

Take Your Marriage Back

Going Where the River Takes Us: Trends and Contemporary Problems Facing Marriage Today

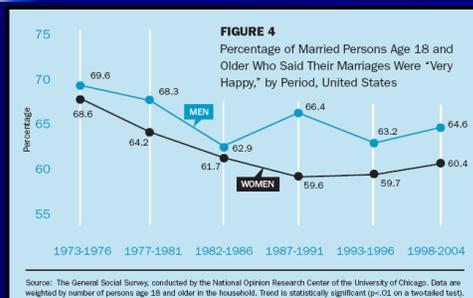
Brigham Young University
Campus Education Week, August 2007



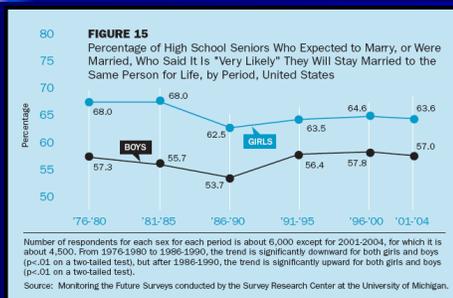
What's Happening Out There

- Young couples marrying for the first time face roughly a 40-50% chance of divorce (U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, P23-180, 1992, p. 5).
- Of first marriages that end in divorce, many end in the first 3 to 5 years. (As one example, for first marriages ending in divorce among women aged 25 to 29, the median length of marriage before divorce in 1990 was 3.4 years; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1992, p. 4).
- Adults and children are at increased risk for mental and physical problems due to marital distress (e.g., Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1994; Coie et al. 1993; Coyne, Kahn, & Gotlib, 1987; Cowan & Cowan, 1992; Fincham, Grych, & Osborne, 1993).
- Mismanaged conflict predicts both marital distress and negative effects for children (e.g., Gottman, 1994; Markman & Hahlweg, 1993; Clements, Stanley, & Markman, 1997; Cowan & Cowan, 1992; Grych & Fincham, 1990).
- Over 50 percent of teenagers today accept out of wedlock childbearing as a "worthwhile" lifestyle. Moreover, half of all teenagers agreed that it a good idea for couples to live together before they get married.

How Many Happy Marriages?



Does the Future Look Bright?



Marriage: A Battered Institution

A popular bumper-sticker reads, "Marriage—the number one cause of divorce." Unfortunately, this slogan seems to be consistent with other media messages in our society. In a recent magazine, there was advertisement for a *Honda Civic*. The headline was: "The sad thing is, it'll probably be the HEALTHIEST RELATIONSHIP of your adult life."

Marriage: A Battered Institution

On a similar note, *Toyota* ran a similar ad in the *New York Times* magazine. The advertisement was for a new car that takes the form of a pre-nuptial agreement. The ad was written in formal legalistic jargon regarding the division of property and other marital assets. The conclusion of the ad states: "Now that the formalities are over, let the love affair begin." The implication being that marriage is a formal institution; real love is for those who don't need the paper work. Similarly, a *New York Times* Journalist attended a wedding reception and reported hearing a relative say of the bride, "She will make a nice first wife for Jason." So, in America, we get our first car, save up for our first home, and if we are lucky, we find our first wife. In a recent cartoon a woman reassured her boyfriend, "Look, I'm not talking about a lifetime commitment; I'm talking about marriage." So much for "until death do us part."

A Time-Starved Culture

- According to Moskowitz-Sweet, the average American family works 160 more hours a year than it did in 1960.
- In the past 20 years, structured sports time has doubled, while unstructured children's activities have declined by 50 percent; household conversations are infrequent; family dinners have declined 33 percent; and family vacations are down by 28 percent.
- And a Palo Alto Medical Foundation survey found that 85 percent of parents feel stress and need balance.

Time Famine

- Today's marriages are overscheduled and under-connected. We spend our days driving our children to Karate and Soccer and Piano and Singing. Who is raising our kids?
- There is a time famine: No time for fun and enjoyment; for talking over the day's events; for unhurried meals, for bedtime talks, for working together on a project, for teaching life skills, for visiting family and friends, for attending church, for participating in community projects.
- In 1950, 12.6 percent of married mothers with children under age seventeen worked for pay; by 1994, 69% did so, and 58.8 percent of wives with children under age one or younger were in the workforce (see A.R. Hochschild, *The Time Bind: When work Becomes Home & Home Becomes Work* [Henry Holt & Company: New York, 1997], p. 11).

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- In a 1990 *Los Angeles Times* survey of 1,000 families, 57 percent of fathers and 55 percent of mothers reported feeling guilty that they had spent too little time with their children. (see A.R. Hochschild, *The Time Bind: When work Becomes Home & Home Becomes Work* [Henry Holt & Company: New York, 1997], p. 6).
- In a recent Gallup poll, 41% of adult Americans said they had too little time to spend with their families. (George Gallup, Jr. And Frank Newport, "Time at a Premium for Many Americans," *Gallup Poll Monthly*, November 1990, p. 45).

Look Familiar?



Time Famine

- Nineteen percent of adults say their job makes them feel older than they are, and 17 percent say work causes them to lose sleep at night" (as cited in Dobson, *Bringing Up Boys*, p. 102).
- There has also been a 1/3 decrease in the number of families who say they have dinner regularly.
- A National poll of teenagers funded by the Whitehouse in the spring of 2000 found that over 20 percent of American teens rated "not having enough time with parents," as their top concern. 59% of today's children come home to an empty house—(James Dobson, *Bringing Up Boys*, 102).

Money vs. Time

"We think more about the use of our money, which is renewable, than we do about the use of our time, which is irreplaceable" (Stephan Rechtschaffen, *Time Shifting* [New York: Main Street Books, 1997]).



Overcommitment & Physical Exhaustion

"Over-commitment and physical exhaustion. Beware of this danger. It is especially insidious for young couples who are trying to get started in a profession or in school. Do not try to go to college, work full-time, have a baby, manage a toddler, fix up a house and start a business at the same time. It sounds ridiculous, but many young couples do just that and are then surprised when their marriage falls apart. Why wouldn't it? The only time they see each other is when they are worn out.... You must reserve time for one another if you want to keep your love alive" (James Dobson, *Love for a Lifetime: Building A Marriage That Will Go the Distance* [Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 1987, 107]).

Do You Have a Frantic Family?

1. We struggle to find time for unhurried family meals. T F
2. We spend too much time getting to and from our children's activities. T F
3. Homework can be difficult to squeeze into the children's schedules. T F

Do You Have A Frantic Family?

4. My kids don't have time to hang out and entertain themselves. T F
5. I wish we spent more time home as a family. T F
6. It is hard to visit relative or family friends because we're too busy. T F

Do You Have a Frantic Family?

7. We don't go on family trips or outings as much as we would like. T F
8. Even on the weekends it's difficult to get everyone together because of our busy schedules. T F

1 point for each true answer. Score of 6-8: You're a serious frantic family. 3-5: Somewhat frantic. 0-2: You should be teaching this class. How do you do it?

(see W.J Doherty and B.Z. Carlson, *Putting Family First: Successful Strategies for Reclaiming Family Life in a Hurry-Up World* [New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2002], p. 22).

A Day in the Life of America

"I feel that this is what I should be doing," she said. "We have worked so hard to have a family, so I would never take for granted that I'm going to leave it to someone else to raise my kids."

Lisa Pokorny of San Carlos has a similar dilemma. She and her husband both work more than 40 hours a week, and have two children involved in soccer, band and student council.

"We have something every night and something every weekend," the 47-year-old said. "It's like 'hurry up and have fun,' but nobody has the time to relax on the weekends and in the evening."

Pokorny admits to stressing out her children as she rushes them around.

"We're certainly out of sync," she said.

Louise Karr, a marriage and family therapist in San Mateo, said there is going to be a population backlash similar to when people left the busy Bay Area after the 9/11 attacks and reassessed the rat race. *OAKLAND TRIBUNE, Oct 26, 2006 by Christine Morente*

The Most Common Distracters Facing LDS Couples

1. Time together (Ecclesiastes 3:1,5,8).

"We are too busy for our marriages. Between work, raising children, and managing daily life, many of us don't think we have enough time to make our marriage relationship a high priority in daily life" (William J. Doherty, *Take Your Marriage Back*, [New York, Guilford Press, 2003], 13).



Marriage is Not #1

"Since the publication of my book, *Divorce Busting*, I have been regularly interviewed by reporters about what makes marriages work. They ask, "Michele, why do you think so many marriages are ending in divorce? What is at the root of all of this?" Although the writers expect a complicated psychological response, to me, it's very simple.

"I'm convinced that the single biggest contributor to the breakdown in relationships today is the fact that couples **aren't spending enough time together**. They aren't making their relationships a number one priority. The relationship gets put on the back burner. Everything else seems more important - careers, children, hobbies, community involvement, and personal pursuits. And when relationships aren't attended to as they should be, trouble sets in.

Marriage is Not #1

"People who don't prioritize their relationships tell me that they often end up fighting during the little time they do have together. They argue about day to day issues; unpaid bills, uncleaned houses, unruly children. And it's no wonder. It's difficult to do what needs to be done to keep life moving in a productive direction, let alone try to coordinate your efforts with your partner's when you're under a time crunch. But the truth is, arguing about "who's doing what around the house," is really just a symptom of deeper problems - isolation, loneliness and resentment. You argue about the mundane issues when your emotional needs aren't being met. The coke can left in the living room becomes a symbol of a lack of caring for you" (from Michele Weiner-Davis, Author of "Divorce Busting.")

From the Trenches

"After 46 years of marriage and raising 6 children.....I think hyper busy-ness robs time from the LDS strong marriage relationship and you become like the preschoolers who engage in parallel play.....just going on your little treadmills, thinking you are doing the Lord's work, but too busy to do the most effective work.....relationships, talking, listening, pondering, loving. I see the problem in my children's lives....and I think it masks realness in relationships. We run too fast for our own good."

From the Trenches

"My husband thinks that one of the greatest challenges for active couples is to grow together and not separately. When you are involved in your calling and the kids and your husband is involved in his work and his calling, your going different directions a lot of the time. So how do you find time to grow together and not face each other when the kids are gone and wonder who that person is you've lived with all these years. I know couples this has happened to because their entire focus was kids and church not continually building their relationship."

From the Trenches

"Spending appropriate amounts of time together: there is always something else that needs to be done and often too much time is spent on unnecessary things like reading the news/emails/computer related activities, shopping, too many extra curricular activities for the kids, etc. No one wants to lose opportunities for personal improvement, so we get involved in too many activities that don't focus on togetherness."

"Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop to enjoy it sometimes, it will pass you by" – Ferris Bueller



From the Trenches

"I am responding to your question about problems in today's marriages. I feel one thing that contributes to problems is the hectic lifestyle we lead. We are running in so many different directions and so often it seems like those activities/pursuits cause the husband and wife to be going in opposite directions. The activities or pursuits may be good and even worthwhile, but the father and mother/husband and wife are not very often going or being together. Couples today need to make time to do things together -- sometimes with the children and sometimes without."

The Most Common Distracters Facing LDS Couples

2. Marital Apathy

President Harold B. Lee said: "Someone has said that the opposite of love is not hate; the opposite of love is apathy. And I say to you brethren, the most dangerous thing that can happen between you and your wife or between me and my wife is apathy—not hate, but for them to feel that we are not interested in their affairs, that we are not expressing our love and showing our affection in countless ways. Women, to be happy, have to be loved and so do men" (Harold B. Lee, *Regional Representatives Seminar*, 12 December 1970; as cited in Teachings of Harold B. Lee, 241).



- "We get to used to our mate. In marriage, familiarity breeds, not contempt, but taking each other for granted. All relationships lose some degree of newness and freshness over time if we don't work to put these ingredients back" (William J. Doherty, *Take Your Marriage Back*, [New York, Guilford Press, 2003], 13).

The Most Common Distracters Facing LDS Couples

3. Television, Computers, and other Media comes before the marriage

"Not only does the television absorb much of our attention during the day and evening, but many couples have a television in their bedrooms, thereby drawing eyes and ears away from each other at the only time of the day they may have some privacy" (William J. Doherty, *Take Your Marriage Back*, [New York, Guilford Press, 2003], 13).



Media and Marriage



A recent survey conducted by Kelton Research discovered that a majority of Americans (52-percent) said their "most recent experience with a computer problem provoked emotions such as anger, sadness or alienation," yet a whopping 65-percent of these same folks spend more time with their beloved computer than their own spouse. Adding even more fuel to the computer addict fire, 84-percent of responders stated that they were "more dependent on their home computer now than they were just three years ago

The Global Village

1. How many hours a day do you spend watching TV when your spouse is at home with you?
2. While at home, how many hours a day do you spend on your computer?
3. While at home, how many hours a day do you spend on other media, such as cell phones, IPODs, or other electronics [toys!]?]

The Most Common Distracters Facing LDS Couples

4. Discontinue Courtship

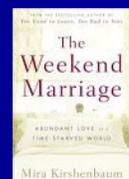
"Special alone times brought us together, but many of us stop arranging them after we become parents" (William J. Doherty, *Take Your Marriage Back*, [New York, Guilford Press, 2003], 13).



The Weekend Marriage

"We can't keep ignoring the impact of our lives on our love. We can't pretend anymore that lack of time doesn't make a difference. We can't keep putting off all the healing we know our relationships need for that time "one day" when time is no longer a problem. The lives we lead today are a recipe for loneliness, for bitterness, for feeling guilty that we're not able to make things better, for fear of where the distance and anger are bringing us.

"This is where so many divorces come from. I'm not talking about the divorces that come when people realize what a stupid choice of partner they've made. No, I'm talking about the sadder, more common divorces that leave people asking each other, "Where did our love go?" There was once real love, but it got chewed up in the time crunch" (From *The Weekend Marriage*, Mira Kirshenbaum).



The Role of Connection Rituals in Marriage

"We fall in love through rituals of connection and intimacy—courtship rituals like romantic dinners, long talks, riding bicycles or going skiing, going for walks, exchanging gifts, talking every night on the telephone. We mostly do these rituals alone as a couple; when people are falling in love, their family and friends know to give them some space. We gladly fill our time through rituals of connection and intimacy. We develop a common language and a common experience bank. We go to dinner at our favorite spots, and we try to sit at our favorite tables. We go dancing at our favorite places. And we don't dance with everybody in the room; we dance mostly with the person we are falling in love with. And then we get married.

The Role of Connection Rituals in Marriage

"Why do we give up what made us so happy at an earlier phase of our relationship? Falling in love is the ultimate consumer fantasy, up there with a truly wonderful SUV or townhouse. Growing the new relationship and reaping personal rewards go hand in hand. When things go well, I give to you, you give to me, and we are wonderful as a couple. What's more, our passion is fueled by anxiety about whether the relationship will last. Romance, novelty, and fear of loss—the stuff of operas and love affairs" (William J. Doherty, *Take Back Your Marriage: Sticking Together in a World that Pulls Us Apart* [New York: The Guilford Press, 2003], 17-19).

The Most Common Distracters Facing LDS Couples

5. Couples don't know strategies for putting their marriage back together.

"In a culture of privacy about marriage [especially in the Church], we don't share our struggles and successes with other couples. We drift pretty much alone, or when we do share, we tend to complain, and so do they" (William J. Doherty, *Take Your Marriage Back*, [New York, Guilford Press, 2003], 14).

The Most Common Challenges Facing LDS Couples

6. Children's issues/schedules

"I don't hold out my own marriage as a model for all couples. And I don't mean to imply that we had no struggles with our children, or made no mistakes. We had our share of both. But I know we did one thing well: we taught our children that we valued our marriage without devaluing them, that more for us meant more for them, that we were mates before we were parents, and that in the solar system of our family, our marriage was the sun and the children the planets, rather than the other way around" (Doherty and Carlson, *Putting Family First*, p. 137).

Marriages Require Nurture and Effort



"Nurture and cultivate your marriage. Guard it and work to keep it solid and beautiful. Divorce is becoming so common, even rampant, that studies show in a few years half of those now married will be divorced. It is happening, I regret to say, even among some who are sealed in the house of the Lord. Marriage is a contract, it is a compact, it is a union between a man and a woman under the plan of the Almighty. It can be fragile. It requires nurture and very much effort" (Gordon B. Hinckley, "Walking in the Light of the Lord," *Ensign*, Nov. 1998, 99).

Solution #1: Prayer

"I know of no single practice that *will have a more salutary effect upon your lives than the practice of kneeling together as you begin and close each day*. Somehow the little storms that seem to afflict every marriage are dissipated when, kneeling before the Lord, you thank him for one another, in the presence of one another, and then together invoke his blessings upon your lives, your home, your loved ones, and your dreams.

"God then will be your partner, and your daily conversations with him will bring peace into your hearts and a joy into your lives that can come from no other source. Your companionship will sweeten through the years; your love will strengthen. Your appreciation for one another will grow" (Elder Gordon B. Hinckley, *Ensign*, June 1971, 72; emphasis added).

A Second Witness

President Thomas S. Monson of the First Presidency told of the day he and his wife, Frances, were sealed in the Salt Lake Temple. Benjamin Bowring, the man who performed the ceremony, gave them the following counsel: "May I offer you newlyweds a formula which will ensure that any disagreement you may have will last no longer than one day? Every night kneel by the side of your bed. One night, Brother Monson, you offer the prayer, aloud, on bended knee. The next night you, Sister Monson, offer the prayer, aloud, on bended knee. I can then assure you that any misunderstanding that develops during the day will vanish as you pray. You simply can't pray together and retain any but the best of feelings toward one another" (President Thomas S. Monson, *Ensign*, Nov. 1988, 70).

Three is a Charm



Elder David B. Haight of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said: "If, as husband and wife, you are having serious misunderstandings or if you feel some strain or tension building up in your marriage, you should humbly get on your knees together and ask God our Father, with a sincere heart and real intent, to lift the darkness that is over your relationship, that you may receive the needed light, see your errors, repent of your wrongs, forgive each other, and receive each unto yourselves as you did in the beginning. I solemnly assure you that God lives and will answer your humble pleas" (David B. Haight, *Ensign*, May 1984, 14).

Solution #2: Intentional Marriage



"The only way to take back our marriages from their drift south is to keep paddling and have a joint navigational plan. Paddling means doing the everyday things to stay connected, to find time for each other, to go on dates, to make a big deal of anniversaries and special occasions, to work hard to reconnect after periods when we have been distracted from each other.

Intentional Marriage

"Having a joint navigational plan means that you both are committed for keeps, with no exit strategy, and that you both take responsibility to monitor how the marriage is doing, when it needs mid course corrections, and when it needs help in the form of marriage education or marital therapy. Intentional marriage is about everyday attention and long range planning" (William J. Doherty, *Take Your Marriage Back*, [New York, Guilford Press, 2003], 18-19).

