

## session 12: **teacher resource**

### MARRIAGE FACTS AND FICTION

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1. **In the years since 1970, people have been getting married at younger and younger ages.**

**Fiction.** It's actually the reverse. People are delaying the age at which that they get married. In 1970, the average age for women to marry was 20.8 and for men it was 23.2. In 2006, the average age for women was 25.0 and for men 27.5. (Census Bureau Reports, American Community Survey: 2006)

2. **The majority of adults are married.**

**Fact.** Nearly 60 percent of adults are married – 10 percent are separated or divorced, 7 percent are widowed, 19 percent have never married and 6 percent are living with a partner. Marital status varies greatly among racial/ethnic groups. Approximately 61 percent of white adults are married, 58 percent of Hispanic adults, and 38 percent of Black adults. (National Center for Health Statistics, *Marital Status and Health: United States, 1999-2002*, December 2004)

3. **Of those adults who are married, most have been married more than once.**

**Fiction.** Most adults have married only once – 74 percent of Hispanics, 70 percent of White non-Hispanics, 65 percent of Blacks, and 84 percent of Asians and Pacific Islanders. (National Center for Health Statistics, *Marital Status and Health: United States, 1999-2002*, December 2004)

4. **Over the last 20 years the divorce rate has continued to climb.**

**Fiction.** Although many people believe that the divorce rate continues to increase, it has, in fact, been declining since 1981 for people born in 1955 or later. (The National Center for Health Statistics)

5. **Having a baby while she's single has no impact on whether or not a young woman will ever get married.**

**Fiction.** Women who have a child without being married have a 40 percent lower likelihood of ever getting married. (Levin-Epstein, J. Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP), *To Have and to Hold: Congressional Vows on Marriage and Sex*, March 2005)

**6. Married people are no happier than single or divorced people.**

**Fiction.** Married people are more likely to say that they are happy with their lives in general and less likely to say they are “not too happy.” They also report less depression and anxiety than people who are single or living with a partner.

(Waite, Linda and M. Gallagher. *The Case for Marriage*. Doubleday, 2000)

**7. Married couples who are having relationship struggles should not count on having a child as a way to solve relationship issues.**

**Fact:** The birth of a child often affects marital harmony and requires adjustment.

Because newborn children have so many needs, one or both parents must spend time taking care of the child. The time they spend taking care of their newborn reduces the time they can spend together doing couple things. Spending less time alone as a couple can create challenges for even the healthiest marriages. (Belsky, J. (1986). *Transition to Parenthood. Medical Aspects of Human Sexuality*, 20, 56-59)

**8. Married people are physically healthier than those who aren't married.**

**Fact.** Married adults are less likely than other adults to be in fair or poor health; to suffer from serious psychological distress; or to smoke, drink heavily or be physically inactive. However, married men are more likely to be overweight or obese than other men. (*Marital Status and Health: US, 1999-2002*).

**9. When you get married, you tend to have fewer financial resources than when you're single.**

**Fiction.** In general, both men and women tend to be better off financially when they marry because they have access to their partner's current and future income. When women are married to men with decent incomes, they generally are better off financially than their non-married sisters. If they separate or divorce, their situations are often worse. (*The Case for Marriage*) Married men often earn 10-40 percent more than single men, and the longer they stay married the fatter their paychecks. Why? Married men tend to lead more settled lives. They miss work less often and are more likely to be focused on supporting their families. For couples who have limited employment skills and low incomes, getting married will not necessarily lead to an improved financial situation unless one or both people can get a decent job. (Wendy Sigle-Rushton and Sara McLanahan, “For Richer or Poorer,” Center for Research on Child Wellbeing – Working Paper #01-17-FF, July 2001.)

10. **Most young couples who are not married at the time they have a child together do not plan to get married in the future.**

**Fiction.** There is an important Fragile Families and Child Well Being study of 3700 unmarried couples taking place in 20 large US cities. The study is telling us a lot about couples' relationships with each other and their children over time. The majority of these mothers and fathers say they have plans to marry in the future. Most of them were romantically involved at the time of their child's birth. Fathers tend to be more optimistic about getting married than mothers. (Marcia Carlson, Sara McLanahan, Paula England and Barbara Devaney. January 2005. Building Strong Families In Brief. *"What We Know about Unmarried Parents: Implications for Building Strong Families Programs."* Wash., DC: Mathematica Policy Research)

11. **Young mothers will typically marry the father of their children even when they don't trust them.**

**Fiction.** This is a powerful finding from the Fragile Families study and other work with similar populations. A woman's attitude about whether "her" man can be trusted is a big factor in the break up of the relationship. Women in the study who had this attitude were less likely to stay in the relationship, to live together or to get married.

12. **Couples are more likely to follow through on their plans to marry (one year later) when the fathers continue their education beyond high school.**

**Fact.** Education is a factor that makes men more attractive as a possible husband.

13. **Women in the Fragile Families study were more likely than men to end the relationship because of ongoing conflicts.**

**Fiction.** Men seem to have a harder time dealing with conflict. They also have a hard time dealing with competing demands if they have children from other women. Men are less likely to commit or marry when their relationship has high levels of conflict and when they have children from other relationships.

14. **On average, children are better off when their parents are married than when their parents are single or living together.**

**Fact.** Although most children raised by single parents end up doing just fine, children are generally better off when their biological parents are married, living in the same home and have a loving, healthy marriage. This is partly because married parents tend to be better educated and earn higher incomes. Having more money reduces stress and makes it easier for parents to spend time with and

nurture children. Children tend to have better emotional development when their parents are married. Married parents also tend to get more support from their extended families and friends. Parental conflict has a negative impact on children regardless of whether the parents are married or not, but child abuse and domestic violence are more likely when parents are not married. Children are more likely to end up in poverty if they grow up in a one-parent home, versus those who grow up in a two-parent home. (CLASP)

**15. When parents divorce, children don't suffer any significant negative consequences.**

**Fiction.** While it is true that most children of divorce are able to effectively deal with the disruption divorce brings to their lives, divorce impacts children's behavior, emotional state, and academic performance. Adjustment problems appear to happen for several reasons: lack of positive contact with noncustodial parents, loss of family income, and less positive relationships with their custodial parent. In some cases, disruption and conflict in the marriage prior to the divorce contributes heavily to the child's problems. Children seem to do better when they can continue to live in a home that is financially secure and have parents who respond to their emotional needs. (National Association of School Psychologists [NASP] Communiqué, Vol. 32, #3, November 2003, *"The Effects of Divorce on Children"* by Alec Brown, Ellie Young & Melissa Allen)

**16. Living together before marriage is the best way to test compatibility with a partner.**

**Fiction.** Marriages that begin by cohabiting have 50 to 100 percent higher disruption rates than marriages without premarital cohabitation. Those who live together report poorer relationship quality than their counterparts in marriage. About 40 percent of cohabiting relationships end before marriage; the longer a couple lives together, the less likely they are to marry. A study showed that the longer that couples lived together before marrying, the more likely they were to resort to heated arguments, yelling, and throwing things when conflicts arose in their subsequent marriage. Women who cohabit before marriage were 33 percent more likely to have a marriage that ended in divorce or separation. (CLASP, Familyfacts.org)