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Marriage Going Out of Style?

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“The bottom line is that a heavily married society is a whole lot better off than one that’s not,” says David Popenoe, a professor of sociology at [Rutger’s University](#) and co-director of the [National Marriage Project](#). Popenoe’s statement should be read in light of sensationalistic media reports about the demise of marriage. Those reports were sparked by a U.S. Census Bureau report released just weeks ago. [See [previous article](#) here.]

Reporter John Johnson of [The Cincinnati Enquirer](#) took a look at the data in a front -page article published Sunday. His article is, in general, a fair overview of the current status of marriage.

First he states the problem:

The National Marriage Project says the median age at first marriage went from 20 for females and 23 for males in 1960 to about 26 and 27, respectively, in 2005, the Marriage Project says.

Other reasons the National Marriage Project cites for declining marriage rates: the growing acceptance of unmarried cohabitation; a small decrease in the tendency of divorced people to remarry; and “some increase” in lifelong singlehood, although the actual amount of the latter won’t be known until the lives of young and middle-age adults run their course.

Unmarried cohabitation is particularly popular among people who’ve come from divorced-parent homes, says David Popenoe, a professor of sociology at Rutgers and co-director of the National Marriage Project.

Why would the children of divorce be more inclined to co-habitation? Johnson answers: “They’ve seen their parents divorce, and that’s the last thing they want to go through themselves.”

The most interesting part of the article is the statement by Popenoe to the effect that “a heavily married society is a whole lot better off than one that’s not. That is a fascinating argument, and one that can be related to so many different fronts of the marriage question. A “heavily married society” should be a goal of social policy and cultural expectation. The alternative is a society in which marriage is effectively marginalized.

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