

April 29, 2004

### Study Questions

Read: Edin: Few Good Men: Why Poor Mothers Stay Single  
Vanderstaay: Karla and the Armstrongs: Two Oral Histories of Homeless American Families

1. Edin begins her article by saying “It is no secret that the institution of marriage is in trouble. The median age at first marriage is at its highest since the United States began keeping reliable statistics: 24 for women and 26 for men.” Is a high age at first marriage a sign that the institution is in trouble? Be able to argue both in favor and against this proposition.
2. Edin speaks of the host of negative outcomes for children associated with living with a single parent. Be able to discuss other authors’ position on this matter. Be able to discuss the role of poverty.
3. What are the two most frequently asked questions about poor single mothers?
4. Be prepared to discuss Edin’s “four theories of nonmarriage,” and the empirical support (or lack thereof) backing up these theories.
5. How do the women Edin and her team interviewed feel about marriage?
6. Edin discusses how these women find marriage “unaffordable” in their present situation. Discuss.
7. Discuss Edin’s findings with respect to “respectability.”
8. Single poor mothers also don’t trust the men in their lives. Discuss.
9. How do these women talk about control?
10. How did the two cases described by Vanderstaay fit your stereotype of homeless people? How did they diverge from your image?
11. Karla said she preferred remaining on AFDC to getting a job at minimum wage—at that time \$3.35. Why? What is AFDC?
12. What should be done about the homeless in the United States?

MIT OpenCourseWare  
<http://ocw.mit.edu>

21A.230J / WGS.456J The Contemporary American Family  
Spring 2004

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <http://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.