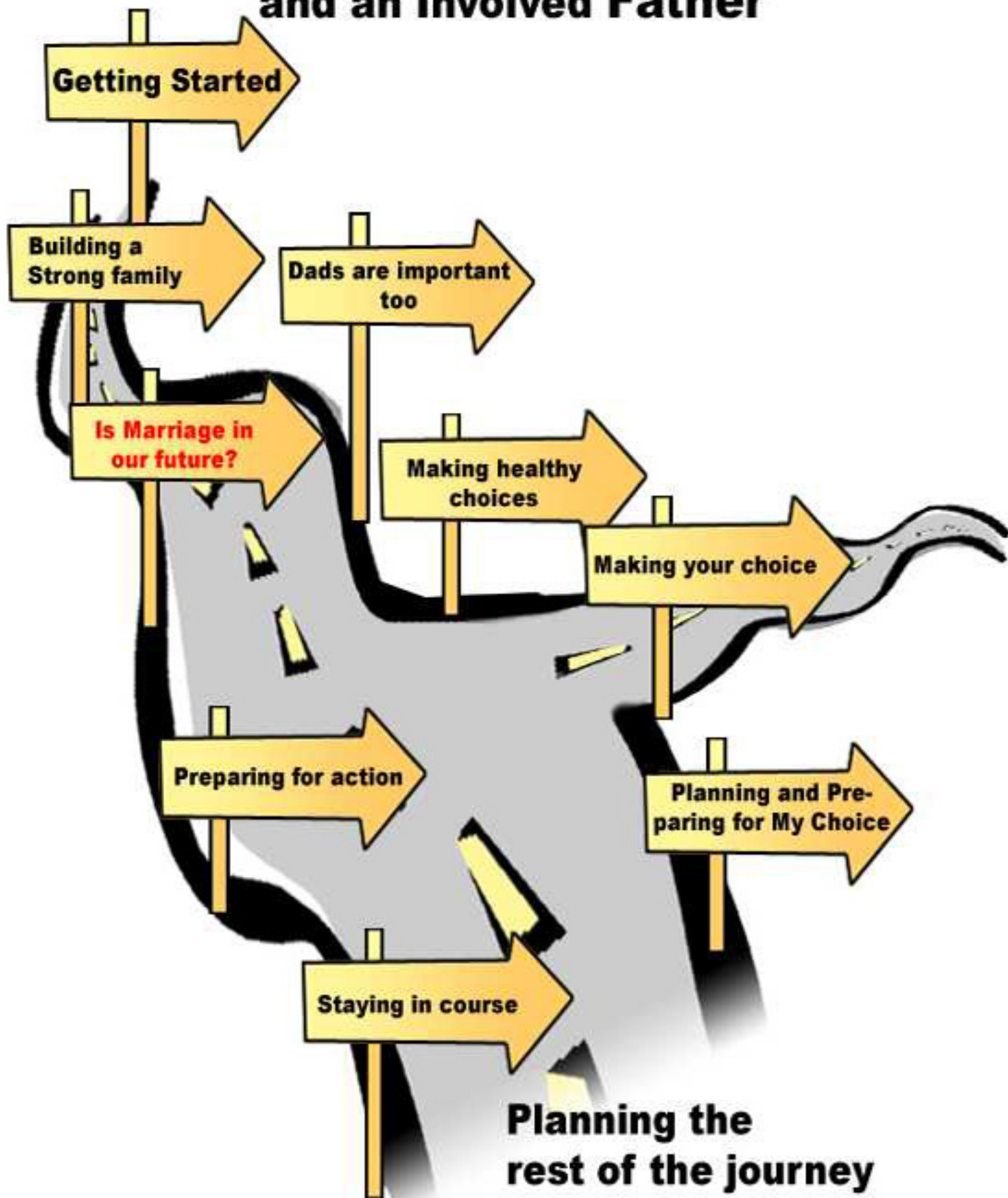


Road Map to a Stable Family and an Involved Father



TOOL BOX: LESSON 4

Materials

- Handouts:
 - *My Relationship History*
 - *Not Everyone Makes a Good Marriage Partner*
 - *The Problem*
- Transparencies
 - *Facts about Marriage*
 - *What the Experts Say about Marriage*
 - *Choosing to Marry Your Partner*
 - *What Makes for a Healthy Marriage?*
- Overhead projector/screen
- Flip chart and markers

Prior to the Lesson

- Set up the room to use an overhead projector/screen
- Put your transparencies in order of use
- Copy handouts and transparencies

Lesson Four

Is Marriage in our Future?

This lesson helps new parents consider the benefits of marriage and make healthy decisions about their future relationship.

Lesson Plan

Objectives

- Explore the importance of a healthy marriage
- Examine personal and situation factors that lead to a healthy marriage.

Introduction

At our last session we talked about fathers and their involvement with children. Does anyone have any reactions or experiences or thoughts they would like to share? Did anyone of you take one step to begin involving your baby's father or another male figure in your child's life that you would like to share with us?

My Relationship History

Getting married is one way many people form a family. Of course, it is not the only way. We are going to explore marriage and the benefits it can bring to you, your child and your baby's father. We will also look at what leads to a healthy marriage and begin thinking about the role marriage might play in your future.

[Families experiencing domestic abuse need to be given information about shelters and other resources available to them. The information about getting married is to plan for a future with a non-abusive partner.]

Activity

Handout: *My Relationship History* Memory Book page

Small Group Discussion

Baby's other parent

To get us thinking about marriage, take a few minutes to complete the handout "My Relationship History." When we finish discussing the answers you write, you will place the page in your memory book.

The purpose of this exercise is to get you thinking about your future with your child's father. Your answers may be very personal and you may be reluctant to share them with others. Please find someone to pair up with in the class and share only the information you feel comfortable sharing.

Now, please introduce your partner to the class. Would anyone be willing to share the story of how they met their baby's father or mother? Would anyone volunteer to share the things they liked about their baby's father or mother when they first met?

The Case for Marriage

The majority of people in our society get married; some people marry more than once! Many of us may have or have had a plan to marry at some time in our lives.

Let's learn a little more about marriage and the benefits that it has. Then, we will take a look at some problems with marriage and ways that they might be overcome.

First, a few facts about marriage:

- In 2000, 58% of all men and 54% of all women over the age of 15 were married. In 1960, 69% of men and 66% of women were married. (1960, Black males = 61%, White males = 70%; Black females = 60%, White females = 67%. In 2000, Black males = 43%, White males = 60%; Black females = 36%, White females = 57%)
- For people age 35 through 44, 69% of men and 71% of women were married. In 1960, 88% of men and 87% of women were married. (No race data available)

Transparencies/Slides

Facts About Marriage

- In 2000, 8.3% of all men and 10.2% of all women over age 15 were divorced. In 1960, 1.8% of men and 2.6% of women were divorced.
(In 1960, Black males = 2%, White males = 2%; Black females = 4.3%, White females = 2.5%. In 2000, Black males = 9.5%, White males = 8.4%; Black females = 12%, White females = 10%).
- In 1998, 4.2 million couples lived together without being married. This is an increase from 439,000 in 1960. (No race data available.)

It is clear that fewer people are married and more are divorced or living together today. Although this is the case, the statistics show us that marriage continues to be a very important part of many people's lives. Why is that the case? What are the benefits of a stable marriage for your family?

What the Experts Say About Marriage

Many people have studied the effects of marriage on people and society. These experts found that people who are married:

- Are healthier, in general
- Live longer
- Tend to have more money and more financial security

They also found that children who live with their married parents:

- Get more education
- Have better marriages when they grow up
- Feel better about themselves and their lives

But healthy marriages are important. People with marital problems tend to be:

- More depressed
- Get sick more often
- Have children who get sick more often
- Have children who are not well adjusted

Transparency/PPT Slide
What Experts Say About Marriage

Activity

Handout: *Not Everyone Makes a Good Marriage Partner*

Group Discussion

Marriage partner characteristics

And if people divorce, their health suffers. For example:

- Divorced adults have a greater chance of dying earlier
- Children whose parents divorce live an average of four years less

Marriage is a mixed blessing. A healthy marriage leads to healthier adults and children. But an unhealthy marriage causes health problems and can even lead to a shorter life.

Choosing To Marry Your Partner

As you can see, deciding to get married is one of the most important decisions you can make. It will have a lasting effect on your personal happiness, your health, your children's well-being and society.

Not everyone is ready to get married. Experts have identified the kinds of people who are very difficult to live with after marriage. Take a few minutes to consider the questions on the work sheet "Not Everyone Makes a Good Marriage Partner." Think about three people you know. Were any of these statements true of him or her? If so, which ones?

As a group discuss these questions:

- Do you know anyone who married someone with these kinds of problems? What happened? What could they have done differently?
- How can you use this information to avoid making mistakes in your own relationship?
- Why is it important for you to carefully think about these problems before you get married? (danger of domestic abuse; higher risk of instability; consider your children and the impact of an unhappy marriage/relationship or of abuse)
- What are positive characteristics you can look for in a partner? Turn around the negative traits in the list and think about their opposite.
(adaptable and flexible, sensitive to others needs and feelings; willing to work through problems; emotionally stable; good communication skills; are alike and have similar family backgrounds)

Transparency/PPT slides
*Choosing to Marry Your
Partner*

In summary, you need to be very careful about who you choose to marry.

Here are questions to ask yourself:

- Do you believe that your future husband or wife will change if you get married? The facts show that most of us do not change very much or very quickly.
- Do you believe that you will be different when you get married? Do you hope that getting married will give you a fresh start and you can leave your problems behind? Most of us bring “baggage” with us into our marriages. If we had unhappy childhoods or don’t get along well with our parents, we will carry these problems into our marriage.
- Do you struggle with depression, anxiety, anger, being overly sensitive to criticism, or having frequent mood swings? Get help with these problems before getting married. Work on building your relationship with your own parents.
- Are you closing your eyes to your own or your partner’s faults? Most of us tend to not see our partner’s faults before we get married. Then after we are married we notice every fault.

What Makes for a Healthy Marriage

When we decide to get married, we all want a happy marriage that will last. We know that both individuals and society benefit when people get married and have a healthy marriage. But what makes for a healthy marriage?

Most people believe that the key ingredient for marriage is compatibility. That means a man and woman are alike in many ways and do not disagree about many things. This is important for a healthy marriage but it is not the only thing.

John Gottman has studied married couples for many years and has learned some important things about healthy marriages.

- A marriage lasts when couples are able to solve the disagreements and conflict that are a part of every relationship.
- A marriage must have at least five positive moments for every negative moment between the couple. In other words, acts of kindness need to outweigh

Transparency/PPT slides
*What Makes for a Healthy
Marriage*

other words, acts of kindness need to outweigh criticism and other negative behavior by a ratio of five to one.

- But it is not a matter of just being nice. Instead, it is learning to calm oneself, to listen and respond non-defensively, and to stick together even when the going gets rough.

So, a healthy marriage involves more than marrying the “right person.” It also involves learning to manage conflict, to talk to each other and to stay committed during the tough times. It means becoming friends. We will spend more time on these topics in future classes.

Next Steps

Today we learned about the importance of a healthy marriage for our children and ourselves. We also learned that sometimes people have problems that need to be addressed before getting married. Lastly, we spent a little time looking at what makes a healthy marriage.

Take a few minutes now to think about one problem you have. Choose a problem that if you can solve it or just improve it, you will be more ready for a lasting relationship and write it down on the handout, “The Problem.”

Next, write down two steps you can take to begin solving this problem.

In future classes we will spend more time on how you can help yourself become a good friend and partner.

In our next class, we will look at how to make good decisions about father involvement and marriage.

References

Gottman, J. (1994). *Why marriages succeed or fail . . . and how you can make yours last*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.

Activity

Handout: *The Problem*

My Relationship History

♥ How and when did you and your baby's father (or mother) meet?

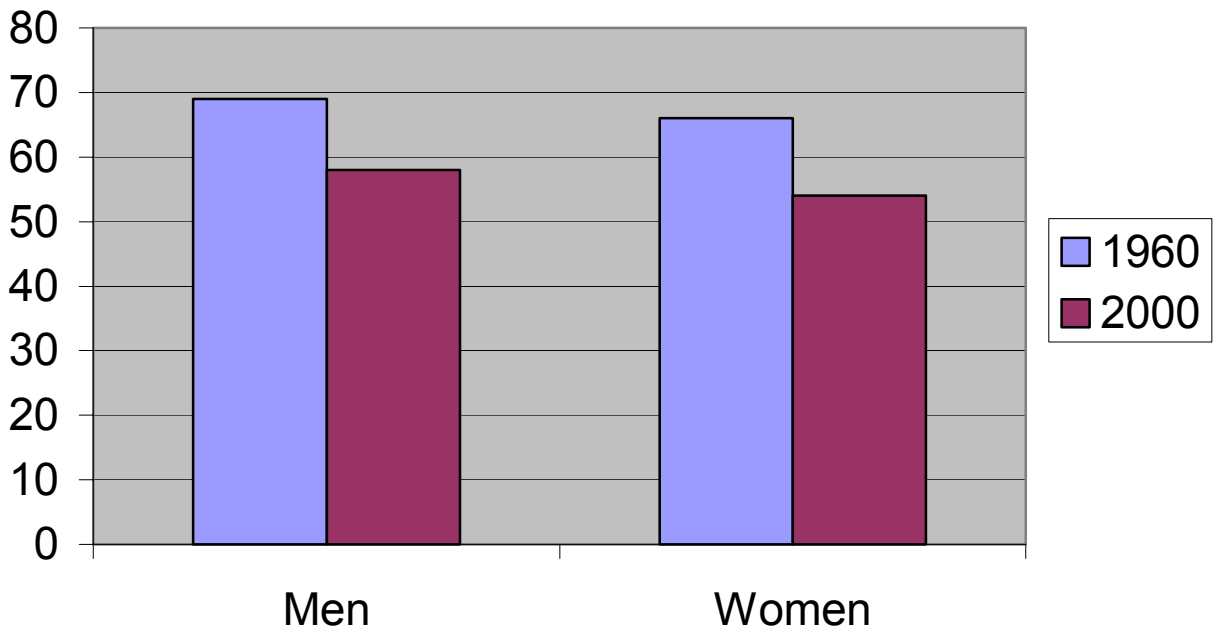
♥ What did you like about your baby's father/mother when you first met him/her? What made you want to spend time with him or her?

♥ At that time, what did you hope would happen in the relationship?

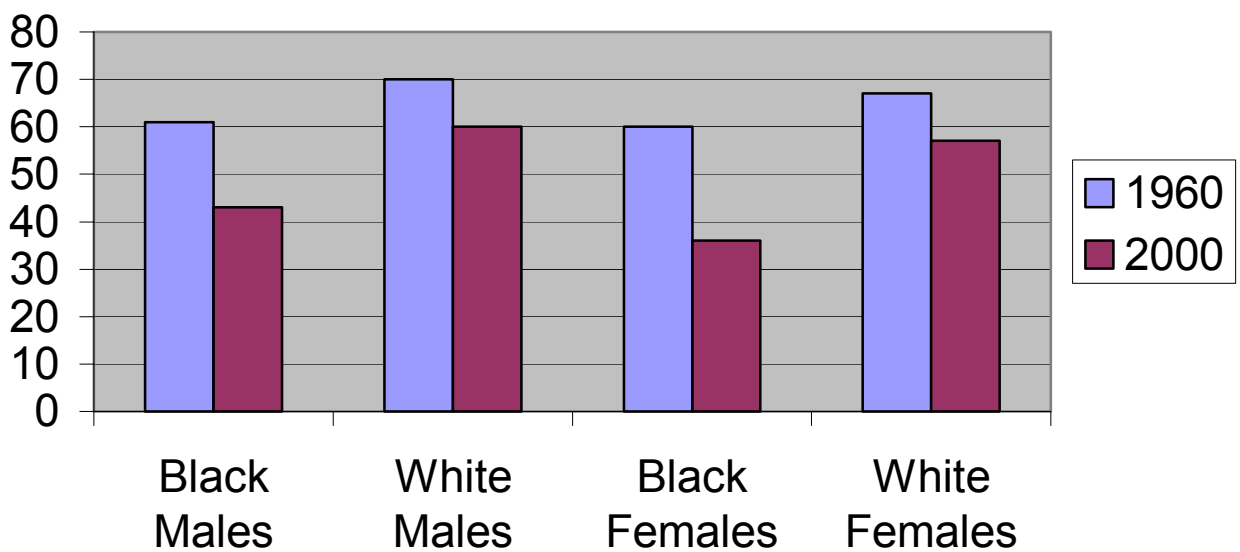
♥ Are you still together? If you are no longer together, can you describe what happened?

♥ What do you hope to have happen in the future with your child's father or mother?

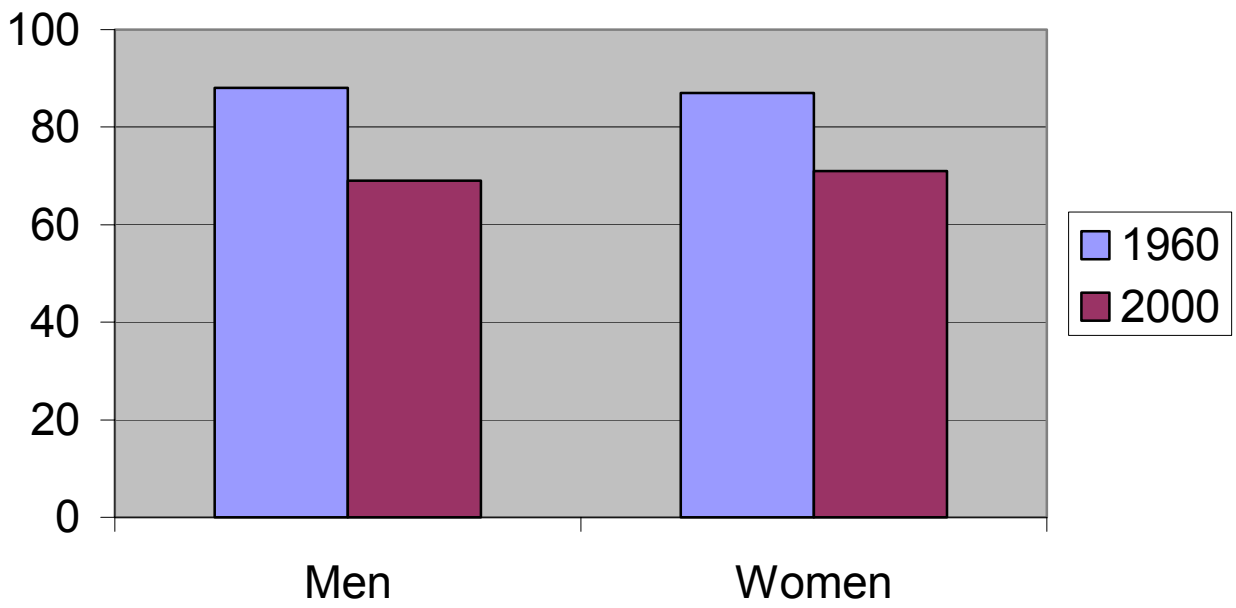
Percent of Men and Women Married



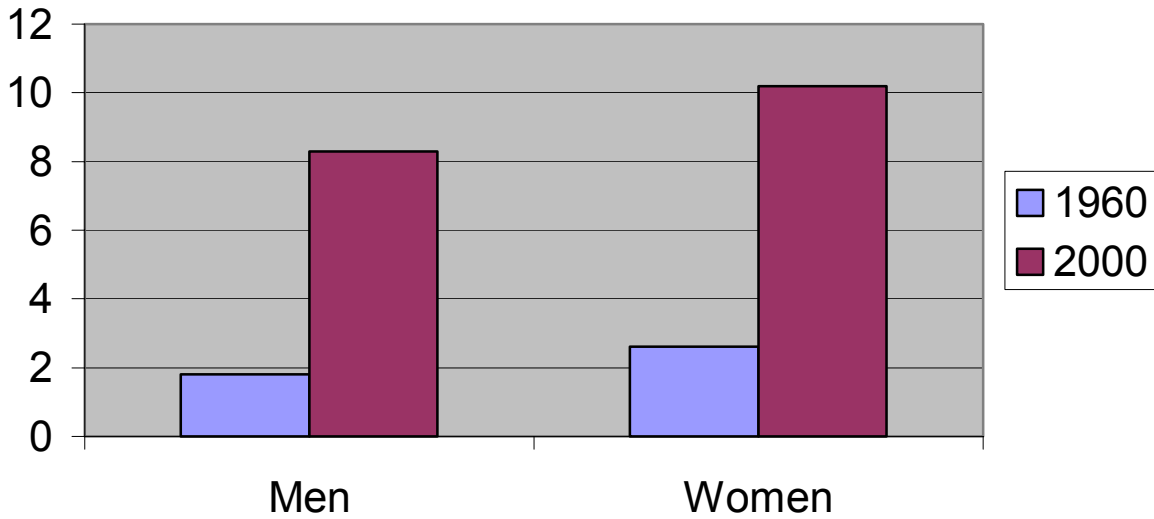
% Married Black/White Men and Women



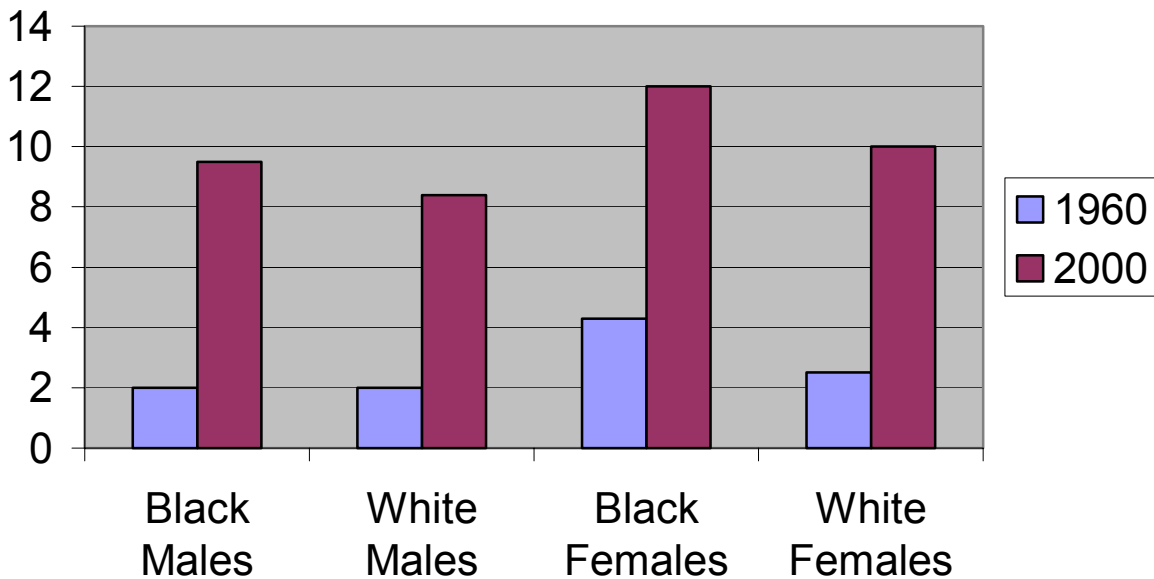
% Married, Ages 35-44



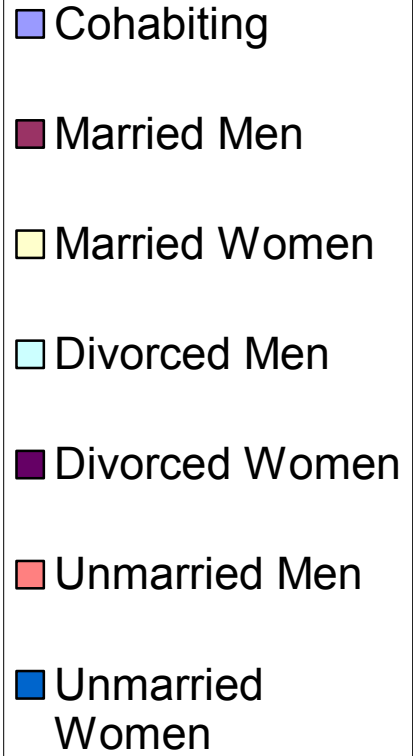
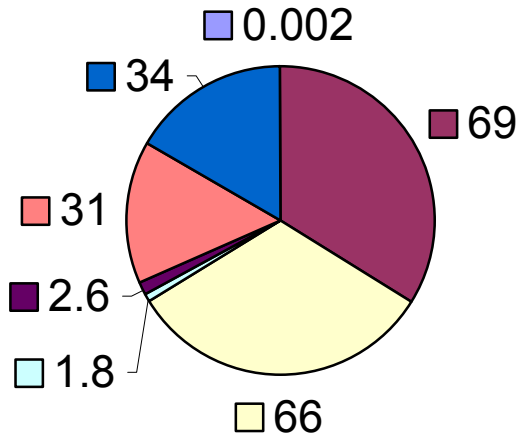
% Divorced Men and Women (over age 15)



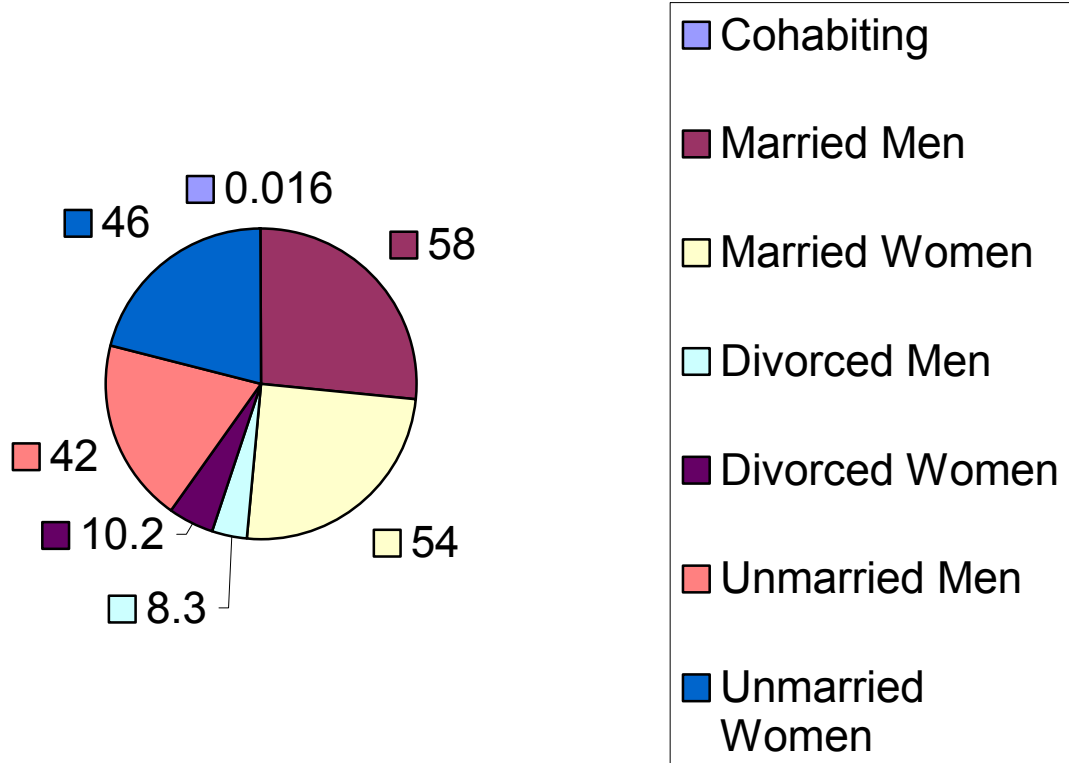
% Divorced Black and White Men and Women



Marital Status, 1960



Marital Status, 1998/2000



What the Experts Say About Marriage

Many people have studied the effects of marriage on people and society. These experts found that people who are married:

- Are healthier, in general
- Live longer
- Tend to have more money and are not poor.

They also found that children who live with their married parents:

- Get more education
- Have better marriages when they grow up
- Feel better about themselves and their lives

But healthy marriages are important. People with marital problems tend to be:

- More depressed
- Get sick more often
- Have children who get sick more often
- Have children who are not well adjusted

And if people divorce, their health suffers. For example:

- Divorced adults have a greater chance of dying earlier
- Children whose parents divorce live an average of four years less

Not Everyone Makes a Good Marriage Partner

Not everyone makes a good partner in a marriage. The items in the “yellow flag” area are things that should make you think twice before marrying this person. If you find that your potential partner does several of the things in the “yellow flag” area, you probably would want to postpone marriage until these things can be worked out.

YELLOW FLAGS

- ❑ If your partner is often very depressed, unsure of himself or herself, and very anxious.
- ❑ If either of you ask over and over again, “Are you sure you love me? Do you really care about me?”
- ❑ If you spend most of your time together arguing and disagreeing.
- ❑ If your partner overreacts to simple problems or situations.
- ❑ If you keep thinking, “Things will be better when we get married.”
- ❑ If your partners wants to make all the important decisions and you resent it.
- ❑ If you are feeling pressure to get married but don’t want to.
- ❑ If you spend a day alone with your partner (not watching television), and you find you can’t stand it.
- ❑ If your partner does things you cannot stand but you are afraid to tell him or her because he or she will get mad.

Items in the “red flag” area mean that you should not marry the person until these things have been resolved. These are things that would put you and your baby at risk for abuse or neglect.

RED FLAGS

- ❑ If your partner is an addict and not in recovery.
- ❑ If your partner physically or verbally abuses you or your children.
- ❑ If your partner is very controlling and you are fearful of him.
- ❑ If your partner demands that you drop all your friends and not see your family.
- ❑ If your partner gets angry easily and can't control his or her temper.
- ❑ If your partner takes money that is needed to buy food and other necessities.

To help avoid marrying someone with these problems, consider:

1. Recognizing these problems in yourself or your partner, and getting help. Marriage does not cure personal problems. It only makes them worse.
2. Waiting to get married until you are older or work through these problems.
3. Getting to know your partner better before you get married.

ADAPTED FROM: *Whom Not to Marry*. Jeffrey H. Larson, Ph.D., Family Studies Center, Brigham Young University. URL:
http://beforeforever.byu.edu/publications/professor_articles/larson.htm

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- But it is not a matter of just being nice. Instead, it is learning to calm oneself, to listen and respond non-defensively, and to stick together even when the going gets rough.

THE PROBLEM

Take a few minutes now to think about one problem you have. Choose a problem that if you can solve it or just improve it, you will be more ready for a lasting relationship.

Next, write down two steps you can take to begin solving this problem.

(1) _____

(2) _____

