*Sex*talk.

factoid It is believed that mariachis take their name from the French word *mariage,* since this musical style from the Mexican state of Jalisco was often performed at weddings.

Q. What is the average age of people when they get married? Has it increased or decreased?

A. The average age for first-time marriages in the U.S. is 27 for men and 25 for women. Overall, Americans are marrying later and co-habitating more (living together unmarried), as is the case in most industrialized countries worldwide, especially in Europe. Delaying marriage the longest are the Scandinavian countries of Denmark and Sweden, where men and women typically wait until age 33 and 30, respectively.

While we Americans still tend to marry earlier and wed more often than most of our European counterparts, by most estimates we seem to be catching up to them (in taking our time, that is). Of course, given the size and diversity of the U.S., geography matters. As in politics, the state of our unions has much to do with the very general but useful Red state (Republican)/Blue state (Democratic) paradigm. Blue states are characterized by lower marriage and fertility rates and higher rates of co-habitation, compared to the more traditional values often found in Red states, where Americans are more likely to marry, marry at a younger age and tend to have larger families.

So what does the future hold? If history is any indication, the definition of marriage will remain a moving target. For example, we tend to forget that marriage for the sake of love is a relatively recent phenomenon, with much of history viewing wedlock strictly in terms of pooling property, linking families and creating heirs.

Here in America at the beginning of the 21st century, we are in the midst of a dialogue on who marriage should include, what it means to be married and its relevance in civil society. How this dialogue will play out will likely have something to do with demographic shifts, secularization and the competing ideologies within America – or some other factors we cannot yet predict.

Have a question? Send it to **sextalk@email.arizona.edu**

CAMPUS HEALTH S E R V I C E

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