

Marriage vs. ?

by Sherwood Kaip, M.D.

This is an article comparing various possible living arrangements between men and women. The Bible and your grandmother already have expressed specific opinions on this subject. I will not repeat them here; you can look them up yourself. Since many people do not take the Bible seriously on many subjects, I will use different sources, mainly a recent book entitled “The Case for Marriage” by Linda Waite, a sociologist, and co-author Maggie Gallagher. They have extensively reviewed the *secular* psychological and sociological literature for their information. There are 25 pages of citation notes and 15 pages of bibliography. It is easy, interesting reading, yet scholarly.

Some of this information will be depressing. You may even be or have been in one of the less desirable situations described. **You can’t change your history; you can decide how to go on from here.** Hang in there because I will also present some very good news about avoiding undesirable relationships or changing them into desirable relationships. It can be *and has been* done with a very high rate of success. The results are in.

The ‘sexual revolution’ started in the US in the 1960’s so we now have nearly forty years of results to explore. I will seek answers to the truth or falsity of the following statements:

True or False

- The sexual revolution of the ‘60’s led to greater sexual freedom and happiness.
- Cohabitation before marriage acts as a ‘trial marriage’ and improves the outcome of any subsequent marriage.
- Unhappy marriages tend to stay unhappy.
- If a marriage is unhappy, it is better for the children that the parents divorce.
- Divorce may be hard on children at first but they tend to get over it.
- If there are no children involved, it doesn’t much matter whether you cohabit, marry, or stay single.
- Changes since the 1960’s have shown that mothers alone can raise children just as adequately, although there is more work involved.
- Cohabiting couples and singles enjoy sex more than marrieds.
- What is the best predictor of poverty?

Since the ‘60 there has been an increase in ‘sexual freedom’. While increasing any freedom might seem like a good idea, exercising freedom indiscriminately is not. Exercising your freedom to jump off high buildings or walk blindfolded at night on the freeway could lead to problems. You should be ‘free’ to choose your lifestyle, However, not all lifestyle choices give equally desirable results.

We will be comparing marriage, cohabitation (living together without marriage), divorced, single sexually active boy/girlfriends (not living together), and casual single sex. We will not be covering single people not engaging in sex.

The ‘advantages’ of sex are well known. That there are disadvantages to sex in certain arrangements is not as well known. Consider breakup of the relationship. Obviously, arrangements other than marriage are not deliberately intended to be permanent so the pain of breakup is to be expected. Lest you think breakup affects men much less than women, listen to the lyrics of a few country songs. Breakups are tough even when they have not progressed to sexual involvement. An

extreme example is Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet". Breakups are much worse when there has been sexual involvement.

The Dating Game

The practice of 'dating' (it used to be called 'going steady') now often begins in Junior High School. These exclusive pairing-off relationships usually last only a few weeks each and if they progress to a sexual stage, the couples are basically practicing divorce! The multiple sexual partners, although occurring one at a time, also sharply increases the incidence of STD's (sexually transmitted diseases—venereal diseases). "Up to 29% of sexually active adolescent girls have been infected with chlamydia."

Condoms have a moderate failure rate preventing pregnancy and a higher failure rate at preventing STD's. Nearly two-thirds of American teenagers who have had sex would advise their peers who haven't to wait. According to a recent survey, the *top* feelings adolescent girls had about their first (unmarried) sexual experience were: afraid, guilt, worried, embarrassed, and hurt or sorry. The boys felt good and probably earned 'bragging rights' but that's not news. They obviously weren't considering the girl's feelings and they often realize they are only 'using' them.

That covers some of the disadvantages of casual sex. What about older boy/girlfriend couples, not living together, who have an ongoing sexual relationship. One survey found that over 35% of the men and about half that percentage of the women had 'unfaithfully' had another sexual partner within the past year. The infidelity rate for married women is about 1%. So much for the idea that 'if you don't get married, you'll be faithful because you wish to be rather than because you're expected to be'.

Cohabitation in Brief

A trendy thing now, believed in by 55% of Americans in general and 45% of regular churchgoers, is to cohabit before marriage to see if the marriage would work out. Sounds good; cohabitation as a 'trial marriage'. The facts. 40% of them will break up. That sounds good. Think of all the bad marriages that were prevented. So those that cohabit and then marry should do very well. But they don't! *They have about three times the odds of getting divorced compared to first marriages who did not cohabit.* The bottom line: If couples cohabit to see if they should get married, only 15% will be together after 10 years. That's odds of 5.6:1 *against*. And probably some of even that 15% are unhappy. Don't let *anyone* talk you into this stupidity.

Divorce

This is a good point to introduce the subject of divorce and remarriage. "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again." After all, if the first marriage isn't as good as you had hoped it would be, for the second one you will be older, wiser, more experienced, know better what to expect, have an idea what worked and what didn't, know your own likes and dislikes better, etc. The truth? *Second and subsequent marriages fail at a much higher rate than first marriages!*

You are still the same person you were before, with whatever problems that may have caused. Also, it seems that breakup/divorce causes emotional scars that interfere with the chance of success for subsequent marriage. Undoubtedly there are good reasons for divorce, such as violent abuse. However, unhappiness is not a good reason. Divorce and remarriage will *usually* (*not* always) just spread the unhappiness more widely and devastate any children.

The cure for an unhappy marriage? I'll cover that later but divorce is usually not a satisfactory answer. The good news? Of people who rated their marriage as 'very unhappy' and

were still married five years later, 77% now reported that their marriages were ‘very happy’ or ‘quite happy’. Stick with it! Better yet, use the resources discussed below.

If you still think divorce (and possibly remarriage) will improve your life, consider this. Ten years after divorce, in only 10% of cases do both former partners reconstruct happier, fuller lives. In two thirds of the former couples, one partner is unhappy, lonely, anxious, depressed and financially precarious. In 25% of the former couples, *both* are worse off, suffering from loneliness and depression.

‘Divorce is Better for the Kids’

What about the effects of divorce on children? 61% of Americans say they no longer believe that a couple with young children “should not get divorced even if they are unhappy.” In other words, ‘If you’re unhappy at the moment, get a divorce; the kids will get over it.’ The truth is that divorce not only affects children immediately, after which they seem to get used to it. Divorce also affects the children later when they become older, affecting their future relationships. Children of divorce are much more likely to experience divorce themselves. (See #2 below for how to drastically improve this.) Also consider the well documented increases in mental illness, delinquency, unmarried births, poverty, etc. associated with children of divorce.

If there are no Kids

OK, so divorce is very hard on kids. But, secularly speaking, does the living arrangement, married or otherwise, make any difference if there are no children involved? Yes. According to the extensive research quoted, marrieds live longer, healthier, happier, monetarily richer lives than any other group. The marrieds also report more sexual satisfaction, even more than the cohabitators. So, the sexual revolution did not improve sexual satisfaction or much else.

As you may have noticed, these facts show that all the bulleted statements at the beginning, except the last one, are false. The answer to the last question is: Single Parenthood. Single parenthood, including from divorce, is very likely to result in poverty. In addition, such people are likely to be concentrated in the same low cost neighborhoods, creating a severe lack of suitable male role models for the children, both male and female.

What can We do about all This?

1. Teach and support, “No sex outside of marriage.” Condoms do not prevent broken hearts or emotional scars. They sometimes don’t even prevent pregnancy. Breakups after sex are even more unpleasant than otherwise, not to mention unplanned pregnancy, STD’s including AIDS, and cervical cancer. Pre-marital sex, according to the studies, is associated with a higher future divorce rate. (I’m just the messenger. Get the book and read it.)

2. This is a *must*. When first engaged or even just seriously dating, couples should go through the Marriage Savers program. It is available at St. Clements. A similar program is also required for marriage in local Roman Catholic churches. A whole article could easily be devoted to this subject. Among other things, the program has the couple take a pre-marital inventory called FOCCUS. The couples examine their individual views on important practical aspects of marriage that are often not ‘discussed’ during courtship. Where they disagree, they learn how to work out solutions they are both comfortable with. This avoids many later unpleasant surprises surfacing after the marriage. A mentoring older couple with a marriage track record helps them through this and are there for them after the marriage. *In the originating church, those who completed the program and married had a 3% divorce rate over ten years.* Of course there will probably be a

few more divorces but compare this to the usual over 40% rate! In this day and age, any couple that does not choose this route is incredibly foolish.

3. If your marriage seems satisfactory, attend a marriage enrichment retreat such as Marriage Ministries International (“www.marriage.org”) or Marriage Encounter (“www.episcopalme.com”). You will probably be together a *long* time so why not make your marriage even better and more fun? Look up on the internet what participants have to say.

4. If the marriage is in trouble, Marriage Encounter found that their program didn’t help and possibly made things worse so they devised a different program called Retrouvaille (“www.retrouvaille.org”, note the spelling). This is for couples who have serious trouble, *even those who are already separated or divorced*. The program has an 80% success rate, saving 52,000 of these deeply troubled marriages and ex-marriages, which is amazing! Saving your marriage is a *much* better choice than divorce and the likely failure of remarriage, with all the personal anguish and child damage it causes.

5. Retrouvaille requires both spouses to attend to try to make things work. If you can’t get your spouse or ex-spouse to commit to this, all is not lost. You can participate in “Reconciling God’s Way”. This also is available at St. Clements. It is a program described in a workbook. You also get help from a ‘support partner’. You choose a Christian of your same sex with a strong commitment to God and marriage who works with you using a smaller workbook. This partner is similar to an Alcoholics Anonymous sponsor, Sometimes there is such a change that the ex notices it and asks to go through the program also! In any case, it is probably a good idea to go through this program before starting another relationship. You really don’t want to fail again.

6. Are you still contemplating divorce? You *must* learn what you face. Fortunately St. Clements has a video series titled “Choosing Wisely” which describes the divorce process and what you can expect in detail. You should get and view this video series *before* starting any proceedings. If you already have, get it anyway.

7. If you are in a sexually active, non-married life style, get the book (The Case for Marriage) and evaluate where you need to be. Your Bible may help corroborate what the other book says. Possibly what makes marriage different is the *commitment* involved. You *intend* to make it work, not just see if it does. And you probably will succeed. If you decide on marriage, go through step 2 above.

8. *Remember* that help is available from the above sources if you need it. *Remember* to ask about and use these resources as needed. Although sometimes people are relieved that they are out of an extremely bad marriage, I never heard of anyone who enjoyed a divorce. Use the resources available, many of them at St. Clements, and start, enjoy, or reclaim a happy marriage.