

Three Special Valentine's Day Releases

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On Love and Marriage

by Reginald W. Bibby

As of Valentine's Day, 2005, Canadians may be divided on the same-sex issue. But when it comes to love and marriage, they are pretty much of one mind.

A recent national study carried out by University of Lethbridge sociologist Reginald Bibby for the Vanier Institute of the Family has found that just about everyone wants to have a special relationship – in more than 95% of cases with someone of the opposite sex.

And contrary to rumour, people across the country have not given up on marriage. Some 8 in 10 Canadians say that it was or is important for them to marry during their lifetimes. Even in Quebec, marriage is in the works for a majority of singles. What's more, most first weddings in Canada are still carried out by ministers, priests, rabbis, and other religious figures. The inclination to opt for a civil ceremony becomes more pronounced with second weddings; but even here, religious ceremonies outnumber their civil counterparts.

Canadian couples obviously know that marriage has its "ups and downs." In their own cases, they say that the major plus is the relationship itself. The major source of tension? Finances. Still, on balance, more than 8 in 10 people say that their marriages are characterized by high levels of enjoyment and very little strain.

Few regret marrying: 95% say that, if they were to do it all again, they would marry. In addition, some 95% also think that, ideally, marriage should last a lifetime.

But, says the critic, hasn't the reality of divorce dulled such ideals? Not really. No less than 90% of people across the country say that they personally expect to stay with their current partner for life – including about 85% of those who have been married more than once. Pretty impressive endorsements of marriage.

Why marry? Primarily, Canadians say, because marriage signifies commitment. Other important reasons for many include moral values and the belief that children should have married parents. About two in three say that marriage is important to them simply because it seems like "the natural thing to do."

Table 1. Importance of Marrying by Select Variables

"How important would you say it was – or is – for you to get married in your lifetime?"

% Indicating "Very Important" or "Somewhat Important"

Nationally	80%
Atlantic	86
Prairies	85
Ontario	83
BC	80
Quebec	67

Source: Reginald Bibby, Future Families Project. Vanier Institute of the Family, 2004.

Table 2. Importance of Marrying: Quebec & Elsewhere

% Indicating "Very Important" or "Somewhat Important"

	NAT	Quebec	Rest of Canada
ALL	80%	67	83
Married	92	85	94
Widowed	85	***	82
Divorced-Sep	76	80	75
Never Married	63	52	67
Cohabiting	51	31	68
Males	82	65	87
Females	77	69	79
55+	87	85	87
35-54	75	59	80
18-34	78	61	84
<i>Service Attendance</i>			
Weekly	92	93	92
Less Weekly	75	61	80

Source: Reginald Bibby, Future Families Project. Vanier Institute of the Family, 2004.

It's true that younger adults wait longer before marrying than did their parents and grandparents; but postponing the game is quite different from cancelling it. When asked pointedly, most unmarried younger adults say they intend to marry in the future. Our national surveys of teenagers have documented the same widespread intentions.

While the vast majority of Canadians personally value marriage as it has been traditionally understood, many are also flexible when it comes to the preferences of other people. A slight majority feel that gay and lesbian couples should know the same benefits as other couples, and close to one in two feel that such couples should be allowed to marry. However, not everything goes: multiple marriage partners are disapproved of by 96% of the population – making polygamy, along with extramarital sex, one of the two near-absolute family “no-no’s” in the minds of people across the country.

During the 1970s considerable attention was given to the idea that marriage, as we have traditionally understood it, might soon become a thing of the past. Sexual liberation seemed to eliminate the necessity of marriage. There was talk of “open marriage” and “swinging” as alternatives to conventional marriage. Academics debated whether marriage was experiencing “disorganization” or simply “reorganization.”

Despite such speculation about marriage’s demise – complete with the hand wringing of many and the enthusiasm of some – the age-old institution continues to be solidly embraced by Canadians.

These are among the findings of Vanier’s national survey of 2,093 Canadians who expressed their hopes and dreams concerning relationships and family life. The findings have been released recently in a report entitled, *The Future Families Project*. The survey results are accurate within approximately 3 percentage points either way, 19 times in 20.

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