

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST

- Misconceptions
- Causes
- Attitudes
- Perspectives

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Searching for Happiness

In the early 1980s the divorce rate peaked at the current 50%, with marriages on a steady incline. As we entered the late 1990s divorce remained almost stagnant; but the number of marriage licenses being issued dropped 18% during the ten year span of 1997-2007 (Live Births, Deaths, Marriages and Divorces: 1996-2007). These statistics present a trend: society seems to be avoiding marriage as a means of steering clear of divorce. Numerous indicators attempt to justify the reasoning behind these trends, but with the institution of marriage being attacked there is a need to identify why so many people resort to no-fault divorce rather than

making a marriage work.

While statistics are merely a reflection of general tendencies, there are exceptions. "Unhappy marriages run a complex gamut – from the dissatisfied couples for whom the present marriage, though flawed, is better than the alternative, to partners who inflict harm on each other" (VanDenBerghe 29). Circumstances vary



greatly, and in "certain clinical situations where abuse, violence and ad-

ditions create oppressive conditions for one partner, divorce can be justified. However, there must, likewise, be open-mindedness to recognizing and dealing with the full range of effects created by divorce (Woody 446)." These effects are having long term consequences on the individuals involved. Although many people in unhappy marriages believe that divorce, or avoiding marriage altogether, is the answer to achieving happiness again, several studies show that a greater level of satisfaction comes to the majority of marriages that learn to work through their differences and remain married.

Benefits of a Happy Marriage

Despite the current focus on personal freedom, there is no substitute for the joy and satisfaction of interdependent living. When a couple moves from being independent [me] to interdependent [we], they work together rather than individually, there is growth

and development that bonds and unites them in profound ways (Covey 20, 182). Numerous social scientists confirm that marriage has a great impact to the overall well-being of individuals. "In assuring happiness, a lasting marriage proves more beneficial physi-

cally, mentally, and economically than exercise programs, medical treatments, therapy sessions, or financial investments" (VanDenBergh 29).

John Gottman summarized it well when he said: "...working briefly on your marriage everyday



Couples who get married and stay married tend to be happier...

Benefits of Happy Marriage Continued...

will do more for your health and longevity than working out at a health club" (261).

A complete family unit offers safety and economic security that is evi-

dent in the direct correlation that research shows between poverty levels and the family structure, or lack thereof (VanDenBerghe 31).

Couples who get and

stay married are more likely to be stable, secure and fulfilled; they tend to be happier than those who marry and later divorce (Lucas).

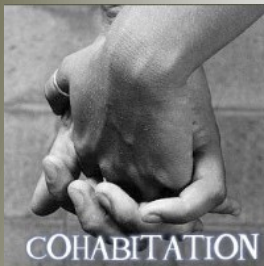
Alternatives to Marriage

Cynicism seems to be on the rise as more "young people in the United States are increasingly apprehensive and pessimistic about marriage. They display a remarkable increase in acceptance of out-of-wedlock childbearing, single parenting, and living together before marriage. No wonder the number of people getting married in the United States has dropped so markedly" (Popenoe and Whitehead 31). It has become the cultural norm in our country to shy away from the commitment of marriage. With an increased number of younger Americans co-

habitating rather than committing to marriage, there is a growing attitude that marriage is non-essential and the human need for companionship can be satisfied with the revolving relationships (Hamilton and Wingert). A recent analysis of adolescent opinions shows they have become a great deal more accepting of these substitutes for marriage, thus endangering the family and its role in society (Popenoe and Whitehead 30).

There is a common misconception that living together will strengthen a relationship that leads to marriage. But statistics show there is a higher

divorce rate for couples that cohabit and then marry, with tendencies in these couples to marry, divorce and then live with someone again; and even higher divorce rates and instability for those that remarry after a divorce (Popenoe and Whitehead 21, 25). "Cohabiting couples experience greater conflict, lower-quality relationships, less stability, and less equality for the women involved... with lower levels of sexual satisfaction and infidelity as a leading problem" (Goldscheider, Thornton and Young-DeMarco 695).



Cohabitation has become a means to test the grounds of a relationship, making it easier to move on when a relationship loses interest.

One Husband's Insight

"I found it convenient to blame my wife because it was a way of justifying my own failure. By my hostile feelings I could make it appear that she was the guilty

one and that I was a helpless victim... The truth is that my irritation was not due to her behavior at all. It was, instead, the product of my

own unwillingness to accept the responsibility of my actions" (Olson 107).



The Causes of Divorce

Marriage is often seen as unnecessary or easily dissolved when no longer convenient. Society tries to tell us that we are strong; we can be single parents, we can survive divorce and we can find happiness – we even deserve it. The reality of that way of thinking is that the void and loneliness remains as many continue to search for fulfillment in all the wrong ways.

All too often couples find themselves blaming each other for the tension and strains of life rather than depending upon the other

for encouragement and love. Unfortunately some couples view this type of discord as a means to leave (Harper 30). We are bombarded on every side with demands for instant gratification, ways to love ourselves and enhance our self-esteem. The care and feeding of our individual self has taken over our perspective (Reynolds 142).

Douglas Brinley said; “Every divorce is the result of selfishness on the part of one or the other or both parties to a marriage contract. Someone is thinking of self-

comforts, conveniences, freedoms, luxuries or ease” (77). Marriage is not about the individual; it is about the other person. It is not about looking for what is wrong in that person but looking for what is good and right. Solutions are not found by turning away from conflict, but by embracing and learning from it. The selfishness that society is immersed in has become the detrimental device in American marriages.

Healthy Marital Atmosphere

Good marriages just don’t happen they require hard work, compromise, selfless giving and realistic expectations; this can either turn someone away in discouragement or lead to a new and deeper level of commitment and love (D. and M. Coombs 195). Research shows that when couples work on common

principles to establish a healthy marital atmosphere, success rates rise considerably (Gottman).

The attitude of couples and the way they handle pressure is far more important than what actually happens in their relationship. Misunderstandings, differences of opinion and even crises are normal in mar-

riage, and can help it to become strong.(Covey 182; Hafen 12; Harper 30). When couples are best friends, they are kind and considerate, sensitive to each other’s needs. Above all, healthy marriages have a common commitment to God and each other.

The Journey of Marriage

America’s search for happiness should be inward. This takes the focus away from the complaining and blaming that often leads to unhappiness and eventual disregard for marriage. With any situation that requires change, the most lasting effects occur when

we work from the inside out (Covey 15).

Marriage is not a final destination; it is a journey that allows us to grow together and achieve a satisfaction that is incomparable to any other worldly accomplishment. True happiness comes from

success, commitment and follow-through. As Americans realize the importance of their vows and embrace the possibilities that their marriages hold, our society will become stronger and healthier because of the family.

Blaming our problems on everyone and refusing to be responsible for our actions are symptoms of pride and selfishness.



“Successful marriages don’t expect perfection, they work together towards perfection.”

(Oaks 72)



Answers cannot be found by leaving when things get hard, but by looking at our own imperfections and finding ways that we can improve.



Image Sources In order of Appearance

"Divorce Ring"

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"Happiness"

<http://www.quakeragitator.files.wordpress.com>

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