

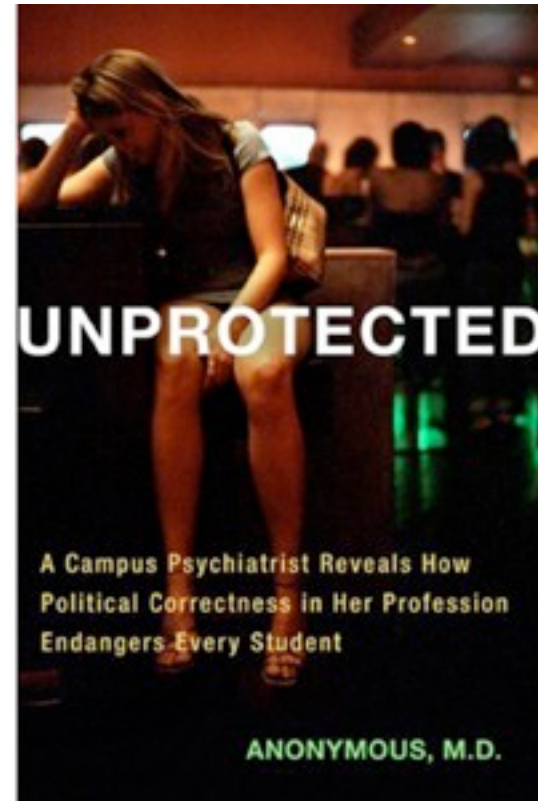
Wedded Bliss: What Makes for Marital Success in Contemporary America



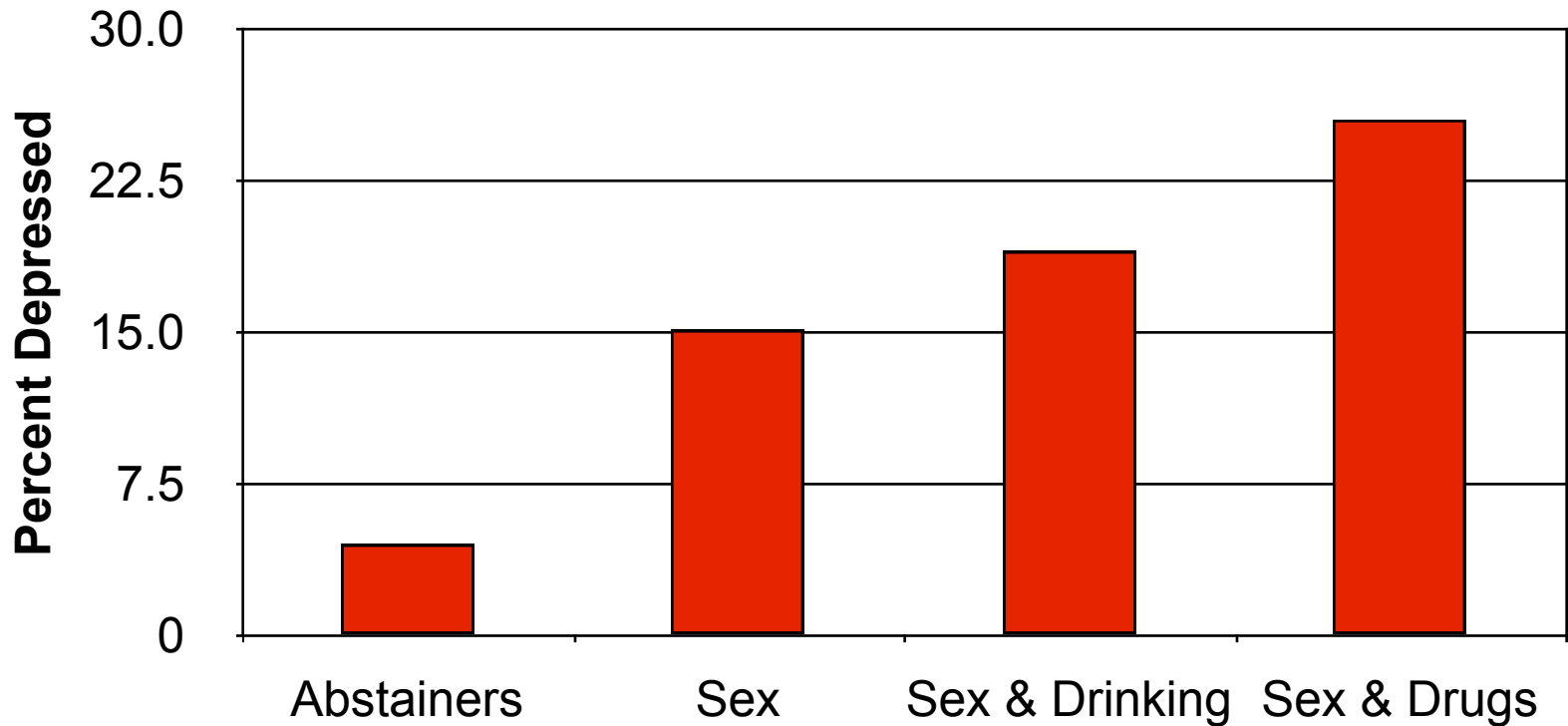
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Contemporary Dating & the Emotional Lives of Young Women

- What's the matter with Heather?



Sex, Drugs, & Depression: Adolescent Females w/ Depression



The Cool Pose: Why Male Players are Really Slackers

Georgia economist Joseph Sabia (2007) finds that sexually active teenage males do significantly poorer in their academic work

- The pleasures of sex “may induce boys to choose immediate investments in sex over schooling.”
 - Status & pleasure





Clueless and Confused about Courtship & Dating

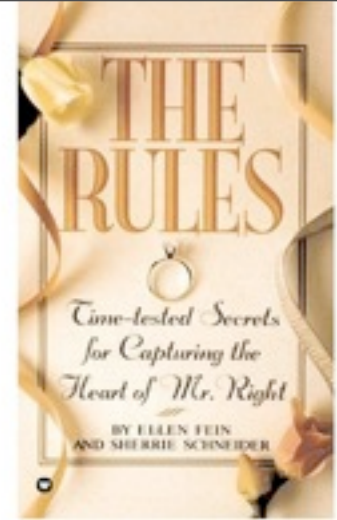
- Our schools, colleges, and universities—and the larger society—have abandoned the task of organizing courtship
 - Courtship is the system of rules, common practices, and roles that guide young people into marriage
- So when it comes to courtship and dating, young men and women in the U.S. are often clueless and confused

Why is Marriage the End of Courtship?

- Marriage is the institution that virtually every culture has used to ensure
 - that children get the material, emotional, social, & spiritual support of their mother and father
 - Marriage binds men to their families
- So, sociologically speaking, marriage is about bonding and babies



The Rules for Contemporary Courtship



- Don'ts

- 1) Cohabit/Casual sex
- 2) Put off marriage
- 3) Rely on chemistry
- 4) Marry a stonewaller or a nagger

- Dos

- 1) Commitment
- 2) Virtuous (wo)man
- 3) Friends and Family
- 4) Common faith

Should We Live Together?

- Would you want to do something that would increase your risk of divorce, conflict, and marital unhappiness?



The Case Against Cohabitation



- Cohabitation associated with increased divorce risk (33% to 151%), less commitment, more conflict, & less happiness in marriage
 - Lack of institutionalization → confusion & conflict
 - Instability → gender distrust
 - Gets family relations off to a bad start
 - Slippery slide into marriage (esp. men)
 - Sources: Cherlin 1992; Dush et al. 2003; Laumann et al. 1994

The Case Against Casual Sex



- Sex before marriage, especially with multiple partners, is associated with an increased divorce risk. By contrast:
 - Male virgins 37% less likely to divorce
 - Female virgins 24% less likely to divorce
 - View marriage as special
 - Less likely to develop distrust of opposite sex
 - More sexual fidelity in marriage
 - Fewer infertility problems
 - Sources: Laumann et al. 1994

Don't Put Off Marriage

■ Young adults are having trouble launching

- In 2003, mean age at marriage for men was 27 & for women was 25; it is still rising...

■ But the happiest marriages are made between ages 23 and 27

- Mature
- But not too settled in their ways
- Also haven't had as much opportunity to move in and out of sexually intimate relationships
- Realism about abstinence

- Source: Glenn 2005



Don't Rely on Chemistry



- Men and women who have nothing in common are often attracted physically to one another
 - The physical and romantic rush associated with this attraction will not last and will not sustain you through the inevitable challenges of married life
- “Homogamy” (having similar interests & values to sustain a marital friendship) is one of the best predictors of marital happiness and stability
 - Source: Heaton 1984; Heaton 2002

Warning Signs



- Avoid stonewalling (men)
 - Partners who retreat into themselves in the face of conflict, challenges, and requests will not make good spouses
- Avoid excessive nagging (women)
 - Partners who frequently criticize their partners will not make good spouses
 - "You never..." "You always..."
- Positive > Negative in Your Interactions
 - Source: Gottman 1998



The Value of Commitment

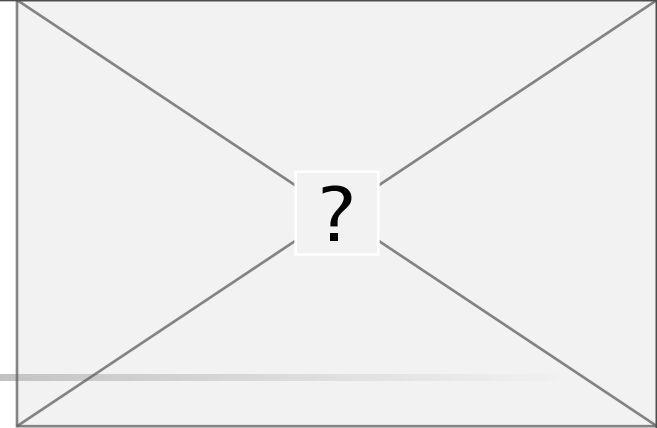
- Two types of commitment
 - Commitment to partner
 - Sacrifices for partner
 - Prioritizes partner over friends and especially opposite sex
 - Has a long-term vision of the future
 - Commitment to marriage
 - See marriage as for life
 - Does not see divorce as an option
 - No prenup
- Commitment is particularly important for men
 - Sources: Wilcox and Nock 2006; Stanley 1998

A Good (Wo)Man is Hard to Find

- Given the financial and practical challenges of marriage and parenting, it is vital that your partner has (the capacity to grow in) the following virtues:
 - Thrift, fortitude, wisdom, loyalty, charity
 - Will he be a good provider and father?
 - Families with annual income over \$50k are 30% less likely to divorce
 - Will she be a good mother and wife?
 - Source: Fowers 2000; Popenoe 2004

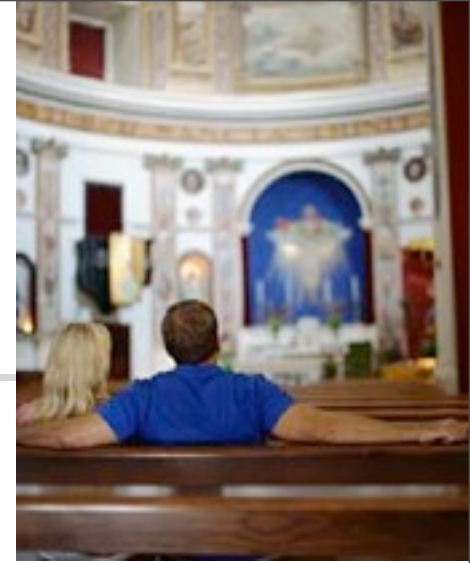


Friends and Family



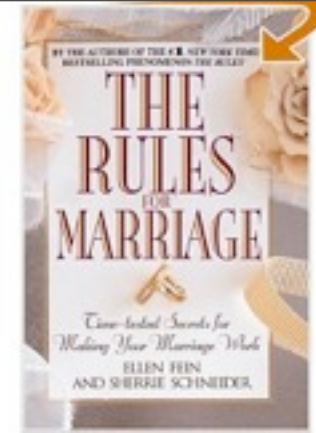
- You should seek out the advice of wise friends and family members
 - Their support will be invaluable later on
- You should try to seek a partner who comes from a happy, intact family
 - This is particularly important for a child of divorce
 - If this isn't possible, be attentive to your partner's capacity for trust, intimacy, and commitment
- Sources: Wolfinger 2005; Nock et al. 2008

A Shared Faith



- Most couples now look at marriage as an opportunity to enjoy a “super relationship” with a soul mate
 - This puts a heavy burden on the relationship
 - No relationship or person is capable of providing us with ultimate meaning in life
 - But couples who focus on something larger than themselves—especially God—are, paradoxically, more likely to enjoy marital happiness and stability
 - Relationship doesn’t have to meet unrealistic expectations
 - More likely to see marriage as an opportunity to serve rather than to satisfy one’s own desires and needs
- Sources: Wilcox and Nock 2006; Popenoe 2004

The Rules for Contemporary Marriage



- Don'ts

- 1) Seek a 50-50 marriage
- 2) Be unfair/selfish
- 3) Be intimate with opposite sex

- Dos

- 1) Emotional engagement
- 2) Complementarity
- 3) Faith & Friends

The 50-50 Trap



- Couples who seek to divide everything in half are less likely to be happy and more likely to divorce
 - Keeping score is terrible for a marriage
 - Spouses have different strengths & rarely have the interest or capacity to do the same thing in their marriages
 - Undercuts mutual dependency, which is great for marriage
 - Source: Wilcox and Nock 2006; Brines & Joyner 1999

But Equity is Essential



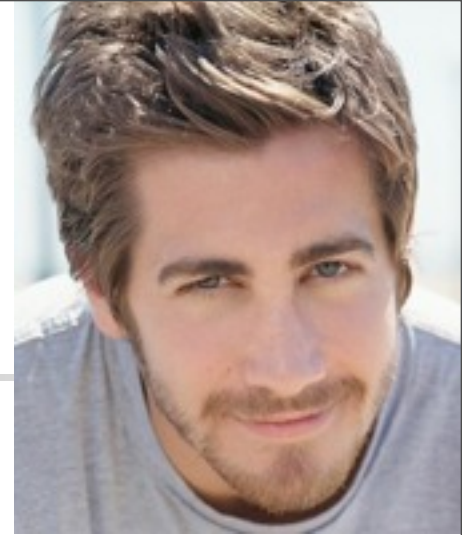
- Each spouse needs to feel like the other spouse is making valuable contributions to the marriage
 - If this doesn't happen, lots of unhappiness
 - 38% of wives report marriages unfair
- Particularly a problem in dual-earner marriages where both spouses are working full-time
 - Few husbands do half the housework and childcare
 - Wilcox and Nock 2006

Don't Cross Boundaries with Opposite Sex



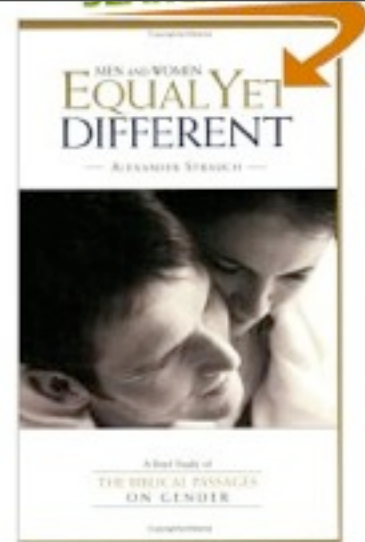
- There are few rules guiding relationships between men and women in workplace
 - Often socialize, travel, and work closely with members of opposite sex
- For men in particular, pornography is also a major issue
- Problems
 - Less interested in investing in one's marriage
 - Less interested in sex
 - More marital unhappiness and divorce
- Source: South and Lloyd 1995; Sack et al. 2004

Emotional Engagement



- Strongest predictor of women's marital happiness is husband's emotional engagement
 - Affection, empathy, understanding
- Men (and women) need to work on remaining emotionally engaged in their marriages

Vive la Difference



- Couples that honor their different interests and gifts tend to be happier & more stable
 - Wives are happiest when husbands take on the lion's share of providing for the family
 - Especially true when children in the home
 - Also true for more feminist-minded wives
 - Source: Wilcox and Nock 2006

Faith and Friends



- Men and women who attend church together are more likely to succeed in their marriages
 - 35% less likely to divorce
- Norms
 - Sacrifice, sexual fidelity, marital permanence
- Networks
 - Share friends who uphold norms, offer support, and believe in marriage

Conclusions



- Today, marriage is a daring and even dangerous adventure
- Marriage is especially challenging because we don't have institutionalized "rules" to guide us through courtship and within marriage
- These rules should help
- The Sociological Bottom Line:
 - The paradox of contemporary marital happiness is that happiness in marriage is most likely to be found by seeing marriage as an opportunity to make a gift of oneself to God, spouse, and children
 - This adventure is best undertaken in a community that honors and values marriage

Conclusions

- We cannot lose sight of the fact that children do best when they are raised by their mother and father
- Thus, perhaps the most important reason to strengthen marriage is to ensure that children have the benefit of being raised by the man and woman whose love helped to bring them into the world

