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7 Divorce Myths—Debunked!

By Marlisce Cepeda

Nobody wants to get divorced, but those statistics that get passed around make it seem like it's an almost inevitable consequence of getting married. Breathe easy, brides. Truth is less grim than fiction here. From that ominous 50% divorce rate to pre-wedding cohabitation's effect on marriage, read on as experts clarify the seven most popular misconceptions about splitting up.

Myth #1: One in two marriages ends in divorce.

Whether you and your partner have been dating since childhood or had a whirlwind romance, chances are you've been (or will be) warned about the dreaded 50% statistic. So are your chances for a happily ever after really that mediocre? Not exactly. In fact, the divorce rate has been steadily decreasing since the 1980s, according to the National Marriage Project. A more accurate divorce rate for American marriages ranges from 40% to 50%. And keep in mind: This factors in people who marry over and over again which drives up the rate. Plus, your own guy isn't likely to file for divorce. Mara Opperman, relationship etiquette expert and co-founder of I Do, Now I Don't, reveals that women initiate about two-thirds of all divorces.

Myth #2: Living together before marriage lowers the chance of divorce.

This fable's popularity may be connected to the fact that it makes sense. Doesn't shacking up before "I do" better prepare you to live with someone after the wedding? Actually, the circumstances under which you decide to move in together make all the difference, says Tina B. Tessina, PhD, author of *Money, Sex and Kids: Stop Fighting About the Three Things That Can Ruin Your Marriage*. If cohabitation occurs out of necessity (say, your partner lost his job and can't afford to live on his own), the experience doesn't benefit the relationship. If you're considering moving in with a boyfriend, "do it carefully," suggests Dr. Tessina. "It can reduce the chance of divorce as long as it's done thoughtfully."

Myth #3: Second marriages are more likely to last than first marriages.

Again, this myth seems logical. After all, you'd learn a lot from a first marriage that you can apply to a second marriage. And wouldn't you be more cautious about agreeing to

tie the knot again? Even though studies show slightly different rates, one thing's for sure—giving marriage another go definitely ups the chances of divorce. Roughly 67% to 80% of second marriages end in divorce, while third marriages crumble at an even higher rate, says Opperman. This could be because “divorce doesn't help us choose a better partner or be a better mate in our next relationship. Divorce teaches us how to divorce,” says Wendy Walsh, PhD, CNN's relationship expert and author of *The 30-Day Love Detox*. In other words, if you already know how to get divorced, the more likely you see it as an option.

Myth #4: Divorce is incredibly expensive.

It's easy to fall for this when you constantly see headlines about your favorite once-married couple engaged in a “multi-million dollar divorce.” Thankfully, those costly cases aren't the norm. **As long as the two parties involved amicably agree on who gets what and don't head to court each time to make a decision, the fees are manageable, says Silvana D. Raso, a matrimonial and family law attorney for Schepisi & McLaughlin, who have offices in Englewood Cliffs, NJ, and New York City.** Dr. Tessina adds that the entire bill can be less than \$1,000. **If the divorce isn't likely to go as smoothly, she and Raso suggest mediation as a more affordable route. “Conflict resolution is less expensive than conflict escalation,” says Raso.** Meaning: Litigation can be a long, drawn-out process, which can simultaneously heighten clashes and hike up charges, while mediation typically involves less time to reach a resolution, which translates to lower fees.

Myth #5: All ex-wives get alimony.

Alimony is money that one spouse is legally obligated to pay the other, either over time or in one lump sum, agreed upon at the time of the divorce. Its purpose is to provide either partner with the lifestyle he or she had throughout the marriage. As nice as an extra paycheck in the mail sounds, not all divorces involve alimony. **As Raso explains, alimony is granted when one spouse, wife or husband, is financially dependent on the other. But alimony may not be granted even if the woman wasn't working during the marriage—if she has the skill set and physical ability to find a job that pays as well as her ex's. A vocational expert, who considers factors like her age and educational background, determines what that salary is likely to be. Another kind of spouse who may not receive alimony: one who wasn't married that long. Raso says, “The shorter the marriage, the less likely it is that one spouse became financially dependent on the other.”**

Myth #6: The mother almost always gets custody of the children.

This could be a widely held belief because so many people think that mothers should always get custody. Legally, though, that's not the case. **Even if the mom is the child's primary caregiver throughout the marriage, both parents are “entitled to equal time with the kids,” says Raso.** The best interest of the child also could preclude a mom from gaining custody, says Dr. Tessina. If a judge doesn't deem that the mother meets the state's standards for being a fit parent, she won't be awarded primary custody. If both parents are fit to raise the child, they're typically granted shared custody.

Myth #7: The US's divorce rate is higher than every other country's.

Not true, but we're definitely up there on the list. According to the United Nations's Demographic Yearbook, the US has the sixth-highest divorce rate. Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova and the Cayman Islands take the top five spots in that order. As for the lowest rates, marriages in Sri Lanka, Brazil and Italy seem to stand the test of time, says Dr. Walsh. The longevity of relationships in those countries, though, isn't necessarily indicative of happier spouses. In some parts of the world, religion and financial stability motivate women to stay hitched.