Love, Sex and Marriage (Coltrane, chapter 2)

“Men and women learn to feel differently about love and marriage because they are exposed to different romantic messages from the culture and play different roles in scripted courtship rituals” (p. 52). These messages and scripts are influenced by the role of marriage in their society’s economic and political structures. Sex, love, and marriage have not always been packaged as they are for us today.

Our notions of romantic love date to the expressions of love for married medieval ladies by knights and troubadours. Romantic love became relevant for marriage as it became less connected to larger political and economic structures and more a bond between “a woman and her loyal breadwinner husband.”

Romance is an exchange of resources in a market. Men’s and women’s different courtship behaviors result from differential access to resources. Because women have less direct access to wealth, power and influence, relationships with men give them indirect access. Therefore:

- Women are more interested in financial prospects and less interested in physical attractiveness than men. Women are more likely to engage in class hypergamy (marrying up) and age hypergamy.
- Until recently, women were much more likely to consider marrying someone they weren’t in love with
- Women engage in more “emotion work”—making their own feelings match those appropriate for the relationship. They may also focus more on the man’s feelings than their own. Men have more luxury to fall in love with whomever they please.
- Men and women’s strategies should become more similar as women’s access to resources increases.

In general, people tend to date and marry people like themselves in race, age, education and religion.