

*Healthy Marriages, Relationships and Families:
Interventions, Research and Policy Course*

Marriage in Context

Values Relating to the Provision of Marriage and Relationship Education

Week __

This is the introductory or opening session for the course.

Promoting Child Welfare: Training Professionals to Support Healthy Marriages, Relationships and Families Project.

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Project Mission: To develop curricula and provide training for students and professionals that enhance their ability to facilitate healthy marriages, relationships and families in the child welfare population, with the end goal of promoting and improving the well-being of children.

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Course Objectives Covered:

Students will:

- **S**tudents will develop and demonstrate an ability to practice within the ethical standards of their chosen profession.
- **D**emonstrate an ability to apply knowledge regarding public policy, private and public child welfare services, and systems that influence family health, well-being and formation.

Marriage, History and Current Context

(Gillis, 2004)

Prior to the 19th century, marriage was driven by economics. Households functioned as economic units to ensure survival and marriages often united families to improve or retain wealth.



Marriage, History and Current Context

(Gillis, 2004)

- Marriage as an institution may be in trouble, but its symbolic standing has never been higher.
- How have attitudes changed from the past?
 - The most anticipated relationship is no longer with God but with a partner.
 - Ancestors did not seek fulfillment/perfection through domestic or vocational life but focused on attaining this spiritually/in heaven.
 - Prior to the 19th century, marriage was driven by economics. Households functioned as an economic unit. Family meant all those living together to ensure survival.





Today, fewer live in conventional marital relationships but continue to live by the marital ideal, structuring adult expectations.

- Postponing marriage when personal and material resource ideals have not been met. Barriers to marriage are not only material but also mental.
 - Marriage as an avenue to personal fulfillment leads to disappointment. Tension between ideal and reality.
- Couples in the past have always turned to “little weddings” or “married but unchurched” for a variety of personal and practical reasons; what we now call cohabitating.

(Gillis, 2004)



Definition

○ **Marriage**

The legal union of two people. Once a couple is married, their rights and responsibilities toward one another concerning property and support are defined by the laws of the state in which they live. A marriage can only be terminated by a court granting a divorce or annulment.

Marriage rites can be performed through a religious or government organization.

Common Law Marriage

In **some** states, a type of marriage in which couples can become legally married by living together for a long period of time, *representing themselves as a married couple and intending to be married.*

Common Law Marriage – litmus test is in italics. Merely living together for a long time will not qualify.

Civil Union - a legally recognized union similar to [marriage](#). Will be discussed more in a later lesson on same-sex couples.

Three main differences between civil unions and marriage as it's traditionally viewed:

- The right to federal benefits. States that allow some type of same-sex union are able to grant only state rights. The Defense of Marriage Act passed in 1996 prohibits same-sex couples from receiving federal marriage rights and benefits.
- Portability. Because civil unions are not recognized by all states, such agreements are not always valid when couples cross state lines.
- Terminology. "Marriage" is a term that conveys societal and cultural meaning, important to both gay rights activists and those who don't believe gays should marry.

Pop Culture, Media and Marriage

"Americans are obsessed with marriage, or more precisely, by an ideal of marriage that is at paradoxical odds with the nation's divorce rate and preference for what appears to be disposable vows."

Detroit News April 7, 2003



Pictures: The Bachelorette, Average Joe, Brad, Angelina and Jen



Discussion

- Based on pop culture depictions of relationships and marriage, what do you think are the norms in our society for committed relationships?
- Do we know what a happy, successful marriage looks like?
- Are long-term, committed relationships unrealistic?
- What can we expect as individuals to get out of a marriage or committed relationship?

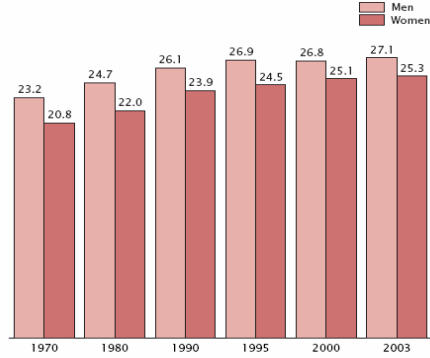


What Do the Statistics Say About Marriage:

- The probability of a first marriage ending in separation or divorce within 5 years is 20%, and within 10 years it is 33%.
- Unmarried cohabitations overall are less stable than marriages.
- For cohabitating couples (who never marry), 49% dissolve within 5 years and 62% within 10 years.

Median Age at First Marriage

Figure 5.
**Median Age at First Marriage for the Population
15 Years and Over by Sex: 1970 to 2003**
(Age in years)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March and Annual Social and Economic Supplements: 1970 to 2003.

As a nation, we are delaying the age at which we marry while at the same time the divorce rate is high.

Both of these demographics have changed the composition of our society.



Marriage Trends

- **Americans have become less likely to marry as the marriage rate continues to decline.**
- **There has been a moderate drop since the 1970's in marital satisfaction...this trend has swung in a positive direction recently.**
- **Marriage rates differ by region in the U.S.**
 - **Highest in the south (Arkansas & Alabama) and the mountain states (Idaho, Wyoming & Utah).**
 - **Lowest in the northeast (Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware & Connecticut.)**

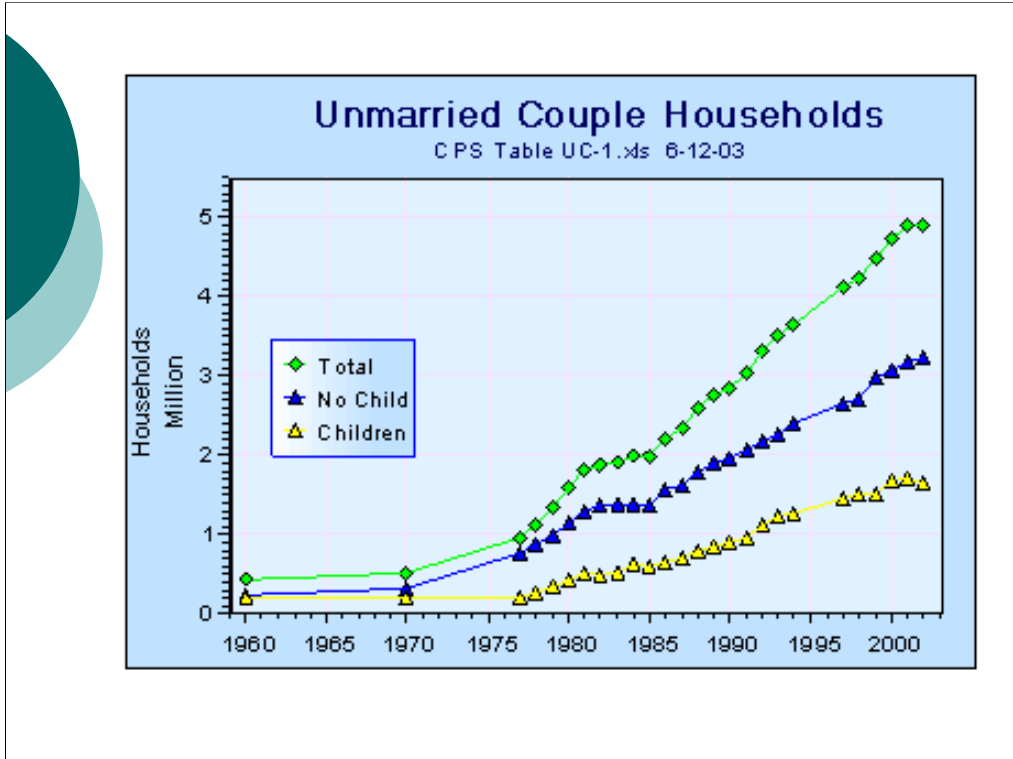
(Popenoe and Whitehead, 2007).



Unmarried, Cohabitation

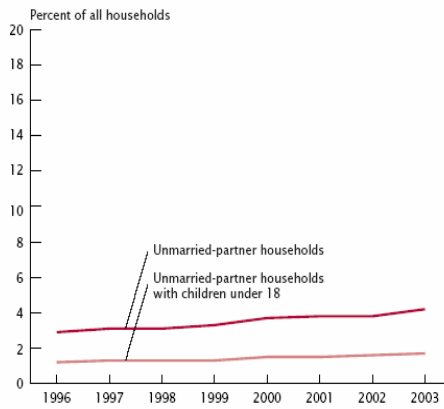
- Number of unmarried couples has increased dramatically since the 1960's and the increase is continuing.
- Unmarried cohabitation now commonly precedes marriage.

(Popenoe and Whitehead, 2007).



Unmarried-Partner Households

Figure 7.
Unmarried-Partner Households: 1996 to 2003



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March and Annual Social and Economic Supplements: 1996 to 2003.

In 2003, 41% of the unmarried-partner households had children under 18 years living in the household. The percentage is slowly increasing.

- Adult education attainment is mostly at a high school diploma level.
- Both adult partners are more likely to work than in married couples.



CDC Study (2002)

- Both cohabitations and marriages tend to last longer under certain conditions:
 - Age of partners at start of cohabitation or marriage, the later the better.
 - History of being raised in a 2-parent family.
 - Religious affiliation and involvement.
 - Living in a community with higher median income, low male unemployment and low poverty.



Divorce

- American divorce rate today is nearly twice that of 1960.
- Has recently started to decline slightly; hitting the highest point in the 1980's.
- The lifetime probability of divorce or separation remains between 40 and 50% on average.*

(Popenoe and Whitehead, 2007).

Rate must be interpreted with caution, background characteristics entering marriage have a major implications for their risk of divorce. Factors such as education, income, age at time of marriage, parent's marriage stability, and religious affiliation.



CDC Study

- Likelihood of divorced women remarrying has been declining since the 1950's.
- Current rates of remarriage are:
 - 54% of women remarry in 5 years.
 - 58% for White women.
 - 32% for Black women
 - 44% for Hispanic women

Strong probability that 2nd marriages will end in separation or divorce; 23% after 5 years and 39% after 10 years.



The retreat from marriage stems from economic, social and cultural shifts

(Smock, 2004)

- **Declining fertility.**
- **Increasing age at first marriage.**
- **High levels of marital disruption.**
- **Growing separation between marriage and child bearing.**
- **Growth of nonmarital cohabitation.**
- **Women's growing economic independence.**
- **Intergenerational feedback and modeling.**



Retreat of Marriage continued:

(Smock, 2004)

- **The retreat is also due to a complex and interrelated set of social forces including -**
 - **Emphasis on emotional satisfaction and romantic love in the 20th century.**
 - **Ethic of expressive individualism that emerged in the 1960's**



The Future of Marriage

(Based on Summary of Literature)

Whether cohabitation becomes more like marriage or marriage becomes more like cohabitation, something like marriage is here to stay. Throughout history, there has always been a wide range of formal and informal marriage practices that have been honored. Should we be so concerned?



Married and Poor

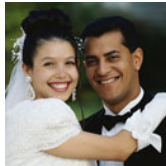
(Fein, 2004)

- People with an economic disadvantage are just as likely to marry as other people, but their marriages are substantially more unstable.
 - Marital quality is not as different from other couples as one would expect.
- First births are more likely to precede marriage.
- Couples are comparatively young.
- About 33% are Hispanic, 47% rural White and 10% Black.
- Partners have lower levels of education and employment.

(Fein, 2004)

Married and Poor: Conclusions

- It can be dangerous to generalize findings about disadvantaged married couples to all race-ethnicity or demographic groups.



- High marital instability rates (and attendant risks for children) affirm that low-income couples do face special challenges.

- The moderate differences in marital quality suggests that prevention-oriented programs are appropriate, especially if they also address those special challenges.





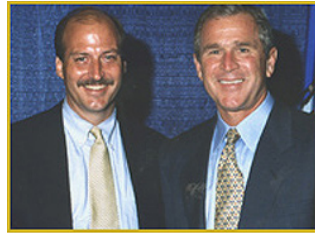
In our discussions, we must keep in mind:

- Currently, marriage is highly valued (by people in all economic strata). Despite the retreat.
- Marrying and staying married Are affected by economic well-being.
- Social context is important for stable and strong marriages and relationships.

(Smock, 2004)

Government Efforts and Contemporary Dialogue

- Increased attention to fostering healthy marriage relationships at multiple levels of government highlights the importance of developing an informed awareness of government trends.



Dr. Wade F. Horn, HHS' assistant secretary for children and families, with President George W. Bush


(Brotherson and Duncan, 2004)



Why is the Federal Government promoting the Healthy Marriage Initiative?

- The Administration for Children and Families administers over 65 different social programs at a cost of \$47 billion dollars each year.
 - They include: child welfare, child support enforcement, programs for runaway youths and anti-poverty programs.
- The breakup of families and marriages often creates or exacerbates the need for such programs.
- To reduce the need for these services, government is focusing on preventing the problems from happening in the first place.
 - One way to accomplish this is to help couples form and sustain healthy marriages.

(http://http://www.acf.hhs.gov/opa/fact_sheets/healthy_marriage_factsheet.html. Retrieved 4/29/08)



Research suggests that children who grow up in healthy married, two-parent families tend to do better.

- ACF concluded from research that many social problems affecting children, families and communities could be reduced if more children grew up in healthy, married families.
- For example:
 - Married couples seem to build more wealth, on average, than singles or cohabiting couples, thus decreasing the likelihood that their children will grow up poor.
 - Children who live in a two-parent, married household enjoy better physical health, on average, than children in non-married households.

(http://http://www.acf.hhs.gov/opa/fact_sheets/healthy_marriage_factsheet.html. Retrieved 4/29/08)



Professional Considerations


- Within the field of marriage and relationship education and therapy, as in all fields, there are ethical concerns that must be considered.
- We will now examine broadly the Code of Ethics applicable to the field.



Professional Code of Ethics

- **Values:** *The customs, standards of conduct, and principles considered desirable by a culture, a group of people, or an individual.*
- **Ethics:** A system of moral principles and perceptions about right versus wrong and the resulting philosophy of conduct that is practiced by an individual, group, profession, or culture.

(Shulman, 1999)



(Bartlett, 2003)

Key Values

- All human beings deserve access to resources (Social Justice).
- Dignity and worth of individuals (value diversity).
- Individual rights to make independent decisions (self determination).
- Interpersonal relationships are essential for well-being and are the vehicle to change.
- Integrity—behaving in a professional trustworthy manner.
- Competence—requires that social workers practice only within their areas of ability and continually develop and enhance their professional expertise.



Value Conflicts Review

- You bring a set of values into this work.
- Tensions may arise between your personal/professional values and clients.
- How do you remain flexible and nonjudgmental?
- Are you aware of your own values and potential sources of tension for you in practice?

(Bartlett, 2003)



Self-Awareness and Capacity Building Template Exercise

Format: Think – Pair – Share

Rule: Students have the right to share as little or as much of their personal information in this exercise as they desire. It is expected that all students will maintain confidentiality about the content revealed through this exercise and class discussion.

Directions:

Each student individually writes down the answers to the following questions:

What is the main value/way of living that you got from your parents/family?

What is one value you have developed on your own or come to live by?

What are 2 values you would want to live by with a partner?

What are 2 values you would want to give to your children?

Students will divide into groups of 3 or 4 and exchange information from your personal reflections to create a joint list to the following:

Discuss with each other your answers to each of the 4 questions above and implications those values would have in working with couples and families in the child welfare system.

Our own framework impacts how we serve other people. Make a list of at least 4 points from your discussion of letter A above that we should be mindful of as we engage couples and families in the child welfare system.

Class will share and create a master list from the shared points from 2 (B).

Engage in class discussion about the master list.

Adapted from a couple's exercise on values found in *The Strongest Link: The Couple* a program by Family Wellness Associates.



Recommended Reading

- Fein, D.J., (2004). *Married and poor: Basic characteristics of economically disadvantaged married couples in the U.S.*. Working Paper SHM-01 Supporting Healthy Marriage Evaluation. July 2004: 1 – 25.
- Smock, P. J. (2004). The wax and wane of marriage: Prospects for marriage in the 21st century. *Journal of Marriage and Family*. 66 (November 2004): 966 - 973.



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