



FocusFamilyINSIGHT

Ministry Strategy– Family Formation Studies

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To: Jim Daly, Interested Students of the Family

Re: New Pew Study – Is Marriage Dying?

“Nearly 40% say marriage is becoming obsolete”

So says *USA Today* and the *Associated Press* based on a new report from the Pew Research Center.

Let's take a closer look at this new [Pew Report](#) to see the good and bad news about marriage and family in the United States. The report is a compilation of both family formation trends as well as attitudes of American adults about marriage, family and parenting.

The bottom line, which is not new: Americans are actually very pro-marriage, pro-family, pro-parenting in their attitudes and deepest desires for their own lives, however not so much in their general views and practices.

First, let's look at the “Marriage is Obsolete” claim.

The Pew report itself says this is not quite what it seems. They cite the 2006 World Values Survey (which Focus on the Family also cited in its Summer 2009 World Family Map Prototype Report) that only 13 percent of Americans agreed that “marriage is an outdated institution.” Our 2009 report also found that 90 percent of Americans disagree that marriage is an outdated institution.¹

Indeed, Pew's new data shows that 39 percent of adults agree “marriage is becoming obsolete.” But this is a general question about marriage as a social concept.

When Pew asked people about *their own feelings* about their present or future marital and family prospects, we see a much different picture – one that shows the majority of Americans still have a deep desire for marriage and family in their own lives. Let's take a look at the numbers.

General Attitude About Marriage

Sixty percent of American adults currently living with someone or not yet married express a desire to marry.

- Only 13 percent of these express no interest in marrying.
- Only 16 percent of cohabiters – those we would assume are less positive on marriage - express no interest in marriage!
- In fact, Pew's data shows more people want to marry today than did in 2007.²

Most promising is that Pew reports, “The youngest generation has the strongest desire to marry... [with] 69 percent of unmarried 18- to 29-year-olds say[ing] they want to get married.”³

Sixty-nine percent of current cohabiters express the desire and belief they will marry one day.

Tellingly, 64 percent of current and ever-cohabiters see their cohabiting as a “step toward marriage” rather than a replacement of marriage.⁴

General Attitude About Family

When asked “How important is your family to you at this time?”⁵

- 76 percent said the “most important element in my life”
- 22 percent said “one of the most important elements” of my life.
- Only 1 percent said “not important.”





Only 16 percent of Americans don't want to have children, while 62 percent do want children.⁶ Sixty-one percent of Americans tend to agree a child needs a home with both a mother and father to grow up happily, down from 69 percent in Feb 2007, but similar to what it was in 1982.⁷ Sixty-nine percent of adults believe it is "a bad thing for society" for more single women to be having babies without a man to help raise them.⁸

When asked "What is important for a man as a good husband?"

93% said "a good father"
89% said "caring and compassionate"
82% said one who "Puts his family first"
41% said "provides a good income"
32% said "good at household chores"
36% said "is well educated"
48% said "is a good sexual partner"⁹

When asked, "what is important for a woman as a good wife?"

90% "a good mother
90% "caring and compassionate
74% "puts her family before all else
48% "a good sexual partner
39% "well educated
28% "good at household chores
19% "provides a good income"

More Americans are more optimistic about "the institution of marriage and family" (67 percent) in our country than are optimistic about "our system of education" (50 percent) or "the moral and ethical standards in our country" (41 percent).¹⁰

Marrieds themselves are most likely (84 percent) to say they were "very satisfied with family life," followed by the widowed (78 percent), those living with a partner (71 percent), the single (66 percent) and lastly, the divorced and separated at 50 percent.¹¹

The Bad News on Marriage

We need to recognize there is plenty of bad news on marriage in the Pew Report, particularly that the marriage rate and the rate of children living with married parents continues to decline, while the cohabitation rates and out-of-wedlock birthrates continue to climb dramatically.

Forty-three percent believe it "doesn't make much difference" whether more unmarried couples are raising children together and 43 percent believe it's a bad thing for society. Only 10 percent believe it is good for society.

In regard to whether more women not ever having children is a good thing, 55 percent believe it doesn't really make any difference, while 29 percent believe it is bad for society and only 11 percent think it good for society.¹²

Forty-six percent of Americans believe it doesn't make much difference whether more couples live together outside marriage, while 43 percent believe it is bad for society.

Concerning more gay and lesbian couples raising children, 43 percent believe it is a bad thing for society, 41 percent believe it doesn't really matter and only 12 percent believe it to be a good thing.¹³

The large number of "doesn't really matter" respondents is concerning. These are the family relativists and their numbers are significant. Overall, this Pew Report is a very good and interesting report that all serious and curious students of the family should take time over the next week to read and consider in our work to strengthen both people's perceptions and behaviors on marriage and family.

¹ Pew Research Center, "The Decline of Marriage and the Rise of New Families," November 18, 2010, p. 25.; W. Bradford Wilcox, et al., *World Family Map Project, Prototype Report*, Published with ChildTrends and Institute of Marriage and Family Canada, Summer 2009), p. 8.

² Pew, "Decline of Marriage," 2010, p. 92, Q. 21,

³ Pew, "Decline of Marriage," 2010, p. 36.

⁴ Pew, "Decline of Marriage," 2010, p. 92, Q. 20, Q. 19.

⁵ Pew, "Decline of Marriage," 2010, p. 88, Q. 7.

⁶ Pew, "Decline of Marriage," 2010, p. 94, Q. 22a.

⁷ Pew, "Decline of Marriage," 2010, p. 90, Q. 10.

⁸ Pew, "Decline of Marriage," 2010, p. 89, Q. 9c.

⁹ Pew, "Decline of Marriage," 2010, p. 94, Q. 23.

¹⁰ Pew, "Decline of Marriage," 2010, p. 82, Q. 2.

¹¹ Pew, "Decline of Marriage," 2010, p. 18.

¹² Pew, "Decline of Marriage," 2010, p. 88, Q. 9a,b.

¹³ Pew, "Decline of Marriage," 2010, p. 89, Q. 9e,d.