



ONE LAST LOOK  
FREDERICK DOUGLASS

# What's Love Got to do With it?

Analyzing the Attitudes of Black College Students  
on Marriage and How They Affect African  
American Marriage Rates

Elizabeth N. Johnson

McNair Summer Scholars Program

Dr. Marci Littlefield; Advisor

July 9, 2004

# Introduction

- **Marriage decline in U.S. over the last 50 years**
- **Severity of decline in African American Community**
  - In 1950 marriage rates among African Americans fell almost three times behind those of Caucasians (Besharov, 2004)
- **Why is it so?**

# Reasons for the Decline

- Government financial aid
- Family background
- “Marriageability” among Black men
- Unbalanced college population
  - Disproportionate marriage markets

??Question??

“Do the attitude, views, and perceptions that African American college students hold for marriage and family actively affect marriage rates in the Black community?”

# Methodology

- Sample= Class of 16 African American College Students
- Enrolled in Marriage and Family Summer Course (2003) at Morris College in Sumter, SC
- Survey taken before and after course was completed
- Nine Questions taken from the survey for analytical review



# List of Questions

- 1) Do you believe in roles within marriage? Please explain.**
- 2) In your opinion is there a problem with marriages in the United States? Explain.**
- 3) Is the idea of marriage outdated? Explain.**
- 4) Do you want to be married? Why or why not.**
- 5) Do you believe in cohabitation? Why or why not.**
- 6) Do you believe people should live together before getting married?**
- 7) In your opinion why do marriages fail?**
- 8) Why is there such a high divorce rate in the U.S.?**
- 9) Should couples divorce if they are not happy? Explain.**

# Results

**Question A: "In your opinion is there a problem with marriages in the United States? Explain."**

Before: 87.5%=Yes

Explanations: Wrong reasons, Not taken serious, Communication, Trust, Lost Values, Easy divorce

After: 100%=Yes

Explanations: Commitment, Not taken serious, Changing values, Easy divorce

\*How did the class come to this conclusion?

# Results

## **Question B: “Do you want to be married? Why or why not.”**

Before: 81.3%=Yes

Explanation: Life partner, To enjoy marriage, Fear of loneliness

After: 62.5%=Yes

Explanations: Life partner, To enjoy marriage, Fear of loneliness, Model after parents

\*Why don't we want to marry anymore?



# Results

**Question C: “Do you believe in cohabitation? Why or why not.”**

Before: 37.5%=Yes

Explanations: To learn about mate, Indicates unconditional love

After: 56.3%=Yes

Explanations: To learn about mate, Don't want to be married or alone,  
Short term, Learn process before marriage

\*Why did the opinions shift?

# Results

## **Question D: “Should couples divorce if they are not happy. Explain”**

Before: 43.8%=Yes

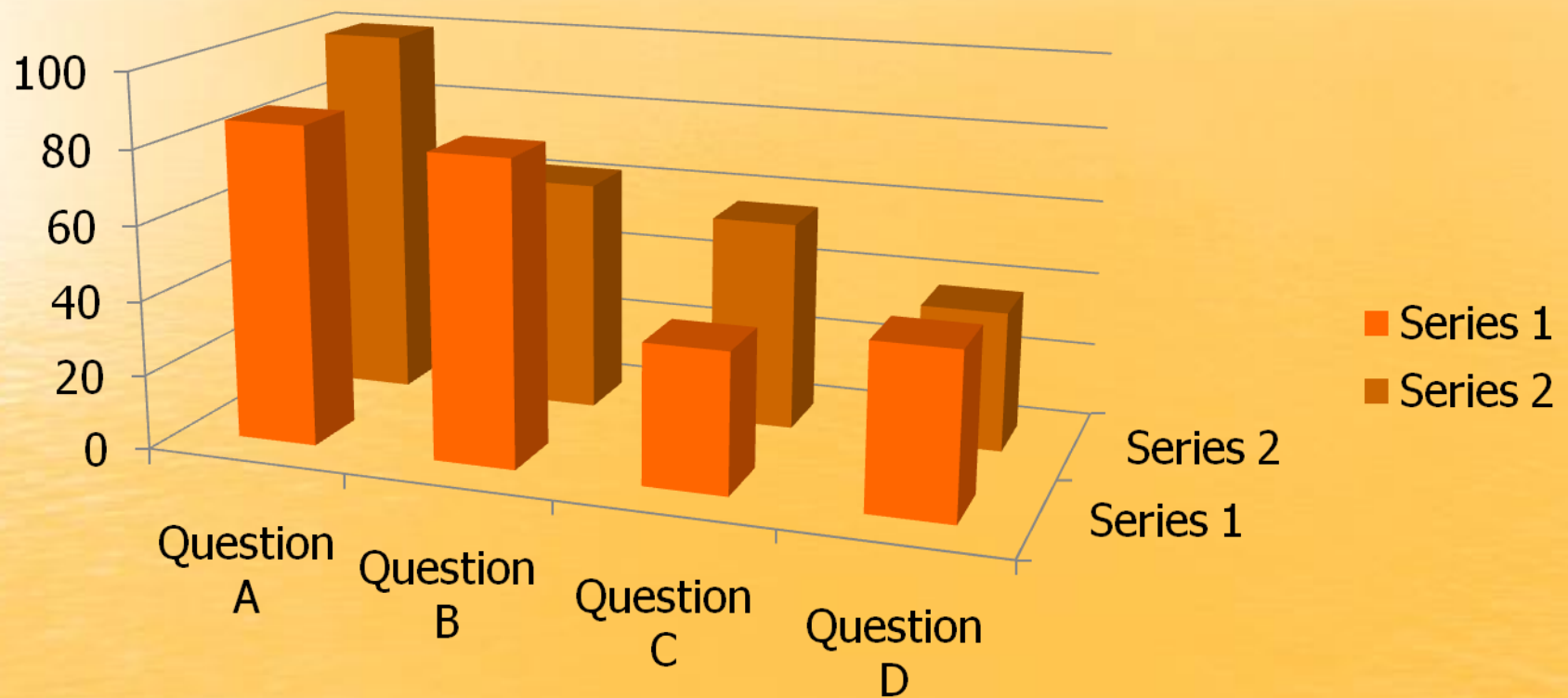
Explanations: Find happiness elsewhere, As a last resort, Alleviate emotional pain

After: 37.5%=Yes

Explanations: Find happiness elsewhere, Avoid latent mistakes, Avoid wasting time

\*56.3% of the sample said no both before and after the course and unanimously agreed that couples should work out their problems

# Review and Comparison



# Summary

- More people did not want to marry and were in favor of cohabitation after the study than before
- More than half the sample disapproved of divorce both before and after the course was completed

# What does it all mean?

- College students don't get married because the idea of cohabitation is becoming more and more acceptable
- College students are wising up to the amount of discipline and hard work it takes to maintain a successful marriage



# Other areas to investigate

- Age
- Family background (intensely)
- Ethnicity
- Region/Location

# Thank You!

