one another, as in the polygynous marriage described in case study 2.4. For example, during one participant observation visit within a polygynous host household, a researcher witnessed a junior wife becoming jealous and refusing to speak for an entire day after her husband bought a dress for his senior wife. In multiple villages there were also accounts of a co-wife using a traditional medicine to win a husband’s devotion, as noted in chapter 6. In one participant observation village, for example, a pregnant 25-year-old woman with two children returned to live
in her parents’ home, reportedly because her husband’s new wife had used charms to make him hate her and throw her out of the house.

Co-wives who lived in separate households often had little or no contact with one another. If a man gradually and informally took on support of a second household, his first wife sometimes felt betrayed by his lack of fidelity, or resentful and angry about loss of income. However, if she did not want to divorce her husband she usually resigned herself to another wife. The potential tension between co-wives is illustrated in the following example from participant observation:

[The second wife] said she and her co-wife do not greet each other at all, because the first wife is very jealous and doesn’t like her. . . . The second wife used to greet the first wife, but the first wife would never respond, so she has now stopped greeting her too. . . . The first wife has given the second wife the [derogatory] nickname, “the one with big breasts.” The first wife’s son said that . . . his mother forbids him to greet the second wife . . . because his mother is extremely jealous. [PO-02-C-2-6f]

This family was conflicted about concurrency in other ways. The son mentioned above was 22 years old and had just finished primary school. He had concurrent premarital sexual relationships and expressed solidarity with his father’s polygyny, stating, “Has my father done something wrong? No— I will be polygynous too” [PO-02-C-2-6f]. Notably, however, his father disapproved: “When [the father] drinks beer these days, he says that his children have become very promiscuous, and that even his son . . . is disreputable and can make people’s daughters pregnant” [PO-02-C-2-5f]. Commenting on this, two women in their 20s said: “But isn’t [the father] also promiscuous?” and “Children imitate. Their father doesn’t sleep at home every day. Does he think they can’t do the same?” [PO-02-C-2-5f]

The typically informal nature of polygynous marriage formation in rural Mwanza meant that it was sometimes difficult to determine whether a woman was a mistress or a junior wife, and opinions could differ about the same woman. In one participant observation household, for example, a wife and her children referred to a woman maintained in a separate household as their husband/father’s mistress, but other villagers referred to the same woman as the man’s junior wife.

In this study it was sometimes also difficult to determine whether a woman was still married to a man if he mainly lived elsewhere. Some first wives had difficult relationships with their husbands and ran their households independently, rarely seeing their husbands and mainly having contact with them through their children. However, a first wife generally was seen as married if the couple had not separated decisively, if they had children together, if
the man still occasionally contributed to the household materially or stayed overnight there, and/or if she did not take on a new sexual partner openly.

Marital Separation or Divorce

Separation and divorce were not unusual in rural Mwanza, including amongst young married couples. In all participant observation villages there were accounts of couples who ran away together, were considered married, and then ended the relationship within a few days, weeks, or months. For example:

They were talking about a girl who had eloped. They said that what surprises them is that the boy who eloped with her has already returned to the village and is continuing with his fishing work, without saying anything about having eloped with her. She said that nowadays it is common for a girl to elope and then be deserted within a short time, especially when she has gone with a fisherman. [PO-01-I-7-5f]

Another example is provided by Juma and Nyanjige, the couple described earlier that eloped after Nyanjige’s father discovered them having sex. They eventually returned to the village as a married couple, but the marriage did not last:

Juma did not follow up to know the required amount of [elopement fine]. After some time Nyanjige became pregnant and went back to her parent’s home and the matter dissolved like that. Her father did not follow-up with Juma. Nyanjige gave birth to a child, but the child died soon afterwards. I asked Juma why the child died, and he told me that he was not sure, but he thought maybe because the girl’s father had beaten her while she was pregnant. [PO-99-C-2-1m]

Like Juma and Nyanjige, some couples hardly knew one another before marrying and quickly separated after they found they did not like or love each other enough to stay married, or that their marriage was unacceptable for some other reason. Marriages were most commonly reported to end because of insufficient economic support (from husbands), infidelity (particularly by wives), difficulty having children, and general disagreements, such as whether to use contraception. For example, a 21-year-old woman who had eloped with her husband explained why she eventually left him:

R: Early in our marriage life was good, but later it became bad. . . . He was a man that just roamed around. He didn’t even look for money. . . . I used to tell him we needed to tend our cotton field, and then when we did he just sold it and I didn’t even know where the money went. . . . I was annoyed. I told him, “You brought me from my home and then abandon me here, so I am going back
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home." . . . Now I had to tell his uncle [a Village Executive Officer]. We were counseled and counseled. I stayed. They said that if someone wrongs you, you must forgive him. They said, "Just put up with each other, because that is how homes are made." I stayed on. . . . [But] when I saw that the same problems persisted, I just had to leave. [II-02-I-325-f]

Other factors which were reported to cause a divorce included incomplete payment of bridewealth, a spouse's drunkenness, a husband's violence, tensions about a husband's family or co-wife, and geographic separation (as when a husband left for work and never returned). Several of the factors listed above seemed to contribute to the two divorces experienced by the young woman in case study 2.4.

The act of divorcing could be sudden if prompted by a particular crisis, such as infidelity, or gradual and more passive, as when an indefinite separation became permanent. In the following example a 22-year-old woman who had eloped one year earlier described how she left her husband's household because of illness and neglect:

R: I had a headache, dizziness, and diarrhea. . . . My husband bought me aspirin but I finished all of those tablets without getting any relief. [After three months] I decided to go back home. . . . I thought I was just going to die there.

I: Did your mother-in-law give you any treatment?

R: Not at all. . . . That disease attacked me. . . . I went on cultivating but I fell seriously ill. One day I returned from the farm and went straight to bed without taking my meal. I stayed like that for about four days. I would have porridge at 2 pm and not have it again until 2 pm the next day. . . . I thought, "These people—these people don't even realize that I'm here!" [So] I decided to go back home. . . . My husband forbade me. . . . He told me to wait until he finished his work. But how could I wait for him without eating? I just left.

I: What did your parents do when you arrived home?

R: They tended to me and began treating me [with traditional medicine]. . . . I know it works, because I experienced relief afterwards. [II-02-I-252-f]

Just as many marriages happened informally, separation and divorce could be similarly informal, usually simply signified by one member of the couple moving out of a shared residence as described above. Most typically a young woman moved back into her parents' or a relative's household, but sometimes she might move into a household with one or more other single women. If bridewealth or an elopement fine had been paid, the couple had not been married for long, and there were no offspring, then the woman's family was expected to repay the man's family.
Many villagers shifted between being unmarried and in a monogamous or polygynous marriage repeatedly over the course of one or two decades, depending on their particular experience of separation, divorce, widowhood, and new marriage. Just as marriage represented a reduction in risk behaviors for some, separation or divorce seemed to involve a shift to higher risk behaviors, as men and women sought new partners for sexual satisfaction, material support, or potential marriage.

**DISCUSSION**

Many of this study’s findings about married young people in rural Mwanza are similar to findings elsewhere in the region and Tanzania, including that half of women married by the age of 18–19 years and half of men by the age of 23–24 years, and that the informal nature of many unions meant some couples were perceived as unmarried by some and married by others (Meekers 1992; Boerma et al. 2002; National Bureau of Statistics and ORC Macro 2005). One important finding of our study was that half of young people married someone who they had only met one to two months earlier, whether they married by elopement or engagement. Similarly, anthropologists working with the Sukuma in the early to mid-twentieth century estimated about one month typically passed between a man meeting a woman, proposing marriage to her father, and the wedding (Tanner 1955a; Varkevisser 1973). At that time, for example, it was not unusual for young Sukumas living in widely dispersed villages and homesteads to marry someone fairly soon after meeting them at a central, celebratory event. Compared to this earlier research, however, we found a much higher proportion of marriages involved elopement with someone largely unfamiliar rather than engagement and formal marriage with parental consent. Even when two individuals had known one another for a longer premarital period, they typically had had very limited opportunities to spend time alone and entered into marriage without great familiarity or emotional intimacy.

Chapter 6 described how many young people entered into premarital sexual relationships spontaneously and opportunistically, and many seemed to use a similar approach when deciding to marry. Usually it did not seem necessary to know a partner well before marrying, but what was critical was for both individuals to be at a point in their lives when they wanted to be married. For many young people in rural Mwanza marriage thus seemed to be a “leap of faith” that involved leaving old sexual relationships and childhood homes behind in the hopes of creating a more satisfactory life with a promising new partner. In a study in Cameroon, Johnson-Hanks (2005) described how young women faced with uncertain futures practiced a similar “judicious
opportunism” or “seizing of promising chances” when it came to marriage and reproduction.

Young women in rural Mwanza had few alternatives to marriage to create a respectable and economically secure future, and they seemed to take the greatest risks in the “leap” described above, both socially and sexually. For some young women, marrying involved moving to another village to live within an unfamiliar family and community. Many married substantially older men who were more likely to enter the marriage with sexually transmitted infections, and a larger proportion of husbands than wives seemed to have extramarital relationships and thus were likely to introduce infections to a marriage later. When a marriage did not work out, as was not unusual, women also had the most to lose in terms of economic security and social status, as has been found elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa (Bingenheimer 2010).

As Varkevisser (1973) found in her research thirty-five years earlier, marriages in our study were typically characterized by gender segregation and often took the form of avoidance relationships. A young wife was expected to obey her husband’s wishes. Young married couples spent little time together during the day and evening, and it was rare for them to overtly display their affection. However, it is difficult to draw conclusions about emotional intimacy and attachment in marriage based on an absence of such data. First, as discussed in chapter 6, measuring the quality or intensity of emotions based on observation or report is not straightforward. Second, researchers did not see all interactions between married couples, most notably not being present when couples were alone together at night, when they were perhaps most likely to speak intimately and with emotion. Acknowledging these limitations, there nonetheless was little evidence in our study to suggest that companionate marriages, or marriages in which emotional intimacy was valued above all else, were common amongst young people in rural Mwanza.

Extramarital Relationships

Most young men in our study entered into marriage expecting their wives to be sexually faithful, and some were motivated to marry specifically to reduce their own sexual health risk. Most young women also entered marriage hoping that their husbands would be faithful, although they were generally less confident that this would be the case. Thus, importantly, unlike the two other highly promoted behavioral risk reduction goals of abstinence or condom use, young people often perceived long-term fidelity in marriage as both feasible and desirable.

The qualitative nature of this study, its primary focus on unmarried youth, and the very secretive nature of extramarital sexual activity means that we
cannot estimate the exact proportions of young married men and women who engaged in extramarital sexual activity, how often they did so, or their numbers of partners. Publicly, most young married people claimed to be faithful to their spouse(s). It seems likely that the number of partnerships and the frequency of non-marital sexual encounters did in fact reduce immediately after marrying, especially for women, as some others have found elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa (Hattori and Dodoo 2007; Research to Prevention 2009). However, our findings suggest that within several years of marriage most young husbands had experienced at least one extramarital relationship, and sometimes multiple ones. A smaller proportion of young wives engaged in extramarital relationships with great secrecy. This was most often reported in marriages in which a man travelled for work, as has been found in other research in the region (Vissers et al. 2008). Nonetheless, it was not unusual for young men who did not travel to also have experience of one-off or open-ended extramarital sexual relationships.

We collected more data on young husbands’ extramarital relationships than those of young wives, but we cannot conclude from this that marital infidelity was rare for women. In chapter 6 we described how many young women reported premarital partners in in-depth interviews before marriage but strongly denied them in in-depth interviews afterwards, suggesting that any extramarital partners would also be denied or underreported, and raising questions about the validity of married women’s self-reported sexual histories in general. The women who did report extramarital relationships rarely seemed to engage in one-off encounters like some men, but rather had secretive partnerships with a familiar man or men involving occasional encounters over a period or many months or years, thus contributing to an extended period of concurrency and its related risk.

In chapter 6 we also discussed how many unmarried young people considered faithfulness to be ideal in a partner but did not expect the same of themselves. Such double standards were also evident within married relationships, especially for men. Nonetheless the ideal of fidelity in marriage means that it may have more potential than abstinence or condom use as a promoted behavior. Critically, any such promotion needs to emphasize that fidelity must be both mutual and long-term between uninfected partners if it is to be effective in protecting one’s self as well as one’s spouse.

Polygyny

Our study could not assess whether polygynous men had more or less extramarital sexual partners than monogamously married men. On the one hand, many men’s relationships with their junior wives began as clandestine, extramarital
relationships, as has been found elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa (Clark 2010). This suggests that such men may have had higher risk behavior than men who were faithful to their wives, whether monogamous or polygynous. On the other hand, men with multiple wives may have been more likely to have a closed sexual network than monogamously married men, because, for example, they might have sex with a second wife while a first wife abstained after delivering a child, rather than seeking out a new, extramarital partner (Vissers et al. 2008).

We found that extramarital relationships were one of the only ways for both polygynous and monogamously married women to obtain supplemental income when needed, as has been found elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa (Caldwell, Caldwell and Quiggin 1989). Our data suggest that women in polygynous marriages who lived in a separate household from their co-wives may have been more likely to have extramarital partners than other polygynous women or monogamously married women. Such women could face greater economic hardship because their husband’s material support was shared between households, and they also had more freedom of movement than women who lived with their husbands full-time. These findings are broadly in keeping with studies elsewhere in the region and sub-Saharan Africa (Hattori and Dodoo 2007; Vissers et al. 2008). For example, a study in another part of Mwanza region found that 34 percent of polygynous men and 41 percent of monogamously married men reported having had extramarital sexual partners, compared to 5 percent of women in polygynous marriages and 2 percent in monogamous marriages (Nnko et al. 2004).

Polygynous societies in sub-Saharan Africa are often assumed to be fairly uniform and to have more social controls than other societies, for example, greater prevention of sex before marriage, especially for women (Kretzschmar, White, and Caraël 2010). In many societies this may be true, but in rural Mwanza polygyny was practiced in diverse ways by people of different faiths, both formally and informally. More research is needed on the diverse forms of polygyny before determining the sexual health risk involved in it, both at individual and population levels. One area warranting further study is the nature and scale of sexual health risk in marriages where co-wives live apart, relative to those where co-wives share a household. Another is the relative risk in settings where polygyny may be fairly uniform and follow strong religious and social norms, in contrast to those where it is practiced in more diverse and informal ways.

Marital Separation and Divorce

Separation and divorce were fairly common among young adults in our study. A recent survey in a semirural ward in Mwanza Region similarly found
that one-half of ever-married men and one-third of ever-married women had divorced at least once, and remarriage soon after divorce was common (Boerma et al. 2002). The researchers suggested that divorce or separation might be increasing in such areas because the increase in informal marriages and incomplete bridewealth payments meant young married couples received less support from their families than in the past. However, it is difficult to know whether divorces truly are more prevalent today than historically. Older people may claim higher rates of divorce today than in the past, but historical documentation does not always support such statements (Kaler 2001; Thomas and Cole 2009). For example, in his review of Sukuma law and custom in the early twentieth century Cory (1953, 59) observed, “marriage, divorce, and remarriage are regarded as customary stages in a normal life-cycle.” Similarly, in his study with the Nyamwezi, Abrahams (1981) found that 66 percent of 30–39-year-old men and 92 percent of men over 60 years of age had experienced divorce. In her 1965–1967 study Varkevisser (1973) also commented on the relatively high rate of Sukuma divorce in comparison to other patriarchal societies, and highlighted that 31 of the 34 divorces officially registered in one court had been initiated by wives. We similarly found that many young women in our study refused to endure negligent or abusive marriages and took the initiative to end them, often with the support of their parents.

Many factors which contributed to divorce in our study have been found in other studies in the region, such as infidelity, infertility, and conflict with a spouse’s family (Adeokun and Nalwadda 1997; Twa-Twa, Nakanaabi, and Sekimpi 1997; Boerma et al. 2002). One factor that we have not seen highlighted previously is partners having little familiarity with one another before marrying—whether the marriage was family approved or not—and ultimately being disappointed as they came to know their spouse and new living circumstances better. In our study marrying someone largely unfamiliar was common and some couples seemed to be satisfied with their choices long-term, but others were clearly dissatisfied, which often led to separation and divorce.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we considered how young people’s lives and sexual relationships changed with marriage and, sometimes, divorce. Having children was a central aspect of married life that we have only briefly addressed here. In the next chapter we will thus examine beliefs and practices related to reproduction in depth, for both married and unmarried young people.