

March 18, 2004

Study Questions

Read:

Kamen: Modern Marriage: From Meal Ticket to Best Friend

Coontz: The Future of Marriage 77-95

Furstenberg: The Future of Marriage

Sanchez, Nock, Wright and Gager: Setting the Clock Forward or Back? Covenant Marriage and the "Divorce Revolution"

1. What, in your opinion is the most important part of a marriage? Do you think men and women would respond to this question differently?
2. In 1995 a CBS News poll found that women were more likely than men (63 to 49 percent) to say that their marriages were better than their parents'. Why, do you suppose?
3. Kamen says that a majority of women (55%) now earn at least half their household's income. How can we reconcile this figure with claims that women overall earn only 2/3rds to 3/4ths of what men earn?
4. How do friendships between men and women differ from same-sex friendships, do you think?
5. You will see differences between Kamen's findings on sharing household work and Coltrane and Adams' findings. Kamen says that men spent about 75% as much time as women in 1997; Coltrane and Adams say that women still do about 2/3 (66%) household work. What might explain these different findings?
6. Coontz says that most Americans don't want to reestablish the supremacy of the male breadwinner model or to define masculine and feminine roles in any monolithic way. What are *your* solutions to the rise of divorce? Your opinions about unwed motherhood?
7. What, according to Coontz is an "institution"? Describe how marriage is an institution.
8. What proportion of all births to unmarried mothers occur in households where the father is present? Discuss the benefits of children living with two married parents as opposed to living with two unmarried parents.
9. There are proportionally far fewer families (people residing together related by blood, marriage, or adoption) than there used to be. What are the reasons?
10. Coontz, obviously a liberal, states that the radical right wing of the family values movement is correct with respect to one of the reasons marriage's role as the lifelong norm for the vast majority of individuals has diminished. What is it?
11. If you were a conservative, family-values father who knew the statistics about correlations between women's higher-paid employment and higher probability of unstable marriage, what would you advise your daughter to do when planning her career?

12. Men increasingly choose to marry women who have good jobs and strong educational backgrounds; however, these are the women most able to leave a bad marriage and indeed have a greater chance of divorcing. Discuss.
13. Coontz criticizes divorce court decisions following the “no-fault” divorce revolution. Why?

Assumed that because more women were working, male-female equality had already been achieved, and so awarded child support but not alimony – maintenance awards.
14. “Divorce rates are the product of long-term social and economic changes, not of a breakdown in values. Do you agree? What evidence does Coontz offer in support of this argument?
15. What’s the flaw in the “get every unmarried pregnant woman married” philosophy?
16. What proportion of women stay on welfare continuously for five years?
17. “A man who gets a woman pregnant has approximately the same causal responsibility as a slice of chocolate cake has in determining whether a woman gains weight (Charles Murray). Defend this statement. Oppose it.
18. What produces increases in unwed motherhood, according to Coontz?
19. Half of all births in Sweden and ¼ of all births in France are to unmarried women. What do you think of this? What does Coontz say about the welfare of these children?
20. What does Coontz find laudable about the new “end welfare as we know it” bill?
21. Furstenberg says that the current gold standard of family life—the family built upon an intimate marital relationship—was regarded with great suspicion when it made its debut. What were the criticisms?
22. What demographic changes have we seen in marriage patterns in the US?
23. What dramatic changes in married partners’ behavior and attitudes toward marriage have occurred?
24. Furstenberg says the move toward gender equality in marriage has come with a price. What is it?
25. Other factors probably contributing to high divorce rate?
26. Do you think marriage has become a luxury item? Why do people say they can’t afford marriage?
27. What do you think should be the role of the state with respect to marriage?
28. In what ways do you agree with the “covenant marriage” couples? Disagree?
29. “When you listen to the rhetoric surrounding marriage, it’s the man who’s giving something up and the woman who’s gaining something.” (p. 49) Do you agree this is the rhetoric? If so, why?
30. Do you think the US will become even more polarized regarding the “family values” debate?