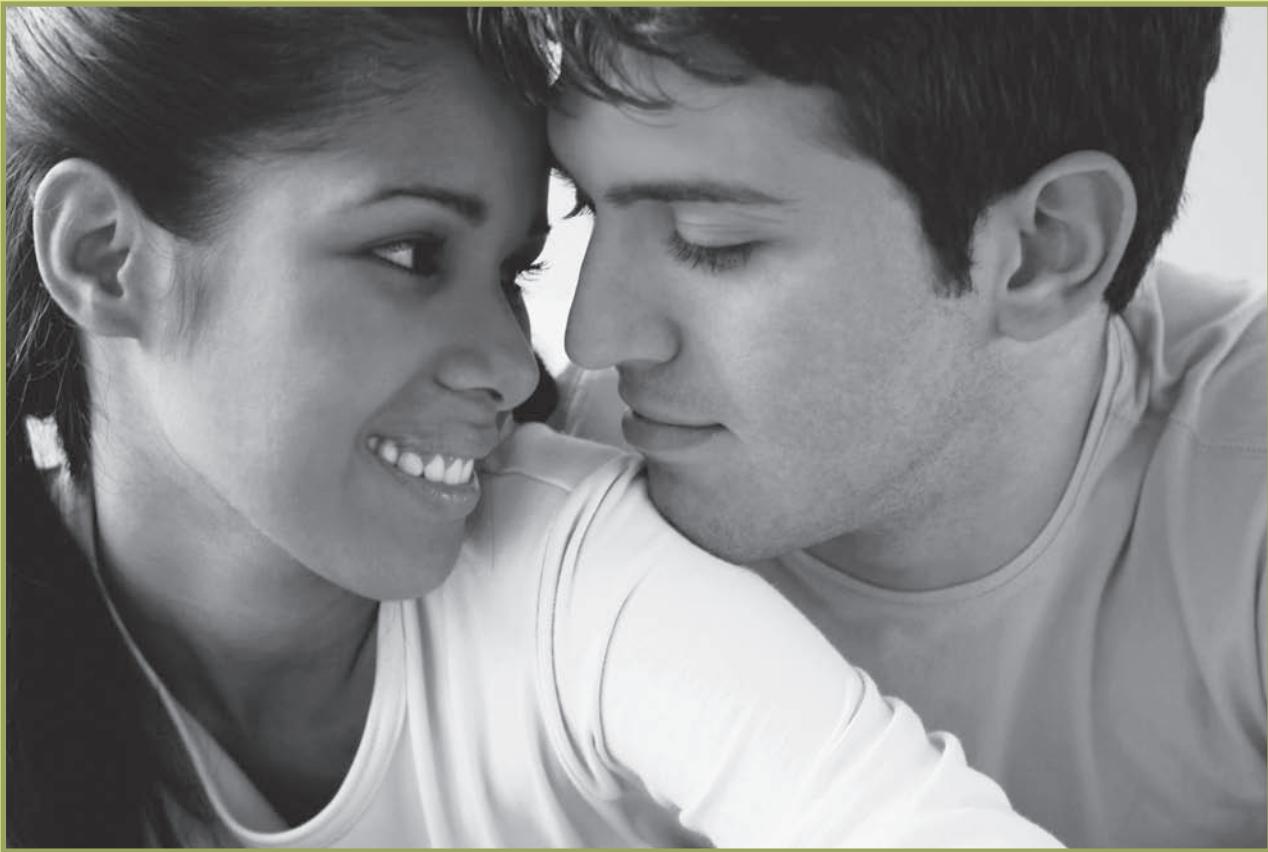


# Twogether in Texas

Baseline Report on Marriage in the Lone Star State



## **Principal Authors**

**Steven M. Harris, Ph.D.**  
Texas Tech University

**Norval D. Glenn, Ph.D.**  
University of Texas at Austin

**Damon L. Rappleyea, M.Ed.**  
Texas Tech University

**Rolando Diaz-Loving, Ph.D.**  
National University of Mexico,  
Public Strategies, Inc.

**Alan J. Hawkins, Ph.D.**  
Brigham Young University

**Andrew P. Daire, Ph.D.**  
University of Central Florida

**Cynthia Osborne, Ph.D.**  
University of Texas at Austin

**Ted L. Huston, Ph.D.**  
University of Texas at Austin

## **Contributors**

**Linda K. Acitelli, Ph.D.**  
University of Houston

**Carolina Armenta, B.S.**  
National University of Mexico

**Kathryn Edin, Ph.D.**  
Harvard University

**Frank D. Fincham, Ph.D.**  
Florida State University

**Dinah J. Harriger, M.S.**  
Texas Tech University

**Edwin I. Hernandez, Ph.D.**  
Notre Dame University

**Austin Houghtaling, M.S.**  
Texas Tech University

**Heidi M. Melz, Ph.D.**  
University of Texas at Austin

**Doug K. Snyder, Ph.D.**  
Texas A&M University

**Barbara D. Whitehead, Ph.D.**  
Rutgers University

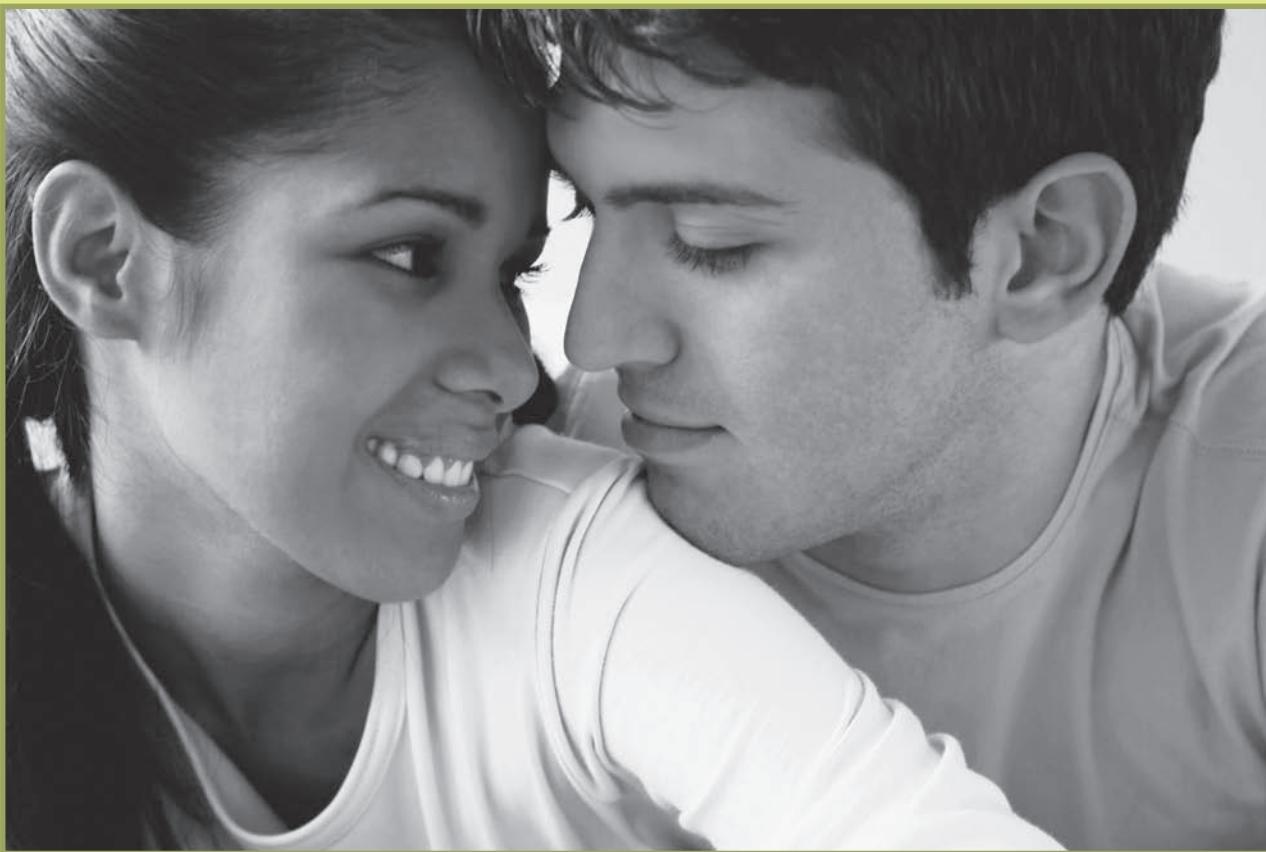
**Erica Wilkins, M.S.**  
Texas Tech University

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# Twogether in Texas

Baseline Report on Marriage in the Lone Star State



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## **Executive Summary**

Marriage is important to Texans. In fact, according to this survey 90 percent of respondents reported that “having a healthy, happy marriage is one of the most important things in life.” Despite this finding, 37 percent of the adults surveyed have experienced a divorce. Although divorce is fairly common, 89 percent of those surveyed agree that “marriage is a lifelong commitment that should only be broken under extreme circumstances.”

These statistics are not unique to Texans. Most Americans who have participated in surveys like this report valuing marriage and desire a lifelong marriage. This report examines attitudes and beliefs among Texans as they relate to marriage and relationships. Some of the key findings include:

- The majority of Texans surveyed (84%), regardless of ethnicity or age reported being satisfied with their relationship and reported “feeling good about their choice of mate” (85%). Not only are they satisfied, 91% reported that their “relationship brings out the best” in them!
- Eighty percent (80%) of the Texans surveyed believe that “marriage is as much about joining families together as it is about being a couple.” Looking at marriage through this lens indicates the importance of good communication in families and setting realistic expectations for couples considering marriage. There aren’t just two adults in a marriage, but a variety of family members with differing opinions and ideas about relationships.
- Texans are willing to participate in marital or relationship education. Marriage and relationship education teaches skills such as how to talk with one another and solve problems as a team. Seventy-six percent (76%) of Hispanics and 63% of non-Hispanics reported being “willing to participate in marriage and relationship education classes or workshops designed to strengthen their relationship and prevent problems from starting.” Eighty-one percent (81%) of the younger adults who participated in the survey (ages 18-44) were also willing to do so (compared to 55% in the older cohort).
- Previous research has found there are certain risk factors for divorce such as living in poverty, marrying at a young age, living together before marriage, experiencing divorce as a child or being divorced previously to name a few. In the survey, young adult Texans and those who identify themselves as being Hispanic tended consistently to hold opinions and engage in behaviors that put them at a greater risk for marital instability and divorce.

- There are a variety of opinions related to divorce and reasons for divorce. The 5 top reasons the respondents gave for their divorces were: “Lack of commitment,” “fell out of love,” “had an affair,” “too much arguing,” and “lacked marital skills.” However, the majority of respondents (95%) indicated that when they argue with their partners they typically “work things out;” and most people (89%) tend to believe that divorce is a serious problem and marriage should be a “lifelong commitment only to be broken under extreme conditions.” These findings may indicate a disconnect between the reasons for divorce and the ability to stay together and work things out.
- Survey respondents were evenly split when asked if a “bad marriage is worse than a divorce.” Although many of the problems attributed to divorce could have been addressed prior to or during marriage, our findings indicate that people may not believe that they are struggling in their own marriages. Improving public awareness of the value of healthy marriage and family life may help people better recognize relationship health issues. Additionally, strengthening marriages, whether the marriages are “good” and “healthy” or if they are in jeopardy of divorce, is a goal worthy of the attention of a variety of Texans.
- The majority of respondents (92%) believe that “parents should be willing to make great sacrifices to make sure their children have a better life.” This highlights the strong influence relationships with children have in how adults make decisions related to marriage and family life.
- Texans tend to be a religious group of people with the majority of the sample indicating that they are very or somewhat religious (85%). Additionally, an overwhelming majority of the sample (93%) reported believing that their marriage is “holy and sacred” and 90% reported “sensing God’s presence” in their marriage. These findings were the strongest among the Hispanic respondents. This finding highlights the important role faith and faith communities play in supporting and strengthening healthy marriage in the State of Texas.

## **How to get the most out of this report**

This report provides an analysis of the attitudes and beliefs held by a segment of the Texas population regarding marriage, divorce, remarriage, cohabitation, and their beliefs about the roles of children, men, and women in Texas homes. A wide variety of people are invested in and concerned about Texas families. The information contained in this report could be used to guide efforts designed to strengthen Texas families.

The authors have specifically avoided making extensive references to complex statistical procedures, so the document is approachable. Where differences are reported, either in numbers or between different segments of the Texas population, the authors are reporting only those differences that were determined to be statistically significant. In other words, the differences reported could not reasonably be attributed to chance. A detailed explanation of how the data were collected is located in Appendix A and references for other scholarly work are located in Appendix B.

Consider the following as you review the results of this statewide survey:

- There are limitations to every research study. However, despite the limitations of this study, this document may be considered a valuable resource to guide efforts in strengthening Texas families. A wide variety of people from all cultural and ethnic groups consider healthy marriage and strong family life as some of the most important things in life.
- The information in this report could be used to introduce topics, or generate discussion within marriage and relationship education programs. Everyone has an opinion about marriage and family life and nothing brings those opinions out faster than supporting or even contrasting viewpoints. The data here could help spark critical thinking about one's relationship as well as serve as a comparison point for how couples are doing in their relationship.
- Consider dividing the report into useful sections for your own purposes. The report was not necessarily written to be read "cover to cover" although many people will do so. This report may be appropriately considered a reference that many will look to on a variety of occasions and for different reasons.

- This report identifies two specific “vulnerable populations.” Those in the younger group (18-44 years old) and those in the Hispanic group consistently responded in ways that raised concerns about their ability to sustain healthy marriages and families. In some situations, neither of these groups reported feeling as though a healthy marriage was within their reach. Those involved in programs and policies designed to reach young adults and Hispanics may want to consider the findings in this report and the unique needs of these two groups.
- The goal of conducting this statewide survey was to establish a “baseline” upon which future comparisons could be drawn to see how the State of Texas changes over time, particularly in the areas of marriage and family life.
- The goal of conducting this statewide survey was to establish a “baseline” upon which future comparisons could be drawn to see how the State of Texas changes over time, particularly in the areas of marriage and family life.

# **Together in Texas**

## **Baseline Report on Marriage in the Lone Star State**

### **Introduction**

Marriage, as both a personal relationship and public social institution, overwhelmingly benefits individuals, couples, families, and communities throughout the United States (National Marriage Project: The State of The Unions 2007). The benefits of a healthy marriage seem to span almost all domains of lived experience. The results of this survey designed to assess Texans' attitudes about marriage, marital stability, and divorce may point to possible ways to sustain and support the formation and maintenance of **healthy** marriages and stable families in the State of Texas.

### **What is a “Healthy” Marriage?**

While it may be difficult to find a uniform definition of “healthy marriage” that will satisfy all people, the following (adapted from the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center and based on a federally funded report by the policy research group, Child Trends) is a good general definition that contains many of the characteristics that could be found in a “healthy marriage.”

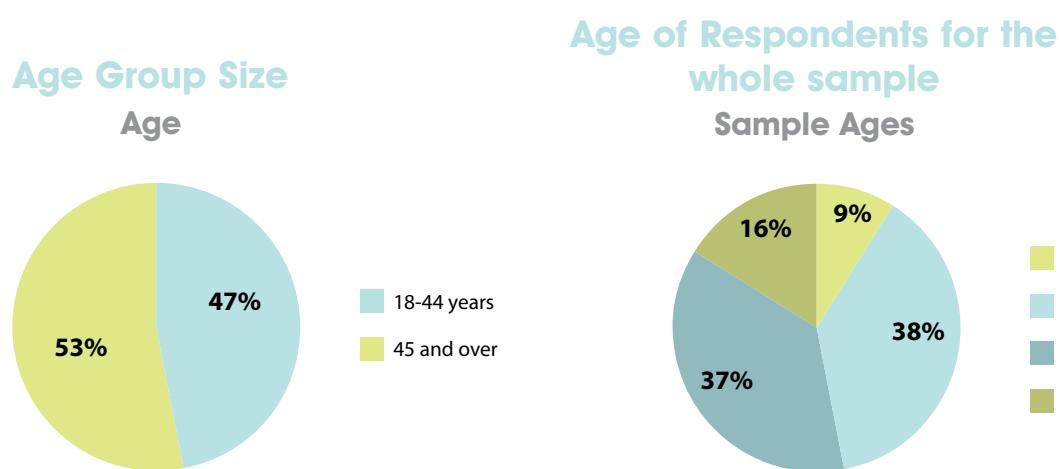
A healthy marriage is a safe, secure, loving relationship that is built on friendship, passion, and commitment. Healthy marriages are strong relationships that can handle life's ups and downs. They are partnerships based on respect, trust, and a willingness to communicate and resolve differences. Domestic violence plays no part in a healthy marriage. Children that live in the homes of those who have healthy marriages are respected and nurtured by two dedicated and loving parents.

Throughout this report when referring to “healthy” marriage the authors are referring to this type of language. Also, throughout the data collection, participants were allowed to define, in their own minds, value-laden terms such as: Successful, healthy, stable, satisfied, etc., when asked questions that used these terms.

## This Report

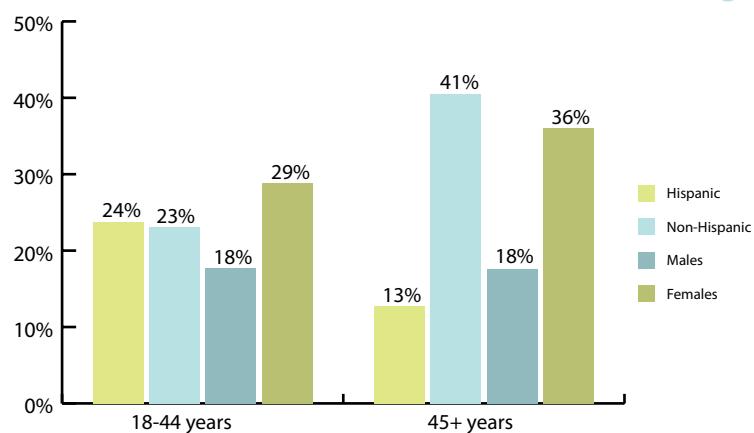
Many of the survey questions came from other publicly funded surveys such as the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative Baseline Survey on Marriage and Divorce that was conducted in 2001, the Marriage in Utah: 2003 baseline statewide survey on marriage and divorce, and the National Fatherhood Initiative's national survey on marriage in America.

The authors are particularly interested in presenting the results as they pertain to two specific age groups. The first group, 18-44 years old (47% of the sample), represents a segment of the population who are most likely to be in first marriages, while the second group, 45 years and older (53% of the sample), represents those who may have experienced more continuous years of marriage or have experienced multiple marriages.

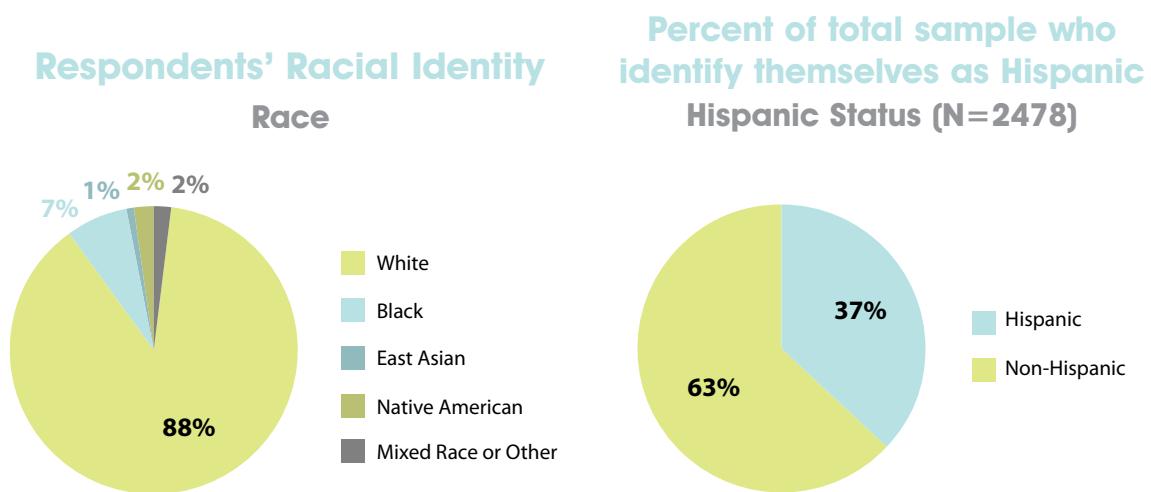


Additionally, the researchers have gone to great lengths to identify and talk to a large sample of Hispanic individuals, who comprise the fastest growing demographic group in the State of Texas. Because of this, it is likely that the results of this survey represent a good first attempt at understanding the unique perspectives of Hispanic individuals in Texas and more generally, the United States.

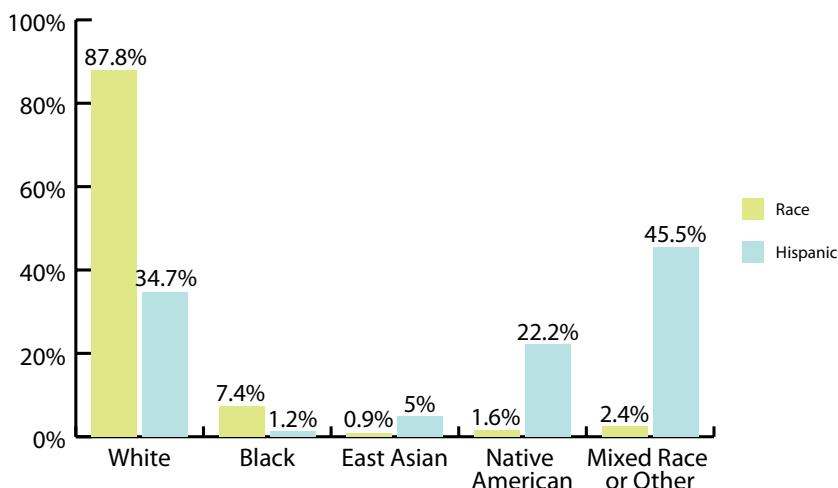
### Age Cohorts by Hispanic and non-Hispanic groups



The majority of participants (total in the sample = 2,503) in this study were female (66%) with males (34%) being somewhat underrepresented. A large number of respondents identified themselves as Hispanic (37%). This number is similar to what the US Census Bureau (2006) reports for the total Hispanic population in the state of Texas (36%). The remaining 63% identified with other ethnic groups, the largest of which were non-Hispanic White (53% - somewhat higher than the U.S. Census numbers for Texas at 48%). In this document, the non-Hispanic group includes all those who have identified themselves as non-Hispanic in one group, not merely those who have identified themselves as non-Hispanic White. Persons who identified themselves as Black were under-represented in the sample (7%) when compared to the State of Texas Census Bureau's number of 12%.

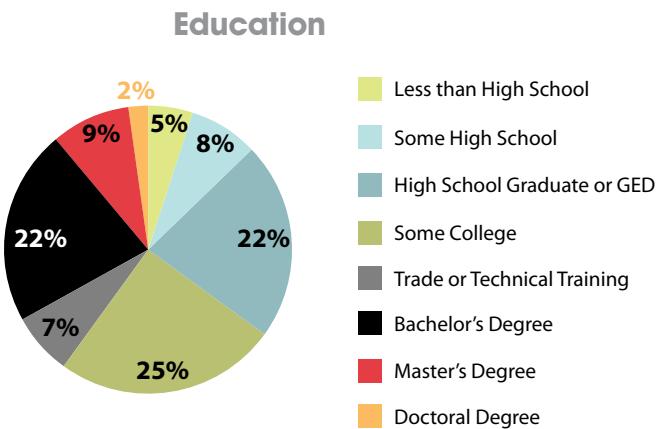


**Racial Identity of Respondents for the Sample by Hispanic Ethnicity (N=2282)**



The respondents represented a variety of educational levels. The most notable finding, however, is that this sample had more college graduates and fewer high school graduates than a typical sample of Texans. The U.S. Census Bureau indicates that 76% of Texans are high school graduates, and 23% have bachelor's degrees or higher. The sample contained 54% high school graduates and approximately 35% who had bachelor's degrees or higher.

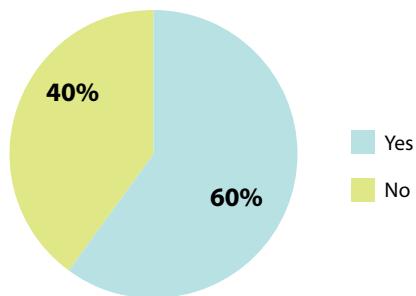
### Education Level for the Whole Sample



Sixty percent (60%) of the respondents reported that they were employed and 40% of respondents reported that they were either seeking work or out of the labor force due to retirement or choice.

### Employment Status for the whole Sample

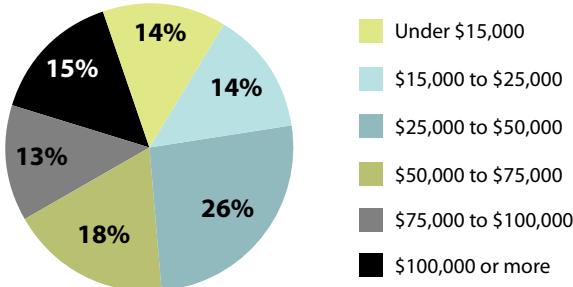
#### Currently Employed



The sample included a wide range of annual income levels: 14% of the respondents reported an annual income of \$15,000 or less; 14% reported that they earned an annual income of between \$15,000 and less than \$25,000; 26% reported that they earned between \$25,000 and less than \$50,000; 18% reported an annual income of between \$50,000 and less than \$75,000, 13% reported that they earned between \$75,000 and less than \$100,000.

### Household Income for the Whole Sample

**Household Income**

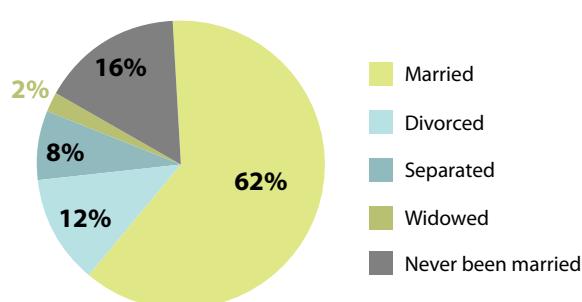


A total of 28% of the respondents reported that they had received government assistance in the last year. The U.S. Census Bureau statistics indicate that the state of Texas can be considered as having a relatively high poverty rate (15.4 % living with family income below the poverty level in 1999). Additionally, Hispanics in Texas represent the poorest segment of the State's population with 25.4 % in 2000 living in poverty.

There was also a diverse array of relationship configurations for this sample as well. The bulk of the sample, 62% reported being "currently married," 12% reported being currently divorced; 8% reported being currently separated; and 2% widowed. This study also included 16% who reported being currently single and had never been married. A total of 37% of the sample reported either being currently divorced or having been divorced at some time in their lives. Of that group, 72% had been divorced once, 20% had been divorced twice, 6% had been divorced three times, and the remaining 2% had been divorced four or more times.

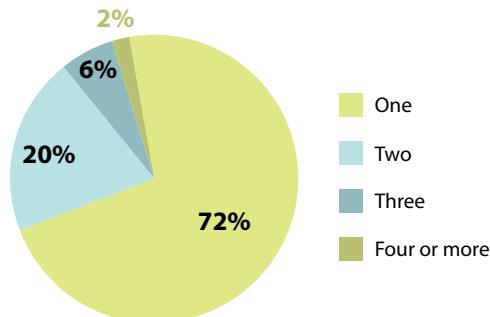
### Marital Status for the whole sample

**Marital Status**



### Number of Previous Marriages for All Married People in the Sample

**Number of Previous Marriages (N=907)**





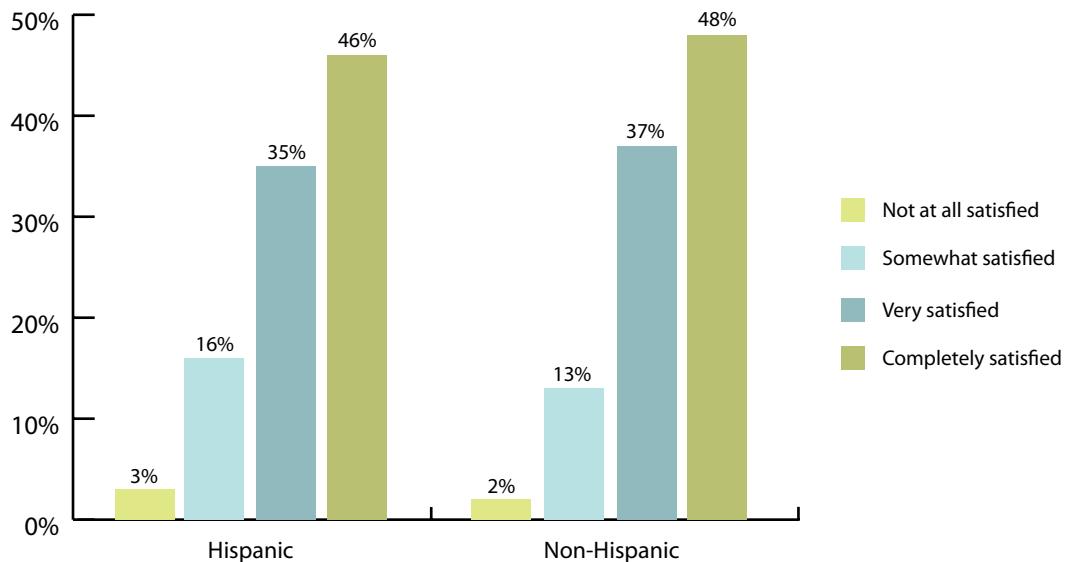
# MARRIAGE EXPERIENCES AND ATTITUDES

# Marriage Experiences and Attitudes

## Highly satisfied and healthy, with room for improvement

The majority of those people in committed relationships, regardless of their ethnicity or their age, reported being satisfied with their relationship. This was an expected result and is typical for most marriage satisfaction research; happy couples tend to believe that they have better relationships than other people they know. However, of that 84% who reported being satisfied, less than half (47%) reported being “completely” satisfied with their relationship. These figures are similar to those from a large, national study of married couples who were followed over a 20-year period by the noted sociologist Paul Amato. Despite high levels of satisfaction in these Texas relationships, there seems to be room for improvement.

**Levels of relationship satisfaction by Ethnic Identity**



Not only did this sample report being highly satisfied, they consider themselves to be in “very healthy relationships” (95% overall). However, when talking about areas of improvement for one’s relationship, even those who say they have “very healthy” relationships can readily give a variety of suggestions where improvements can be made.

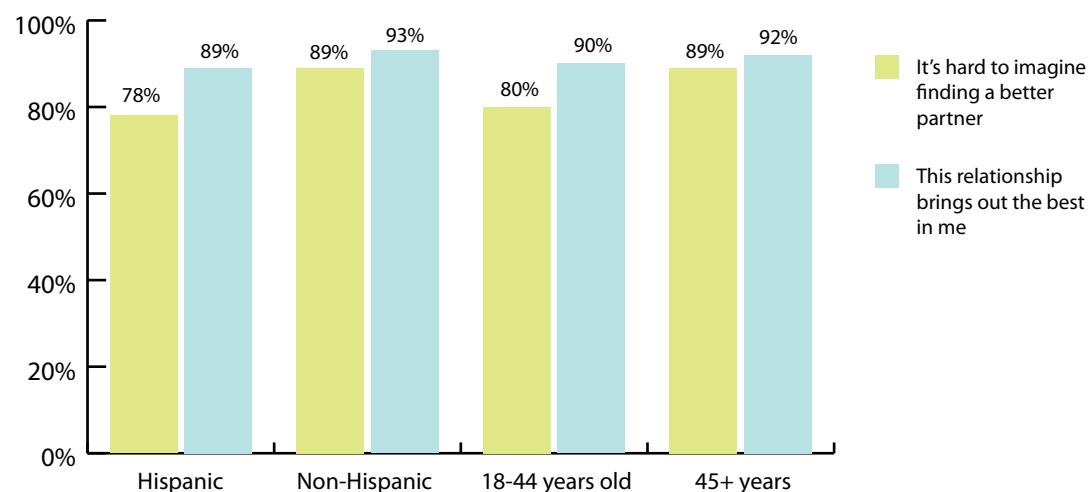
It is important to place this finding into context with what is known about marriage and divorce. Research from a large-scale, national study of family life (National Study of Families and Households) documented that a large majority of divorces come from marriages in which, just a few years earlier, spouses said they were happy. It is possible that relationships are subject to the same laws as physical systems; that they tend to fall apart and get more chaotic over time unless more energy is put into them. Nurturing the relationships of satisfied couples is not just “frosting on the cake;” it may help prevent serious problems that could eventually threaten those relationships.

## Soul Mates

Overall, most people felt good about their choice of mate (85%). Non-Hispanic respondents and those over the age of 44 (89 % for both groups) indicated that it would be hard for them “to imagine finding a partner better than the one” to whom they are married. Additionally, an overwhelming 91% of the entire group surveyed reported believing that their relationship “brings out the best” in them.

In American culture, nearly all young adults believe they will meet their “soul mate,” fall in love, and marry (according to research by The National Marriage Project). The findings from this survey point to the power of expectations; people expect to find and be with their soul mate. And the vast majority report that the one they are with fits the bill. Some people believe that divorces are primarily the result of bad matches. No doubt there are bad matches. But the data suggest that bad matches cannot be the primary problem. People are overwhelming pleased with their partners. Satisfaction with one’s partner, however, doesn’t guarantee effortless success. Even soul mates can come up against serious relationship issues. Successful relationships take work.

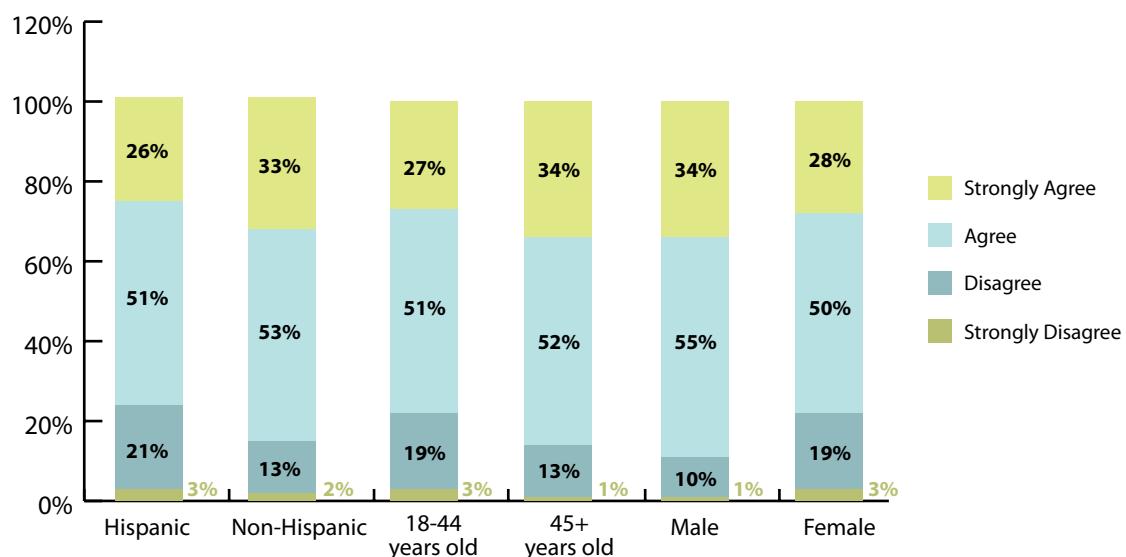
### Satisfaction with partner by age groups and ethnicity



## Commitment

Commitment is always something to be considered when talking about marriage and other close relationships. Texans largely believe that their “relationship is more important” to them “than almost anything” in their lives. Both Hispanic and non-Hispanic respondents indicated as much (76% and 86% respectively) with Hispanics believing so to a lesser degree. Those in the younger group reported less agreement than those in the older group (78% and 86% respectively). And men were more likely than women to score higher on this. The most committed people in the survey were more likely to be older, non-Hispanic, and male. The researchers also found that overwhelmingly the respondents agreed that they are “dedicated to doing what it takes to make their relationship work.” This was the case regardless of age group, cultural identity, or gender.

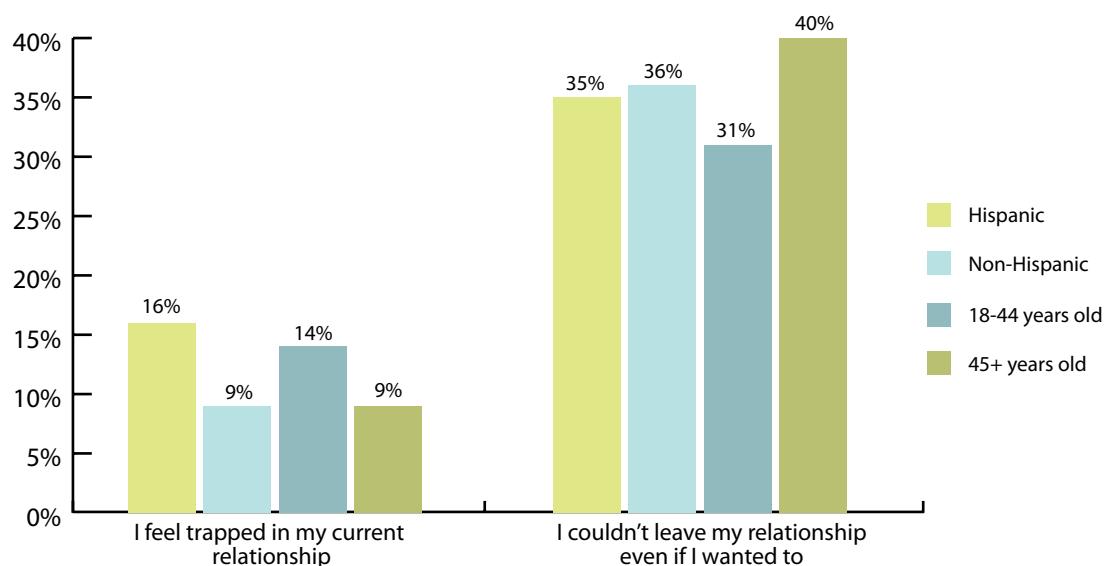
### My relationship is more important than anything else in my life



The researchers also tried to determine whether any respondents were considering changing their relationship status. Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the following statement: “I am just about ready to give up on making this relationship work.” The majority of the sample indicated that they are not ready to give up on their current relationship. There was a difference between the Hispanic and non-Hispanic samples, where 12% of the Hispanic respondents indicated agreement with this statement while only 4% of the non-Hispanic sample indicated agreement. There were no differences by gender of respondent. People were also asked if they were “likely to someday leave” their current relationship. The numbers were low, as expected, but there was a notable difference between Hispanic and non-Hispanic respondents (11% and 6% respectively) as well as younger vs. older respondents (10% and 6% respectively). Both younger and Hispanic respondents indicated higher agreement with the statement when compared to the older and non-Hispanic groups. Being in the younger cohort or in the Hispanic cohort may place an individual’s relationship in a more tenuous or threatened position.

Researchers also wanted to know if people felt “trapped or pressured to continue” in their relationships. As expected, these numbers were generally low with 11% of the total sample indicating that they felt “trapped”. There was a greater number of the younger group reporting feeling trapped (14%) as compared to the older group (9%). Also, a higher percentage of Hispanic respondents reported feeling trapped (15%) as compared to 9% in the non-Hispanic population. There were no differences between the responses of men and women in relation to feeling trapped. Another statewide survey on marriage and family life (done with Oklahoma residents in 2002) reported similar findings in regard to gender. A sizable number of Texans indicated that they felt they “couldn’t leave their relationship even if they wanted to” (35%). Those Texans in the older group (40%) indicated this at a higher rate than those in the younger group (31%). There were no differences when analyzing respondents’ ethnicity in relation to this question.

### People who reported feeling Trapped in Relationship by age group and ethnic group



## **Happy, healthy marriage is important...but where can I find one?**

Most Texans (90%) agree that a “healthy, happy marriage is one of the most important things in life.” However, half of those surveyed (50%) indicated that they know of very few people who have “good and healthy marriages.” These responses were the same regardless of ethnic background, age group, or gender. However, a higher percentage (68%) of the people in the sample who were cohabiting (meaning unmarried but living together) reported that they know of “few good and healthy marriages.” The unmarried people in the survey gave us a glimpse at understanding how important healthy marriage is by 86% of them indicating that they “would rather not be married if it meant being in a mediocre marriage.”

This pessimism about the prevalence of good marriages is curious given the previously reported finding that the majority of respondents are happy in their marriages and believe they are with a nearly perfect partner. Granted, couples in love may tend to see their own relationships through rose-colored lenses. Perhaps when people look at the relationships of others they more easily see problems instead of strengths. With all the attention to the struggles and pit falls of family life it may be difficult to see the positive sides.

### **The more you know**

The education level of respondents had an influence on how they thought about marriage and family relationships. Generally speaking those with more education reported that they “know very few good healthy marriages.” Given this, it makes sense that they also tend to agree that living together before marriage is a good thing. Additionally, they tend to believe that it should not take “extreme circumstances” for one to break a marriage commitment. The more education one has also influences how people think about the relationship between having children and being married. For example, people with higher levels of education in the survey were less likely to believe that having a child together is good enough reason to marry someone.

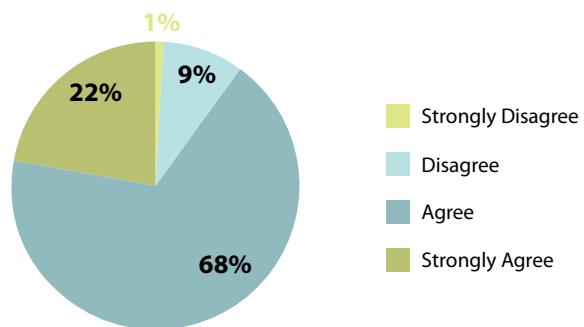
In many respects, these are curious findings. From national research (Centers for Disease Control Prevention – National Center for Health Statistics, July 2002), it is known that there is an “education gap” in marriage and divorce. Individuals with higher education tend to be more likely to marry and substantially less likely to divorce. Educated Americans are more likely to be around other educated Americans who are more likely to be in stable, healthy marriages. Despite this demographic reality, educated Texans report they know very few good marriages.

An ongoing national study of high school seniors indicates that a good, stable marriage remains a central goal for the majority of Americans, but younger Americans also are less optimistic than in the past of their abilities to achieve that goal. Perhaps that personal pessimism also colors how they perceive others' marriages. Plus, given the very high standards that people hold for marriages these days, perhaps any visible problem in a marriage is enough to prove the perception that few good marriages exist.

## **Marriage joins families...not just two people.**

The majority of Texans (80%) surveyed reported believing that "marriage is as much about joining families together as it is about being a couple." In this way it is easy to see that supporting the development and maintenance of healthy families is an important to most Texas communities. In fact, 90% of the sample indicated that "it is important for couples to have close relationships with aunts, uncles, grandparents, and cousins." This was the case regardless of the respondent's ethnic, gender, or age category.

### **Importance of Extended family relationships to couples**



A number of marriage scholars have discussed the problem of couples in the modern age being increasingly cut off from their extended family members. Marriages are always embedded in larger family systems, and good national studies (e.g., Paul Amato's 2000 Survey of Marriage and Family Life) suggest that supportive family ties generally help to strengthen marriages which in turn contribute to more positive outcomes for children. This report indicates that Texans understand this important reality.

## **Are good partners available?**

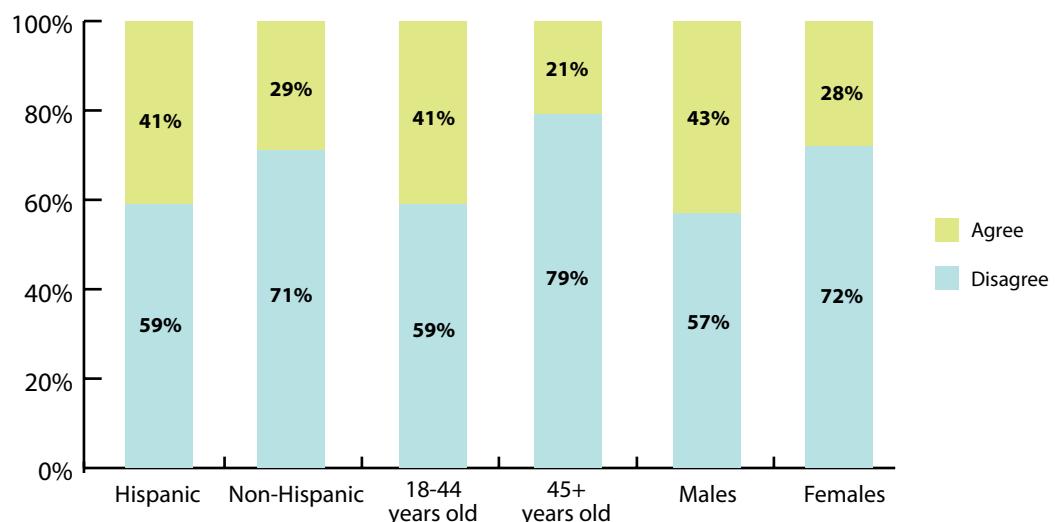
Researchers wanted to know if marriage was a realistic option for the singles in the study. A little over half of the respondents (52%) reported having been "involved with a man or a woman that they would" consider marrying. But that leaves nearly half (48%) who may be discouraged about the prospects of forming a good marriage. The researchers were also curious to see if singles in Texas thought that they came in "contact with people who would make good" husbands or wives. Hispanic respondents were more optimistic in their

responses with 41% agreeing that they come in contact with a lot of eligible people while of the non-Hispanic respondents, only 29% agreed. Still, more than half of Hispanics and two-thirds of non-Hispanics say the availability of potential spouses has been low for them.

These findings suggest two implications. First, if pools of potential mates are indeed shallow, then people might need to learn ways to broaden their search to find more potential mates. Some scholars believe that the ways of meeting potentially good marriage partners have diminished over the last few decades and that people may need help to develop better strategies for finding good partners.

On the other hand, Texans' expectations for potential mates could be unrealistic? Other scholars have suggested that the standards for marriage and mates have risen considerably over the past few generations. These issues are addressed in more depth in the special report entitled, "The Search for Acceptable Spouses in Texas" located at the end of this report.

### Come in contact with potentially good spouses



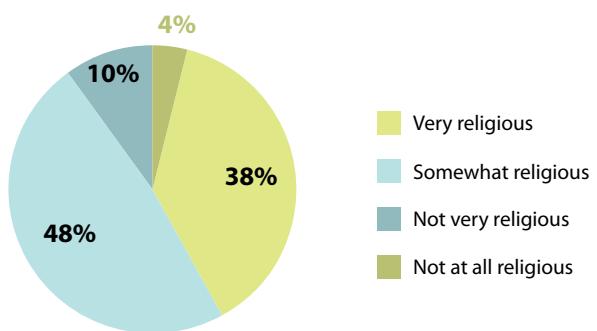
The individuals in the younger cohort (41%) reported agreeing that they "came in contact with people who would make" good spouses at almost twice the level compared to those in the older cohort (21%). The response from this age group makes some sense from a developmental perspective. Those singles in the younger age group are more likely to be actively looking for a first-time marriage partner while those in the older singles group may be less active in looking for a marriage partner after having experienced some relationship distress, including divorce, in the past. This might make the older group more cautious in their decision making.

## The role of faith in marriage

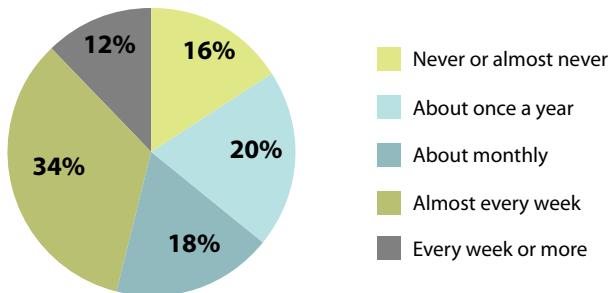
It came as no surprise that Texans are a religious group of people. Most of those surveyed indicated that they were very or somewhat religious (85%). This finding is consistent with previous reports on Texans' religious attitudes (National Fatherhood Initiative report, 2004). The religious affiliation reported the most was Catholic (33%) with Baptists representing 20%, and those belonging to other Protestant denominations representing 16%. Half of the respondents indicated that they were actively involved in their religious communities and that they "attend religious services at least every week," sometimes more.

Going to church, however, may not be the only mark of recognizing the role of religion or spirituality in Texas family life. An overwhelming majority of the sample (93%) believe their "marriage to be holy and sacred." And 90% reported "sensing God's presence in their marriage." These findings were the strongest among those who identified themselves as Hispanic. There may be an opportunity for spiritual leaders to further support the development and maintenance of healthy marriages in Texas.

**"How religious are you?" for the entire sample**



**Amount of Church Attendance for the whole sample**





# STRESS AND STRAIN IN MARRIAGE



# Stress and Strain in Marriage

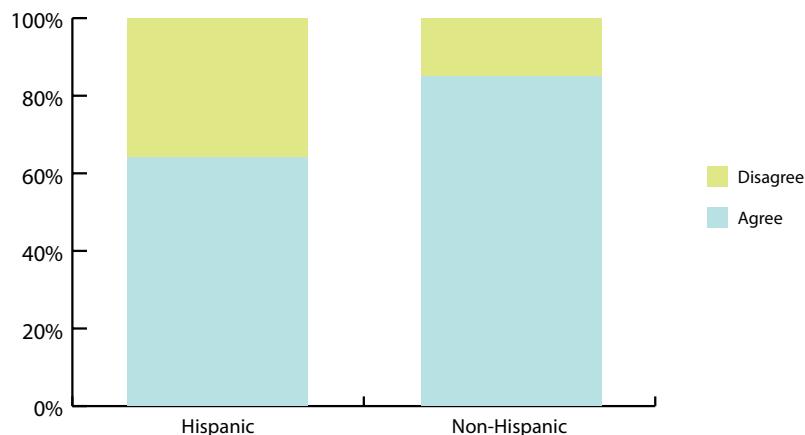
## Resolving conflict

Around 95% of the respondents indicated that when they argue with their partners they “typically work things out.” When asked if people felt “helpless in dealing with problems that come up” in their relationships 86% of the respondents disagreed. Although it was impossible to determine exactly how their arguments were “worked” out, these findings appear to be positive in regard to relationship health. But this good news may obscure a deeper challenge. There was a significant difference between the scores of women and men on this question. Women were more likely than men to report feeling “helpless in dealing with” relationship problems. This may be a reflection of women having a more relational outlook on life, being more sensitive to relationship problems, and/or being more willing to seek out help and support. The stereotype about men may be true, in this case. They are reluctant to admit they are lost and resist asking for help. Men may also be less aware of unresolved problems and thus less likely to want assistance, when they could benefit from it. In regard to reaching out to support or strengthen a committed relationship, men may need some encouragement..

## Realistic expectations

Respondents were also asked if they were “willing to accept disappointments in order to keep” their “relationship together.” Older males, as a group, were more willing to accept disappointments than other groups. While 64% of Hispanic respondents agreed with this statement 85% of the non-Hispanic respondents agreed with this. Many couples will encounter some disappointment during the course of their relationship. An unwillingness to accept disappointment may indicate a greater risk of divorce among younger individuals and individuals who identify themselves as Hispanic. Those who serve Texas families may want to consider tailoring their efforts and programs to talk about realistic expectations, disappointments, and the important role communicating effectively about dissatisfaction can play in a healthy relationship.

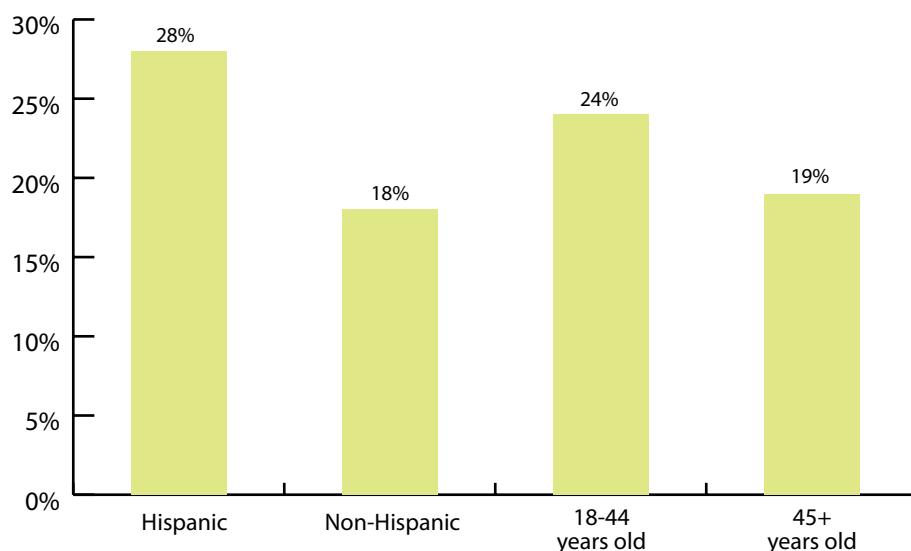
### Willing to Accept Disappointments in order to Keep Relationship Together



## Some of us want more

When respondents were asked if they “want more from their relationship” than their partner was willing to give, the results indicated differences in both the age groups and by ethnicity. For the 44 and younger group, 24% agreed with this statement while the older group reported 19% agreement. This might be a reflection that, as Texans get older and log more relationship and life experience, they seem to have more consistent relationship expectations and satisfaction than younger couples. Similar results were detected among Hispanic respondents with 28% agreeing with the statement as compared to 18% of the non-Hispanic respondents. Those who agreed with this statement might represent that portion of the population that could benefit from programs that highlight the importance of commitment as well as problem solving and communication skills.

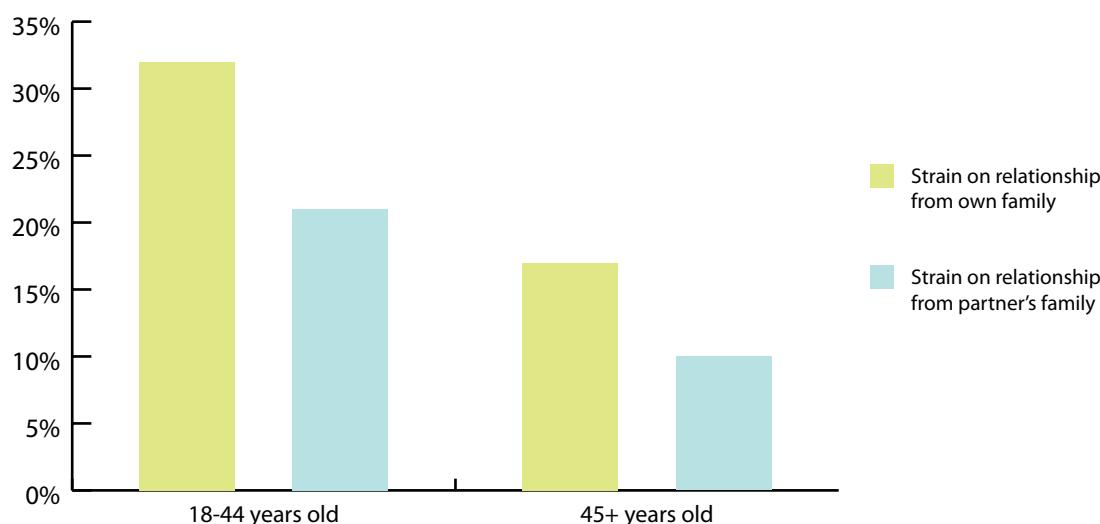
**People who report wanting more from the relationship -  
by age and ethnic group**



## You don't get to pick your in-laws

The vast majority of Texans in the survey tend to believe that the family they grew up in is “always there, ready to help when times are tough” (86%). However, a sizeable minority of the respondents acknowledged that their “family places a strain on” their partner. This was particularly evident among the younger cohort (32%) in comparison to the older group (17%). The younger group’s response also stood out when asked if “your partner’s family puts a strain on you,” with 21% agreeing while only 10% of the older group agreed with this statement. It is not surprising to see that this was reported in greater numbers among the younger group than in the older group who may have had more time to negotiate relationships with in-laws and have a greater sense of identity within their own relationship as opposed to still identifying with and having an allegiance to the family in which they grew up. It is clear that extended family members play a role in either supporting or straining a couple’s marriage. The extent to which this plays out in specific relationships may be a point of consideration for each couple.

### Strain on Relationship from Family Issues



## Under pressure

In general the younger cohort as well as those in the Hispanic group reported having too many “demands” placed on them in their relationships (32% young and 34% Hispanic). Non-Hispanic participants and those in the older group reported this experience at a much lower level (17% for both groups). These two groups may be the most vulnerable to relationship stress as they tend to hold attitudes and beliefs that could jeopardize the securing and maintenance of healthy relationships. This is an area that may benefit from additional research.

# DIVORCE EXPERIENCES AND ATTITUDES



# **Divorce Experiences and Attitudes**

## **Divorce is a serious problem**

Like their counterparts across the United States, most Texans believe that divorce is a serious problem, with 89% agreeing that marriage should be a “lifelong commitment” and should only be broken under “extreme circumstances.” When asked if most divorces “happen for a good reason,” 63% disagreed. Of the respondents who experienced their own divorce, 23% indicated a lack of commitment as the major reason why their marriage did not last. This is discussed more fully in the “Reasons for divorce” section of this report.

## **Six of one, half dozen of the other?**

When asked if a bad marriage is worse than a divorce Texans were split right down the middle with 50% agreeing and 50% disagreeing. It appears that no one wants to be in a bad marriage, and no one really wants to go through a divorce either. Recent statewide surveys in Oklahoma and Utah suggest that a substantial number of divorcees express regrets that they and/or their partner did not work harder to try and repair their marriage. In addition, research from the National Survey of Families and Households found that most unhappily married people who can hold on through the tough times report a few years later that they are happy. It may also be that Texans are sensitive to the potential toll that divorce takes on families and children. Unfortunately it is difficult to explain the exact origin of why the sample responded the way they did. This might point to the need for more understanding of what divorce can and cannot do in moving people from unhealthy situations to more healthy and stable relationships in the future.

## **Breaking up is hard to do**

Both guilt and the presence of children seem to be factors that affect one’s willingness to end a relationship. Forty percent (40%) of the sample reported that they “would never leave” their partner because they “would feel guilty about letting” their partner down. This was the case regardless of the particular group under consideration. Thirty-three percent (33%) reported they “could never leave because” they “would feel as though” they “had let their children down.” This was particularly the case among the younger respondents (37%) when compared to the older cohort (29%).

## Reasons for divorce

Those Texans who had been divorced were asked a series of questions about their reasons for divorce. Specifically, these participants were asked to respond to a series of possible reasons and indicate whether it was a “major reason,” a “minor reason,” or “not a reason” why they divorced. The five most common reasons for divorce are listed below.

### Reasons for divorce (ever divorced respondents)

Rationale for Divorce	Respondent Percentages		
	A Major Reason	A Minor Reason	Not a Reason
Lack of Commitment	57	19	24
Fell Out of Love	55	12	33
Had an Affair	49	6	45
Too Much Arguing	44	17	39
Lacked Marital Skills	38	21	41
Lost Sexual Interest	33	15	52
Lack of Equality	32	18	50
Unrealistic Expectations	30	22	48
Problem with Drugs/Alcohol	27	6	67
Domestic Violence	24	8	68
Conflict with Family	17	14	69
Could Not Hold A Job	17	10	73
Too Absorbed in Job	14	11	75
Serious Financial Problems	13	17	70
Conflict About Roles	10	17	73

The most common reasons the group of Texans gave for divorce seem to be a departure from what has been listed in much of the divorce literature as main causes for divorce. These reasons often include “conflict about marital roles,” “too absorbed in work,” “financial problems,” and “job instability.”

By contrast those reasons listed most often on the chart above seem primarily to be rooted in issues of commitment and relationship skills. Commitment is largely considered to be one’s intention of making a relationship a long term priority. From the questionnaire it is unclear whether respondents felt that it was they or their partner who lacked the “commitment” to make the relationship successful. However, given the list above and numbers reported earlier in this report regarding how people in this survey value marriage and the importance they place on healthy marriage, it seems as though Texans may be interested in finding ways to increase commitment in their relationships and obtaining the needed skills to make their marriages and relationships successful.

Worthy of special attention is the fact that “lack of commitment by one or both spouses to make the marriage work” was the major reason for divorce chosen most frequently by the women and second most frequently by the men—a finding consistent with those from other state marriage surveys and at least one national survey. The importance of this finding is that it is inconsistent with the often repeated claim that couples rarely divorce until they have done their best to make their marriage work. It is perhaps not surprising that many of the ever-divorced respondents claimed that their ex-spouses were not sufficiently committed to the marriage, but 34 % of the respondents who chose this major reason for their divorce (20 % of the ever-divorced respondents) admitted that their own lack of commitment was a major reason for the divorce.

There were also some significant differences between men and women when it came to “having an affair” as a reason for their divorce. Men were less likely to report that an affair was a major reason for their divorce, but more likely than women (16% of the men compared to 4% of the women) to admit that it was their own affair that caused the divorce. There were also gender differences when it came to the topic of “being too absorbed in job.” Men generally indicated this as a reason for divorce more than women (22% compared to 10% for women). They were also more willing to acknowledge that it was their own “absorption” in work that caused the divorce with 71% of the men claiming fault in this area compared to 27% of the women.

Gender differences continued in the area of interpersonal or domestic violence. This is addressed in the next section.

## **Domestic violence as a factor in divorce**

Violence is unacceptable in any family relationship. Efforts to strengthen relationships must reinforce the idea that violence has no place in marriage or between adults and children. Because of this it is important to understand the role respondents thought violence played in their divorces.

The results of previous research suggest that when persons who have ever been divorced are asked to give major reasons for their divorces, a substantial percentage of the women indicate violence while only a very small proportion of men do. For instance, the percentages from the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative Baseline Survey mentioned earlier are 44% and 7%, respectively, for women and men, and from the National Fatherhood Initiative National Marriage Survey they are 42% and 9%. These findings are dramatic and disturbing, but research suggests that couples who are married are less likely to report a violent relationship than are those who are not married.

Clearly the results of the survey indicate that men and women tend to have different views of any violence that has occurred in their marriages. They also indicate a level of interpersonal violence that may be of concern to persons interested in promoting healthy marriages.

This survey used a longer checklist of reasons for divorce than earlier surveys used and allowed the ever-divorced respondents to indicate whether each listed reason was a major reason, a minor reason, or not a reason for their divorce. The responses to the domestic violence portion of the reasons for divorce question are given for men and women below.

**Responses (In Percent) of Ever-Divorced Respondents to a Question about Whether Violence or Physical Aggression Was a Reason for Their Divorce (First Divorce if Divorced More than Once)**

	Men	Women
Major reason	6	32
Minor reason	4	9
Not a reason	90	59
Total	100	100

The findings shown are consistent with those from other surveys. Violence or physical aggression as a major reason for divorce was less frequently given in the survey than on the earlier surveys by both men and women, but probably only because respondents had a choice between “a minor reason” and “a major reason.” Violence as a reason was chosen by over four times as many women as men on all of the surveys.

The survey also asked each respondent who chose the violence or physical aggressions reason whether it was they, their spouse, or both they and their spouse who engaged in the violence. Around 2% of the ever-divorced males admitted that their violence or physical aggression was a reason for their divorce, while 40% of the females said that their ex-husbands' violence or physical aggression was a reason for their divorce (the latter being an amazing 25 times greater than the former). It is clear that ex-husbands and ex-wives tend to view any violence that occurred in their terminated marriages very differently.

The findings reported here reinforce the principle that family advocates, marriage and relationship educators, and policymakers must continue to be sensitive to the reality of intimate partner violence; far too many women have just cause to report violence in their marriages.



# COHABITING EXPERIENCES AND ATTITUDES



## Cohabiting Experiences and Attitudes

Given the low number of individuals in the survey who reported being in cohabiting relationships it is impossible to make any inferences based upon age or ethnic group for this part of the report. Further, the authors recommend caution in reading this section of the document. While statistics for the current sample are reported here, they are likely not entirely representative of what is happening in the state of Texas and there is some evidence that cohabitation means one thing to a younger cohort while it means a very different thing to those in an older cohort. For the sample, of the people who reported being married, 37% also reported cohabiting with their partners prior to marriage. National estimates of people who cohabited at some time in their life prior to marriage come in around 40% (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). Texans seem to be similar to the national average in this respect.

### Living together

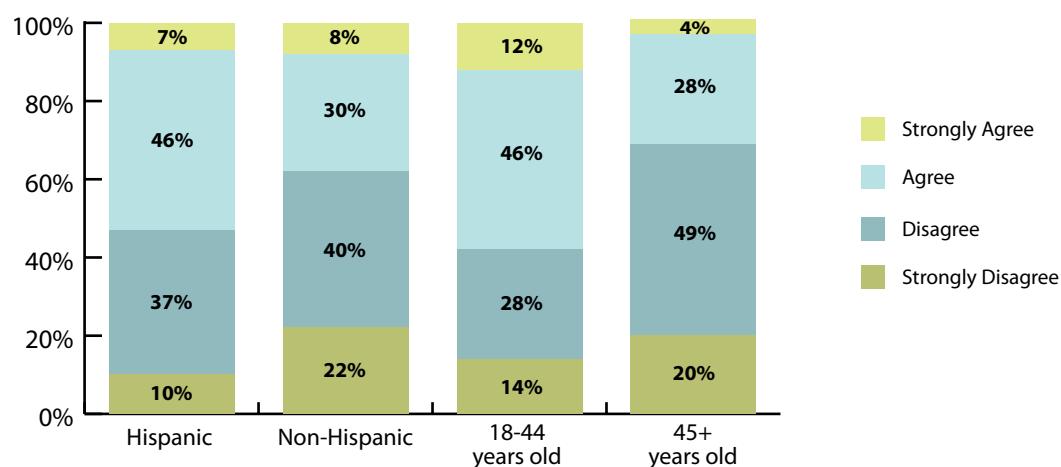
According to the National Marriage Project cohabiting is becoming a more popular relationship configuration in the United States. Their research indicates a sharp increase in the number of cohabiting couples in the past few years. This includes couples with children, which is the most dramatic ten-year family change documented by the 2000 census. Roughly 8.2% of the US population is in cohabiting relationships as of 2001 (US Census). However, this sample only had 116 people (4.6%) who reported “currently living together” without being married.

In some ways there were not many differences between the married sample and the cohabiting sample. For example, both groups indicated that they believe their current relationship to be healthy (around 90% for both groups). Neither group overwhelmingly reported feeling as though they were “trapped in this relationship” (around 19% for both groups). Both groups had a sizeable number of individuals report that it “would be hard to imagine finding a better partner” than the one they were already with (69% for the cohabiting group and 65% for the married group). Both groups reported that having a partner with a “good education” (81% for cohabitators and 84% for married) and “a good paying job” (81% cohabitators and 87% married) is important.

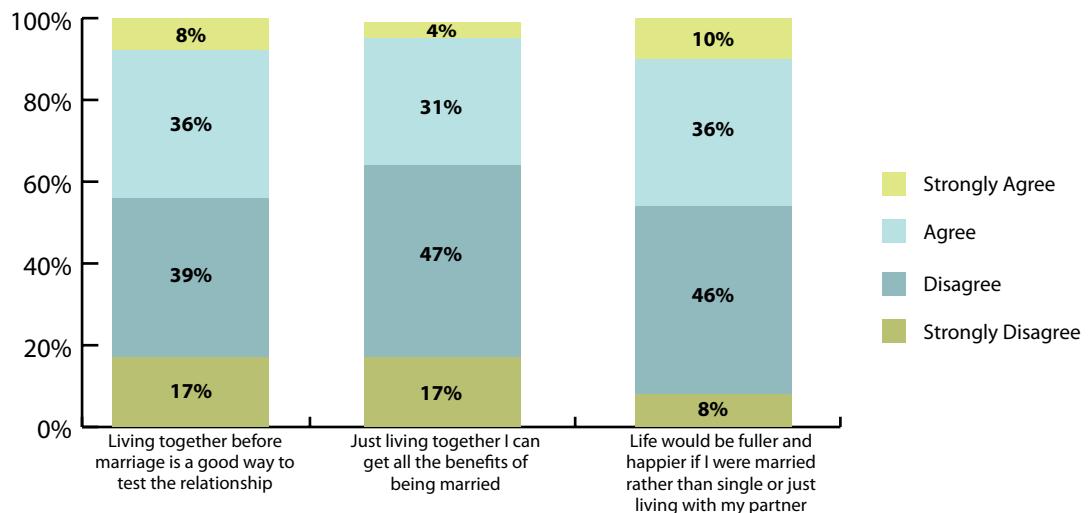
## This is a test...This is only a test

Much like the neighbors to the north in Oklahoma, a sizeable number of Texans believe that “living together before marriage is a good way to test the relationship” (42% compared to 38% in Oklahoma). However, Texans are less enamored with cohabitation than Americans in general—60% of whom believe living together before marriage is a good way to test a relationship, according to a national survey. For the sample, smaller numbers of non-Hispanic respondents and those 45 years and older (38% and 32% respectively) believe that it is a good idea to live together prior to marriage. Hispanics and those in the younger cohort reported that cohabitation prior to marriage was a good idea (53% and 58% respectively) at a much higher rate than others. Further analysis revealed that men are more inclined to believe that living together is a good idea when compared to the women in the sample. However, of the unmarried Texans surveyed only 34% agreed with the statement that “just living with my partner, I can get all the benefits of being married.” Additionally, the group was fairly evenly split with 48% agreeing that their lives “would be fuller and happier if” they were “married rather than staying single or just living with” their partner.

### Cohabitation before marriage is good way to test relationship by age group & ethnicity



## Attitudes about living together vs. being married for the whole sample



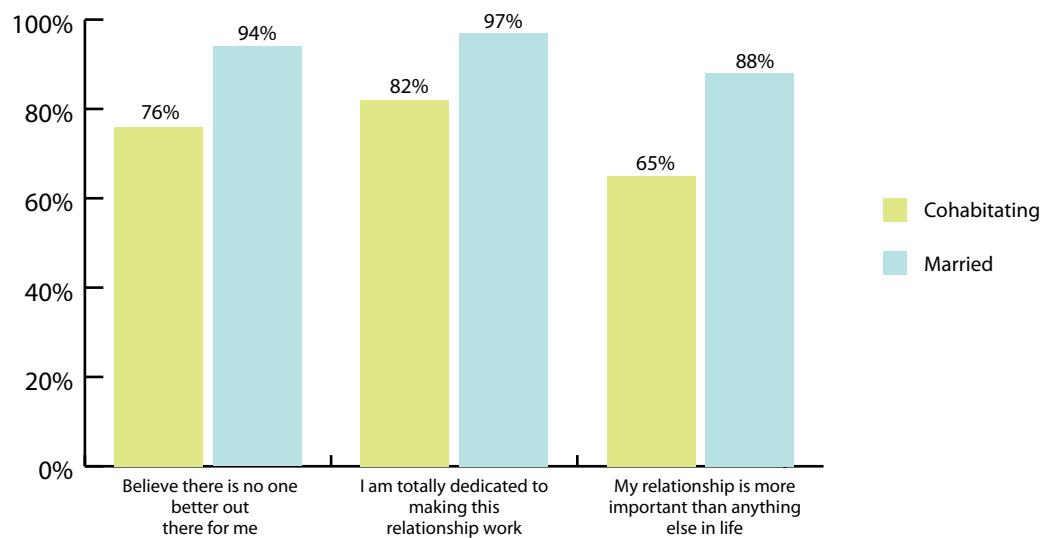
Of the people in the sample who were cohabiting (a total of 116 people), 36% reported being engaged to be married and 19% indicated that they are “planning on getting married but are not engaged.” As expected, 80% of this group believes that “living together before marriage is a good way to test the relationship,” while only 37% of those who are not cohabiting believe this. Given the results from several large, national studies, that those who live together prior to marriage tend to have higher divorce rates (especially those who have children prior to cohabiting relationships, or who have had multiple cohabiting relationships), many Texans may benefit from knowing that, contrary to popular thought, living together does not always and in all cases provide the best proving grounds for a long lasting marriage.

## Dedicated to making it work, but just keeping my options open

While an overwhelming majority (94%) of the married sample indicated that they did not believe there was someone better “out there” for them, the cohabiting respondents answered the same question with less conviction (76%), probably indicating a greater degree of uncertainty in the future viability of their relationship. At the same time however, 82% of the cohabiting individuals and 97% of the married individuals in the sample agreed with the statement, “I am totally dedicated to doing what it takes to make this relationship work.” Similarly, 65% of cohabitators indicated that their relationship is more important than anything else in life. While this figure is greater for married individuals (88%), two-out-of-three cohabitators say that the relationship is their highest priority. Both groups, married and cohabiting, reported that they are willing to accept disappointments to keep the relationship together (79% and 77% respectively).

On the other side of this equation, 12% of the cohabitators indicated that they were “about ready to give up on the relationship;” this compares to only 5% of the married individuals. While more cohabitators said they will “likely leave” their current relationship, still less than one-out-of-five cohabitators (17%) agreed with this statement. While marriage, compared to cohabiting, seems to bring with it an increased resolve to stay with or maintain the relationship, most cohabiting Texans (in the study) show high levels of commitment to their current relationship. Whether married or cohabiting, Texans report that they are willing to go to great lengths to make their relationships work.

### Cohabiting and Married people's attitudes toward relationship dedication



### We're not anti-marriage, we're just being cautious.

The cohabiting Texans in the sample are not unlike the rest of the participants. They also believe that having a happy marriage is one of the most important things in life (86%) and that once a decision to marry is made that it should only be broken “under extreme circumstances” (80%). So clearly, many cohabiting Texans are not anti-commitment or anti-marriage, they are just pro-caution. Unfortunately, and in some situations, the research suggests that their caution may have just the opposite effect, putting them at greater risk for eventual divorce if they choose to marry.



# CHILDREN AND OUR RELATIONSHIPS



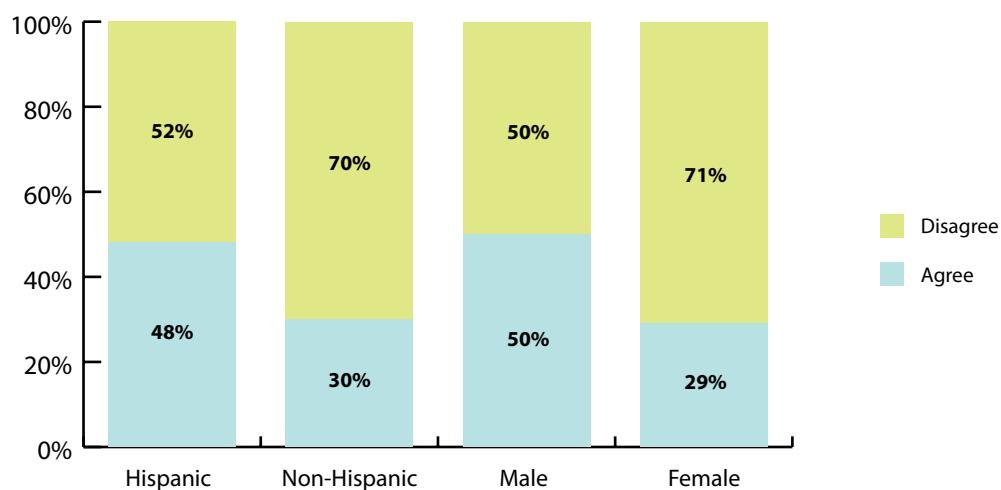
## Children and Our Relationships

### In it for the kids (los niños son muy importantes)

A major, if not the major, reason for concern about healthy marriage grows out of its effects on children, and there is widespread agreement among family experts that, all else being equal, the optimal situation for child and adolescent development and well being is to grow up with both biological or adoptive parents who have a stable marriage. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statement, “Children are the glue of marriage.” Interestingly enough, men were more likely to agree with this statement than were women. Additionally, those in the Hispanic group were more likely to agree with this statement than those in the non-Hispanic group (48% compared to 30%). This might mean that Hispanics in the State of Texas are more likely to see children as a viable reason to stay married.

That does not mean however, that divorce may not be an option. When asked if “a person in a very bad marriage should divorce quickly, particularly if children are involved” 54% of Hispanics agreed with this statement while 48 % of the non-Hispanic sample agreed. There were no differences between the younger and older groups on this question. Additional analysis indicated that it was particularly Hispanic women who were more likely to agree with this statement.

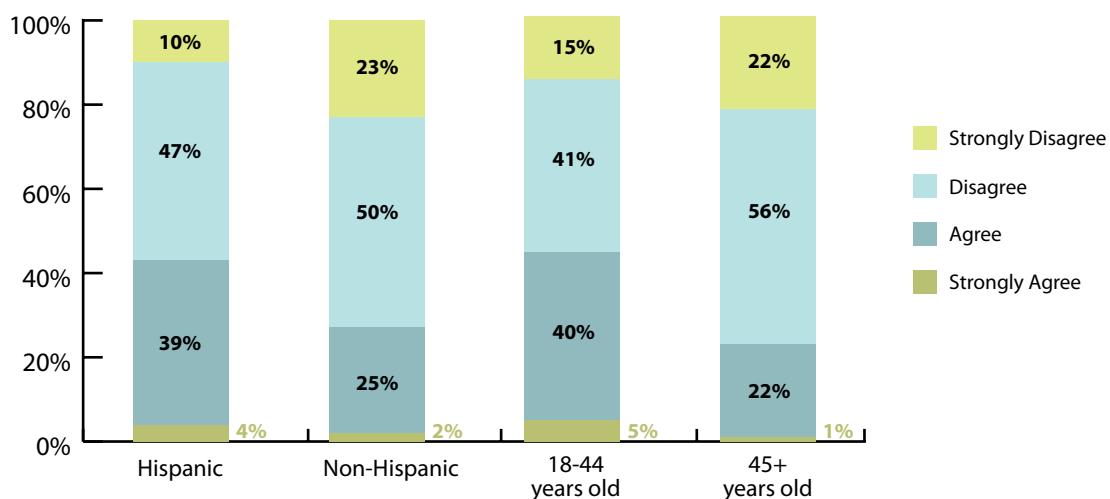
**“Children are the glue of marriage”  
by age group and ethnic group**



## **“I heard they had to get married”**

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the following statement, “A man and a woman who are going to have a child together should get married to each other.” Fifty-seven percent (57%) of Hispanic respondents and 56% of those in the 18 – 44 age group agreed with the statement, but there was higher agreement for non-Hispanic respondents (73%) and those in the 45 years and older group (78%). Although over half of the Hispanic and younger group respondents agreed with the statement, there seems to be less adherence to the “If we’re going to have a child we need to get married” attitude among them compared to the non-Hispanic and older groups. Of the married people surveyed 90% reported that they were married prior to having their first child.

### **People who are having children together should be married- by age group and ethnicity**



The declining support for the notion that two people ought to be married if they have a child together is undoubtedly one of the most significant changes in family attitudes over the last few decades. Opinion polls indicate that the vast majority of Americans still support the ideal of giving children a stable, married, two-parent family. But more and more, Texans (and all Americans) are facing the struggle between the ideal and the reality of conceiving a child outside of marriage. Research from the National Center for Health Statistics points out that having a child together before marriage is a risk for being able to sustain a marriage, if they choose to marry. And in many of these situations, the quality of the relationship and the prospects of the individuals involved are not good indicators for the success of the relationship, whether or not they choose to marry. For others, prospects might be better than they suppose. But perhaps the pessimism about the number of good marriages out there described earlier in this report influences unmarried parents’ thinking about whether to marry. For many, the worst possible scenario is not the absence of a two-parent, married family but rather a failed marriage.

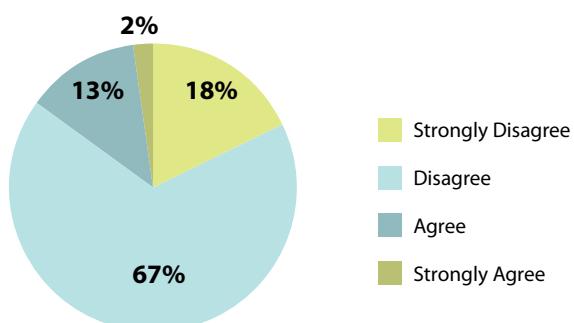
The fact remains, however, that children born in these situations are at significantly greater risk throughout their childhoods for a whole set of negative outcomes compared to children who grow up in married, two-parent families. It may be that one of the most important things that can be done in the State of Texas is to support and enhance educational efforts to encourage youth and young adults to build a healthy marriage before becoming parents.

## **Children change everything**

Existing research is clear that having children changes a person's world. Most people will go to great lengths to make sure they are giving their children the things they need to develop appropriately. Respondents to the survey overwhelmingly believe that "parents should be willing to sacrifice to make sure their children have a better life" (92% overall). However, despite the love for the children and the willingness to do anything for them, they can also be a source of stress. Researchers were particularly interested in knowing if the stress of supporting one's children impacts relationships.

Respondents were asked how much they agreed with the statement, "My children are often a source of friction and stress in my marriage/relationship." A large majority of the sample disagreed with this statement (85%). And there were no differences among the different groups analyzed on this variable. Respondents were also asked if the cost of children "puts a major strain on [your] household budget." To this, the majority of respondents indicated disagreement as well (63%). However, there was a sizable minority of the sample (37%) that did indicate that the price tag associated with having children can be a strain. It seems as though Texans who (as reported earlier) believe they should make sacrifices for their children generally do not feel as though children are too much of a burden.

### **Children as a source of friction and stress for the whole sample**



# MARRIAGE AND RELATIONSHIP EDUCATION

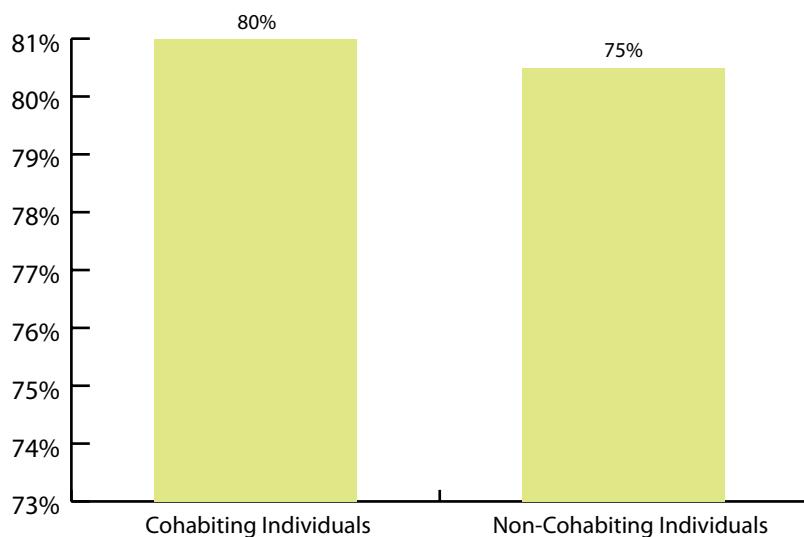


# Marriage and Relationship Education

## Ready and willing

There is some promising news regarding those who are in what the authors of this report consider to be an “at risk” population. “At risk” in this instance specifically means at risk of divorce once marriage has taken place. Of those who reported being in cohabiting relationships (a high divorce risk group), 80% indicated that they may be “willing to participate in relationship education classes designed to strengthen” their “relationship and prevent problems from starting” compared to 75% for the rest of the sample. The good news is that those people in this higher-risk category are slightly more willing than the married people to consider attending educational classes aimed at strengthening their relationship. Traditionally, relationship education has been targeted to those couples that are formally engaged (pre-marital and relationship education) or married (marital enrichment), but this seems to be changing as more and more programs are becoming available for wider selection of audiences. Cohabiting couples may value testing the future viability of their relationship by living together, but apparently they are also interested in “classroom learning,” not just “on the job training.”

**Willing to attend Marital and Relationship Education Classes  
by Cohabiting status**



Of course, it is noteworthy, that marketing research has shown that the proportion of survey respondents who say that they are willing to do something is always greater than the proportion that will actually follow through and do so. The discrepancy will vary depending on the nature of the activity. One might assume that more approachable and

inviting educational programs may achieve greater turnout than those that, from the outset, seem more threatening. Additional research is needed to examine what techniques or incentives may be acceptable and to which specific populations to increase participation in these programs.

Earlier, this report suggested that Texans generally are strongly committed to making their relationships succeed, suggesting a fertile field for marriage and relationship education. More direct evidence of this comes from a question in the survey that directly asked respondents about their willingness to participate in marriage and relationship education. As it turns out, those who may be at most risk for relationship problems—younger adults and Hispanics—are the most enthusiastic about this resource. Hispanics (76%) reported being more willing to participate in marriage and relationship education classes or workshops designed to strengthen their relationships and prevent problems from starting than non-Hispanics (63%). Clearly, this population deserves substantial attention. Also, 45% of younger Texans reported that they would “definitely” participate in marriage and relationship education classes, while only 26% of those age 45 and above reported such sentiments. These results seemed to hold regardless of the respondent’s race, income level, or education level. The table below summarizes the percentages with each category.

### **Willingness to participate in marriage and relationship education classes**

	<b>Definitely</b>	<b>Maybe</b>	<b>Probably Not</b>	<b>Definitely Not</b>
<b>Hispanic*</b>	42	34	14	10
<b>Non-Hispanic*</b>	31	32	21	16
<b>18-44*</b>	45	37	11	7
<b>45+*</b>	26	30	24	20

All numbers are percentages  
Significant at  $p < .01$

## **Summary**

This baseline report provides a good understanding of Texans' experiences of marriage and divorce, as well as the importance they place on family life. Texans generally report being satisfied with their partners and in their relationships. They also indicate that having a happy healthy marriage is one of the most important things in life. Children play an important role in Texans' decision making about getting into and out of marriage. In some instances there were clear differences between the younger and older respondents as well as between the Hispanic group and the other participants in the survey. Perhaps the most important finding is that Texans overwhelmingly value marriage and say that they are willing to go to great lengths to make their relationships healthy.

This survey was never intended to be the final authority on family life in the state. It does, however, provide a good start in understanding the needs of Texas families in relation to marriage, divorce, and other topics that touch family life. Throughout the document the results specifically indicate that younger Texans and those who belong to the Hispanic cohort reported attitudes and behaviors that may put them in jeopardy of experiencing marital instability. The researchers believe that, based on the findings presented herein, these two groups are more vulnerable to the stresses and strains inherent to family life when compared to other groups in the survey. Fortunately, these two groups indicated a greater interest and willingness to attend marital and relationship education than other groups in the sample. This was a promising finding and has implications for all those who work with Texas families.

# SPECIAL REPORT #1

## Culture and Marriage:

Strengths and  
Weaknesses of  
More Traditional  
Versus Assimilated  
Hispanics in the  
Texas survey



# Special Report #1

## Culture and Marriage: Strengths and Weaknesses of More Traditional Versus Assimilated Hispanics in the Texas survey

With a large group of Hispanic respondents to the survey, researchers were able to look deeper into patterns of acculturation and assimilation with the majority population in relation to attitudes about marriage and relationships. The discussion below highlights some of the more interesting findings.

People can hold on to their culture (traditional), incorporate some aspects of a new culture and hold on to some traditional cultural aspects (accommodation) or move into the new culture and incorporate all of its essence (assimilation). One way to know the level of acculturation of a group of people is to look at their language preference and proficiency and their values and their attitudes. Participants were asked about their spoken language preferences (e.g., ranging from Spanish only, to English only) with friends, family and others within the total Hispanic sample and found some statistically significant results.

### Traditional Hispanic Group

The correlations of this language scale (level of acculturation) show that those who speak only Spanish came to the United States more recently, are less educated; they follow traditional Mexican norms and have a lower socio-economic status, which puts a higher general stress on them and their marriages. Given that many of the recent migrants came from rural areas in Mexico and work for minimum wages in the United States; this group combines traditional Hispanic culture with characteristics of a culture of poverty. In fact, this more “traditional” portion of the sample has more difficulty paying bills, runs out of money at the end of the month; has too many demands at home, they have partners whose health stresses them, their extended family stresses their marriage partner, which makes them feel helpless, even trapped, and thus ready to give up on their relationship.

The stress of acculturation and poverty is compounded for traditional Hispanic respondents who indicated they have a series of personal challenges which affect their ability to have a healthy marriage: They worry about their self worth and thus think others do not love them, they especially wonder if their partner loves them. They may have problems controlling their anger and even indicate that they get jealous easily. They tend to want more than their partner is willing to give, and when there are problems they tend to blame others, in fact they find fault with others. They tend to think more about the bad times they have and they often feel helpless dealing with problems in their relationships.

An extra burden is placed on the relationship by adhering to traditional gender roles. The women in this group indicate that they spend more time doing household related activities; they feel the division of labor is not fair and that their partner controls access to money. On top of that, they believe it that it is harder for men to be faithful within the relationship. The situation is made worse by the fact that the women tend to have significantly more education and have higher employment rates. On the other hand, males cannot provide as they feel they need to and thus, feel a lack of respect in the family relationship which is central to their self-definition and esteem.

## **Traditional Hispanic Group's Views on Marriage and Family Life**

Given the circumstances of the general climate in which traditional relationships are developed, it comes as no surprise that this group indicates that they know few healthy marriages and believes divorce happens for a good reason. For those in this more traditional population who have separated, the reasons given for the separation include: that there was too much arguing, because they lost sexual interest or due to the presence of physical aggression.

On the constructive side, the strengths for the maintenance of marriage in the Hispanic community are derived in part from their capability to endure and be resilient to difficult times which they express by agreeing with being more willing to accept disappointments. There is also a high commitment to the family and community staying together, exemplified in the fact that they are totally dedicated to do what it takes to stay together, and they believe that one must put the children above individual needs and wants. In fact, the more children one has, the more you should stay together, men will sacrifice their own well-being, and no one should leave the family even if they want to leave. And even if they do split up, they think it is hard to imagine finding a better partner. On the other hand, the emphasis placed on good family interactions makes them believe that it is good to seek advice from close relatives while they develop positive qualities that predisposes them to be more giving partners, friends, and neighbors. This may be why they are more willing to place the needs of others above their own, perceive themselves as very kind, cannot say no when asked for help, are very affectionate with each other, and describe themselves as having a good heart. Part of this very collectivistic orientation is that these traditional Hispanics are committed deeply to more than just their marriages. They also attend religious services more often and they tell us that they rarely feel lonely or blue.

## **Assimilated Hispanic Group**

For the Hispanic group which has assimilated into American mainstream culture, those who speak mostly English, the acculturation process is very clear. They enjoy American entertainment, fully participate in mainstream Anglo traditions and they believe in Anglo values. However, they are also of a different socio-economic status. Their education, their partners' and their fathers' education is higher than that for the traditional Hispanics. They are currently employed and have a higher family income.

### **Assimilated Hispanic Group's Views on Marriage and Family Life**

The basic weakness for the assimilated Hispanic marriage is their individualistic look on life. They believe that marriage should be about high expectations and feeling good, and when they compare the ideal with reality they often wonder if they love their partner as much as they should and if they should therefore even be committed to the relationship. There is also less of a social norm to live up to, in reality, more of their parents divorced. The basic problem seems to be sinking into habit, which can bring them to believe that the relationship brings out the worst in them. In fact, these are the reasons the divorced group gives for their splitting up. They explain that they divorced because it was a poor match from the beginning or because they did not know each other well enough.

On the positive side, assimilated Hispanics have developed individual strengths and nurtured skill sets that are viewed as necessary (according to relationship research) to build satisfactory relationships. They are good at solving problems on their own (positive agency) and they feel comfortable telling their partner what they need (assertive communication) in the relationship. They can be counted on to follow through and can be trusted to be faithful (trustworthy), they succeed because of individual abilities (internal locus of control); and they typically have good overall health (less stress on relationship). They tend to be sensitive and warm in relation to others and are aware of others' feelings (empathy). Interestingly enough, they are willing to polish or enhance these qualities by indicating they are willing to participate in marriage enhancement classes. Finally, congruent with a more individualistic perspective of life, they have more gender-equal relationships. Both husbands and wives tend to work outside the home for income and they tend to share household duties. They also tend to have equal say within the relationship. As far as family structure goes, they show some traditional Hispanic strengths; their parents and family are willing to help both financially and with the children.

## **Summary**

It is clear to us that simply identifying an individual as belonging to a specific cultural group is only a small part of understanding one's identity. Much more significant information is needed to more fully understand how a person thinks and feels about a variety of topics that so dramatically affect his or her life. Those persons interested in serving Hispanic populations in Texas and in other places in the country may want to consider the level of acculturation an individual or family has achieved and how much that family identifies with the majority culture in a given area.

It is also important to recognize economic factors that impinge on family life in the United States. Some of the people in the survey who identified themselves as Hispanic were also deeply embedded in a culture of poverty. This culture is relentless. At best, it marginalizes those it affects in relation to the rest of society. At worst, it makes them invisible and eliminates hope in the future. Efforts to support healthy marriage and family life are sorely needed in these homes because healthy marriage and family relationships can act as a buffer to and a protection against the negative forces accompanying family life in a culture of poverty.

*Written by: Rolando Diaz-Loving, Ph.D.*

National University of Mexico & Public Strategies Inc.

Dr. Diaz-Loving is a Professor of Psychology and Head of the Psychosocial Research Unit at the National University of Mexico. He is one of the most accomplished social psychologists in Latin America. His primary research areas are couple relations, culture, and personality. Additionally, Dr. Diaz-Loving is the author of many research articles and chapters in social psychology, personality, and ethnopsychology.



# SPECIAL REPORT #2

## The Search for Acceptable Spouses in Texas



# Special Report #2

## The Search for Acceptable Spouses in Texas

A large section of the survey was devoted to the standards and perceived prospects of the respondents who were “on the market” for a spouse. The questions in this section were asked of all unmarried respondents who said that they wanted to marry. One large battery of questions asked about desirable and undesirable characteristics for a spouse and another asked about the characteristics of potentially available persons in the respondents’ social world.

An important finding from this section of the survey is that most young unmarried persons surveyed said that they wanted to marry someday, the percentage being 81 for those under age 30, including 83 percent of the never-married persons in that age range. Another 8 percent (of those never-married) said that they were unsure, and these people may be likely to marry under certain circumstances. Taken together, these findings suggest that over 90% of the young unmarried Texans in the sample may be “on the market” for a marriage partner.

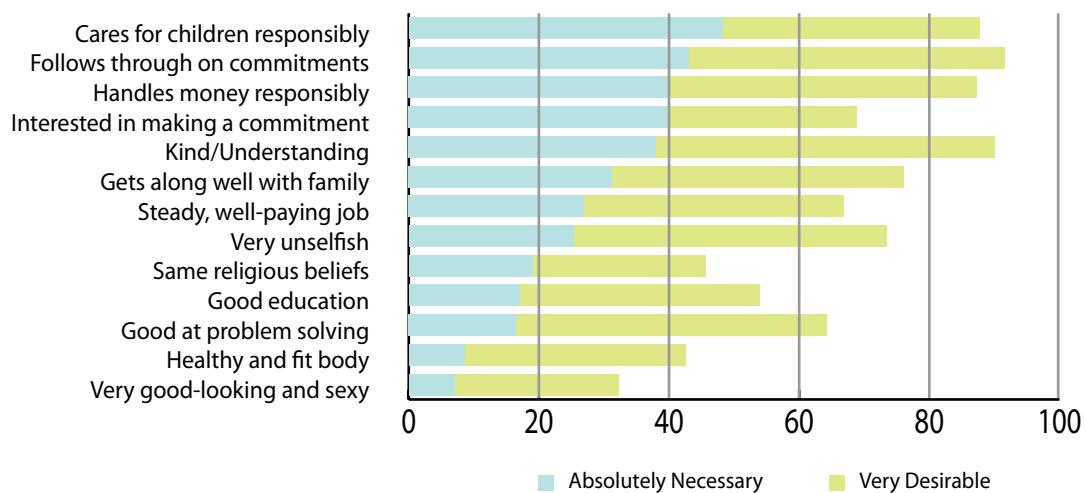
On the other hand, older unmarried persons were much less likely to aspire to marriage than younger ones. The percentage answering “yes” to the question “Would you like to get married someday” was 65 for those in their thirties, 63 for those in their forties, and 23 for those 50 and older. However, this should not be taken as an indication that as individuals age they lose the desire to marry. Rather, this trend is largely a result of the fact that older individuals are more likely than younger individuals to be divorced or widowed rather than never-married. Among unmarried individuals aged 30 and older, 74% of those who were never-married still definitively stated that they wanted to marry, compared to only 41% of those who were divorced, and 14% of those who were widowed.

### Opportunities and Barriers to Marriage

Although the vast majority of Americans – including the unmarried Texans in the sample – report that they value marriage and would like to marry someday, the last few decades have witnessed an unprecedented tendency for Americans to delay entry into marriage or to sometimes never marry at all. One explanation that has been suggested for this discrepancy between individuals’ motivations to marry and their actual marriage behavior is that many individuals – particularly those who feel there are no promising mates – may be hard-pressed to find and attract partners who can meet the high standards they hold for a marriage partner. Specifically, as the qualities that individuals consider to be *absolutely necessary* and *very desirable* in a marriage partner become more numerous, finding a fully qualified partner is likely to become more difficult.

When asked to assess the desirability of a variety of attributes that previous research has identified as important in a marriage partner, unmarried Texans who were “on the marriage market” reported that nearly all of the characteristics were highly desirable. As can be seen in Figure 1, respondents particularly valued interpersonal attributes, such as dependability and kindness, in a potential spouse. Nearly half of the participants indicated that in order for them to consider marrying a person, it would be *absolutely necessary* that the individual could be trusted to care for children responsibly and could be counted on to follow through on commitments. Although respondents generally placed less emphasis on attributes related to physical attractiveness (e.g., very good-looking and sexy) and human capital (e.g., good education), one-third to one-half of the unmarried Texans sampled still indicated that these traits were either absolutely necessary or very desirable in a marriage partner.

**Figure 1. Percentage of Unmarried Respondents Stating that Attributes are Absolutely Necessary or Very Desirable in a Marriage Partner**



**Figure 2. Availability of Desirable Attributes**

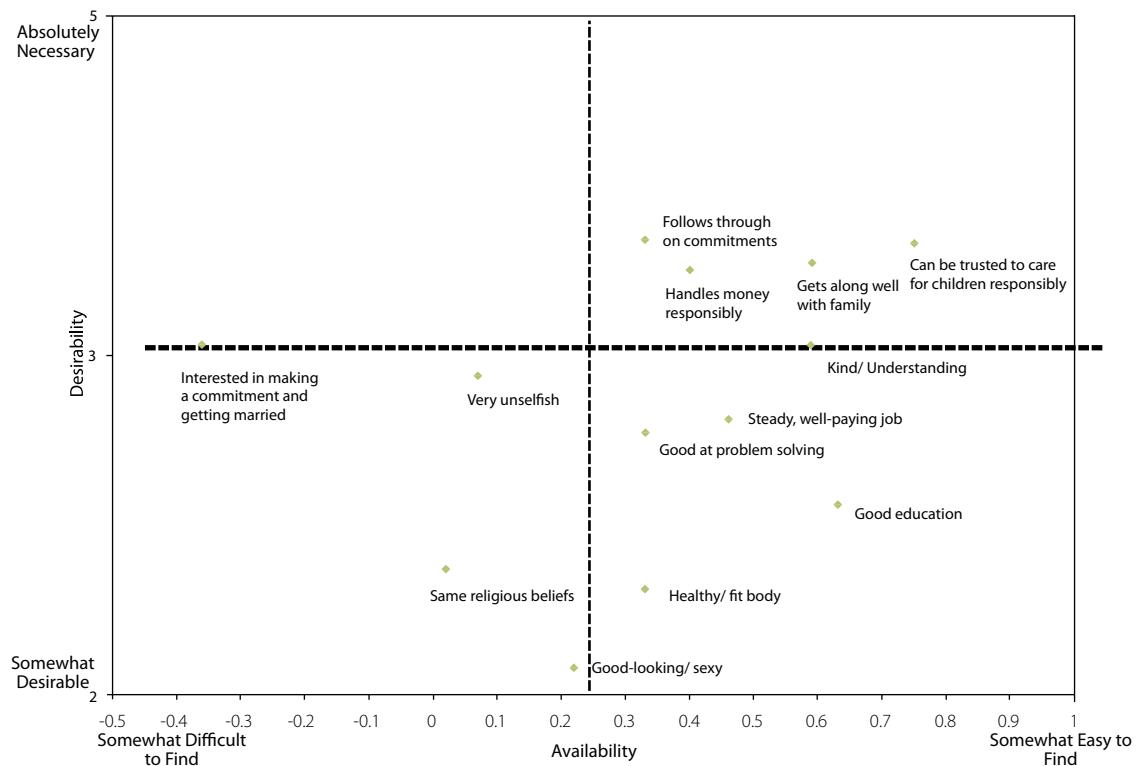
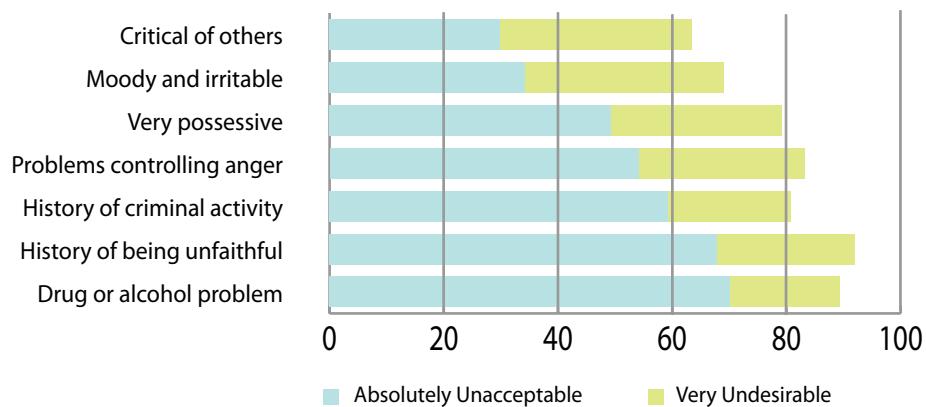


Figure 2 presents the desirability of the attributes described above in relation to respondents' perceptions that the attributes were available within their pool of available mates. Although there was substantial variation in the degree to which the desirable attributes were perceived as being easy or difficult to find in a marriage partner, nearly all of the qualities that respondents believed were most important (those which lie above the horizontal line in Figure 2) were also perceived to be at least somewhat easy to find. One exception to this trend is the attribute "interested in making a commitment and getting married" (located in the upper left quadrant of Figure 2), which respondents rated as very desirable, but somewhat difficult to find. Taken as a whole, these data suggest that among Texans who report a desire to marry, finding partners with the qualities they desire most may not be a significant impediment to marriage.

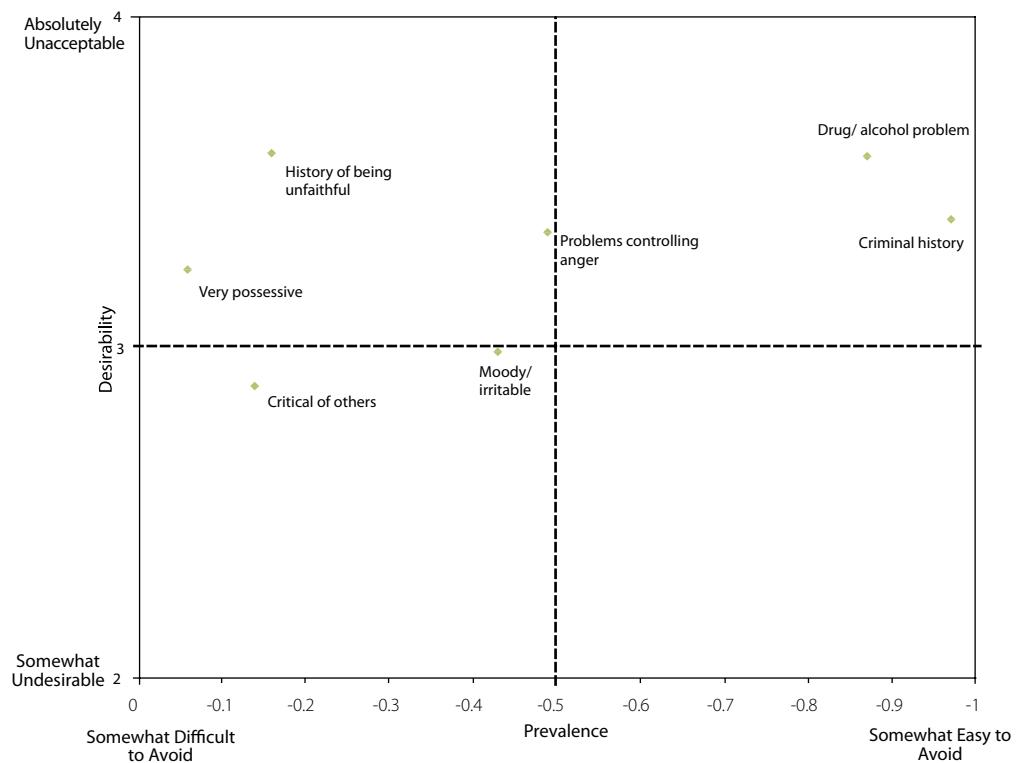
Interestingly, when respondents were asked to rate how undesirable a number of aversive qualities would be in a marriage partner, a majority of the respondents indicated that each and every characteristic would be either very undesirable or absolutely unacceptable (see Figure 3). The percentage of individuals who viewed these negative characteristics as absolute disqualifiers was particularly striking. For five of the seven attributes, at least half of the respondents said that it would be absolutely unacceptable for a potential marriage partner to possess such a characteristic, and close to three-fourths of the respondents reported that they would under no circumstance consider marrying someone who had drug or alcohol problems or had a history of being unfaithful. A visual comparison of Figures 1 and 3 suggests that individuals' standards for negative attributes may be considerably less flexible than those they hold for desirable attributes.

**Figure 3. Percentage of Unmarried Respondents Stating that Attributes are Absolutely Unacceptable or Very Undesirable in a Marriage Partner**



Similar to Figure 2, Figure 4 (shown below) depicts the undesirability of the negative attributes in relation to respondents' perceptions that these attributes were prevalent within their marriage markets. Unlike Figure 2, where most of the highly desirable attributes were also perceived as relatively available, Figure 4 indicates that respondents perceived several highly undesirable characteristics as being fairly difficult to avoid. Specifically, although nearly 70% of the participants indicated that a history of being unfaithful was absolutely unacceptable in a marriage partner, this attribute was rated as reasonably difficult to avoid. Partners who were possessive, as well as those who were very critical of others, were also viewed as difficult to steer clear of. These findings provide preliminary support for the notion that some Texans, despite their desire to marry, may be situated in social arenas where a large number of the available people possess aversive characteristics that disqualify them as potential partners.

**Figure 4. Prevalence of Undesirable Attributes**



*Written by: Ted L. Huston, Ph.D.,  
University of Texas at Austin.*

Dr. Huston is the Amy Johnson McLaughlin Centennial Professor in Home Economics in the Department of Human Development and Family Sciences at the University of Texas at Austin. He studies how and why intimate relationships change over time. During his distinguished career he has examined the role of disillusionment in divorce, the connection between problems that surface during courtship and later marital distress, the impact of parenthood on marriage, gender differences in interpersonal styles, and marital roles. In 2004, Dr. Huston was awarded the “Distinguished Career Award” for his many contributions to the scientific study of interpersonal relationships by the International Association of Relationship Researchers.

# **Appendix A**

## **Methodology Narrative: Texas Healthy Marriage Initiative- Baseline Survey Project**

Finding people to participate in research studies can be a difficult process. Researchers for this study wanted to interview as many people as possible to understand their ideas about marriage and family life. Naturally, calling all 24 million Texans would have been impossible and mailing out surveys would not have given us all the information needed to fully understand the topic. What was needed was a method to get the depth necessary for a quality report and have as many Texan's represented as possible.

Over the years, other states (e.g. Oklahoma, Florida, Kentucky, and Utah to name a few) have done similar surveys as this. Generally, those researchers chose to call participants on the phone using a technique called random digit dialing. The Texas survey used a similar method. Texans' residential phone numbers were randomly selected by an independent firm (Survey Sampling International) to ensure that every residential line had an equal probability of being selected to participate in the survey. Data collection began in the early months of 2007 and was completed in July. The data were collected by the Office of Survey Research at the University of Texas in Austin.

Using only residential phone lines to contact participants does create a few problems. In the past, most Texans would have paid for access to "land-line" phone service in their homes. Those numbers are usually public record and listed in local phone books. Survey Sampling International used phone books from Texas to generate numbers for researchers to call. Presently, a significant number of people in the United States (and Texas) choose to subscribe to cellular service and do not have access to a "land-line" in their home. Others within the state simply do not have enough money to subscribe to a "land-line." With some people in the state not having a phone and cellular phone numbers not a part of public record it was difficult to reach certain segments of Texas' population.

So, in a compromise, what has been collected are responses from a large body of Texans with the researchers understanding that they may have missed some ideal participants because there was no way of reaching them. In terms of strict research protocol, and the best possible data collection practices, it may have been better to have had a random sample of participants who represented the exact demographics of the state of Texas. However, this would have been impossible to accomplish given the changes in telephone technology and the economic conditions that exist within the state.

Only participants who were age 18 and older were interviewed. Within each household, the intended participant was the person 18 or older with the most recent birthday. Only one person per household participated in the survey. In all, 2,003 surveys were completed. These 2,003 participants represented men, women, singles, married people, cohabiting people, widows, and widowers, African Americans, Hispanics, Anglos, and a variety of

other people with diverse ethnic and cultural identities. The data set contains older people and younger people all with varying attitudes and experiences of marriage and family life. A variety of religious affiliations, and people from various household economic conditions were also represented. There is also representation from both urban and rural as well as border and interior portions of the state of Texas. All in all the data set taps into a good cross-section of the Texas demographic landscape.

It was also important to pay attention to the largest and fastest growing ethnic minority group in the state of Texas: The Hispanic population. Using similar phone techniques already described, researchers also surveyed an additional 500 persons with Spanish surnames who also identified themselves as being Hispanic or Latino/a. This tactic proved to be effective. According to the Census Bureau's 2005 American Community Survey, 32.1% of Texas' population is Hispanic. With the original 2003 participants and the additional 500 Spanish-surname group, the total number of Hispanic participants was 915 (36.6% of the total group). One of the strengths of this report is that Hispanics, as a group, are well represented. A hidden benefit to the data collected is that it may represent the single largest group of Hispanics who have been asked to weigh in on their experiences of and attitudes toward marriage, divorce, and family life.

When researchers conduct surveys it is standard practice to report how many people were contacted. One commonly used response rate for telephone surveys is the percentage of completed interviews with intended respondents (people who answered the phone). For the core sample of 2003 participants, there was a response rate of 71%. For the additional 500 Hispanic identified participants the response rate was 77%.

As for the gender of the survey participants, most were female (67%). In this report, researchers chose to conduct analyses between males and females separately where there were statistically significant findings. Throughout the report when differences are indicated the report is referring to differences that met statistical criteria indicating that the differences cannot reasonably be attributed to chance. In other words, the differences are likely describing divergent views or experiences on the topic or phenomenon in question. In places where this was not the case the reader will be made aware.

## **Survey Instrument**

This survey was designed to help us understand Texans' views about marriage and family life. Many survey questions came from other publicly funded surveys such as the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative Baseline Survey on Marriage and Divorce that was conducted in 2001, the Marriage in Utah: 2003 baseline statewide survey on marriage and divorce, and the National Fatherhood Initiative's national survey on marriage in America. Many of these questions have been used in other statewide and national surveys. The final survey contained approximately 125 questions. Professional research associates at the University of Texas' Office of Survey Research conducted the survey interviews with participants that, on average, required between 30 to 45 minutes to complete. In some extreme cases the interviews lasted just over 60 minutes.

The final survey included questions on the following topics: (1) Attitudes about marriage and gender roles; (2) Relationship history; (3) Relationship quality; (4) Factors that affect entry into marriage; (5) Information from previous marriages (including reasons for divorce); and (6) Demographic information.

## Contact Information

If you are interested in the statistical information or would like more details about how the results were generated feel free to contact the Texas Tech University Research Team, in writing, at the following address:

Steven M. Harris, Ph.D.,  
Chair – Texas Healthy Marriage Initiative Research Advisory Group  
Department of Applied and Professional Studies  
College of Human Sciences  
Box 41210  
Texas Tech University  
Lubbock, Texas  
79409-1210

# **Appendix B**

## **Reference Resources**

### Recent Baseline Surveys:

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Wolfinger, N.H. (2003). Family structure homogamy: The effects of parental divorce on partner selection and marital stability. *Social Science Research*, 32, 80-97.





