



MARK DRISCOLL
MINISTRIES

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A Nobody Trying to Tell Everybody About Somebody,

Pastor Mark Driscoll

Christian Sexuality Research Brief from Mark Driscoll Ministries

A LOOK AT THE SEXUALITY OF MARRIED CHRISTIAN COUPLES

How often are married Christian couples having sex? Do they masturbate? If so, how often? To answer these questions, we provide findings from several bodies of sociological and sexuality research. We begin with a summary of past research on the frequency of sex by married couples in the United States and investigate how religion mediates this outcome. Because this arena of research is relatively outdated, we then present findings from the 2008 nationally representative General Social Survey (GSS).¹ Next, we explore masturbation frequency in the U.S., particularly through the lens of religious affiliation. Because of the private nature of this topic, few studies have focused on masturbation frequency. We therefore present findings from the 1995 National Survey of Health and Social Life.² We then briefly summarize Brad Wilcox's latest research articles featured in the National Marriage Project.³ Next, we highlight some "historical tidbits" about marriage including a discussion on the history of marriage as an institution, gender roles, and sexuality. This is followed by a discussion of news articles featuring the growing trend of "commuter marriages" in the United States. We then present a summary of and highlights from a recent TIME Magazine article entitled *Who Needs Marriage?: A Changing Institution*. We close with a brief summary of one scholar's explanation of "emerging adulthood," focusing on how it relates to loosened sexual morality, gender roles, and delayed marriage and parenthood.

SEX FREQUENCY AMONG MARRIED COUPLES

In terms of the study of sex frequency among married couples in the U.S., it is important to note that the height of the study of sex frequency among married individuals was during the 1990s,⁴

¹ The GSS is widely regarded as the single best source of data on societal trends. It contains a standard 'core' of demographic, behavioral, and attitudinal questions, plus topics of special interest. Many of the core questions have remained unchanged since 1972 to facilitate time-trend studies as well as replication of earlier findings. The GSS takes the pulse of America, and is a unique and valuable resource. It has tracked the opinions of Americans over the last four decades.

² For more information, see <http://cloud9.norc.uchicago.edu/faqs/sex.htm>

³ More information about the National Marriage Project can be found at <http://www.virginia.edu/marriageproject/>.

⁴ As noted by Scott and Sprecher in their decade review of the literature on sexuality in marriage. Christopher, F. Scott and Susan Sprecher. 2000. "Sexuality in marriage, dating, and other relationships: A decade review." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 62(4):999-1017.

and more recent work among young and middle aged adults is difficult to come by. Although, there has been a resurgence of studies of sex frequency among older aged couples (age 57 and above).⁵ We will start by reviewing what older studies show about how often married couples are having sex, and then move into more recent studies.

How often and how do they compare to cohabitating couples?

The importance of sex for a couple's relationship is thoroughly documented. Sex helps keep marriages healthy; it brings couples closer emotionally and helps them weather strains in life.⁶ Analysis from the 1988 National Survey of Families and Household Survey⁷ found that married respondents had sex an average 6.3 times per month. Couples under the age of 24 had a mean frequency of 11 times per month; however frequency of sex decreased with age. Cohabiting couples, married couples who had once cohabitated in the past and individuals who are on their second or later marriage, reported having more sex compared to their non-cohabitating and single marriage counterparts. This pattern was also seen in other national surveys: married men and women did not report as high frequency of having sex per month compared to cohabitating men and women. Other data reported a mean frequency of sexual activity per month of 6.9 for married men and 6.5 for married women, with again cohabiters having the higher rates of sexual activity.⁸ The General Social Survey revealed that married respondents had sex about 67 times per year, or just over once per week. The highest rates were among those who were younger and those married just over three years.⁹

In a section of Linda Waite's article, "Does Marriage Matter?" Waite analyzed data from the 1991 National Health and Social Life Survey—as seen in the charts below accompanied by brief commentaries to interpret them.¹⁰

⁵ Waite, Linda and Aniruddha Has. 2010. "Families, Social Life, and Well-Being at Older Ages." *Demography* 47: 87-109.

⁶ Greeley, A. 1994. "Marital infidelity." *Society* (31): 9-14.

⁷ Call, V., Sprecher, S., & Schwartz, P. (1995). "The incidence and frequency of marital sex in a national sample." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* (57): 639–652.

⁸ Laumann, E. O., Gagnon, J. H., Michael, R. T., & Michaels, S. 1994. The social organization of sexuality: Sexual practices in the United States. Chicago: University of Chicago Press and Michael, R. T., Gagnon, J. H., Laumann, E. O., & Ko-lata, G. 1994. Sex in America: A definitive survey. Boston: Little, Brown.

⁹ Smith, T. W. 1994. "The demography of sexual behavior." Menlo Park, CA: Kaiser Family Foundation.

¹⁰ Waite, Linda J. 1995. "Does Marriage Matter?" *Demography* 32(4): 483-507

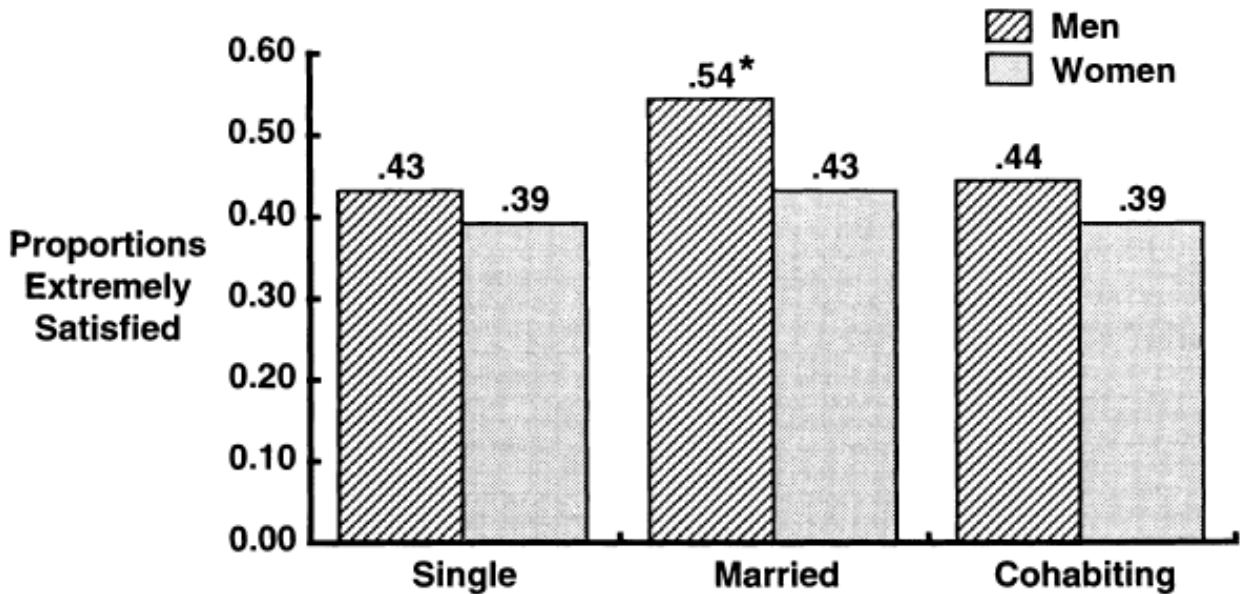


Figure 1. Number of Times Respondent had Sex with Primary Partner in the Past Month, by Marital and Cohabitational Status and Sex. Source: National Health and Social Life Survey 1991.

Figure 1 indicates that married persons report “levels of sexual activity about twice as high as the singles, even after we take into account other characteristics that might affect this behavior. Married men report a mean frequency of sexual activity of 6.84 times per month and single men a mean of 3.63 times per month, over the last year. Married women report a mean of 6.11 times per month and single women a mean of 3.23 times per month, over the last year. Cohabiting men and women also report very high rates of sexual activity—7.43 and 7.20 times per month over the past year, which suggests that on this dimension, cohabitation equals marriage in its benefits to the individuals involved” (p.490).

Although cohabiting couples reported higher rates of sex frequency, married couples did report higher satisfaction with their sexual partners than cohabiting couples as seen in Figure 2 from Waite’s study (next page).¹¹

^{11,9} Waite (1995)



*Statistically significant difference.

Figure 2. Proportions Extremely satisfied Physically with Sex and Primary Partner, by Marital and Cohabital Status and Sex. Source: National Health and Social Life Survey 1991.

Figure 2 demonstrates that, in general, levels of physical satisfaction are somewhat higher for men than for women. Married men report significantly higher rates of satisfaction in relation to single and cohabitating men at 54% of married men indicating that they are extremely satisfied compared with only 43% of single men and 44% of cohabitating men. Additionally, other studies have confirmed that perceived quality of sex also decreases with duration of the marriage along with whether a couple has cohabitated or is currently cohabiting.¹² One theory for this is that the greater commitment to a sex partner, the greater the incentive for an individual to invest in skills that are “partner-specific,” thus enhancing enjoyment of sex for that partner.¹³ Furthermore, marriage facilitates an emotional investment in the relationship, which would affect satisfaction of sex. Waite theorizes that “the wife or husband who knows what the spouse wants sexually is highly motivated to provide it, both because sexual satisfaction of one’s partner brings similar regards to oneself and because the emotional commitment to the partner makes satisfying him or her important in itself” (p. 491). Others have argued that sexual non-monogamy leads to a less satisfying sexual relationship with any particular sexual partner because those who cohabitate bring different levels of commitment to the relationship, with possibly conflicting expectations

¹²Liu, Chien. 2003. "Does quality of marital sex decline with duration?" *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 32(1): 55–6. Rao, K.V. and Alfred Demaris. 1995. "Coital frequency among married and cohabiting couples in the United States." *Journal of Biosocial Science* 27:135-150. Brewis, Alexandra and Mary Meyer. 2005. "Marital coitus across the life course." *Journal of Biosocial Science* 00:1-20.

¹³ Laumann et al. (1994)

for its future.¹⁴ Therefore, differences in commitment between couples may affect the sexual satisfaction of those who cohabit.¹⁵

What affects sex frequency among married couples and why?

The most important factor in lower sex frequency among married couples is the passing of time. Decreased sexual activity and interest begins in the first two years of marriage.¹⁶ As Scott and Sprecher (2000) explain: “Passage of time (i.e., age, duration of marriage) was found to have the strongest (negative) association with frequency of marital sex, although marital satisfaction also had a unique and strong (positive) association with sexual frequency (e.g., Call et al., 1995; Laumann et al., 1994; Smith, 1994b)” (p. 1002). Additionally, life course events like pregnancy play a significant role. While some couples reported having sex 4 to 5 times during pregnancy, they still experienced a decrease to almost no sexual activity at all at seven weeks postpartum.¹⁷ This is probably due to medical reasons as postpartum women are advised to abstain from sexual intercourse until 6 to 7 weeks postpartum.

What types of sex are married couples engaging in?

The 1992 National Health and Social Life Survey found that 95% of married couples had vaginal intercourse in their last sex act. Although a majority of the respondents had engaged in oral sex in their lifetime, less than one-fourth of the married respondents reported having oral sex during their last sex act. Anal sex was even less common, only 1% to 2% reported having had it during their last episode, although 9.7% of married men and 7.3% of married women reported engaging in anal sex during the past year. Oral and anal-sex are more common among the more highly educated and white respondents.¹⁸

WHAT ABOUT CHRISTIAN COUPLES?

Almost no studies have looked at the rates of marital sexual frequency by religious affiliation. And if they have been done, they are relatively outdated. However they still provide important glimpses in how religion affects sex frequency. Laumann et al. (1994) noted that religious individuals were less likely to think about sex, masturbate, have oral or anal sex, or have multiple partners.¹⁹ “Evangelical Protestant adults reported the highest frequency of sex, the

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Laumann et al. (1994)

¹⁶ Huston, T. L., & Vangelisti, A. L. (1991). “Socioemotional behavior and satisfaction in marital relationships: A longitudinal study.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 61: 721-733.

¹⁷ Hyde, J. S., DeLamater, J. D., Plant, E. A., & Byrd, J. M. 1996. “Sexuality during pregnancy and the year postpartum.” *The Journal of Sex Research* 33: 143- 151.

¹⁸ Scott and Sprecher (2000)

¹⁹ Laumann et al. (1994)

highest levels of satisfaction with sex, and the lowest frequency of oral and anal sex. Moreover, they were more likely to have had only one sex partner in the last year. Their study suggested that religion can and does continue to influence people’s sexual lives well into adulthood and marriage.”²⁰ Scott and Spreacher found that “social and background characteristics, such as race, social status, and religion, were generally unrelated to marital sexual frequency, with the exception of a few modest associations, such as a Catholic background being associated with a lower frequency (Call et al., 1995).”

The most recent work is from Mike McFarland, Jeremy Uecker, and Mark Regnerus in their 2010 article “Religion and Sex Among Older U.S. Adults” appearing in *The Journal of Sex Research*.²¹

Variable	Married ^a		Unmarried ^b		Range
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Frequency of sex	1.406	1.163	–	–	0–4
Sex last year	–	–	0.174	0.379	0–1
Physical satisfaction	3.011	0.908	–	–	0–4
Emotional satisfaction	3.087	0.860	–	–	0–4
Healthy couple	0.300	0.457	–	–	0–1
Health	3.407	1.041	3.188	1.161	1–5
Age	66.941	7.148	70.252	8.127	57–85
Female	0.442	0.497	0.709	0.544	0–1
Black	0.063	0.242	0.117	0.322	0–1
Number of friends	3.511	1.091	3.239	1.276	0–5
Function limitations	0.134	0.312	0.198	0.367	0–3
Evangelical Protestant	0.180	0.384	0.213	0.410	0–1
Catholic	0.288	0.453	0.251	0.434	0–1
Mainline Protestant	0.291	0.455	0.251	0.434	0–1
Other	0.241	0.428	0.285	0.452	0–1
Low religious attendance	0.232	0.422	0.262	0.440	0–1
Moderate religious attendance	0.291	0.454	0.306	0.461	0–1
High religious attendance	0.477	0.500	0.432	0.496	0–1
Religious integration	3.067	0.841	3.093	0.830	1–4
Social support (<i>z</i> score)	0.047	2.726	–	–	–7.4–3.9
Positive spousal support	5.590	0.783	–	–	2–6
Negative spousal support	3.025	1.107	–	–	2–6
Relationship happiness	6.313	1.128	–	–	1–7

^a*N* = 1,221.

^b*N* = 791.

^{20, 21} McFarland, Mike, Jeremy Uecker, and Mark Regnerus. 2010. "The Role of Religion in Shaping Sexual Frequency and Satisfaction: Evidence from Married and Unmarried Older Adults." *Journal of Sexuality* 47: 1-12.

Figure 3. Weighted Averages and Standard Deviations Among Individuals, Aged 57 to 85.
Source: National Social Life, Health, and Aging Project 2005-2006.

McFarland et al. interpret Figure 3 for us: “The majority of married respondents had engaged in sexual activity at least once in the last year, and they also indicated elevated levels of sexual satisfaction. Percentage breakdowns of sexual frequency (not shown) indicated that roughly 30% of married respondents did not have sex in the last year, 25% had sex once per month or less, and 24% had sex more than once per month. Finally, over 20% of respondents indicated that they engaged in sexual intercourse once per week or more” (p.6).²²

Variable	Sex in the Last Year ^a	
	Women ^b	Men ^c
Religious attendance		
Low	7.89	45.90
Moderate	13.62	43.62
High	3.93	31.78
“I carry my religious beliefs into daily life”		
Strongly disagree	18.03	55.46
Disagree	18.51 ^d	36.15
Agree	7.16 ^d	49.63
Strongly agree	4.45	29.27

Note. All values are weighted.

^a*N* = 791.

^b*N* = 559.

^c*N* = 232.

^dThe overall percentages of women and men that had sex in the last year are significantly different at $p > .05$.

Figure 4. Percentage of Unmarried Respondents Having Sex by Religiosity, Aged 57 to 85
Source: National Social Life, Health, and Aging Project 2005-2006.

How does religion play in role in how often *unmarried* people have sex? McFarland notes that Figure 4 “presents the percentage breakdowns by religiosity of unmarried adults that had sex in the last year. This table reveals two discernable patterns. First, among both men and women, those indicating low and moderate levels of attendance and integration were more likely to have

²² It is important to note that individuals who indicated they were Baptist or nondenominational Christian were classified as Evangelical Protestants, while those indicating other Protestant denominations (Episcopalians, Methodist, etc.) are classified as Mainline Protestants.

had sex within the last year than those with high levels of religiosity. Second, the percentage of unmarried men that had sex in the last year was higher among men regardless of religiosity. A higher percentage of men that had high religious attendance or strongly agreed that they carry their religious beliefs into their everyday lives had sex in the last year than did women indicating the lowest levels of religious attendance and integration. This table suggests that religion shared an inverse relationship with sex in the last year, and this relationship was stronger among women.”

The authors conclude that religion “is largely unrelated with sexual frequency and satisfaction, although religious integration in daily life shares a weak, but positive, association with pleasure from sex” (p. 1). For unmarried adults, religious integration has a negative association with having had sex in the last year among women, but not men. The take home point here is that religious affiliation seemed to better predict who would and would not have extramarital sex, rather than sexual frequency and satisfaction among married couples.

RECENT DATA ON MARITAL SEX FREQUENCY

Based on our survey of the literature on this topic, it appears that recent work is more difficult to find and even less so in terms of the impact of religion. For this reason I include findings²³ here from the latest available data (2008) of the General Social Survey. This analysis shows that:

AMONG MARRIED PERSONS:

7.1% have sex 4 or more times a week

20.5% have had sex 2-3 times per week

24.3% have had sex weekly

16.9% have had 2-3 times a month

14.5% have had sex once a month

7.7% have had sex once or twice a year

9.3% have not had sex in the past year

The above numbers are displayed in the first column of figure five on the next page.

²³ The findings reported here were calculated by the Docent researcher using publically available data, accessible online here: <http://www.norc.org/GSS+Website> Data were weighted appropriately.

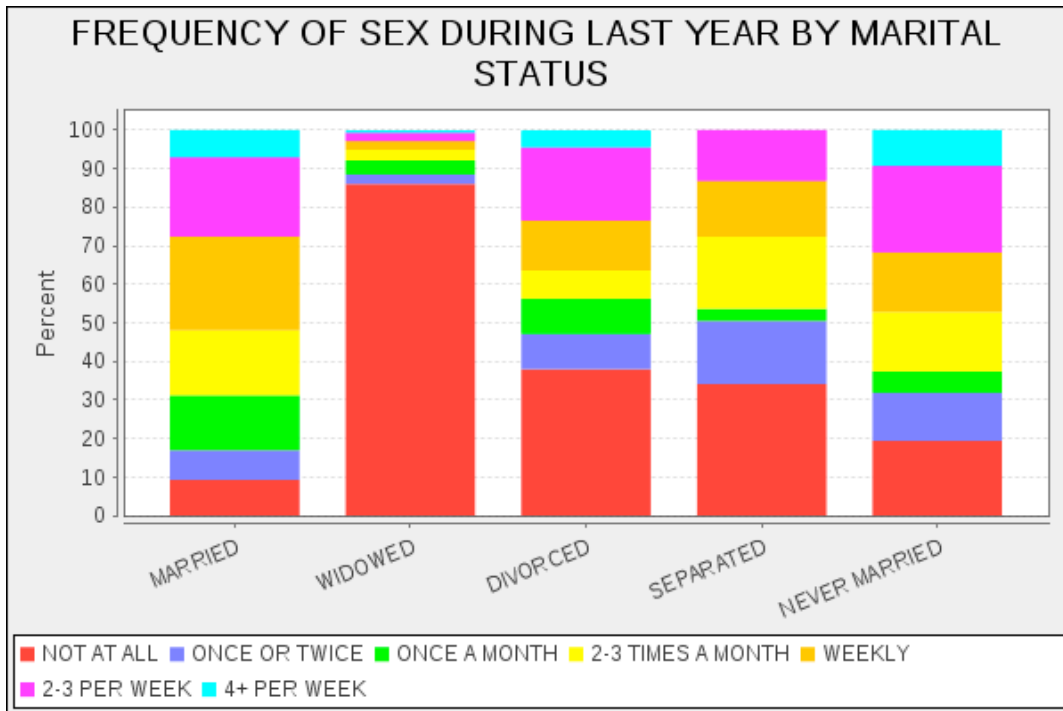


Figure 5. Frequency of Sex During Last Year By Marital Status; Source: General Social Survey, 2008.

Figure 5 demonstrates that married individuals tend to have the most sex, compared to widowed, divorced, separated, and never married respondents.

AMONG MARRIED PROTESTANTS:

6.9% of married Protestants have had sex 4 or more times a week

18.6% have had sex 2-3 times per week

22.5% have had sex weekly

18.4% have had 2-3 times a month

14.5% have had sex once a month

7.9% have had sex once or twice a year

11.3% have not had sex in the past year

AMONG MARRIED CATHOLICS:

7.1% of married Catholics have had sex 4 or more times a week

20.1% have had sex 2-3 times per week

25.3% have had sex weekly

14.5% have had 2-3 times a month

17.7% have had sex once a month

6.9% have had sex once or twice a year

8.4% have not had sex in the past year

A MORE FINELY GRAINED LOOK AT MARRIED PROTESTANTS:

7.6% of married **fundamentalist** Protestants have had sex 4 or more times a week

21.3% have had sex 2-3 times per week

23.7% have had sex weekly

14.7% have had 2-3 times a month

12.4% have had sex once a month

8.9% have had sex once or twice a year

11.4% have not had sex in the past year

10.2% of married **moderate** Protestants have had sex 4 or more times a week

13.9% have had sex 2-3 times per week

19.3% have had sex weekly

23.4% have had 2-3 times a month

18.5% have had sex once a month

3.8% have had sex once or twice a year

11.0% have not had sex in the past year

2.9% of married **liberal** Protestants have had sex 4 or more times a week

16.0% have had sex 2-3 times per week

22.3% have had sex weekly

22.5% have had 2-3 times a month

16.0% have had sex once a month

8.9% have had sex once or twice a year

11.4% have not had sex in the past year

To summarize, married couples in the U.S. are mostly having sex on a weekly basis. Protestants and Catholic couples reflect similar percentages of sexual frequency, with fundamentalist Protestant couples being the most sexually active, followed by moderate, then liberal orientations.²⁴

MASTURBATION IN THE UNITED STATES

Masturbation is rarely studied, perhaps because it is viewed as such a private act.²⁵ In Mark Regnerus' recent book on sex and religion among American adolescents,²⁶ he is only able to devote a few pages to the topic, noting that the dataset he used²⁷ did not ask respondents about masturbation or its morality. He suggests that, "It seems that we too have trouble saying the word,"²⁸ and he calls for researchers to collect more reliable data on masturbation.

We have encountered the same trouble as Regnerus in pooling together the existing literature on masturbation. Even large surveys with the explicit intention of measuring sexual behaviors and attitudes rarely discuss masturbation, and when they do, respondents are not asked how often they masturbate, but rather whether they have ever masturbated or if they have masturbated in the last year, month, or week. The sole exception, and the most famous and comprehensive study of human sexuality in the last twenty years, is the Chicago study by Laumann.²⁹ In 1992, they

²⁴ This was calculated based on which group had the highest percentage in the weekly through 4 times a week or more categories.

²⁵ Edward Laumann discussed the difficulty getting government funding to ask about masturbation. He said that government officials reasoned "that masturbation was a private matter." (Laumann et al. 1994. *Sex in America*. Pg. 28)

²⁶ Regnerus, Mark D. 2009. *Forbidden Fruit: Sex and Religion in the Lives of American Teenagers*. Oxford University Press.

²⁷ The National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR)

²⁸ Pg. 116

²⁹ See Laumann, Edward, John H. Gagnon, Robert T. Michael, and Stuart Michaels. 1994a. *The Social Organization of Sexuality: Sexual Practices in the United States*. University of Chicago Press and

conducted a nationwide survey of 3,432 American men and women between the ages of 19 and 59. Even this study, however, cited by many as the best source for data on sexual conduct among Americans, only allows respondents to indicate the category which best fits their masturbation frequency.³⁰ We cannot determine a mean frequency of masturbation from this kind of data.³¹

These surveys are also limited because they often focus on small, specific subsamples of the broader population. The best update of Laumann's study is the National Social Life, Health, and Aging Project (NSHAP). Unfortunately, this study only focuses on adults aged 57 to 85, so it adds nothing to our understanding of sexuality among younger and middle aged adults. Other studies of sexual activity that include masturbation measures analyze non-US samples or only look at college students.³² An additional problem with current masturbation data is that, since it is self-reported and socially taboo, many researchers are concerned that it is under-reported.³³ Even with these poor and limited measures, we are able to see clear patterns of masturbation by gender, religion, marital status, and age. The data presented here are either from previous studies or from our own analysis of the National Survey of Health and Social Life.³⁴

GENERAL TRENDS

According to 1992 data from the National Survey of Health and Social Life, about half (50.31%) of the sample did not masturbate at all in the previous year.³⁵ This means that half of the sample did masturbate. The figure below illustrates these findings.

Laumann, Edward, Robert T. Michael, and Gina Kolata. 1994b. *Sex in America: A Definitive Survey*. Warner Books: New York.

³⁰ These categories are zero times in last year, one to two times a year, three to five times a year, every other month, once a month, 2-3 times a month, once a week, several times a week, every day, and more than once a day.

³¹ Another limitation of this data is how dated it now is.

³² These countries include Sweden (see Brody, Stuart, and Rui Miguel Costa. 2009. Satisfaction (sexual, life, relationship, and mental health) is associated directly with penile-vaginal intercourse, but inversely with other sexual behavior frequencies. *The Journal of Sexual Medicine* 6(7): 1947-1954) and Great Britain;

Gerressu, Makeda, Catherine H. Mercer, Cynthia A. Graham, Kaye Wellings, and Anne M. Johnson. 2007. "Prevalence of Masturbation and Associated Factors in a British National Probability Survey." *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 37:266-278.) The college student studies are

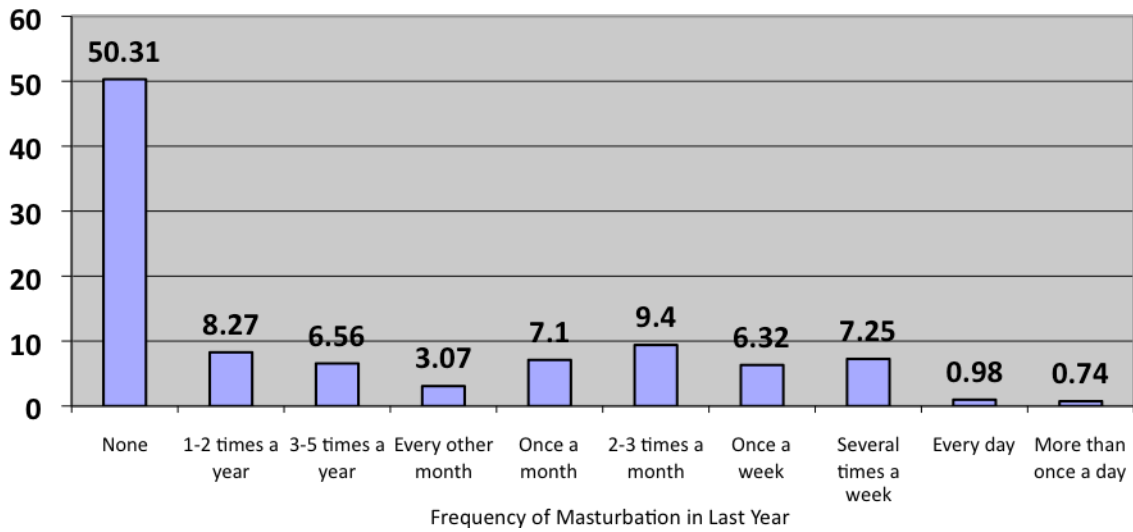
Farmer, Melissa A., Paul D. Trapnell, and Cindy M. Meston. 2008. "The Relation Between Sexual Behavior and Religiosity Subtypes: A Test of the Secularization Hypothesis." *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 38:852-865;

Leitenberg, Harold, Mark J. Detzer, and Debra Srebnik. 1993. "Gender differences in masturbation and the relation of masturbation experience in preadolescence and/or early adolescence to sexual behavior and sexual adjustment in young adulthood." *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 22:87-98.

³³ See Halpern, Carolyn J. T., J. Richard Udry, Chirayath Suchindran, and Benjamin Campbell. 2000. "Adolescent Males' Willingness to Report Masturbation." *Journal of Sex Research* 37:327-332.

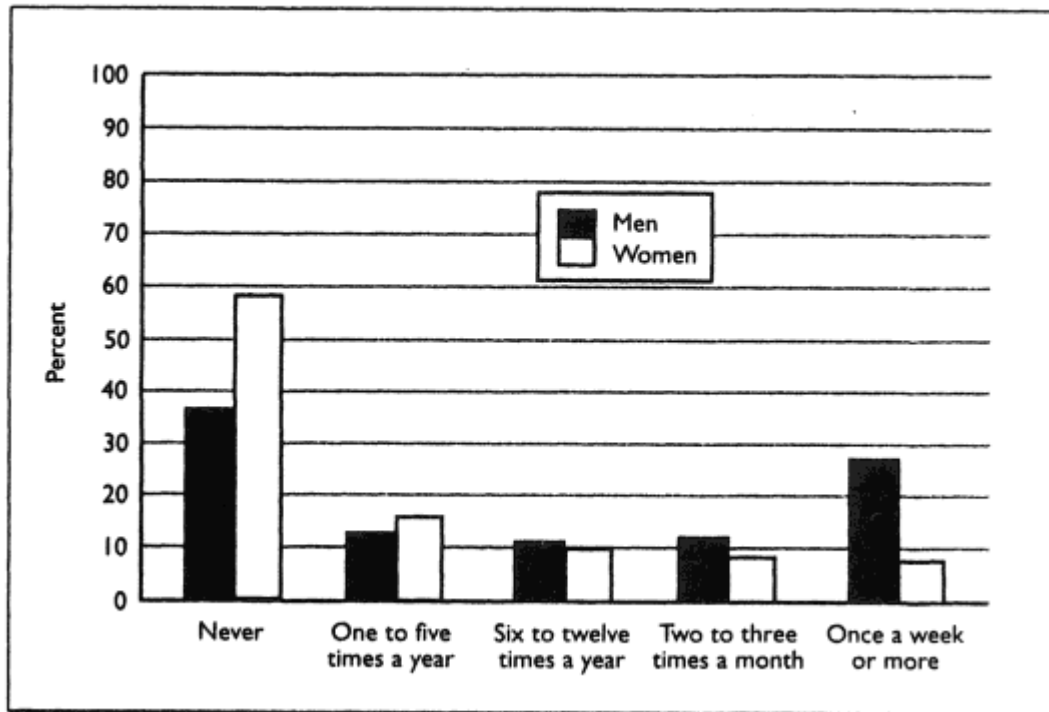
³⁴ For more information, see <http://cloud9.norc.uchicago.edu/faqs/sex.htm>

³⁵ All data in this section from analysis of National Survey of Health and Social Life unless otherwise stated. Thus all data from 1992.



These trends are markedly different by gender. According to the National Survey of Health and Social Life, 29% of men aged 18-24 masturbate at least once a week, compared to 9% of 18-24 year old women. This is illustrated below.³⁶

FIGURE 11:
Frequency of Masturbation



³⁶ Figure from Laumann et al. 1994a.

The average age that individuals first begin masturbating also varied by gender. Leitenberg and colleagues (1993) report that the average man first masturbates at 13.45 years and the average woman begins at 12.75 years.³⁷

WHAT ABOUT CHRISTIAN MASTURBATORS?

In general, the research shows that religious individuals do masturbate, though they are less likely to do so than the non-religious, and when they do masturbate, it is less frequently. Most studies only look at religious affiliation, rather than any measure of religiosity such as frequency of church attendance or specific beliefs. According to these studies, slightly less than one-fifth of conservative Protestant³⁸ men, regardless of age, masturbate *weekly*, down from about three-tenths (28%) of mainline Protestant men, one-quarter (25%) of Catholics, and four-tenths (38%) of nonreligious men.³⁹ Half of conservative Protestant men did not masturbate in the last year, compared to one-third of those with no religious affiliation and one-third of mainline Protestant men. Additionally, Fundamentalist Protestants are less likely to report any masturbation over the last year than Catholics, moderate Protestants, and those without religious affiliation.⁴⁰ This pattern also holds for women. A little more than two-thirds (68.5%) of conservative Protestant women reported no masturbation in the past year, compared to 58% of mainline Protestants, 63% of Catholics, and 45% of women with no religion. The figures below illustrate these findings.



Figure 8. No masturbation in last year (by religion and gender) (percentage)

³⁷ Leitenberg, Harold, Mark J. Detzer, and Debra Srebnik. 1993. "Gender differences in masturbation and the relation of masturbation experience in preadolescence and/or early adolescence to sexual behavior and sexual adjustment in young adulthood." *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 22:87-98.

Sample was 280 respondents from two introduction to psychology classes.

³⁸ Or "evangelically-oriented."

³⁹ Laumann et al. 1994a. Also replicated in my own analysis.

⁴⁰ Farmer, Melissa A., Paul D. Trapnell, and Cindy M. Meston. 2008. "The Relation Between Sexual Behavior and Religiosity Subtypes: A Test of the Secularization Hypothesis." *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 38:852-865.

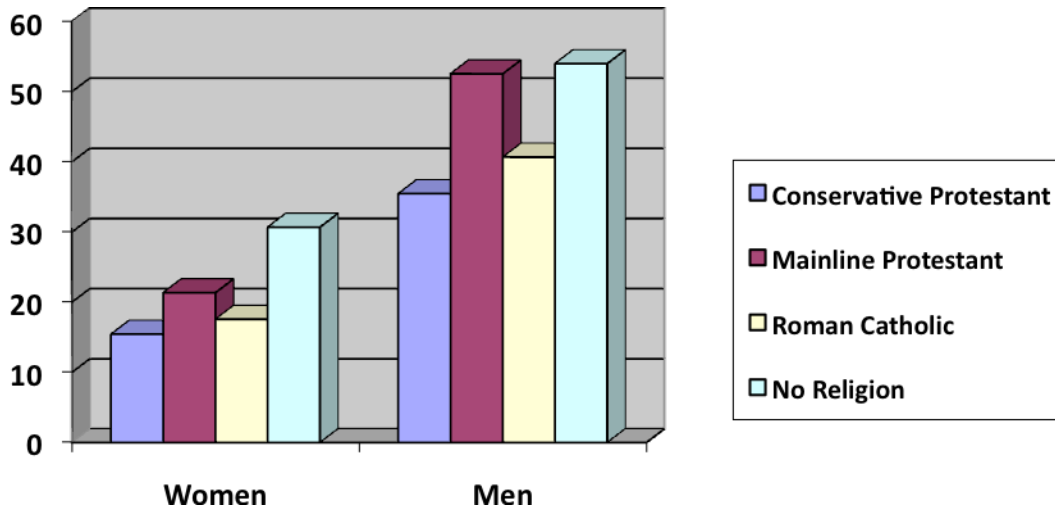


Figure 9. Masturbation *Once A month or More* (by religion and gender) (percentage)

Another measure of religion is frequency of church attendance. About one quarter (24.95%) of those who attend church at least “almost every week” report masturbating once a month or more, compared to about four in ten (37.29%) of those who never attend church. Fifty-seven percent of those who attend church once a week or more report not masturbating in last year, compared to 46.61% of those who never attend church. These numbers become less different when looking only at men. Among men only, 38.65% of those who attend church at least “almost every week” report masturbating at least once a month, compared to 49.37% of men who never attend church. Additionally, 39.88% of those who attend church once a week or more report not masturbating in last year, compared to 37.55% of those who never attend church. See figure 10 on the next page for these patterns, along with more detail.

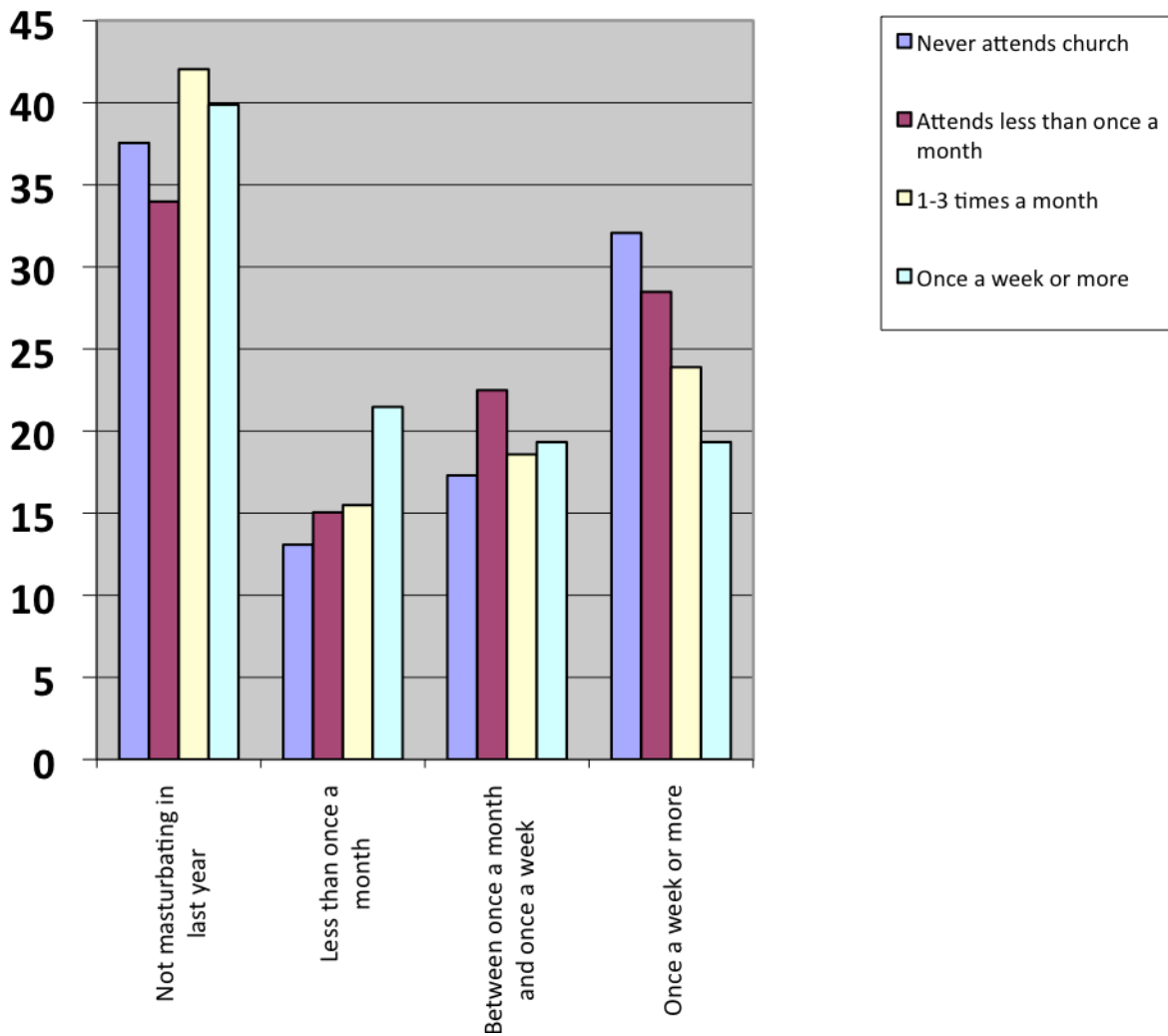


Figure 10. Frequency of Masturbation by Religious Attendance for Men Only

These numbers can be further broken down by marital status. 44.2% of married men who attend church once a week or more report not masturbating in past year, compared to about 44.1% of men who never attend church and 43.6% of all married men. This implies that church attendance is not a large determinant of masturbating behaviors in the life of married men. There is slightly more difference when looking at religious affiliation. Of married men, more than half (54.6%) of conservative Protestants report not masturbating in last year, compared to one-third (34.6%) of mainstream Protestants, almost two-fifths (38.0%) of Catholics, and more than one-third (35.8%) with no religious affiliation. On the other end of the spectrum, among married men, about one in ten (9.7%) conservative Protestants report masturbating *once a week or more*. In comparison, 15.9% of mainstream Protestant married men, two in ten (19.8%) Catholic married men, and about one quarter (25.6%) of married men with no religious affiliation report masturbating once a week or more.

Figure 11 below displays the frequency of masturbation among conservative Protestant men by marital status. As this picture illustrates, the most masturbation is seen among the never married. This graph shows that about one in five (20%) of married conservative Protestant men report masturbating more than once a week.

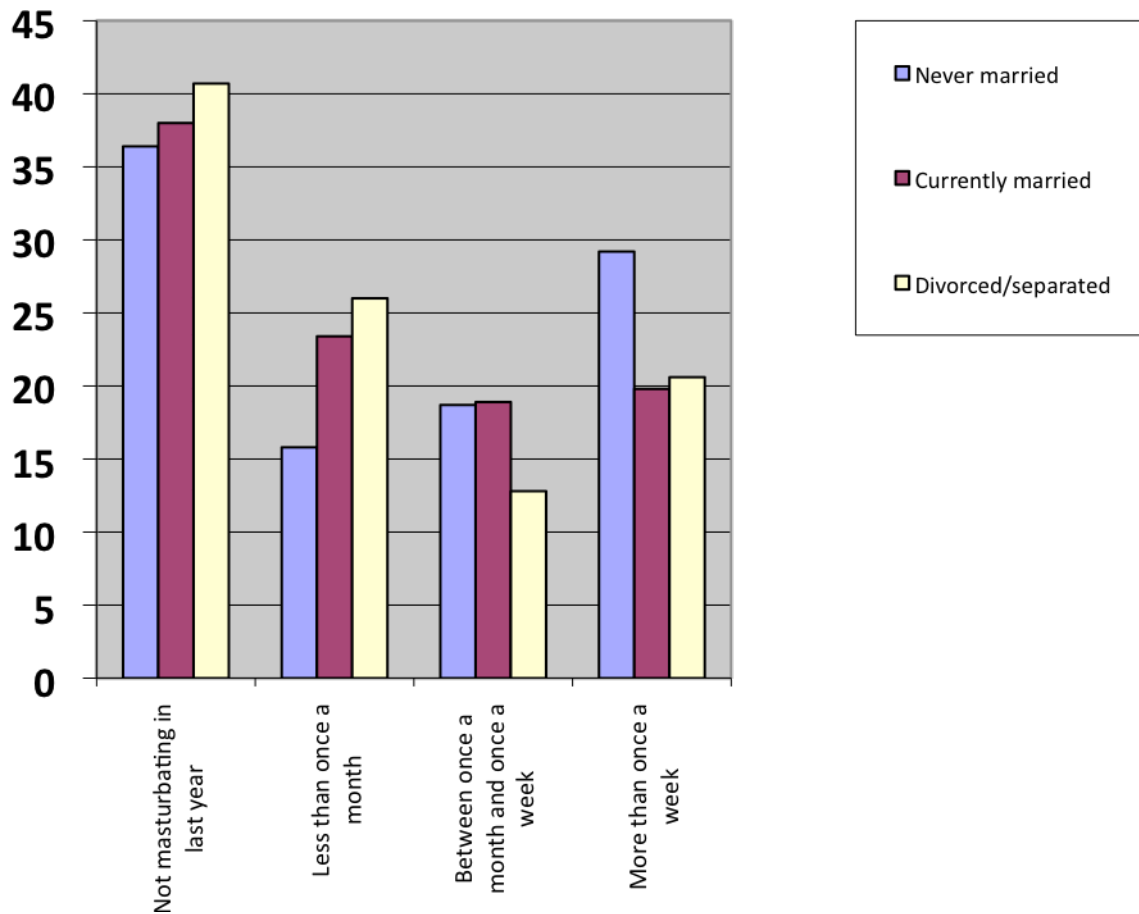


Figure 11. Frequency of Masturbation by Marital Status Among Protestant Men

BRAD WILCOX AND THE NATIONAL MARRIAGE PROJECT

Recent articles:

1. Ellison, Christopher G., Amy M. Burdette, and W. Bradford Wilcox. 2010. "The Couple That Prays Together: Race and Ethnicity, Religion, and Relationship Quality Among Working-Age Adults." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 72:963-975.

In this paper, Ellison, Burdette, and Wilcox examine how important common religious affiliations, practices, and beliefs are for shaping marital quality for adults ages 18-59 and

whether this varies by race and ethnicity. The authors found that religious homogamy⁴¹ is important across race and ethnicity. They found that 78% of couples have the same religious affiliation. Importantly, these couples in same-faith relationships and who both attend religious services regularly report greater relationship satisfaction than do others. In addition, the frequency with which couples engage in regular in-home worship activities (e.g., prayer, scriptural study) was also positively linked with relationship quality. However, religious homogamy used to be a greater predictor of marital quality than it now is.

2. Nicholas H. Wolfinger, and W. Bradford Wilcox. 2008. "Happily Ever After?: Religion, Marital Status, Gender and Relationship Quality in Urban Families." *Social Forces* 86:1311-1337.

In this study, Wolfinger and Wilcox analyze data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, a national survey designed to provide information on new unwed parents and their children in large U.S. cities (n=3,340). Thus this study is uniquely looking at unmarried adults who are generally lower income. The authors find that religious participation by fathers, irrespective of marital status, is consistently associated with better relationships among new parents in urban America; however, mothers' participation is not related to relationship quality. Women may only benefit from religious participation if both they and their partners attend frequently, whereas for men even solo church-going is associated with favorable views of their relationship. Couples in which the husband attends church several times a month were found to be happier with their relationships and more likely to report that their partner was emotionally supportive. Likewise, religious participation benefits romantic relationships through the positive behaviors it encourages and, conversely, the negative behaviors it discourages.

3. Wilcox, William Bradford, and Steven L. Nock. 2006. "What's Love Got To Do With It? Equality, Equity, Commitment and Women's Marital Quality." *Social Forces* 84:1321-1345.

In this paper, Wilcox and Nock examine what factors promote women's marital quality and men's emotional investment within a marriage. They test the companionate theory of marriage which suggests that egalitarianism in practice and belief leads to higher marital quality for wives and higher levels of positive emotional investment on the part of husbands. They analyze data drawn from the second wave of the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH2 [1992-1994]), a nationally representative sample of adults age 23 and older (n=5010 couples). They find no support for the theory that egalitarianism (conceptualized as approving or disapproving of women working when have children, whether or not the wife participated in labor force, whether husband or wife earned more, and how equally household labor divided) promotes wife's marital quality. It is more important for wife's marital happiness that husband and wife have shared ideas about marriage, that they both committed to the institution of marriage, that they are

⁴¹ Being married to someone with the same religious affiliation.

integrated into institution (like the church) that also have these same ideas about marriage, and that the marriage, and that the husband is emotionally invested in marriage.

4. Wilcox, W. Bradford. 2006. "Religion and the Domestication of Men." *Contexts* 5:42-46.

This article by Dr. Wilcox is a summary of previous research on the importance of religion for men's lives. He begins by noting that many feminists and scholars see religious men (especially conservative Protestants) as too authoritarian and abusive, especially towards their families. In Wilcox's research, he finds that conservative Protestantism does promote gender inequality. In one study, he finds that that 58 percent of churchgoing, evangelical men who are married with children believe it is "much better for everyone if the man earns the main living and the woman takes care of the home and family," compared to only 44 percent of churchgoing, mainline Protestant men and 37 percent of unaffiliated men. These beliefs have real consequences. One illustration of this is that Evangelical Protestant husbands do an hour less housework per week than other American husbands. Protestant women also marry earlier, bear children earlier, and work less than other women in the United States. Additionally, Protestant men seem to be stricter on their children than other fathers. Evangelical fathers are significantly more likely to use corporal punishment on their children than Catholic, Jewish, and unaffiliated fathers.

Wilcox argues that this is not the full story, however, and he urges scholars to look more carefully at the data. He argues that there are many things Evangelical fathers do that other fathers should do as well. There is a push in the church (such as through Promise Keepers) for evangelical men to recommit to their marriages and families and see these areas as important priorities. He finds that these institutional pushes seem to be bearing fruit. Men who are religious—especially evangelical fathers and husbands—are more involved and affectionate with their children and wives than are unaffiliated family men. As fathers, religious men spend more time in one-on-one activities like reading to their children, hug and praise their kids more often, and keep tabs on the children more than unaffiliated fathers do. As husbands, religious men are more affectionate and understanding with their wives, and they spend more time socializing with them, compared to husbands who are not regular churchgoers. I also found—contrary to the expectations of critics—that churchgoing, evangelical married men have the lowest rates of reported domestic violence of any major religious or secular group in the United States. Not surprisingly, wives of religious men report higher levels of marital happiness than wives of men who are not religious. Wilcox sees this as a neo-traditional approach to family life, as it combines a progressive insistence on men's active engagement in family life with a traditional insistence on some degree of gender complementarity in family life, but he believes this approach has not received much scholarly attention.

ANECDOTES AND QUOTES ABOUT MARRIAGE, SEX, GENDER, AND THE CHURCH

Here we have collected quotations and anecdotes about marriage, sex, gender, and the Church over the past several centuries. The first section traces the importance of love to marriage across multiple time periods and culture. Interestingly, during the Middle Ages, love was seen as incompatible with marriage. Culturally today, marriage is seen as founded on love and impossible without it. The second section examines the relationship of sex to marriage. In the early Church, sex was only acceptable within marriage and only for the purpose of reproduction. Otherwise, sex was impure and to be avoided. The Puritans broke this tradition, and many sources⁴² note that Puritans actually promoted sex for the purpose of pleasure, not just reproduction, though that was still encouraged. In the third section, there are quotes and anecdotes about gender, marriage, and the Church. Not surprisingly, women were not highly valued in the early church, and like sex, seen as impure. In the final section, I have included a couple of notes about how the church has viewed divorce over the past several centuries.

This section of the research brief should not be viewed as a fully comprehensive history of these incredibly broad topics of marriage, gender, love, sex, and the church. Rather, this research brief is a collection of anecdotes and quotes that I hope you will find interesting and useful to your book. Many examples here were drawn from Stephanie Coontz' book, *Marriage, a History: How Love Conquered Marriage*.⁴³

Marriage and love

The linking of love to marriage is a fairly modern invention. Before the Victorian age, marriage and love were actually seen as mutually exclusive. This was true both outside of and within the Christian church and across cultures.

Among the European aristocracy in 12th and 13th century, it was viewed as impossible for true love to “exert its powers between two people who are married to each other.”⁴⁴ Rather, “true love” only was believed to exist in adulterous relationships. This was not a view limited to the secular world. Andreas Cappellanus, chaplain to Countess Marie of Troyes, wrote in 12th century

⁴²See Leites, Edmund. 1982. “The Duty to Desire: Love, Friendship, and Sexuality in Some Puritan Theories of Marriage.” *Journal of Social History* 15:383-408. This is great history of how Puritans viewed marriage and how this contrasted with past views.

Also see Foster, Thomas A. 1999. “Deficient Husbands: Manhood, Sexual Incapacity, and Male Marital Sexuality in Seventeenth-Century New England.” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 56:723-744. Great history of male sexuality in Puritanism.

⁴³ Coontz, Stephanie. 2006. *Marriage, a History: How Love Conquered Marriage*. Penguin (Non-Classics).

Go to <http://www.stephaniecoontz.com/books/marriage/chapter1.htm> to read the first chapter for free. Stephanie Coontz teaches history and family studies at [The Evergreen State College](http://www.evergreen.edu) in Olympia, Washington and is Director of Research and Public Education for the Council on Contemporary Families

⁴⁴ Quote from the Countess of Champaign (See pp. 106-7 in Capellanus, Andreas. 1969. *The Art of Courtly Love*. New York: W.W. Norton. This is a treatise on the principles of courtly love written by the chaplain to Countess Marie of Troyes.)

France that “marriage is no real excuse for not loving,” meaning that marriage should not serve as a barrier to a true love affair which required being unfaithful to a spouse.⁴⁵

In fact, the preservation of love for affairs outside of marriage was practiced by many inside the church during this time period. Stephanie Coontz writes of a famous love affair from the Middle Ages involving Peter Abelard, a well-known theologian in France, and Héloïse, the niece of a fellow churchman at Notre Dame.⁴⁶ Héloïse bore Abelard a child, which would have been a huge scandal though the couple hid what had occurred. Abelard proposed they marry in secret, but Héloïse refused, as she believed that marriage would harm his career and, more interestingly, undermine their love. This reflects the idea that marriage and love were incompatible.

Love within marriage was believed to reduce marriage to the level of the profane. Some Greek and Roman philosophers even said that a man who loved his wife with "excessive" ardor was "an adulterer."⁴⁷ Coontz notes that “Catholic and Protestant theologians argued that husbands and wives who loved each other too much were committing the sin of idolatry. Theologians chided wives who used endearing nicknames for their husbands, because such familiarity on a wife's part undermined the husband's authority and the awe that his wife should feel for him.”⁴⁸ Even societies which allowed love within marriage limited its public expression. A Roman senator was expelled from the Senate because he kissed his wife in front of his daughter.⁴⁹

This separation of love and marriage was also seen in other cultures and religions. “In China, excessive love between husband and wife was seen as a threat to the solidarity of the extended family. Parents could force a son to divorce his wife if her behavior or work habits didn't please them, whether or not he loved her. They could also require him take a concubine if his wife did not produce a son. If a son's romantic attachment to his wife rivaled his parents' claims on the couple's time and labor, the parents might even send her back to her parents. In the Chinese language the term love did not traditionally apply to feelings between husband and wife. It was used to describe an illicit, socially disapproved relationship.”⁵⁰ Additionally, medieval Muslim thinkers, like Christian theologians of the day, thought that too much intimacy between husband

⁴⁵ See pp. 106-7 in Capellanus 1969.

⁴⁶ See Radice, Betty (trans). 1974. *Letters of Abelard and Heloise*. Harmondsworth, U.K.: Penguin.

⁴⁷ See p. 252 in Grimal, P. 1986. *Love in Ancient Rome*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

⁴⁸ Coontz 2005: 17. See also Thomas, Yan. 1996. “Fathers as citizens of Rome.” Pg. 265. In Burguiere, Andre, Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, Martine Segalen, and Francois Zonabend. *A History of the Family, Volume I: Distant Worlds, Ancient Worlds*. Belknap Press.)

⁴⁹ See p. 7 in Pomeroy, Sarah. 1990. *Plutarch's Advice to the Bride and Groom and a Consolation to His Wife*. New York: Oxford University Press.

⁵⁰ Quoted from Coontz 2005: 16. For more, see Hsu, Francis. 1972. “Kinship and Ways of Life” in Hsu, Francis K. (ed). 1972. *Psychological Anthropology*. 2nd ed. Schenkman Publishing Company, Inc. and Hsu, Francis L.K. 1986. *Americans and Chinese: Passage to Differences*. 3rd ed. University of Hawai'i Press.

and wife weakened a believer's devotion to God.⁵¹ Secular writers in the Islamic world also believed that love was only appropriate and possible outside of marriage.⁵²

This began to shift within the church in the 16th century.⁵³ Medieval religious writers used the word "love" in sermons and writings to refer to the love between man and Jesus or how people should behave towards their neighbors.⁵⁴ But in the 16th century, sermons began to encourage love between husband and wife. In the 17th century, preachers even began to condemn marriages without love, arguing that husbands should govern their wives with fear *and* love. This marked a huge change from earlier ideas of the relationship between husband and wife. Robert Cleaver, an English Puritan, called for husbands to not treat their wife's like servants, but to "exert his authority in a way that would rejoice and content her."

This call for love within marriage greatly evolved over the next two centuries, so that by the twentieth century, it was inconceivable for a marriage to be entirely loveless, especially to start in that state. This "love" expected in marriage does not seem to be the love encouraged by Puritan ministers, but more akin to the love between men and their mistresses. George Bernard Shaw sums it up well with his famous quote: "When two people are under the influence of the most violent, most insane, most delusive, and most transient of passions, they are required to swear that they will remain in that excited, abnormal, and exhausting condition continuously until death do them part."⁵⁵ This is the modern day love expected in marriage, and as many have pointed out,⁵⁶ this love is unsustainable and unrealistic.

Marriage and sex

Just as marriage and love have a complicated history, so too do marriage and sex. Coontz notes that, "In many societies of the past, sexual loyalty was not a high priority. The expectation of mutual fidelity is a rather recent invention. Numerous cultures have allowed husbands to seek sexual gratification outside marriage. Less frequently, but often enough to challenge common preconceptions, wives have also been allowed to do this without threatening the marriage."⁵⁷ She cites an anthropological study of 109 studies which found that only 48 forbade both husband and wife from engaging in extramarital sexual relations.⁵⁸

⁵¹ See Bouhdida, Abdelwahab. 1985. *Sexuality in Islam*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul and Mernissi, Fatima. 1987. *Beyond the Veil, Revised Edition: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society*. Revised Edition. Indiana University Press.

⁵² Baron, Beth. 1991. "Marital Bonds in Modern Egypt" in Nikki Keddie and Baron (eds), *Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

⁵³ Coontz 2005: 134-5.

⁵⁴ Davies, Kathleen. "Continuity and change in literary advice on marriage," in Outhwaite, R.B. (ed.) 1981. *Marriage and Society: Studies in the Social History of Marriage*. Europa Publications Ltd. Pp. 76-77

⁵⁵ This is widely cited, though I can't track down the original source. I first ran across it in Coontz 2005: 15.

⁵⁶ The most famous critic of this idea is Ernest Becker, a sociologist from the mid-1900s. See Becker, Ernest. 1997. *The Denial of Death*. Free Press.

⁵⁷ Coontz 2005: 25.

⁵⁸ See p. 31-32 in White, D.R. 1987. *Cultural Diversity Data Base*. La Jolla, CA: National Colligate Software Clearinghouse.

Even in cultures and religions in which sex was restricted to marriage, it was not necessarily encouraged within the marriage. While the medieval church praised marriage, it placed many restrictions on conjugal sex, as depicted in the famous [Medieval Sex Flow-Chart](#), created by James Brundage from medieval penitential manuals.⁵⁹

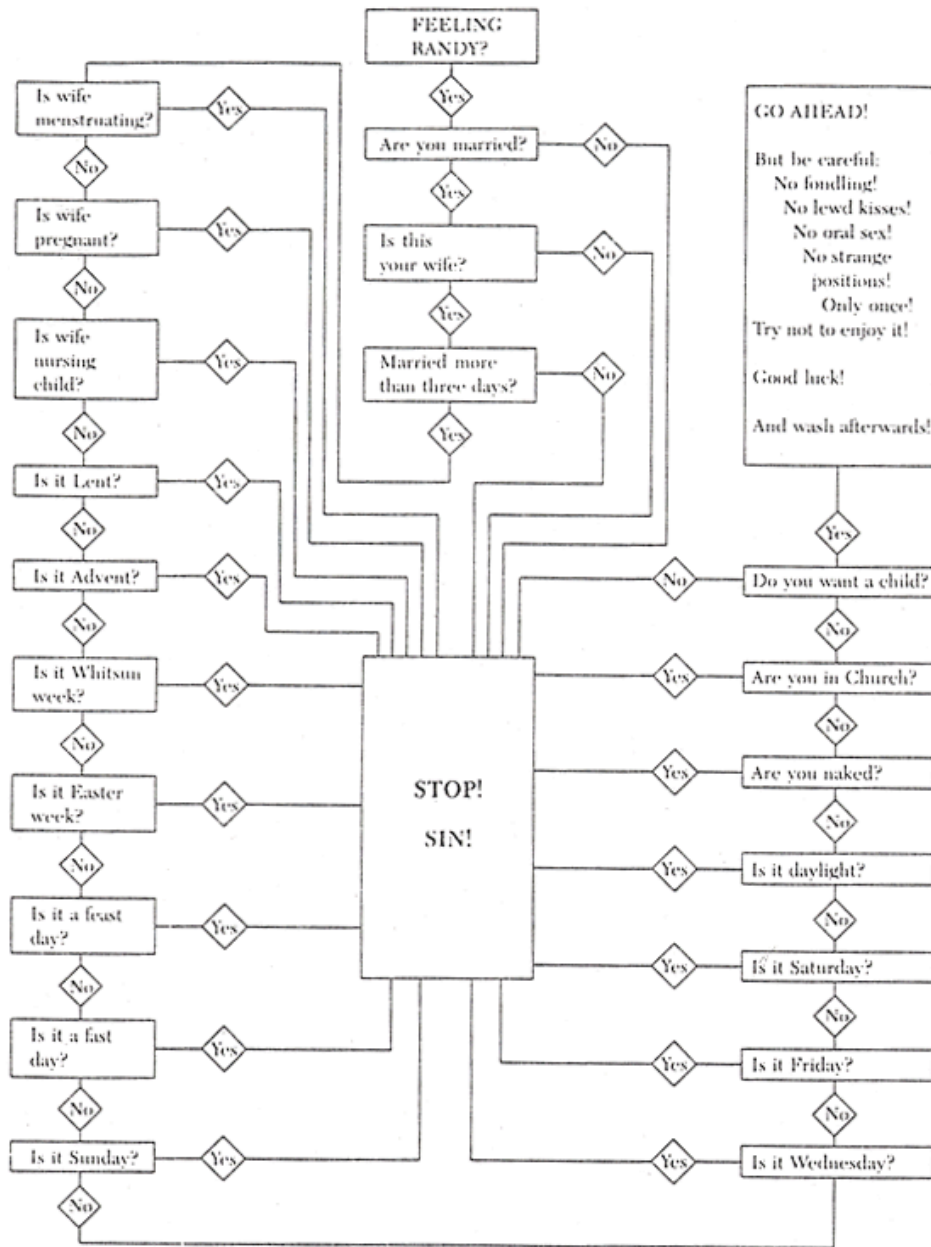


Figure 4.1. The sexual decision-making process according to the penitentials

⁵⁹ This chart is according to medieval penitential manuals. It was taken from Brundage, James A. 1984. *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. It is slightly easier to read here: <http://bit.ly/gJitbM>

The celibate life of the monk was exalted, while the life of the married couple was looked at with suspicion.⁶⁰

Early theologians emphasized the reproductive function of sexuality while arguing for a suppression of sexual needs.⁶¹ Aquinas saw sexual intercourse as duty alone. Anything beyond this was immoral. He writes, "For if the motive for the marriage act be a virtue, whether of justice that they may render the debt, or of religion, that they may beget children for the worship of God, it is meritorious. But if the motive be lust... it is a venial sin."⁶² Catholic moral instruction, following the tradition of Thomas Aquinas, cautioned that marital relations of husbands and wives could only be justified as a matter of "duty," certainly not as a matter of "desire."⁶³ St. Jerome believed that a husband was guilty of adultery if he engaged in unrestrained sexual passion with his wife.⁶⁴ Despite having had a lover at one point in his life, St. Augustine came to view sexual intercourse as a form of animal lust that should be tolerated only for reproductive purposes.⁶⁵ Early in the 6th century, Pope Gregory the Great wrote that although marriage was not sinful, "conjugal union cannot take place without carnal pleasure, and such pleasure cannot under any circumstance be without blame."⁶⁶

The Puritans marked a shift in these ideas. Church historian Belden Lane states that, "Puritan marriage manuals by English writers like William Whately⁶⁷ and William Gouge⁶⁸ forthrightly defended 'mutual dalliances for pleasure's sake' within the marriage covenant, urging 'that husband and wife mutually delight each in the other,' maintaining a 'fervent love' in their regular yielding of that 'due benevolence' one to another which is warranted and sanctified by God's word."⁶⁹

In Colonial America, sex and marriage were intrinsically linked. Michael Rosenfeld describes the tradition of bundling, still used by the Amish: "Bundling was a courtship ritual in which a male suitor visited a young woman at her parents' house. After some time conversing with the young people, the young woman's parents would retire to their bed, and the suitor and the young

⁶⁰ Allen, Peter L. 2002. *The wages of sin: sex and disease, past and present*. University of Chicago Press.

⁶¹ Reiss, I. L., & Reiss, H. M. 1990. *An end to shame: Shaping our next sexual revolution*. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus.

⁶² This is from Summa theologica, part 3 (supplement), qu. 41, art. 4 (trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province [New York: Benziger Brothers, 1948]).

See full passage here-- <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/5041.htm>

⁶³ Quoted in Lane, Belden C. 2000. "Two Schools of Desire: Nature and Marriage in Seventeenth-Century Puritanism." *Church History* 69: 372-402.

⁶⁴ Cole, W. G. 1966. *Sex in Christianity and psychoanalysis*. New York: Oxford University Press.

⁶⁵ Bullough, V. 1976. *Sexual variance in society and history*. New York: Wiley.

⁶⁶ Quoted on p. 86 in Coontz 2005 and p. 331 in Pierre Guichard and Jean-Pierre Cuviller. 1996.

"Barbarian Europe," in Burguiere, Andre, Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, Martine Segalen, and Francois Zonabend (eds.) *A History of the Family, Volume I: Distant Worlds, Ancient Worlds*. Belknap Press.

⁶⁷ William Whately, *A Bride Bush, or a Direction for Married Persons* (London, 1616), 18-20.

⁶⁸ William Gouge, *Of Domestical Duties* (London: J. Haviland, 1622), 221.

⁶⁹ Lane 2000.

woman would spend the night together in her bed, sometimes with a wooden board between them. If the board came down and the clothes came off, the young couple was engaged.”⁷⁰ Over time, sexual relations in marriage took an even more central position. In 17th century New England, about one in six divorce petitions filed by women involved charges of male sexual incapacity, though this likely related more to the husband than being unable to impregnate his wife⁷¹. Currently, sexual compatibility within marriage, like passionate love, is seen as vital to marriage.⁷² Historian Nancy Cott suggests that during the 1950s and 60s, “sex appeal” replaced “submission” as a wife’s first responsibility to her husband.⁷³

Marriage and gender

Changes in ideas of marriage, love, and sex are intrinsically tied to ideas of gender roles within marriage. Women’s value was often determined by her marital status. Since according to the Catholic church through the 16th century, marriage was tainted by sexual intercourse, married women were the most profane. According to Coontz, “in the church’s hierarchy of worthy females, the virgin ranked highest, the widow second and the wife a distant third.”⁷⁴ Juan Vives's Catholic guide for Christian women, published in London in 1557, argued: “There is nothing that our Lord delighteth in more than virgins.”⁷⁵

Just as virgins were viewed as “more godly” and pure than wives, so men were viewed as better than women. Coontz notes that, “In the Middle Ages, women were thought to be the lustier sex, and in their campaign against clerical marriage, the Gregorian reformers were vitriolic in their denunciations of how women entangled men in ‘the slimy glue’ of their sexuality.”⁷⁶ One prominent reformer wrote in the mid-eleventh century that *all* women “bitches, sows, screech-owls, night-owls, she-wolves, blood-suckers” seduce clerical men with the “appetizing flesh of the devil.”⁷⁷ Tertullian wrote to women, “And do you not know that you are (each) an Eve? The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age: the guilt must of necessity live too. You are the devil’s gateway: you are the unsealer of that (forbidden) tree: you are the first deserter of the divine law: you are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack.

⁷⁰ Rosenfeld, Michael J. 2007. *The Age of Independence: Interracial Unions, Same-Sex Unions, and the Changing American Family*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 24. He cites Godbeer, Richard. 2004. *Sexual Revolution in Early America*. The Johns Hopkins University Press.

⁷¹ Foster, Thomas A. 1999. “Deficient Husbands: Manhood, Sexual Incapacity, and Male Marital Sexuality in Seventeenth-Century New England.” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 56:723-744.

⁷² See ch. 12 in Coontz 2005.

⁷³ Cott, Nancy F. 1989. *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*. Yale University Press.

⁷⁴ Coontz, Stephanie. 2006. “‘Traditional’ Marriage has Changed a Lot.” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. February 26. <http://www.stephaniecoontz.com/articles/article25.htm>

⁷⁵ Juan Luis (Johannes Ludovicus) Vives. 1557. *The Instruction of a Christian Woman*. London, D4. Juan Vives (1492-1540) was a Spanish Catholic humanist praised by Erasmus for his commentary on Augustine's City of God. He was made a fellow of Corpus Christi College at Oxford, lecturing there in the 1520s.

⁷⁶ Coontz 2005: 120-1. Coontz cited Barstow, Anne Llewellyn. 1982. *Married Priests and the Reforming Papacy: The 11th Century Debates*. Edwin Mellen Press. Pgs. 61-62.

⁷⁷ Barstow 1982: 61-2.

You destroyed so easily God's image, man. On account of your desert — that is, death — even the Son of God had to die.”⁷⁸

As stated earlier, though, the purest⁷⁹ women were unmarried virgins, thus the Church encouraged young women to swear off marriage and become nuns. “Holy Maidenhood” was one treatise from the Church which encourages this. It states, “Now thou art wedded, and from so high estate alighted so low:...into the filth of the flesh, into the manner of a beast, into the thralldom of a man, and into the sorrows of the world... When he is out, thou shalt await his homecomings with all sorrow, care, and dread. While he is at home, all thy wide dwellings seem too narrow for thee; his looking on thee makes thee aghast; his loathsome mirth and his rude behavior fill thee with horror. He chideth and jaweth thee, as a lecher does his whore; he beateth thee and mauleth thee as his bought thrall and patrimonial slave.”⁸⁰

Since the wife was viewed as naturally worse than the man, then it was the man's job to control his wife. Wives were thought to be entirely under the control of their husbands, and a badly behaving woman was a reflection of the husband's faults. The relationship between husband and wife was more like a relationship between a man and his horse. Socrates argued that when a wife is bad, the husband is to blame for not training her properly, just as it is the rider's fault when a horse turns vicious.⁸¹ Coontz⁸² states that “marriage advice books from the fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries are filled with monotonously detailed instructions to wives about being chaste, obedient, hardworking, and respectful, interspersed with practical tips on getting rid of fleas and an occasional sentence directing husbands to be chaste and loving too. The few manuals directed at husbands invariably sound more like tips for training a horse than building a marriage.”⁸³

Women were to treat husbands as their superiors. William Whately, a Puritan minister quoted earlier as one of the first theologians to encourage sex within marriage for pleasure, urged wives to repeat a catechism that ended “Mine husband is my superiour, my better.”⁸⁴ This often required formality in the marriage relationship. Coontz again draws from advice books, noting that they “warned wives not to be too familiar in the way they addressed their husbands, telling them to avoid nicknames and endearments that undermined the dignity of a man's position. Even women in loving marriages wrote to their husbands as ‘sir’ and signed with protestations of obedience.”⁸⁵ This was not a relationship of openness and sharing. The fifteenth-century

⁷⁸ Tertullian. 2004. *On The Apparel Of Women*. Kessinger Publishing.

([On The Apparel of Women](#), Book 1, Chpt 1)

⁷⁹ This term is relative, as the attitude of the church was that all women were incredibly depraved.

⁸⁰ Coontz (2005: 121) jokes that this depiction of marriage “makes the complaints of twentieth-century feminists sound tame.” The passage is from pp. 91-92 in Amt, Emilie. 1993. *Women's Lives in Medieval Europe: A Sourcebook*. New York: Routledge.

⁸¹ Thornton, Bruce S. 1998. *Eros: The Myth Of Ancient Greek Sexuality*. Westview Press.

⁸² Coontz 2005: 118.

⁸³ See for example *A Medieval Home Companion*, trans. and ed. Bayard, Tania. 1991. *A Medieval Home Companion*. Harper Collins.

⁸⁴ p. 52. Saxton, Martha. 2004. *Being Good: Women's Moral Values in Early America*. First Edition. Hill and Wang.

⁸⁵ Coontz 2005: 121. Cites Eales, Jacqueline. 1998. *Women in Early Modern England, 1500-1700*. London: UCL Press.

humanist Leon Battista Alberti told men they had “the opportunity to communicate fully” with their wives. But he advised a husband to hide his personal papers from his spouse and “never to speak with her of anything but household matters or questions of conduct, or of the children.”⁸⁶

Through the 1950s, women in the church continued to be taught to do whatever it took, chastely of course, to be appealing to men. This meant to be as submissive as possible, avoiding any hint of being domineering. In 1952, Norman Vincent Peale, a Methodist-ordained minister in New York City, published a self-help guide, *The Power of Positive Thinking*. Peale drew upon religion and psychology. He advised that if you think of yourself in positive terms and have faith in God, you will succeed in life. This book became incredibly popular. Andrew Cherlin summarizes one of the stories told in the book: “Peale tells the story of a woman who came to see him because she wanted to get married but couldn’t find a man she liked who would marry her. When he arrived five minutes late for the appointment, ‘it was obvious that she was displeased for her lips were pressed firmly together.’ She chided him for his tardiness, then told him her problem and asked him to tell her why she couldn’t get married. Peale studied her and, speaking frankly, said the problem was her attitude. Then he said, ‘You have a very firm way of pressing your lips together which indicates a domineering attitude. The average male, I might as well tell you, does not like to be dominated, at least so that he knows it. . . I think you would be a very attractive person if you got those too-firm lines out of your face. You must have a little softness, a little tenderness, and those lines are too firm to be soft.’ For good measure, he added that she might get her hair done better, use a little perfume, and get a dress that hangs better. ‘Well,’ she remarked, ‘I never expected to get this combination of advice in a minister’s office.’ Peale then told her the ‘God runs a beauty parlor’ saying. Many years later, after finishing a speech, Peale was approached by ‘a lovely looking lady with a fine-looking man and a little boy about ten years of age. It was. . . the woman with the pursed lips, now happily married and a mother. She thanked Peale for his valuable advice and said that putting into practice the principles he suggested had worked.”⁸⁷

Divorce

The Church’s view on divorce has been more complicated over the years than often assumed. Andrew Cherlin notes that Martin “Luther believed that divorce was to be deplored but also allowed in limited circumstances. Most notably, he argued that if one spouse was guilty of adultery, the other spouse could obtain a divorce and remarry. In his later writings, he also allowed for divorce in the case of desertion. Most notably, he argued that if one spouse was guilty of adultery, the other spouse could obtain a divorce and remarry. In his later writings, he also allowed for divorce in the case of desertion. The willful deserter, he wrote, ‘shows his contempt for matrimony...he does not consider his wife his wedded wife.’”⁸⁸

⁸⁶ p. 210. Alberti, Leon Battista. 1969. *The Family in Renaissance Florence*. 1st ed. Univ of South Carolina Press.

⁸⁷ Cherlin, Andrew J. 2009. *The Marriage-Go-Round: The State of Marriage and the Family in America Today*. 1st ed. Knopf: 76. Story on pp. 96-99 in Peale, Norman Vincent. 2003. *The Power of Positive Thinking*. First Fireside. Fireside.

⁸⁸ Cherlin 2009: 49. He is citing Phillips, Roderick. 1988. *Putting Asunder: A History of Divorce in Western Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 47. Quoting Luther from *On Marriage Matters* 1530.

John Calvin also had a complicated relationship with divorce. Though he condemned it, he did advocate for it under specific circumstances, most notably in the case of his brother, Antoine. Antoine requested a divorce on the grounds that his wife, who resided with Antoine in Calvin's house, had committed adultery, and Calvin acted as counsel to his brother. Although Antoine's wife denied the charge, even after being imprisoned and tortured twice, the Calvin brothers persisted, and the divorce was granted.⁸⁹

The Church's view on divorce is no more clear today. In 2007 a biblical scholar in an article in *Christianity Today* concluded that divorce is allowable not only for adultery and desertion but also for abuse and for emotional and physical neglect.⁹⁰ Still, women within the church are less likely to divorce than those outside of it. Cherlin finds that during the first fifteen years after marriage, an estimated 41 percent of women who have any religious affiliation would separate or divorce, compared to 56 percent of those who have no religious affiliation.⁹¹

If divorce and Christianity is an important topic for the book, I recommend reading *The Marriage-Go-Round: The State of Marriage and the Family in America Today* by Andrew Cherlin, a prominent family sociologist.⁹² In this book, Cherlin presents his thesis for why America has both a higher marriage rate *and* higher divorce rate than any other developed country. He argues that this is because of the U.S.'s emphasis on both individualism and religion (which values marriage). He points to the increasing permissiveness of divorce within the church as also contributing to this pattern.⁹³

COMMUTER MARRIAGES – GROWING PRACTICE AMONG U.S. COUPLES

“Minikel and Balle chatted throughout the 11-hour flight and later met for coffee near her home in San Francisco before Balle returned to [his native] Denmark. They fell in love (through e-mail) and married in 2005 (in person), celebrating in four cities with friends and family. Are they happy? Yes. Are they together? Not exactly. Minikel, 37, remains in California to practice obstetrics and gynecology, while Balle, 44, an electronics technician, still lives in his homeland 5,500 miles away. She gets to work herculean hours at a job she loves; he gets to help raise his two teenage kids.”⁹⁴

Commuter marriages, in which couples live apart for long stretches, are multiplying. Their number jumped 30%, to 3.6 million, from 2000 to 2005, according to an analysis of census

⁸⁹ Kingdon, Robert. 1995. *Adultery and Divorce in Calvin's Geneva*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Also cited in Cherlin 2009: 49.

⁹⁰ Instone-Brewer, David. 2007. “What God Has Joined.” *Christianity Today*, October.

⁹¹ Cherlin 2009: 50.

⁹² Most recently, Cherlin's research was prominently featured in the *Time* magazine cover article titled “Who Needs Marriage?” <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,2031962,00.html>

⁹³ Or perhaps adapting to.

⁹⁴ These stories are from Time article facts, and stories are from...

figures. Additionally, about 50 % of those couples were at least 100 miles away from each other, and 50 % were separated for more than nine months.^{95,96}

Why?

“The 32-year-old engineer lives in a small, rented apartment above a garage, relying heavily on microwavable dinners and an exercise regime that fends off his less-than-stellar diet. But Hausmann isn't a typical single guy. On Friday afternoons, he piles into his car and makes the four- to five-hour trip to Newark, Del., back to his house, wife and life as he used to know it before taking a job near Hartford, Conn., in February. "I liken my experience to going back to college and living in a dorm room," says Hausmann, who started commuting long distance after being laid off and his subsequent job search reaped no leads closer to home. "It's literally going back to microwave and hotpot cooking." His wife...continues to work and live in their Delaware home, which has been on the market, garnering very little interest, since June.”

Military deployments, migratory jobs, difficult job market, and the wavering house market have been cited as the main reasons that couples around the world are forced.⁹⁷ Marszalek in *Commuter Marriages Can Work - -With Work*, notes that, “couples live in different cities, states or even countries to make ends meet while trying to weather the economic storm.” Additionally, software like instant message and Skype make the separation a little easier to bear, allowing couples to see each other face to face (through a computer monitor screen) despite the distance.

Takeuchi Cullen in her 2007 TIME article, *Till Work Do Us Part*, attributes the growth of commuter marriages with growing number of married women with careers, “Men have worked in transient jobs since the beginning of time--as soldiers, truck drivers, traveling Bible salesmen--leaving the wife and kids home to hold down the fort or moving the entire family from town to town. But with today's preponderance of dual-career couples--80% of the labor force--it is just as often the woman's job that separates the partners.”

“Wendy Wu, 34... [is] a litigator for New York City-based firm Proskauer Rose, was married in April 2006. As an associate, she works ungodly hours but feels little guilt about leaving her new husband waiting at home alone--because said husband is three time zones away, in Los Angeles, where he works for the police department. Wu has been working out of the L.A. office of her firm, and when she's back in New York, he keeps busy with triathlons and buddies. ‘It may not work for every couple, but it works for us,’ says Wu.”

“Sheila Gleason, 49, met Jay Banerjee, 56, while both worked as banking executives in Singapore. He soon relocated to Germany, then to Belgium. She eventually accepted a big job in London. "During the week we would work ridiculous hours, so it was easy to devote weekends to each other and nothing else," she says. Their commuting romance lasted 10 years, until they

⁹⁵ Time article <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1666269,00.html>

By [Lisa Takeuchi Cullen](#) Thursday, Sep. 27, 200

⁹⁶ Detroit article *Commuter marriages can work --with work* Detroit Free Press - [Diana Marszalek](#) - Oct 31, 2010

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

married in 2004 and moved together to New York City.”

How many children are affected? The Census reveals that “817,000 children under 18 who have married parents living apart for reasons other than marital discord.” Takeuchi Cullen observes, “For these couples, it can mean a hectic and stressed-out lifestyle akin to single parenting for one spouse and an achingly lonely and guilt-ridden one for the other.”

“Every Monday, Jaime Cangas, 40, kisses his wife Karen, 36, goodbye as she leaves their Plano, Texas, home and heads toward the airport. As a consultant for Accenture, she will be gone until late Thursday night, working with clients in faraway cities. Jaime, who sells and markets security software, will drop off their children Caroline, 7, at school and Mitchell, 3, at day care. He shops for groceries during his lunch break, then picks them both up at 6. When they get home, the kids blow kisses at Mommy through the webcam.”

What are the consequences and societal implications for marriage?

In a commuter marriage, who wins ultimately? To Takeuchi Cullen, it’s the companies, “The companies that employ these commuting couples often get the best end of the deal: employees are married and thus thought to be more stable but are wedded as well to their jobs--perhaps especially so, given the physical absence of a spouse.” Despite this, some studies have shown that “divorce in commuter marriages is no more frequent than in those where the couple is under the same roof. A large Rand Corp. study published last spring based on military personnel found that the longer the deployments, the higher the chance the marriage would stay together--in part because soldiers and their spouses cling to idealized memories of each other during their separations.”

Why does it seem, then, that some long-distance romances can be drawn out for years? “Laura Stafford, a professor of interpersonal communication at Ohio State University, says that’s partly because the distance can retard the development of the relationship, extending the honeymoon period and delaying the inevitable friction of integrating lives. ‘We all do a certain amount of impression management’ at the beginning of a romance, says Stafford. ‘But in a long-distance relationship, you may always have your makeup on. You avoid conflict no matter what.’ Additionally, the hardship on the relationship does not disappear after the couples reunite, but can be extended into the “longed-for permanent reunion.”

Tom McConnell, 62, and his wife Joy, 55, lived apart when Tom was laid off from his job as an insurance executive in 1993 and found a similar position in Boston--115 miles away from their home in Simsbury, Conn., a commute too grueling to make daily. When Tom finally moved back 10 years later, Joy had “gotten used to being without him, to having my own life,” she says. How long did it take to readjust? “Six months to a year,” says Joy. “At least.”

Stephanie Coontz of Evergreen State College, a historian of marriage, argues that the growth of commuter marriage implies a new egalitarian attitude toward marital roles. “There’s no longer the assumption that the woman immediately puts her career on hold once she gets married,” says Coontz. “It’s part of an avalanche of evidence that marriage is being reconstructed for the first time in history as a marriage of equals. More so, “Lee Igel, a New York University assistant

professor and psychologist, says it's also incumbent upon employers to realize and accommodate the growing phenomenon by giving employees in commuter relationships options like telecommuting and flexible schedules. 'Not all of them know how to deal with it well,' Igel says. 'It challenges our assumption of how married people live and what a normal household is.'"

Interestingly enough the author of the TIME piece, Takeuchi Cullen, offers personal peak of her experience in a commuter marriage after taking a job in Tokyo, Japan that separated her from her husband for just over a year.⁹⁸

The author admits, "I won't lie to you: it was rough on the marriage. That's why I ultimately ended the arrangement and came home. At the time, I had a job offer in Tokyo that was even more attractive than the one I had, plus a lot of pressure from people I admired to take it. I didn't have a job lined up back in the U.S. I saw one career path ahead of me that blazed like Shibuya at midnight. I saw another crooked with uncertainty, but that led back to the man I married. I chose that one."

She also concludes, "I also won't feed you the line that some of my sources did: that our long-distance stint made our marriage stronger. I think our marriage started out strong, and remains so with a lot of effort on both our parts. I think we survived the distance. Period. Oh, sure, it was fun sometimes, reuniting in Hong Kong or zipping off to watch the World Cup in Korea. But our marriage works best when we get to sit our tired butts down on the same couch, side by side, to watch *The Daily Show*... The commuter part of my commuter marriage ended, and for that I'm pretty glad."

THE CHANGING INSITUION OF MARRIAGE IN THE UNITED STATES

Who needs marriage asks Belinda Luscombe in the November 18, 2010 TIME article, *Who Needs Marriage? A Changing Institution*.⁹⁹

"This fall the Pew Research Center, in association with TIME, conducted a nationwide poll exploring the contours of modern marriage and the new American family, posing questions about what people want and expect out of marriage and family life, why they enter into committed relationships and what they gain from them. What we found is that marriage, whatever its social, spiritual or symbolic appeal, is in purely practical terms just not as necessary as it used to be. Neither men nor women need to be married to have sex or companionship or professional success or respect or even children — yet marriage remains revered and desired."

The survey reveals that nearly 40% of us think marriage is obsolete. Luscombe cautions however, "This doesn't mean, though, that we're pessimistic about the future of the American family; we have more faith in the family than we do in the nation's education system or its economy. We're just more flexible about how family gets defined.

⁹⁸ http://workinprogress.blogs.time.com/2007/09/28/i_was_in_a_commuter_marriage/

⁹⁹ The article can be found at this URL: <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,2031962-1,00.html>

“Even more surprising: overwhelmingly, Americans still venerate marriage enough to want to try it. About 70% of us have been married at least once, according to the 2010 Census. The Pew poll found that although 44% of Americans under 30 believe marriage is heading for extinction, only 5% of those in that age group do not want to get married. Sociologists note that Americans have a rate of marriage — and of remarriage — among the highest in the Western world. (In between is a divorce rate higher than that of most countries in the European Union.)”

"Getting married is a way to show family and friends that you have a successful personal life," says Andrew Cherlin, a sociologist at Johns Hopkins University and the author of *The Marriage-Go-Round: The State of Marriage and the Family in America Today*. "It's like the ultimate merit badge."

Who is marriage for?

Socioeconomic status and education play a vital role, “Americans are increasingly marrying people who are on the same socioeconomic and educational level. Fifty years ago, doctors commonly proposed to nurses and businessmen to their secretaries. Even 25 years ago, a professional golfer might marry, say, a flight attendant. Now doctors tend to cleave unto other doctors, and executives hope to be part of a power couple.”

The growing segment of the American population gaining college degrees might also explain why fewer people are married. “They want to finish college first.”¹⁰⁰ In 2010 the median age of men getting hitched for the first time is 28.2, and for women it's 26.1. It's gone up about a year every decade since the '60s.”

Because of the increase of women graduating from college¹⁰¹, “it's more likely than it used to be that a male college graduate will meet, fall in love with, wed and share the salary of a woman with a degree. Women's advances in education have roughly paralleled the growth of the knowledge economy, so the slice of the family bacon she brings home will be substantial.”

The Pew survey found that “46% of college graduates want to get married, and 44% of the less educated do. ‘Fifty years ago, if you were a high school dropout [or] if you were a college graduate or a doctor, marriage probably meant more or less the same thing,’ says Conley. ‘Now it's very different depending where you are in society.’ Getting married is an important part of college graduates' plans for their future. For the less well educated, he says, it's often the only plan.”

"The loss of decent-paying jobs that a high-school-educated man or woman could get makes it difficult for them to get and stay married," says Cherlin. As the knowledge economy has

¹⁰⁰See sociologist Mark Regnerus' article in The Washington Post for further discussion on the current trend of Christians waiting longer to get married than in times past: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/04/24/AR2009042402122.html>

¹⁰¹ Recently, women are more likely to complete college than men. See Buchmann, Claudia and Thomas A. DiPrete. 2006. “The Growing Female Advantage in College Completion: The Role of Family Background and Academic Achievement.” *American Sociological Review* 71(4): 515-541.

overtaken the manufacturing economy, couples in which both partners' job opportunities are disappearing are doubly disadvantaged. So they wait to get married. But they don't wait to set up house.

Additionally, “Well-off women don't need to stay in a marriage that doesn't make them happy; two-thirds of all divorces, it's estimated, are initiated by wives. It's not just the Sandra Bullock types who have been treated shabbily and have many other fish on their line but also Tipper Gore types whose kids have left home and who don't necessarily expect to remarry but are putting on their walking boots anyway.”

In 1978, “fewer than half of all respondents thought that the best kind of marriage was one in which both the husband and the wife worked outside the home. In the new Pew poll, 62% do...In 1970, 40% of wives worked outside the home. Now 61% do.”

This shift is having “an impact on what people look for in spouses. While two-thirds of all people think a man should be a good provider, more men than women do. Meanwhile, almost a third of people think it's important for a wife to be a good provider too.”

Cohabitation

“All this might explain why there was a 13% increase in couples living together from 2009 to 2010. Census researchers were so surprised at the jump that they double-checked their data. Eventually they attributed the sharp increase to the recession: these newly formed couples were less likely to have jobs.”

“Cohabitation is on the rise not just because of the economy. It's so commonplace these days that less than half the country thinks living together is a bad idea. Couples who move in together before marrying don't divorce any less often, say studies, although that might change as the practice becomes more widespread. In any case, academic analysis doesn't seem to be as compelling to most people as the example set by Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt. Or as splitting the rent.”

Children

“Half or more of the respondents in the Pew poll say that marital status is irrelevant to achieving respect, happiness, career goals, financial security or a fulfilling sex life. When it comes to raising kids, though, it's a landslide, with more than three-quarters saying it's best done married.”

However, “very few people say children are the most important reason to get hitched. Indeed, 41% of babies were born to unmarried moms in 2008, an eightfold increase from 50 years ago, and 25% of kids lived in a single-parent home, almost triple the number from 1960. Contrary to the stereotype, it turns out that most of the infants born to unmarried mothers are not the product of casual sexual encounters. One of the most extensive databases on such kids, the *Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study*, a joint project of Princeton and Columbia universities, which has been following 5,000 children from birth to age 9, found that more than half of the unmarried parents were living together at the time their child was born and 30% of them were

romantically involved (but living apart).”

In terms of cohabitation’s effect on marriage, “it seems to have no negative effect on a marriage’s chances if it’s preceded by an engagement, no previous live-in lovers and no children. Who has the clout to put those conditions into place? Women with their own means of support and guys who don’t need a woman to look after them: the wealthy and well educated. The others often are left in limbo — not able to get married and not able to move on. ‘Ironically, the very people who would benefit from a committed marriage the most are the people who have the toughest time locating reliable long-term partners,’ says Stephanie Coontz, a marriage historian who teaches at Evergreen State College in Olympia, Wash.”

“Could living together become respected and widespread enough that it challenged the favored-nation state of marriage? The American Law Institute has recommended extending some of the rights spouses have to cohabiting partners. But cohabitation has not yet proved to be a robust enough substitute for most Americans to believe they can build a family on it. And as a successful marriage increasingly becomes the relationship equivalent of a luxury yacht — hard to get, laborious to maintain but a better vessel to be on when there are storms at sea — its status is unlikely to drop.”

EMERGING ADULTHOOD

Dr. Jeffrey Arnett, research professor of developmental psychology at Clark University, coined the term “emerging adulthood” in the late 1990s¹⁰² and, over the past decade, he has produced a number of articles, books, and edited volumes on the topic.¹⁰³ In brief, this series of scholarly publications has argued that a new, distinct, and historically unprecedented period in the human life course has emerged in many Western societies since the 1970s for persons in their late teens and continuing through the late twenties. Up until Arnett’s work, much research in sociology had theorized “the transition to adulthood” and basically concluded that adulthood was marked by finishing education, entering full-time work, marriage, and parenthood. Arnett’s research among Americans in their twenties revealed something different—that if one actually asks young people in the United States today, these four life events tend to land at the bottom of their list of markers of adulthood. Against scholarly assumption, then, the markers of adulthood have been replaced by less tangible, more abstract, subjective, and individualistic criteria for adulthood: namely, (1)

¹⁰² See Arnett, Jeffrey Jensen. 1998. “Learning to Stand Alone: The Contemporary American Transition to Adulthood in Cultural and Historical Context.” *Human Development* 41: 295-315.

¹⁰³ For only a sample of these works, see Arnett, Jeffrey Jensen. 2000a. “High Hopes in a Grim World: Emerging Adults’ Views of their Futures and of ‘Generation X.’” *Youth and Society* 31: 267-286; Arnett, Jeffrey Jensen. 2000b. “Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of Development from the Late Teens through the Twenties.” *American Psychologist* 55: 469-480; Arnett, Jeffrey Jensen. 2001. “Conceptions of the Transition to Adulthood: Perspectives From Adolescence Through Midlife.” *Journal of Adult Development* 8: 133-143; Arnett, Jeffrey Jensen (ed.). 2002. *Readings on Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood*. New York: Prentice-Hall; Arnett, Jeffrey Jensen. 2003. “Conceptions of the Transition to Adulthood among Emerging Adults in American Ethnic Groups.” *New Directions in Child and Adolescent Development* 100: 63-75; Arnett, Jeffrey Jensen. 2007. “Emerging Adulthood: What Is It, and What Is It Good For?” *Child Development Perspectives* 1: 68-73; Arnett, Jeffrey Jensen. 2010. *Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood: A Cultural Approach*, fourth edition. Boston: Prentice Hall.

accepting responsibility for one's actions, (2) making independent decisions, and (3) becoming financially independent.

The first three paragraphs of Arnett's 2004 book¹⁰⁴ are helpful: "In the past few decades a quiet revolution has taken place for young people in American society, so quiet that it has been noticed only gradually and incompletely. As recent as 1970 the typical 21-year-old was married or about to be married, caring for a newborn child or expecting one soon, done with education or about to be done, and settled into a long-term job or the role of full-time mother. Young people of that time grew up quickly and made serious enduring choices about their lives at a relatively early age. Today, the life of a typical 21-year-old could hardly be more different. Marriage is at least five years off, often more. Ditto parenthood. Education may last several more years, through an extended undergraduate program—the 'four year degree' in five, six, or more—and perhaps graduate or professional school. Job changes are frequent, as young people look for work that will not only pay well but will also be personally fulfilling.

"For today's young people, the road to adulthood is a long one. They leave home at age 18 or 19, but most do not marry, become parents, and find a long-term job until at least their late twenties. From their late teens to their late twenties they explore the possibilities available to them in love and work, and move gradually toward making enduring choices. Such freedom to explore different options is exciting, and this period is a time of high hopes and big dreams. However, it is also a time of anxiety and uncertainty, because the lives of young people are so unsettled, and many of them have no idea where their explorations will lead. They struggle with uncertainty even as they revel in being freer than they ever were in childhood or ever will be once they take on the full weight of adult responsibilities. To be a young American today is to experience both excitement and uncertainty, wide-open possibility and confusion, new freedoms and new fears.

"The rise in the ages of entering marriage and parenthood, the lengthening of higher education, and prolonged job instability during the twenties reflect the development of a new period of life for young people in the United States and other industrialized societies, lasting from the late teens through the mid- to late twenties. This period is not simply an 'extended adolescence,' because it is much different from adolescence, much freer from parental control, much more a period of independent exploration. Nor is it really 'young adulthood,' since this term implies that an early stage of adulthood has been reached, whereas most young people in their twenties have not made the transitions historically associated with adult status—especially marriage and parenthood—and many of them feel they have not yet reached adulthood. It is a new and historically unprecedented period of the life course, so it requires a new term and a new way of thinking; I call it *emerging adulthood*."

What has brought about emerging adulthood?

"Emerging adulthood has been created in part by the steep rise in the typical ages of marriage and parenthood that has taken place in the past half century... [I]n 1950 the median age of marriage in the United States was just 20 for women and 22 for men. Even as recently as 1970, these ages had risen only slightly, to about 21 for women and 23 for men. However, since 1970

¹⁰⁴ Arnett, Jeffrey Jensen. 2004. *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties*. New York: Oxford University Press

there has been a dramatic shift in the ages when Americans typically get married. By the year 2000 the typical age of marriage was 25 for women and 27 for men, a four-year rise for both sexes in the space of just three decades. Age at entering parenthood has followed a similar pattern. Then as now, couples tend to have their first child about one year after marriage, on average.¹⁰⁵ So, from 1950 to 1970 most couple had their first child in their very early twenties, whereas today most wait until at least their late twenties before becoming parents.” (Arnett 2004: 4-5).

And what has brought about the delay in marriage and parenthood?

“One reason [for the delay of marriage and parenthood since the 1970s] is that the invention of the birth control pill, in combination with less stringent standards of sexual morality after the sexual revolution of the 1960s and early 1970s, meant that young people no longer had to enter marriage in order to have a regular sexual relationship. Now most young people have a series of sexual relationships before entering marriage, and most Americans do not object to this, as long as sex does not begin at an age that is ‘too early’ (whatever that is) and as long as the number of partners does not become ‘too many’ (whatever that is)...

“Another important reason for the rise in the typical ages of entering marriage and parenthood is the increase in the years devoted to pursuing higher education. An exceptionally high proportion of young people, about two thirds, now enter college after graduating from high school. This is a higher proportion than ever before in American history. Among those who graduate from college about one third go on to graduate school the following year. Most young people wait until they have finished school before they start thinking seriously about marriage and parenthood...

“But it may be that the most important reason of all for the rise in the typical ages of entering marriage and parenthood is less tangible than changes in sexual behavior or more years spent in college and graduate school. There has been a profound change in how young people view the meaning and value of becoming an adult and entering the adult roles of spouse and parent. Young people in the 1950s were eager to enter adulthood and ‘settle down.’ ... The young people of today, in contrast, see adulthood and its obligations in quite a different light. In their late teens and early twenties, marriage, home, and children are seen by most of them not as achievements to be pursued but as perils to be avoided...

“Women’s roles have also changed in ways that make an early entry into adult obligations less desirable for them now compared to 50 years ago. The young women of 1950 were under a great deal of social pressure to catch a man. Being a single woman was simply not a viable social status for a woman after her early twenties. Relatively few women attended college, and those who did were often there for the purpose of obtaining their ‘m-r-s’ degree (in the joke of the day)—that is, for the purpose of finding a husband. The range of occupations open to young women was severely restricted, as it had been traditionally—secretary, waitress, teacher, nurse, perhaps a few others. Even these occupations were supposed to be temporary for young women. What they were really supposed to be focusing on was finding a husband and having children. Having no other real options, and facing social limbo if they remained unmarried for long, their yearning for

¹⁰⁵ Arnett (2004:229) notes: “This applies to couples who marry. However, since the early 1970s, the rate of single parenthood has grown dramatically.”

marriage and children—the sooner the better—was sharpened. For the young women of the 21st century, all this has changed...

Features of and further reading on emerging adulthood

According to Arnett (2004:8), the distinguishing features of emerging adulthood—as a new, distinct, and historically unprecedented period in the life course—include the following: (1) it is the age of *identity explorations*, of trying out various possibilities, especially in love and work; (2) it is the age of *instability*; (3) it is the most *self-focused* age of life, but not necessarily in the negative or selfish sense; (4) it is the age of *feeling in-between*, in transition, neither adolescent nor adult; and (5) it is the age of *possibilities*, when hopes flourish, when people have an unparalleled opportunity to transform their lives. Since Arnett's groundbreaking theory, a host of popular and scholarly works has been written on this topic. For a list of more than eighty such works (including links whenever possible), you can visit one of the researchers' websites here: <http://bit.ly/chmj1X>. Summaries of these works are available by request.