

**SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC DATA ON THE IMPACT OF
MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE ON CHILDREN**

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY,
AND SPACE

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE,
SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION

UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED EIGHTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

—————
MAY 13, 2004
—————

Printed for the use of the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation



U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

21-482 PDF

WASHINGTON : 2016

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Publishing Office
Internet: bookstore.gpo.gov Phone: toll free (866) 512-1800; DC area (202) 512-1800
Fax: (202) 512-2104 Mail: Stop IDCC, Washington, DC 20402-0001

SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION

ONE HUNDRED EIGHTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

JOHN McCAIN, Arizona, *Chairman*

TED STEVENS, Alaska	ERNEST F. HOLLINGS, South Carolina,
CONRAD BURNS, Montana	<i>Ranking</i>
TRENT LOTT, Mississippi	DANIEL K. INOUE, Hawaii
KAY BAILEY HUTCHISON, Texas	JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER IV, West Virginia
OLYMPIA J. SNOWE, Maine	JOHN F. KERRY, Massachusetts
SAM BROWNBACK, Kansas	JOHN B. BREAUX, Louisiana
GORDON H. SMITH, Oregon	BYRON L. DORGAN, North Dakota
PETER G. FITZGERALD, Illinois	RON WYDEN, Oregon
JOHN ENSIGN, Nevada	BARBARA BOXER, California
GEORGE ALLEN, Virginia	BILL NELSON, Florida
JOHN E. SUNUNU, New Hampshire	MARIA CANTWELL, Washington
	FRANK R. LAUTENBERG, New Jersey

JEANNE BUMPUS, *Republican Staff Director and General Counsel*

ROBERT W. CHAMBERLIN, *Republican Chief Counsel*

KEVIN D. KAYES, *Democratic Staff Director and Chief Counsel*

GREGG ELIAS, *Democratic General Counsel*

SUBCOMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND SPACE

SAM BROWNBACK, Kansas, *Chairman*

TED STEVENS, Alaska	JOHN B. BREAUX, Louisiana, <i>Ranking</i>
CONRAD BURNS, Montana	JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER IV, West Virginia
TRENT LOTT, Mississippi	JOHN F. KERRY, Massachusetts
KAY BAILEY HUTCHISON, Texas	BYRON L. DORGAN, North Dakota
JOHN ENSIGN, Nevada	RON WYDEN, Oregon
GEORGE ALLEN, Virginia	BILL NELSON, Florida
JOHN E. SUNUNU, New Hampshire	FRANK R. LAUTENBERG, New Jersey

CONTENTS

Hearing held on May 13, 2004	Page 1
Statement of Senator Brownback	1

WITNESSES

Berlin, Gordon, Executive Vice President, MDRC	16
Prepared statement	17
Campbell, Gerald L., President, The Impact Group, Inc.	81
Prepared statement	84
Fagan, Patrick F., The William H.G. FitzGerald Fellow in Family and Culture Issues, The Heritage Foundation	39
Prepared statement	41
Nock, Ph.D., Steven L., Professor of Sociology and Psychology, University of Virginia	2
Prepared statement	5
Waller, Margy, Visiting Fellow, Brookings Institute	32
Prepared statement	34
Zill, Ph.D., Nicholas, Vice President and Director, Child and Family Study Area, Westat, Inc.	10
Prepared statement	12

APPENDIX

Casey, Timothy J., Senior Staff Attorney and Lisalyn Jacobs, Vice President, Legal Momentum, prepared statement	121
Children's Defense Fund, prepared statement	97
Jacobs, Lisalyn, Vice President and Sherry Leiwant, Senior Staff Attorney, Legal Momentum, prepared statement	113
Weiser, Irene, Executive Director, Stop Family Violence, prepared statement .	104

SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC DATA ON THE IMPACT OF MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE ON CHILDREN

THURSDAY, MAY 13, 2004

U.S. SENATE,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND SPACE,
COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION,
Washington, DC.

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:30 p.m. in room SR-253, Russell Senate Office Building, Hon. Sam Brownback, Chairman of the Subcommittee, presiding.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. SAM BROWNBACK, U.S. SENATOR FROM KANSAS

Senator BROWNBACK. We will call the hearing to order. Thank you all for joining me this afternoon.

America's political system is framed around a particular understanding of human freedom: an understanding of freedom, not as mere license, but as something that must be guided and governed by a fundamental moral code, in keeping with human nature, that directs us toward both the individual good and the common good. Our great experiment with freedom as a nation has not been without its difficult moments of trial, when we have struggled with our very identity as a people as we attempt to resolve the tensions inherent in responsible exercises of freedom. The attempt at grappling the evil of slavery in the 19th century, and the civil rights struggle of the 20th century, being primary examples.

In the long view of history, it seems likely that we will look back at the social changes identified with the decline of marriage and the family, which began to make cultural inroads in the 1960s, and conclude that this vast cultural experiment has been a very harmful failure, particularly harmful for our children. That experiment, of course, continues apace today. But there are indications that America is beginning to reevaluate the experiment, to assess where it is headed and whether, as a people, we need to correct course on our view of marriage and the family. A vitally important part of this assessment is to study the social science data regarding what happens when sexuality and childbearing are taken outside of the context of marriage, and what happens when marriage declines as an institution as a result of a culture in which divorce, out-of-wedlock births, cohabitation, and single parenthood have become a social norm.

The question before us today is whether this course is desirable, and, if not, what can be done to avert it. Particularly important is what the social science evidence has to tell us about how children

have been affected by the weakening of the institution of marriage over the last 40 years. It is incumbent on those of us who deal with public policy issues to investigate this trend and its consequences for society.

We have here today two distinguished panels of social scientists and public policy experts to help us look into these questions regarding marriage and children. In the first panel, we will look at the trends with regard to marriage and divorce, and we will inquire as to the effects of those trends on the welfare of both adults and children. In the second panel, we will explore how the family and society at large have been affected by the weakening of marriage, with an eye toward whether public policy can play a role in addressing the crisis of marriage.

We'd invite our first panelists to come forward, if you would, and I'll introduce you as you come forward and take your seats.

Our first panelist is Dr. Steven Nock. Dr. Nock is Professor of Sociology and Psychology, and Director of the Marriage Matters Project, at the University of Virginia. He co-founded the University of Virginia's Center for Children, Families, and the Law. His research concentrates on the causes and consequences of change in the American family. He has investigated issues of privacy, unmarried fatherhood, cohabitation, commitment, divorce, and marriage.

Our next panelist is Dr. Nicholas Zill. Dr. Zill is a Psychologist and a Vice President and Study Area Director at Westat, a survey research firm in the Washington area. Before coming to Westat, Dr. Zill was the Founder and, for 13 years, Executive Director of Child Trends, a nonprofit research organization that is well known for its work on childhood social indicators and teen childbearing. Dr. Zill will address marriage and divorce trends as they relate to the health and welfare of children.

And our final panelist on this first panel is Gordon Berlin. Mr. Berlin is currently Executive Vice President for the Work, Community, and Economic Security, WCES, organization, and the Education, Children, and Youth Departments at MDRC, a research and demonstration intermediary organization which tests new approaches to the Nation's social welfare problems. Mr. Berlin will discuss research findings from the Minnesota Family Investment Program.

Gentlemen, thank you for joining me today on a most important issue for the overall culture and trends within the society. I look forward to your testimony.

We will run the clock at about 7 minutes, so you'll have an idea of where you are. I would like to have time for questions afterwards. We will take your entire statement into the record. If you want to put that in and then summarize your points, that would be fine to do, and they will all be placed in the record at the outset.

Dr. Nock, thank you for being with us today. The floor is yours.

**STATEMENT OF STEVEN L. NOCK, PH.D., PROFESSOR OF
SOCIOLOGY AND PSYCHOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA**

Dr. NOCK. Thank you, Senator. I appreciate the opportunity to be invited to share my thoughts.

I am currently Professor of Sociology and Psychology at the University of Virginia, where I've devoted a career to investigating the consequences of marriage, divorce, unmarried—

Senator BROWNBACK. Pull that microphone a little closer to you. Our technology is not the best.

Dr. NOCK. Fine.

I'm going to begin my testimony by reviewing basic demographic trends in marriage and divorce. First, let me begin by saying that marriage is being delayed. I've provided some charts in the appendix to my testimony that will be submitted. First marriages now occur in the late—mid to late 20s. But Americans are not rejecting marriage; nine in ten young people will eventually marry. Delayed marriage means that fewer married people are in the population at any point in time. About six in ten men and about half of all adult women today are currently married.

Postponing marriage does not mean that people are postponing intimate living arrangements. Unmarried cohabitation has increased dramatically. One in twenty households today is an unmarried couple. And cohabiting couple households are almost likely as married-couple households today to include children.

Four in ten first marriages are predicted to end in marriage. We see how the divorce rate soared in the 1960s before peaking in 1982. Since then, the increase has stopped. In fact, there's some indication that it's slightly declined.

Finally, these current trends result in fewer people in America living in families. One-third of households today are currently maintained by a single man or a single woman.

I'll now turn to some of the evidence on the consequences of marriage.

Social scientists agree that married people live longer, enjoy better physical and mental health. They have lower rates of suicide, fatal accidents, acute and chronic illnesses, alcoholism, and depression than unmarried people. They're more likely to save and invest money. They have better sex lives. They earn more, advance faster in occupations, are more generous, more involved in community organizations, and they're more religious. But the enduring question is whether these benefits are produced by marriage or whether happy and healthy people are the ones who are more likely to marry to begin with. I believe that the evidence suggests that both are true.

So why does marriage have these effects? First, married people have someone to remind them about appointments with doctors, or to help them in times of illness or trouble, to carry some of the weight of daily obligations—what two researchers have called “the nagging factor.” Second, married people are better able to endure difficult times because they typically have higher commitment to one another. The here-and-now problems are understood as something that will probably pass, or can be justified by a shared past or an imagined future.

But, most importantly, marriage is a social institution. There are widely understood standards for what married people should and should not do. This cannot be said about any other existing form of intimate relationship. The “shoulds” include waiting until one is mature before being married, having and caring for children, being

economically independent of parents, providing for one's partner, being sexually and emotionally faithful, and caring for family members in times of trouble. The "should nots" include abuse, violence, abandonment, adultery, sharing intimate secrets with strangers. In short, the norms of marriage resemble the vows that are traditionally spoken in wedding ceremonies. But these vows are more than personal promises. Other people, including parents, friends, and relatives, share those beliefs, and will react when people violate them.

Married people are treated differently than unmarried people are. Insurers and employers value the stability and maturity associated with this status. Married people are subject to different laws, they're held to different standards. It would be difficult to imagine that such expectations have no consequence. And, indeed, I think they do.

Turning now to the implications of divorce, women's economic well-being declines by a third following divorce. After their divorce, a quarter of mothers experience a decline of more than 50 percent in their standard of living. Divorce also affects a woman's chance of becoming poor. One in five previously non-poor mothers become poor after a divorce. And unlike their ex-husbands, poor mothers are less likely to escape from poverty if their marriages are disrupted. Only 60 percent of divorced mothers are awarded any child support, and only 44 percent receive anything.

Divorce also disrupts ties across generations, especially among men. Men often lose touch with their children following divorce, and only half of older men report weekly contact with their children. But nine in ten never-divorced older fathers are in touch with their children weekly. Adult children whose parents divorced report very poor relations with their fathers.

The disruption of intergenerational ties between men and their children has implications for public policy. Historically, children, and especially daughters, have provided most of the care needed by older parents in declining health. This informal system of kinship care is now being strained, and may break. Divorce disrupts kinship ties and leaves many older people, especially men, without relatives to care for them. How will we, as a society, provide care needed by the huge number of baby boomers who have divorced?

To conclude, non-family living has important social consequences. Historically, very few people lived outside of families. Indeed, the practice was either prohibited by law or heavily taxed for most of our history, because non-family living has always been perceived as a threat to social order. When people are not members of a family, social control and the provision of care are more difficult. There is no public arrangement capable of monitoring and controlling behavior as effectively as other family members, nor is there any better method of providing for dependent adults and children.

Marriage has always been the method that society has relied upon to allocate the responsibilities for children and for dependent elderly adults. It has also been the primary method of controlling behavior and limiting deviance. Accordingly, a compassionate government has a legitimate interest in encouraging healthy and stable marriages.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Nock follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF STEVEN L. NOCK, PH.D., PROFESSOR OF SOCIOLOGY AND
PSYCHOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

TRENDS IN MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE: IMPLICATIONS FOR ADULTS

Senator Brownback, members of the Committee, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for allowing me to share my thoughts on the implications of trends in marriage and divorce for adults in America.

I am currently Professor of Sociology and Psychology at the University of Virginia where I have devoted a career to the study of these issues. For 28 years I have investigated the consequences of marriage, divorce, unmarried childbearing, and cohabitation for adults and for American society. My work has convinced me that marriage is the primary source of well being for adults. It is also of great importance for an orderly society.

I begin my testimony by reviewing basic demographic trends in marriage, divorce, and cohabitation. I have prepared some graphs to help illustrate the magnitude of the changes in each of these matters. After I review these trends, I will summarize the research on their consequences for adults.

I. Trends in Marriage, Cohabitation, and Divorce

1. *Marriage is being delayed as seen in Figure 1.* In 1950, half of men's first marriages had already occurred by the time they turned 23 (22.8.) Half of women's marriages had occurred by the time they reached 20 (20.3.) Today, the corresponding ages are 27 (26.9) for men and 25 (25.3) for women.¹ Though the 1950s family is now regarded as anomalous, current ages at first marriage are the highest in American history.

But while waiting longer to marry, *Americans are not rejecting marriage.* We estimate that nine in ten young people (87 percent of men, 89 percent of women) will eventually marry. However, marriage rates are declining for blacks. While over 90 percent of young white women are projected to marry, only two-thirds of black women are.² In sum, while the overwhelming majority of young Americans will eventually marry, they will wait many more years than their parents did before doing so.

2. *Delayed marriage means there are fewer **married** people in the population at any point in time as seen in Figure 2.* A smaller fraction of all adults in America is currently married than was true for most of the 20th century. About six in ten (57.3 percent) men, and about half of all adult women (54.2 percent) are currently married (note that Figure 2 begins at 50 percent)³

3. *Postponing marriage does not mean that people are postponing intimate living arrangements.* Figure 3 shows that unmarried cohabitation has increased dramatically. In 1960, there were fewer than half a million such couples (444,000). Today there are almost five million (4,899,000). An unmarried couple now maintains one in twenty households.⁴

A growing fraction of unmarried couples have children. The Census Bureau estimates that 40.9 percent of cohabiting couples have a resident child under 18 who is related to one or both adults. The corresponding figure for married spouses is 45.6 percent. In short, *cohabiting couple households are almost as likely as married couple households to include children.* Cohabiting couples with children are 5.7 percent of all partners with children.⁵

¹U.S. Bureau of the Census. 2004. Estimated Median Age at First Marriage, by Sex: 1890 to the Present <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hh-fam.html#history>

²Raley, R. Kelly. 2000. "Recent trends and differentials in marriage and cohabitation: The United States. Pp 19–39 in *The Ties That Bind: Perspectives on Marriage and Cohabitation*, edited by Linda J. Waite, Christine A. Bachrach, Michelle Hinden, Elizabeth Thomson, and Arland T. Thornton. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

³Table: Marital Status of the Population 15 Years Old and Over, by Sex and Race: 1950 to Present. <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hh-fam.html#history>

⁴Table: Unmarried-Couple Households, by Presence of Children: 1960 to Present. <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hh-fam.html#history>. See also, Casper, Lynne M., and Suzanne M. Bianchi. 2002. *Continuity and Change in the American Family*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

⁵Fields, Jason and Lynne M. Casper. 2000. "America's Families and Living Arrangements." U.S. Bureau of the Census. Current Population Reports, P-20, No. 537 (Fields and Casper, 2000:13–15)

Over half of all marriages are now preceded by cohabitation. Cohabitation is also becoming an alternative to marriage, or remarriage.⁶

4. *Four in ten (42 percent) first marriages are predicted to end in divorce.* Figure 4 shows how the divorce rate soared in the late 1960s before peaking in 1982. Since then, it has declined very modestly each year.⁷

5. *Current trends result in fewer people living in families as seen in Figure 5.* A growing fraction of Americans do not live in any family based on blood or marriage. One third (32 percent) of all households are currently maintained by a single man or woman.

I will now review the evidence on the consequences of marriage.

II. Consequences of Trends in Marriage and Divorce

1. *Marriage contributes to health, happiness, and overall well-being for men and women.* Most social scientists agree that married people live longer, and enjoy better physical and mental health. They have lower rates of suicide, fatal accidents, acute and chronic illnesses, alcoholism and depression than unmarried people.⁸ They are more likely to save and invest money, and they have better sex lives.⁹ They earn more, advance faster in occupations, are more generous, more involved in community organizations, and are more religious.¹⁰

The enduring question is whether these benefits are *produced* by marriage, or whether healthier and happier people are the ones most likely to marry anyway. In my opinion, both are true. There is now convincing evidence that getting married changes people. But there is also evidence that happier, healthier, and more productive individuals are more likely to marry, and stay married, in the first place.¹¹

2. *Why does marriage have these effects?* Let me mention just a few reasons. First, there are consequences of a shared life. Married people have someone to remind them about appointments with doctors, to help in times of illness and need, and to carry some of the weight of daily obligations of family life. Two researchers describe part of the benefits of marriage as a result of “The nagging factor”¹²

Second, married people are better able to endure difficult times because they typically have a higher commitment to one another than is found in other relationships. This means that their here-and-now problems are understood as something that will probably pass, or can be justified by a shared past or imagined future.¹³

But most importantly, marriage is a social institution. There are standards for what married people should and should not do. *This cannot be said about any other form of intimate relationship.* The “shoulds” include waiting until one is mature before marrying, having and caring for children, being economically independent of parents and others, providing for one’s partner (economically, emotionally), being sexually and emotionally faithful, and caring for family members in times of trouble.

The “should nots” include abuse and violence, abandonment, adultery, and sharing intimate ‘family secrets’ with strangers. In short, the norms of marriage are like the vows traditionally spoken in wedding ceremonies (*e.g.*, to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish until we are parted by death.)

But these vows are more than *personal* promises. Other people, including parents, friends, and relatives share these beliefs and will react when people violate them. Married people are treated differently than unmarried people. Insurers and employers value the stability and maturity associated with the status. Married people are subject to different laws. They are held to different standards. It would be difficult to imagine that such expectations have no consequence. And, in fact, they have enormous consequences.

Turning now to the issue of divorce.

3. *Divorce harms women’s economic circumstances.* Women’s economic well being (income-to-needs) declines by a third (36 percent) following divorce (but improves 28 percent for fathers. A quarter (25 percent) of mothers experience a decline of more

⁶Bumpass, Larry L, and Hsien-Hen Lu. 2002. “Trends in cohabitation and Implications for Children’s Family Contexts in the United States.” *Population Studies* 54: 29–41.

⁷Casper and Bianchi, 2002. Bramlett, M. D., and W. D. Mosher. 2002. “Cohabitation, Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the United States.” National Center for Health Statistics. *Vital Health Statistics* 23 (22).

⁸Nock, Steven L. *Marriage in Men’s Lives*. 1998. New York: Oxford University Press.

⁹Waite, Linda J. and Maggie Gallagher. 2000. *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People are Happier, Healthier, and Better Off Financially*. New York: Doubleday.

¹⁰Nock, 1998.

¹¹Waite and Gallagher. 2000.

¹²Waite and Gallagher. 2000.

¹³Nock, Steven L. 1998. “Turn-Taking as Rational Behavior.” *Social Science Research* 27:235–244.

than 50 percent in their income relative to needs (compared with only 5 percent of fathers).¹⁴

Divorce affects a woman's chance of becoming poor. About one in five (19 percent) previously non-poor mothers falls into poverty following marital separation. And unlike their ex-husbands, poor mothers are less likely to escape from poverty if their marriages are disrupted.¹⁵ Women's economic problems after divorce are also related to the fact that *only 60 percent of divorced mothers are awarded any child-support, and only 44 percent actually receive any support from their ex husband.*¹⁶

4. *Divorce disrupts ties across generations.* Men often lose touch with their children following divorce. Only half of older divorced men report weekly contact with their children. But nine in ten (90 percent) never-divorced older fathers are in touch with their children weekly. Adult children whose parents divorced report very poor relationships with their fathers.¹⁷

The disruption of intergenerational ties between men and their children has implications for public policy. Historically, children (especially daughters) have provided most of the care needed by older parents in declining health. This informal system of kinship care is now being strained and may break. Divorce disrupts kinship ties and leaves many older people, especially men, without relatives to care for them. How will we, as a society provide the care needed by the huge number of Baby Boomers who have divorced? How can we afford to provide the care that children and kin have traditionally given?

To conclude, non-family living has important social consequences. Historically, very few people lived outside of families. Indeed, the practice was either prohibited by law, or heavily taxed for most of our history because non-family living has always been perceived as a threat to social order¹⁸. When people are not members of a family, social control and the provision of care are more difficult. There is no public arrangement capable of monitoring and controlling behavior as effectively as other family members. Nor is there any better method of providing for dependent adults and children.

Marriage has always been the method that societies relied on to allocate responsibilities for children and dependent elderly adults. It has also been the primary method of controlling behavior and limiting deviance. Accordingly, a compassionate government has a legitimate interest in encouraging healthy and stable marriages.

Thank you.

¹⁴Bianchi, Suzanne M., Lekha Subaiya, and Joan R. Kahn. 1999. "The Gender Gap in the Economic well-being of Nonresident Fathers and Custodial Mothers." *Demography* 36 (No 2) 195-203.

¹⁵Bianchi, Subaiya, and Kahn 1999; Smock, Pamela J., Wendy D. Manning, and Sanjiv Gupta. 1999. "The Effect of Divorce on Women's Economic Well-Being." *American Sociological Review* 64: 794-812

¹⁶U.S. Bureau of the Census. *Child support for custodial mothers and fathers*. Current population reports, Series P20-212. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

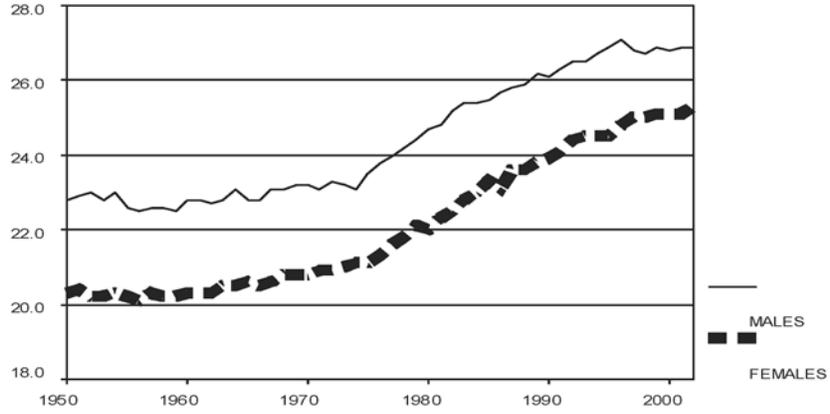
¹⁷Cooney, Teresa M and Peter Uhlenberg. 1990. "The role of divorce in men's relations with their adult children after mid-life." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 52: 677-688; see also Aquilino, William S. 1994. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol. 56: 295-313.

¹⁸Nock, Steven L. *The Costs of Privacy*. 1993. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

FIGURES

Figure 1

Median Age at First Marriage

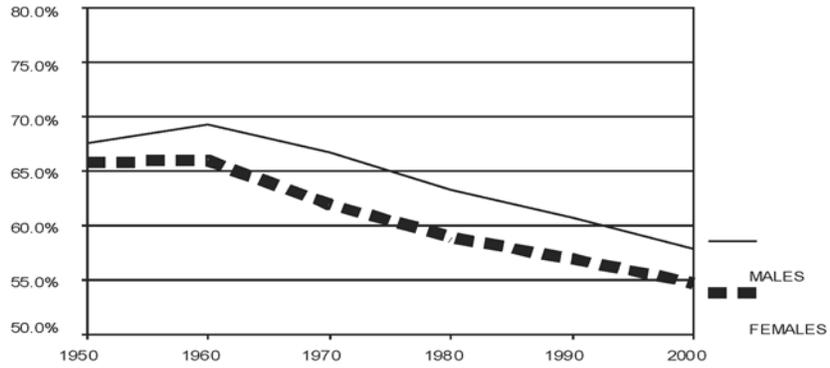


Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

Figure 2

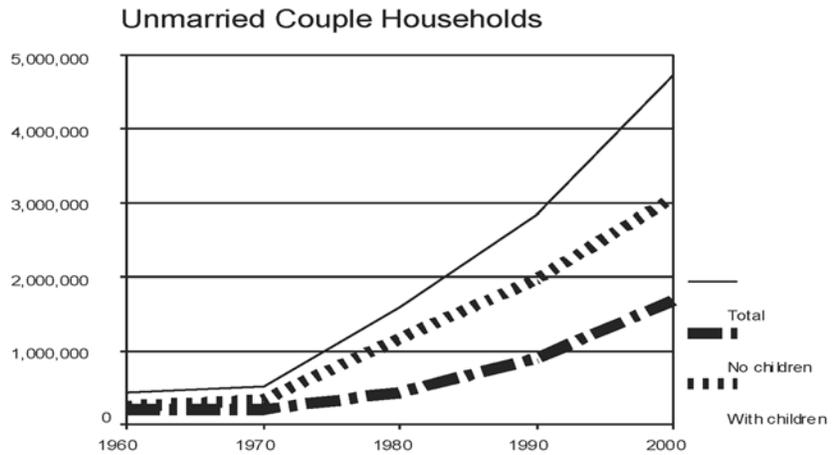
Percentage Married

(15 years old and over)



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

Figure 3



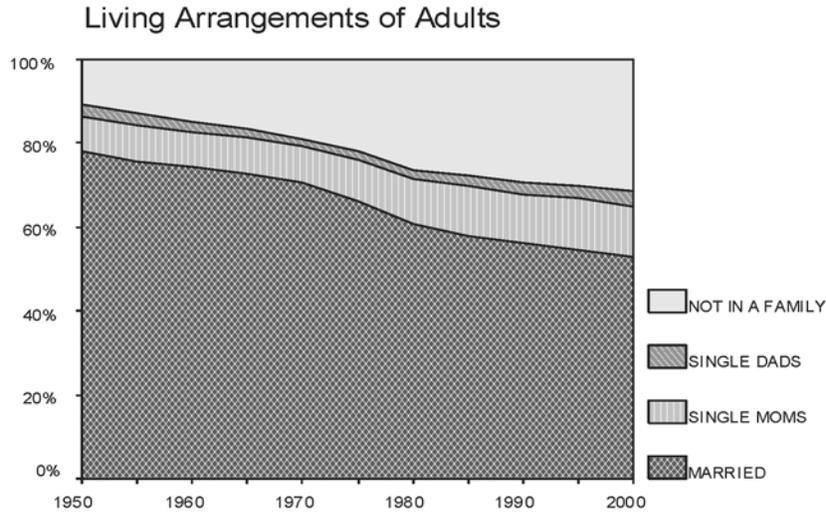
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

Figure 4



Source: National Center for Health Statistics
(Various years)

Figure 5



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

Senator BROWNBACK. Thank you, Dr. Nock.
Dr. Zill?

STATEMENT OF NICHOLAS ZILL, Ph.D., VICE PRESIDENT AND DIRECTOR, CHILD AND FAMILY STUDY AREA, WESTAT, INC.

Dr. ZILL. Thank you, Senator Brownback.

I've been asked to summarize what recent research has revealed about the relationships between the family situations in which children are reared and indicators of young people's development and welfare.

Since the 1960s, there have been a considerable number of social science studies of children's well-being based on large, representative samples of American children and youth. The results of these studies have all pointed to the conclusion that children do best when they grow up in a household that contains both their parents, their biological father as well as their biological mother, who are legally married to one another. All other family types—single-parent families, stepfamilies, foster families—show less good outcomes for children.

Family situations in which children are reared have been found to be significantly related not only to young people's emotional well-being, but also to their physical health and safety, their academic achievement, and their moral and social development. And these relationships remain significant after controlling for related factors, like parent education level, family income, and family size.

I've prepared a summary of representative research findings, and ask that it be entered into the record along with my testimony.

Senator BROWNBACK. Yes, without objection. Pull that microphone a little closer to you, too, if you would, Dr. Zill.

Dr. ZILL. The 2003 edition of the annual report published by the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics contains the following statement. "On average, the presence of two married parents is associated with more favorable outcomes for children, both through and independent of added income. Children who live in a household with only one parent are substantially more likely to have family incomes below the poverty line and to have more difficulty in their lives than are children who live in a household with two married parents."

The Interagency report does not distinguish between two-parent biological, step, or adoptive families, but, in fact, the research evidence clearly showed that indicators of children's achievement and social behavior are more favorable in two-parent biological families than in two-parent step, adoptive, or foster families.

The continuing problem for our society is that many of today's children are not growing up in the ideal two-parent married-couple family situation. Survey data from the Census Bureau tells us that nearly a quarter of American children under the age of 18 are living only with their mothers, typically as a result of marital separation or divorce or birth outside of marriage. Five percent are living with their fathers only, and another 4 percent are living with neither parent—in foster families, for example. Somewhere between 10 and 15 percent of children are living in a stepfamily situation with their mother and a stepfather, or their father and a stepmother. So although the Census Bureau reports that 69 percent of U.S. children are living with two married parents, the proportion living with two married biological parents is more like 55 percent—a majority, but a slim majority.

Furthermore, up until recently the Nation was experiencing a decades-long decline in the proportion of children living with two married parents. It has only been in the late 1990s and the early 2000s that the percentage of children living with both parents has stabilized, and even increased slightly. But it is still the case that a large minority of all U.S. children are living in single-parent or stepfamily situations. And for African-American children in the U.S., it is a majority that live with only one parent or neither parent.

Even if one accepts the importance of the family situation for children's well-being, the question remains as to what government policy can do about it. Many Americans believe that decisions about marriage, childbearing, and family formation are inherently private matters, things that the government should intrude in only minimally, if at all.

Recently, the Bush Administration and Congress have put in place a number of relatively modest initiatives to try to promote healthy marriage and marriage education in low-income communities where marriage, and childbearing within marriage, have become practically extinct. I believe that these initiatives should be welcomed as fresh approaches to the persistent problems of childhood poverty and a lack of social advancement of young people who must grow up in low-income urban and rural communities in the U.S. These initiatives seem quite appropriate as long as they are coupled with careful evaluation studies aimed at determining just how effective these programs turn out to be at achieving their stat-

ed goals. It is my understanding that such evaluation studies are being, and will be, conducted.

I would argue, however, that existing marriage promotion programs need to be coupled with other government-sponsored efforts that would complement and perhaps be ultimately more significant than the current initiatives.

Among the efforts I would recommend are the following:

One, public education campaigns that make the research findings about the importance of marriage to children better known, especially to the Nation's adolescents and young adults.

Two, more effective child-support enforcement among unmarried fathers to help ensure that the action of fathering a child has real consequences for the young men involved.

Three, new school-based marriage education and extracurricular activity programs focused on young people who are not doing well in school and who are in greatest danger of dropping out and bearing or fathering children outside of marriage.

Four, maintaining or strengthening tax-credit and childcare policies that make it easier for working poor married families to maintain a decent standard of living and find adequate care for their children while both parents are working.

Five, not returning to the failed welfare policies of the past that encouraged unmarried childbearing and marital breakup.

Six, sponsoring experimental and quasi-experimental research that investigates the efficacy of new approaches to promoting and preserving marriage.

While there is still much to be learned about the determinants of children's healthy development, existing evidence about the importance of parental marriage for child well-being is extensive enough and compelling enough to justify acting on it now to benefit American children.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Zill follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF NICHOLAS ZILL, PH.D., VICE PRESIDENT AND DIRECTOR,
CHILD AND FAMILY STUDY AREA, WESTAT, INC.

Good afternoon. My name is Nicholas Zill. I am the Director of Child and Family Studies at Westat, a social science research firm in the Washington area. For the last 29 years, I have been conducting large-scale studies of the health, learning, and behavior of our Nation's children and working to develop better statistical indicators of child and family well-being. I have been asked to summarize what recent research has revealed about the relationships between the family situations in which children are reared and indicators of young people's development and welfare.

Since the 1960s, there have been a considerable number of social science studies of children's well-being based on large, representative samples of American children and youth. Most of these studies were sponsored by U.S. Government agencies, such as the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Education, or the Department of Labor. Others were sponsored by private foundations, like the National Survey of American Families and the National Survey of Children, the latter of which I had the honor of directing. The studies have made use of various combinations of study methods, such as physical examination or achievement testing of children, interviews with parents, questionnaires filled out by teachers, and interviews or questionnaires completed by children and youth themselves. Several of the studies have had a longitudinal component, wherein the same children were followed and studied repeatedly over time as the children developed into adolescents and young adults.

The results of these studies have all pointed to the conclusion that children do best when they grow up in a household that contains both their parents—their bio-

logical father as well as their biological mother—who are legally married to one another. All other family types—single-parent families, step families, foster families—show less good outcomes for children. The family situations in which children are reared have been found to be significantly related not only to young people's emotional well-being, but also to their physical health and safety, their academic achievement, and their moral and social development. And these relationships remain significant after controlling for related factors like parent education level, family income, and family size.

The 2003 edition of the annual report published by the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics contains the following statement: "On average, the presence of two married parents is associated with more favorable outcomes for children both through, and independent of, added income. Children who live in a household with only one parent are substantially more likely to have family incomes below the poverty line, and to have more difficulty in their lives than are children who live in a household with two married parents." The report also notes an association between the number of parents a child lives with and "the economic, parental, and community resources available to children." Although the Interagency report does not distinguish between two-parent biological, step, or adoptive families, in fact, the research evidence clearly shows that indicators of children's achievement and social behavior are more favorable in two parent biological families than in two-parent step, adoptive, or foster families.

Now all of this may strike the skeptical layman as another instance of social science elaborately and expensively demonstrating the obvious. But it was not so long ago that the late Senator Patrick Moynihan provoked a firestorm of criticism when he wrote a report noting that the explosive growth of single-parent families might be hindering the advancement of African-Americans. It was not so long ago that social scientists were publicly chastised for saying that some types of family environment were more favorable for children's development than others. Many respected scholars and policy analysts claimed that the fact that a child came from a single-parent family or stepfamily had no particular bearing on how well he or she did in school or in life. Single-parent families and stepfamilies were simply different from, not necessarily more stressful or less supportive than two-parent, married-couple families. Single-parent families were even seen as having "hidden strengths," such as the presence of warm, nurturing grandmothers who taught children about their heritage and bolstered their self-esteem. It was only when a large body of consistent research evidence accumulated that it became broadly acceptable for social scientists and policy commentators to state what most members of the general public believed all along, that two-parent families are better for children.

The continuing problem for our society is that many of today's children are not growing up in the ideal two-parent, married-couple family situation. Survey data from the U.S. Census Bureau tell us that nearly a quarter of American children under the age of 18 are living with only their mothers, typically as a result of marital separation or divorce or birth outside of marriage. Five percent are living with only their fathers and another four percent are living with neither parent. Somewhere between 10 and 15 percent of children are living in a stepfamily situation, with their mother and a stepfather or their father and a stepmother. So, although the Census Bureau reports that 69 percent of U.S. children are living with two married parents, the proportion living with two married biological parents is more like 55 percent: a majority, but a slim majority.

Furthermore, up until recently the Nation was experiencing a decades-long decline in the proportion of children living with two married parents. The U.S. divorce rate doubled between the late 1960s and the late 1970s. It stabilized and even declined slightly after that, but remains at a high level. The proportion of children born outside of marriage grew exponentially between the 1960s and the mid-1990s. It too finally leveled off, but remains very high by historical standards. About one child in three born in the United States today is born to unmarried parents, many of whom will never get married to one another. There was also a decline in the number of children born to married couples. As a result of these marital and childbearing trends, the proportion of children living with both parents declined from about two-thirds in the early 1980s to about 57 percent in the early 1990s. It has only been in the late 1990s and early 2000s that the percentage of children living with both parents has stabilized and even increased slightly. But it is still the case that a large minority of all U.S. children is living in single parent or stepfamily situations, as we have just observed. And for African-American children in the U.S., it is a majority that is living with only one parent or neither parent.

Even if one accepts the importance of the family situation for children's well-being, a question remains as to what government policy can do about it. Many Americans believe that decisions about marriage, childbearing, and family formation

are inherently private matters, things that the government should intrude in only minimally, if at all. Recently, the Bush Administration and Congress have put in place a number of relatively modest initiatives to try to promote healthy marriage and marriage education in low-income communities where marriage and child-bearing within marriage have been practically extinct. I believe that these initiatives should be welcomed as fresh approaches to the persistent problems of childhood poverty and a lack of social advancement among young people who must grow up in low-income urban and rural communities in the U.S. These initiatives seem quite appropriate as long as they are coupled with careful evaluation studies aimed at determining just how effective these programs turn out to be at achieving their stated goals. It is my understanding that such evaluation studies are being and will be conducted.

I would argue, however, that existing marriage promotion programs need to be coupled with other government-sponsored efforts that would complement and perhaps be ultimately more significant than the current initiatives. Among the efforts I would recommend are the following:

- Public education campaigns that make the research findings about the importance of marriage to children better known, especially to the Nation's adolescents and young adults. Such campaigns should communicate the implications of the research findings outlined above in a clear and compelling manner.
- More effective child support enforcement among unmarried fathers, to help ensure that the action of fathering a child has real consequences for the young men involved. By getting more young men to live up to their financial responsibilities, we will not only be improving the lot of their children. We will be helping to reduce the frequency of unmarried conception in the future.
- New school-based marriage education and extracurricular activity programs focused on young people who are not doing well in school and who are in greatest danger of dropping out and bearing or fathering children outside of marriage.
- Maintaining or strengthening tax credit and child care policies that make it easier for working poor married families to maintain a decent standard of living and find adequate substitute care for their children while both parents are working.
- NOT returning to the failed welfare policies of the past that encouraged unmarried childbearing and marital breakup.
- Sponsoring experimental and quasi-experimental research that investigates the efficacy of new approaches to promoting and preserving marriage among young people, especially those from low education and low income family backgrounds.

While there is still much to be learned about the determinants of children's healthy development, existing evidence about the importance of parental marriage for child well-being is extensive enough and compelling enough to justify acting on it now to benefit American children.

REPRESENTATIVE RESEARCH FINDINGS RELATED TO IMPACT OF MARRIAGE AND
DIVORCE ON CHILDREN

Compiled by Nicholas Zill, Ph.D., Westat

Marriage and divorce and the economic well-being of children

- U.S. children under the age of 18 living with mothers who have never married have a poverty rate (47 percent) that is 6 times higher than the poverty rate (7.8 percent) for children living with married mothers and fathers. Children living with divorced mothers have a poverty rate (27.4 percent) that is 3 and a half times higher than the poverty rate for children in married-couple families.
—Nicholas Zill, Westat, 2004. Analysis of data from the 2002 Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of the Census and Department of Labor
- U.S. children under the age of 18 living with mothers who have never married have a welfare dependency rate (18.1 percent) that is 11 times greater than the dependency rate (1.6 percent) for children living with married mothers and fathers. Children living with divorced mothers have a dependency rate (7.1 percent) that is 4 times higher than the welfare receipt rate for children in married couple families.
—Nicholas Zill, Westat, 2004. Analysis of data from the 2002 Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of the Census and Department of Labor

- The presence or absence of three protective factors at a child's birth are closely related to the child's chances of living in poverty at the time he or she begins elementary school. The three protective factors are: (1) whether the child's mother is married; (2) whether she is 20 years of age or older at the time of the child's birth; and (3) whether she has completed high school. If all three of these protective factors are present, the child's chances of growing up in poverty are only 7 percent. If one protective factor is missing, the risk of child poverty nearly quadruples, to 27 percent. If two protective factors are absent, the risk of child poverty is six times greater, 42 percent. And if all three protective factors are lacking—if the mother is an unmarried teen high school dropout at the child's birth—the risk of child poverty is nine times greater, 64 percent.

—Kevin O'Donnell and Nicholas Zill, Westat, 2004. Analysis of data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study of the Kindergarten Cohort of 1998–99, NCES, U.S. Department of Education.

Psychological and achievement correlates of parental divorce in young adulthood

Compared to young adults whose parents had not divorced, U.S. young adults of ages 18–22 whose parents had divorced showed the following elevated rates of emotional, behavioral, and achievement problems. They were:

- Twice as likely to have poor relationships with their fathers: 65 percent versus 29 percent;
- Nearly twice as likely to have ever received psychological help: 41 percent versus 22 percent;
- Nearly twice as likely to have poor relationships with their mothers: 30 percent versus 16 percent;
- Twice as likely to have dropped out of high school: 27 percent versus 13 percent;
- Twice as likely to show a high rate of current problem behavior: 19 percent versus 8 percent.

—Nicholas Zill, Donna Morrison, & Mary Jo Coiro, *Journal of Family Psychology*, 1993. Findings from the longitudinal National Survey of Children, 1976 to 1987.

Achievement and school adjustment problems of school-aged children from different family situations

Compared to children living with married mothers and fathers, children aged 7–17 living with *never married mothers* showed the following elevated rates of achievement and school adjustment problems. They were:

- 1.6 times more likely to rank in the bottom of the class: 60 percent versus 38 percent;
- 2.5 times more likely to have repeated a grade: 33 percent versus 13 percent;
- 3.4 times more likely to have been suspended from school: 17 percent versus 5 percent.

Compared to children living with married mothers and fathers, children aged 7–17 living with *separated or divorced mothers* showed the following elevated rates of achievement and school adjustment problems. They were:

- 1.3 times more likely to rank in the bottom of the class: 51 percent versus 38 percent;
- 1.8 times more likely to have repeated a grade: 23 percent versus 13 percent;
- 2.4 times more likely to have been suspended from school: 12 percent versus 5 percent.

Compared to children living with married mothers and fathers, children aged 7–17 living with *remarried mothers and stepfathers* showed the following elevated rates of school adjustment problems. They were:

- 1.8 times more likely to have repeated a grade: 24 percent versus 13 percent;
- twice as likely to have been suspended from school: 10 percent versus 5 percent.

—Nicholas Zill, *Family Change and Student Achievement*, 1996. Data from the 1988 National Health Interview Survey, NCHS, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Senator BROWNBACK. Thank you. That's very clear testimony, very interesting, and informative.

Mr. Berlin, thank you for joining us.

**STATEMENT OF GORDON BERLIN,
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, MDRC**

Mr. BERLIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm honored to be invited to appear before you today to discuss what we do and don't know about the effects of marriage and divorce on families and children, and about what policies might work to promote and strengthen healthy marriages, especially among the poor.

MDRC is a non-partisan research organization dedicated to learning what works to improve the well-being of disadvantaged families and children, and we try hard to emphasize the science in the social sciences, especially by trying to use the most rigorous methods possible, typically experimental designs similar to those required by the FDA, to determine whether the Nation's social policies and programs are effective.

We used these methods in evaluating the Minnesota Family Investment Program, a program that supplemented the earnings of low-wage workers, and had surprisingly strong initial effects on the likelihood that two-parent families would stay together. And we hope to use these same methods, in partnership with the Nation's leading marital scholars and practitioners, and under the direction of staff at Department of Health and Human Services, to learn whether marital education, family counseling, and related services are effective in promoting and strengthening healthy marriages among low-income populations.

My prepared remarks provide a historical summary on the research to date on this topic, beginning with Senator Moynihan's landmark, if controversial, 1960 study of trends in single parenthood and the black family; fast forwarding through more than three decades of research by psychologists, sociologists, and demographers on the effects of single parenthood on the life prospects of children; past 15 years of pioneering efforts by sociologists and psychologists to develop, test, and evaluate the effectiveness of various models of marital education; up to the present, where we see an historic coming together of longitudinal survey data telling us that the poor share the broader society's commitment to marriage with studies of the effectiveness of marital education programs, which suggest that it is possible to successfully intervene to promote healthy marriages.

To summarize my conclusions:

First, on average, children who grow up in an intact two-parent family, with both biological parents present, do better on a wide range of outcomes than children who grow up in a single-parent household. Single-parenthood is not the only, nor the most important, cause of the higher rates of school dropout and youth unemployment and other negative outcomes we see among these children, but it is an important factor.

Second, an emerging body of evidence demonstrates that marital education, family counseling, and related services can improve middle-class couples' communication and problem-solving skills, resulting initially in increased marital satisfaction and reduced divorce, although the effects on divorce seem to dissipate over time.

Third, we do not yet have evidence to tell us whether marital-education services could be effective in reducing marital stress and eventual divorce among low-income populations or in promoting

marriage among the unmarried. Not surprisingly, low-income couples face a wide range of stresses that middle-class families do not. They are more likely to experience job loss, have an unexpected health or family crisis, be the victim of a violent crime, and so forth; yet, by definition, they have fewer financial resources with which to respond to these chronic and acute stresses, and less time to dedicate to the relationship-building that can help a marriage survive such crises.

While it seems likely that the skills marital-education programs teach could make an important difference—that is, reducing negative exchanges, like anger, criticism, and blaming—and strengthening positive behaviors—like expressions of support, humor, and affection—it is also possible that these skills could be overwhelmed by the added problems low-income couples face.

My fourth point—these concerns raise the question of whether strategies to combine marital education with strategies to more directly address the job and income and related needs of low-income couples are needed. We don't have good evidence on which to base policy in this area.

The Minnesota Family Investment Program, which provided employment assistance with earnings support to welfare recipients who took low-wage jobs, had a large effect on the likelihood that two-parent families would stay together, primarily by reducing separations. But the program's long-term, six year afterward effects on divorce was uncertain and less convincing.

In short, the problem and the goal are reasonably clear, and, importantly, we have promising evidence on what might work to encourage and strengthen healthy marriages. But there are also a number of open questions about the effectiveness of government policies to encourage and strengthen marriage among the poor.

Recognizing the importance of obtaining reliable answers to these questions, the Administration for Children and Families and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has launched two large-scale social experiments to learn whether and what types of policies and programs might successfully strengthen marriage as an institution among low-income populations. Evidence matters in our national quest to improve the well-being of families and children. Done well, we think these studies should provide that evidence in the marital-education field.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Berlin follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF GORDON BERLIN, EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, MDRC
Chairman Brownback, Senator Lautenberg, and Members of the Subcommittee:

My name is Gordon Berlin. I am the Executive Vice President of MDRC, a unique nonpartisan social policy research and demonstration organization dedicated to learning what works to improve the well-being of disadvantaged families. We strive to achieve this mission by conducting real world field tests of new policy and program ideas using the most rigorous methods possible to assess their effectiveness.

I am honored to be invited to address your committee about what we know and do not know about the effects of marriage and divorce on families and children and about what policies and programs might work to promote and strengthen healthy marriages, especially among the poor. My goal is to briefly summarize the evidence in three areas: (1) what we know about the effects of marriage, divorce, and single parenthood on children; (2) what we know about the effectiveness of policies and programs that seek to stem persistently high rates of divorce and out-of-wedlock

childbearing; and (3) what we know about the likely effects of these policies on low-income families and children. The central focus of my remarks will be to explicate the role that marital education, family counseling, and related services might play in promoting and strengthening healthy marriages and to discuss what we know about the potential of strategies that seek to ameliorate the key stressors (for example, job loss, lack of income, domestic violence, and childbearing) that make it difficult to form marriages in the first place or act as a catalyst that eventually breaks up existing marriages.

To summarize my conclusions:

- First, children who grow up in an intact, two-parent family with both biological parents present do better on a wide range of outcomes than children who grow up in a single-parent family. Single parenthood is not the only, nor even the most important, cause of the higher rates of school dropout, teenage pregnancy, juvenile delinquency, or other negative outcomes we see; but it does contribute independently to these problems. Neither does single parenthood guarantee that children will not succeed; many, if not most, children who grow up in a single-parent household do succeed.
- Second, an emerging body of evidence suggests that marital education, family counseling, and related services can improve middle-class couples' communication and problem-solving skills, resulting initially in greater marital satisfaction and, in some cases, reduced divorce, although these effects appear to fade over time.
- Third, we do not know whether these same marital education services would be effective in reducing marital stress and eventual divorce among low-income populations or in promoting marriage among the unmarried. Low-income populations confront a wide range of stressors that middle-class families do not. The evidence is limited, and mixed, on whether strategies designed to overcome these stressors, for example, by providing job search assistance or by supplementing low earnings, rather than relying solely on teaching marital communication and problem-solving skills would also increase the likelihood that low-income couples would marry or that married couples would stay together.
- Fourth, to find out whether and what types of policies and programs might successfully strengthen marriage as an institution among low-income populations as well as among a wide variety of ethnically and culturally diverse populations, our national focus should be on the design, implementation, and rigorous evaluation of these initiatives.

Marriage, Divorce, and Single Parenthood

Encouraging and supporting healthy marriages is a cornerstone of the Bush Administration's proposed policies for addressing the poverty-related woes of single-parent households and, importantly, for improving the well-being of low-income children. The rationale is reasonably straightforward: About a third of all children born in the United States each year are born out of wedlock. Similarly, about half of all first marriages end in divorce, and when children are involved, many of the resulting single-parent households are poor. For example, less than 10 percent of married couples with children are poor as compared with about 35 to 40 percent of single-mother families. The combination of an alarmingly high proportion of all new births occurring out of wedlock and discouragingly high divorce rates among families with children ensures that the majority of America's children will spend a significant amount of their childhood in single-parent households. Moreover, research shows that even after one controls for a range of family background differences, children who grow up living in an intact household with both biological parents present seem to do better, on average, on a wide range of social indicators than do children who grow up in a single-parent household (McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994). For example, they are less likely to drop out of school, become a teen parent, be arrested, and be unemployed. While single parenthood is not the main nor the sole cause of children's increased likelihood of engaging in one of these detrimental behaviors, it is one contributing factor. Put another way, equalizing income and opportunity do improve the life outcomes of children growing up in single-parent households, but children raised in two-parent families still have an advantage.

If the failure of parents to marry and persistently high rates of divorce are behind the high percentage of children who grow up in a single-parent family, can and should policy attempt to reverse these trends? Since Daniel Patrick Moynihan first lamented what he identified as the decline of the black family in his 1965 report, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, marriage has been a controversial subject for social policy and scholarship. The initial reaction to Moynihan was harsh; scholars argued vehemently that family structure and, thus, father absence

was not a determinant of child well-being. But then in the 1980s, psychologists (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980; Hetherington, 1982) began producing evidence that divorce among middle-class families was harmful to children. Renewed interest among sociologists and demographers (Furstenberg and Cherlin, 1994) in the link between poverty and single parenthood soon emerged, and as noted above, that work increasingly began building toward the conclusion that family structure did matter (McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994). Of course, the debate was not just about family structure and income differences; it was also about race and gender. When Moynihan wrote in 1965, 24 percent of all births among African-Americans occurred outside of marriage. Today, the black out-of-wedlock birthrate is almost 70 percent, and the white rate has reached nearly 24 percent. If single parenthood is a problem, that problem cuts across race and ethnicity.

But the story has nuance. Yes, growing up with two parents is better for children, but only when both mother and father are the biological or “intact” (as opposed to remarried) parents. In fact, there is some evidence that second marriages can actually be harmful to adolescents. Moreover, marriage can help children only if the marriage is a healthy one. While the definition of a “healthy marriage” is itself subject to debate, it is typically characterized as high in positive interaction, satisfaction, and stability and low in conflict. Unhealthy marriages characterized by substantial parental conflict pose a clear risk for child well-being, both because of the direct negative effects that result when children witness conflict between parents, and because of conflict’s indirect effects on parenting skills. Marital hostility is associated with increased aggression and disruptive behaviors on the part of children which, in turn, seem to lead to peer rejection, academic failure, and other antisocial behaviors (Cummings and Davies, 1994; Webster-Stratton, 2003).

While our collective hand-wringing about the number of American births that occur out-of-wedlock is justified, what is often missed is that the birthrate among unmarried women accounts for only part of the story. In fact, birthrates among unmarried teens and African-Americans have been falling—by a fourth among unmarried African-American women since 1960, for example (Offner, 2001).

How, then, does one explain the fact that more and more of the Nation’s children are being born out of wedlock? Because the nonmarital birth ratio is a function of (1) the out-of-wedlock birthrate (births per 1,000 unmarried women), (2) the marriage rate, and (3) the birthrate among married women (births per 1,000 married women)—the share of all children born out of wedlock has risen over the last thirty years, in large measure, because women were increasingly delaying marriage, creating an ever larger pool of unmarried women of childbearing age, and because married women were having fewer children. Indeed, families acted to maintain their standard of living in the face of stagnant and falling wages, earnings, and incomes during the 1970s and 1980s by having fewer children and sending both parents into the workforce, a strategy that undoubtedly has increased the stress on low-income two-parent families (Levy, 1988), and that contributed to the rise in out-of-wedlock births as a proportion of all births.

Concern about these trends in out-of-wedlock births and divorce, coupled with the gnawing reality that child poverty is inextricably bound up with family structure, has encouraged conservatives and some liberals to focus on marriage as a solution. Proponents of this approach argued that many social policies—welfare and tax policy, for example—were actually anti-marriage, even if research only weakly demonstrated that the disincentives to marry embedded in these policies actually affected behavior. Moreover, they maintained that social policy should not be neutral—it should encourage and support healthy marriages—and they stressed the link between child poverty and single parenthood and the positive child effects associated with two-parent families.

The focus on marriage was met with skepticism by others. Critics argued that marriage was not an appropriate province for government intervention and that income and opportunity structures were much more important factors than family structure. They questioned why the focus was on low-income families when the normative changes underlying the growth in single-parent households permeated throughout society, as witnessed by the prevalence of divorce across all economic classes.

“Fragile Families” Are Pro-Marriage

More recent evidence from the Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Study tipped the balance for many in favor of the pro-marriage arguments. Designed by two prominent academics, Sara McLanahan and Irv Garfinkel, the study is a longitudinal survey of 5,000 low-income married and nonmarried parents conducted in 75 hospitals in twenty cities at the time of their child’s birth. Among mothers who were not married when their child was born, 83 percent reported that they were

romantically involved with the father, and half of the parents were living together. Nearly all of the romantically involved couples expressed interest in developing long-term stable relationships, and there was universal interest in marriage, with most indicating that there was at least a fifty-fifty chance that they would marry in the future. Looking at employment history and other factors, researchers estimated that about a third of the couples had high potential to marry; another third had some problems, like lack of a job, that could be remedied; while the final third were not good candidates due to a history of violence, incarceration, and the like (McLanahan, Garfinkel, and Mincy, 2001).

There was certainly reason to be cautious about presuming a link between what people said and what they might actually do, and longer follow-up data did indeed throw some cold water on initial optimism. However, when the Fragile Families data were thrown into the mix with the trend data and with the data that suggested that family structure was a determinant of poverty, the reaction was catalytic. The notion was reinforced that more marriage and less child poverty would result if public policies could just be brought in line with the expressed interests of low-income couples.

Marital Education Can Work

But what, if anything, could government actually do to promote marriage among low-income families? For some policy analysts, the discovery of marriage education programs seemed to provide the missing link. To the surprise of many, not only did these programs exist, but there was a body of evidence, including more than a dozen randomized trials, indicating that marriage education programs could be effective. Marriage education refers to services that help couples who are married or planning to marry to strengthen their communication and problem-solving skills and thus their relationships. Models range from those that adopt a skills-based instructional approach to those that use a therapeutic “hands on” approach that addresses the specific marital problems facing individual couples.

Some of the cutting-edge work now underway provides a flavor of the approaches being developed. Dr. Phil Cowan and Dr. Carolyn Cowan, both professors of psychology at the University of California, Berkeley, have been involved in the development and rigorous testing of family instruction models for more than twenty years. Dr. Benjamin Karney, a psychologist at the University of Florida, has been conducting a longitudinal study of newly married couples. Dr. Richard Heyman, a psychologist at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, has 15 years’ experience conducting prevention and treatment research on couple and family interaction. Dr. John Gottman, who leads the Relationship Research Institute where he focuses on marriage, family, and child development, has developed and carefully evaluated some of the most innovative new approaches to marital education and group instruction. Dr. Pamela Jordan developed the Becoming Parents Program, a couple-focused educational research program being tested in a large randomized trial. Dr. Howard J. Markman and Dr. Scott Stanley, both of the University of Denver, developed and refined the Preparation and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP).

Among the skills-training programs, PREP is the most widely used with couples who are about to marry. It teaches skills such as active listening and self-regulation of emotions for conflict management and positive communication. PREP also includes substantial content on topics such as commitment, forgiveness, and expectations clarification. PREP appears to have a significant effect on marital satisfaction initially, but the effect appears to fade over time (Gottman, 1979), and there is some indication that it improves communication among high-risk couples but not low-risk couples (Halford, Sanders, and Behrens, 2001). Therapeutic interventions are more open-ended and involve group discussions, usually guided by trained professionals to help partners identify and work through the marriage problems they are facing. The most carefully evaluated of the structured group discussion models targeted couples around the time of their child’s birth, an event that triggers substantial and sustained decline in marital satisfaction. Couples meet in a group with a trained therapist over a six-month period that begins before the child is born and continues for another three months after the birth. Initially, marital satisfaction soared and divorce rates plummeted relative to a similar group of families that did not participate in the program. But the divorce effects waned by the five-year follow-up point, even while marital satisfaction remained high for those couples who stayed together (Schultz and Cowan, 2001). More recent work by Cowan and Cowan and by John Gottman appears to produce more promising results.

Both the Cowans’ model of education via structured group discussions and a marital-education and skills-development model pioneered by John Gottman led to positive effects on children. The Cowans found positive effects in the school performance

of children whose parents participated in their couples instruction and group discussion program. Gottman describes improved cooperative interaction between the parents and their infant child and sustained increased involvement by fathers.

While the results from the marriage education programs are encouraging, they are not definitive. Most of the studies are small, several have serious flaws, and only a few have long-term follow-up data (and those that do seem to show decay in effectiveness over time). Moreover, only a handful of the studies collected information on child well-being. Most importantly, all of the programs studied served mostly white, middle-class families, not the low-income and diverse populations that would be included in a wider government initiative.

Context and Low-income Families

Not surprisingly, low-income couples have fewer resources to cope with life's vagaries. They are more likely to experience job loss, have an unexpected health or family crisis, be evicted from or burned out of their home, be the victim of a violent crime, and so forth. As a result, they face greater difficulty than middle-class individuals in forming and sustaining marriages. With the exception of African-Americans, low-income couples are not less likely to marry; but they are more likely to divorce when they do marry. Yet evidence from the Fragile Families survey of 5,000 low-income couples who have just given birth to a child and ethnographic interviews conducted with low-income women in Philadelphia by Kathy Edin of Northwestern University provide convincing evidence that low-income people share the same normative commitment to marriage that middle-class families demonstrate. As Kathy Edin told the Senate Finance Committee last week, "[T]he poor already believe in marriage, profoundly so. The poor want to marry, but they insist on marrying well. This . . . is the only way to avoid an almost certain divorce."

If poor families share the same commitment to marriage as better-off couples, what is it about their low-income status that inhibits the formation of stable marriages? One possible explanation is the mismatch between a large number of stressful events they face and few resources with which to respond to those stressors. The imbalance places greater demands on the individuals in a dyad, leaving less time together and less time to dedicate to relationship building than might be the case for a middle-class couple. In addition, the problems low-income couples have to manage—problems such as substance abuse, job loss, eviction, chronic infidelity, a child with a chronic condition like asthma or developmental delays, and criminal activities—may be more severe than those confronted by better-off couples. (Edin, 2004; Karney, Story, and Bradbury, 2003; Heymann, 2000).

Because the problems low-income couples confront are likely to be more acute and chronic than those faced by middle-class couples, it is an open question whether the problem-solving and communication skills taught by marital education programs will be as effective among low-income couples as they appear to have been for middle-class couples (where the evidence base is still evolving). Clearly, the skill sets taught in those programs and the strategies applied by therapists and counselors to solve the problems couples present will need to be adapted. Moreover, it is possible that these kinds of stressors overwhelm the abilities of individuals to use the skills they are taught. It is difficult to be understanding of a partner's failings when the rent is due and there is not enough money to pay it.

Such concerns have elicited two kinds of responses: first, efforts to adapt marital education programs to better meet the needs of low-income families; and second, proposals to combine marital education with strategies that would directly tackle the poverty-related stressors on family life—for example, with help in finding a job, income supplements to make up for low wages, child care assistance, and medical coverage.

Adapting Marital Education to the Needs of Low-Income Families

Underpinning the interest in public support for marital education programs is a conviction that low-income individuals do not have good information about the benefits of marriage. In part, this dearth results from their experience of having grown up in single-parent households where they were simply not exposed to role models that might inform their own relationships. In part, it is a consequence of their lack of access to the same kinds of supports and information, counseling, and therapy that are often available to middle-class couples contemplating marriage or divorce. Buoyed by the success of the model marriage education programs with middle-class families, and following the lead of former Oklahoma Governor Frank Keating, who was determined to end his state's embarrassing status as the Nation's divorce capital, practitioners of marital education programs have begun applying and adapting these models to the needs of low-income couples. The objective is to equip low-income couples with relationship skills to improve couple interaction by reducing neg-

ative exchanges (anger, criticism, contempt, and blaming) and strengthening positive behaviors (expressions of support, humor, empathy, and affection). The logic is obvious: When couples enjoy positive interaction and are successful in handling conflict, their confidence and commitment would be reinforced, thereby fostering satisfaction and stability. But the designers of these programs recognize that they must adapt marital education as middle-class families know it to better meet the different needs of low-income households. This might involve changes in the types of agencies that deliver services, the training leaders would get, the content and examples used in the training, the duration and intensity of services, and the balance between strengthening internal communication and the forging of links to community programs that can provide support related to the contexts in which poor families live.

Does Reducing Financial Stress Promote Marital Stability?

While there is a strong relationship between poverty and marital breakup, would programs that ameliorate poverty by providing supports to the working poor actually improve marital relationships? There have been few tests of this question; the most relevant recent reform that has been carefully evaluated for two-parent families is the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP). Implemented in 1994, MFIP used the welfare system to make work pay by supplementing the earnings of recipients who took jobs until their income reached 140 percent of the poverty line, and it required nonworkers to participate in a range of employment, training, and support services. For two-parent families, MFIP also eliminated the arcane work-history requirements and the “100-hour rule,” a policy that limited the number of hours a primary earner could work and still receive welfare but which had the perverse, unintended effect of encouraging couples to divorce so they could remain eligible for welfare.

MDRC’s evaluation of MFIP examined program effects on employment, income, marriage, and other family outcomes up to three years after entry. Because MFIP treated two-parent family recipients (who were receiving welfare at the onset of the study) and new applicants differently, outcomes for these groups were examined separately. We found that two-parent recipient families in MFIP were as likely as those in a comparable group of welfare recipients who were not eligible for MFIP to have at least one parent work; but the MFIP sample was less likely to have both parents work, leading to an overall reduction in their combined earnings of approximately \$500 per quarter. Yet because the program supplemented the earnings of participating families, the two-parent *recipient* families who participated in MFIP still had slightly higher family incomes (up \$190 per quarter more, on average, when taking into account their decreased likelihood of separating or divorcing—and, thus, retaining access to both partners’ earnings). In contrast, MFIP had fewer effects on parental employment, earnings, and income for welfare *applicants*, a finding that is not entirely surprising given their short welfare spells.

One of the striking findings of the three-year evaluation was that, among the 290 two-parent recipient families who were part of a follow-up survey sample, families in the MFIP group were 19.1 percentage points more likely than families in the group who received traditional welfare payments under the Aid for Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program to report being married and living with their spouse. Most of this increase in marital stability was a result of fewer reported separations in MFIP families as compared to AFDC families, although some of it was a result of small reductions in divorce. Because there is some question about how families on welfare might report their marital status, MDRC also obtained and analyzed data from publicly available divorce records. We did this for some 188 two-parent recipient families who were married at study entry. (The other 100 or so families in the original survey sample were cohabiting, and we did not look for marriage records for them). The data confirmed that these couples were 7 percentage points less likely than their AFDC counterparts to divorce. This gave us confidence that MFIP did indeed reduce marital instability. (Again, divorce records would not tell us about the separations we found in the survey, so the effect should be smaller than the 19 percentage point effect we found there).

These findings have two important implications. First, make-work-pay strategies might reduce financial stress and increase the likelihood that two-parent families stay together. Second, given the small number of people followed in the MFIP survey sample, MFIP’s marriage effects on all two-parent families should be investigated and the results should be replicated in other locations before the findings are used to make policy.

As a first step in that process, MDRC went back to the state of Minnesota to obtain divorce and marriage records for the full sample of 2,200 two-parent MFIP families (including both recipients and applicants) for a follow-up period of more than six years. This fuller record would give us the opportunity to understand whether

the positive effects on divorce (but not the much larger effects on separation) we found for the 290 two-parent families in the survey sample applied to the larger group of two-parent MFIP families. In addition, we wanted to learn about MFIP's possible effect on subgroups of two-parent families that we could not previously examine.

Six years later, the full-sample story on divorce is decidedly mixed. Overall, for the full sample of two-parent families, there is no discernable pattern of effects on divorce over time. When we look at the two-parent *recipient* families only, those eligible for the MFIP program appear to be less likely to get divorced, but the finding is not statistically significant until the last year of follow-up, leaving open the possibility that the pattern we see could still be due to chance. Moreover, the pattern among *applicants* is also uncertain—barely statistically significant in one year, but favoring more rather than less divorce. The different direction in the findings for the recipient and applicant groups explains the absence of an overall effect on divorce. And in both cases, the effects we did see were small—about a 3 to 4 percentage point difference in divorce between the MFIP group and the AFDC group. Finally, recall that public marriage and divorce records can capture only a family's legally documented marital status. They cannot distinguish informal statuses like separations, the form of marital dissolution that drove the dramatic 36-month recipient findings mentioned above. We are currently planning further analyses to better understand MFIP's effects on divorce for these and other subgroups. We have no reliable way of exploring the separation findings.

MFIP's initial results were tantalizing in large part because MFIP was not specifically targeted to affect marriage, divorce, or separations, and yet it appeared to produce large effects on the likelihood that some two-parent families would stay together, suggesting that strategies that tackle the vagaries of poverty could promote marital stability by reducing some of the economic stress on poor families. But the full-sample findings cast some doubt on that promise (with regard to divorce but not separations), reinforcing the need to replicate programs like MFIP for two-parent families in different settings before reaching conclusions about the contribution such strategies might make toward strengthening marriage. The findings particularly leave open the question of the possible range of effects that programs could achieve if policies providing marital education were combined with policies designed to affect employment and income.

What We Don't Know

While the evidence base on marital education is extensive, there is much left to learn. For example:

- Will participation in marital education programs by low-income couples lead to an increase in marriage and in marital harmony and, in turn, have lasting effects on couples' satisfaction, on parenting skills and practices, and on children?
- Will the skills taught in marital education programs be a match for the poverty-related stresses experienced by low-income families, or are additional supports such as employment and income also needed to reduce divorce and increase the number of healthy marriages?
- Will marriage education programs be effective regardless of race, ethnic identity, and cultural norms, and how should these programs be adapted to better meet different groups' divergent needs?
- Who will participate in marital education programs? Will they attract predominantly couples who already have a deep commitment to each other or couples whose problems are acute? Will a broad cross-section of low-income couples participate or only a narrow slice of the population?
- Will these programs facilitate the dissolution of unhealthy marriages as proponents contend, or will they prolong marriages that might be better off dissolving or not forming in the first place?
- Can a relatively short education course—say, 10 to 20 hours spread over a few months—have a long-lasting effect on marital and couple discord, or are more long-term strategies and even one-on-one back-up couple-counseling services necessary? What is the right duration and intensity of an initiative? Can courses be short term and intense, or must they be longer and more sustained to yield longer-lasting effects? What is the right content? What are the implications for affordability and scale?

An Opportunity to Learn

On substantive, policy, and financial grounds, there are good arguments to be made for public involvement in the marriage field. If marital education programs could be mounted at scale, if participation rates among those eligible were high, and

if the programs were effective in encouraging and sustaining healthy two-parent families, the effects on children could be important. The key word is *if!*

The strong correlation between growing up in a two-parent family and improved child outcomes does not ensure that intervening to encourage more marriage and less divorce will have the intended results. Indeed, social policymaking based on correlation has an uncanny way of ending with unintended consequences. The only reliable way to understand whether marital education and other supports designed to strengthen marriage produces such results is to conduct a social experiment with the right mix of quantitative and qualitative methods to answer the “what difference,” “how,” and “why” questions.

The Administration of Children and Families within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has launched two new projects to do just that. Managed by Mathematica Policy Research, the Building Strong Families evaluation is targeted to low-income unwed couples beginning around the time of their child’s birth. The Supporting Healthy Marriage initiative, which is being overseen by MDRC, is aimed at low-income married couples. Both projects will involve large-scale, multisite, rigorous random assignment tests of marriage-skills programs for low-income couples. The goal is to measure the effectiveness of programs that provide instruction and support to improve relationship skills. Some programs might also include services to help low-income couples address barriers to healthy marriages, such as poor parenting skills or problems with employment, health, or substance abuse. Programs operated under these demonstration umbrellas will screen for domestic violence and help participants gain access to appropriate services. Done well, the results from these path-breaking projects should inform the marriage field, and they should add value to our existing understanding of the potential and the pitfalls of government intervention in this critically important arena.

References

- Cummings, E. M., and P. Davies. 1994. *Children and Marital Conflict*. New York: Guilford.
- Edin, K. 2004. Testimony Before the United States Senate Committee on Finance Subcommittee on Social Security and Family Policy. The Benefits of Healthy Marriage Hearing, May 5.
- Edin, K., and M. Kefalas. 2004. *Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women Put Motherhood Before Marriage*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gennetian, L. and V. Knox. 2004. *Getting and Staying Married: The Effects of a Minnesota Welfare Reform Program on Marital Stability*. New York: MDRC.
- Gottman, J. M. 1979. *Marital Interaction: Experimental Investigations*. Oxford, England: Elsevier.
- Furstenberg, F. and A. Cherlin. 1994. *Divided Families: What Happens to Children when Parents Part*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Halford, W. K., M. R. Sanders, and B. C. Behrens. 2001. “Can Skills Training Prevent Relationship Problems in At-Risk Couples? Four-Year Effects of a Behavioral Relationship Education Program.” *Journal of Family Psychology* 15, 4: 750–768.
- Hetherington, E. M., M. Cox, and R. Cox. 1982. “Effects of Divorce on Parents and Children.” In M. Lamb (ed.), *Nontraditional Families*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Heyman, R. E. 2001. “Observation of Couple Conflicts: Clinical Assessment Applications, Stubborn Truths, and Shaky Foundations.” *Psychological Assessment* 13: 5–35.
- Karney, B. R., L. Story, and T. Bradbury. 2003. “Marriages in Context: Interactions Between Chronic and Acute Stress Among Newlyweds.” Presentation at the International Meeting on the Developmental Course of Couples Coping with Stress, October 12–14, 2002, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA.
- Levy, F. 1988. *Dollars and Dreams: The Changing American Income Distribution*. New York: Norton.
- McLanahan, S., I. Garfinkel, and R. B. Mincy. 2001. “Fragile Families, Welfare Reform, and Marriage.” Policy Brief No. 10. Washington DC: Brookings Institution.
- McLanahan, S., and G. D. Sandefur. 1994. *Growing Up with a Single Parent: What Hurts? What Helps?* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Moynihan, D. P. 1965. *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Policy Planning and Research.
- Offner, P. 2001. “Reducing Non-Marital Births.” Policy Brief No. 5. Washington, DC: Welfare Reform and Beyond.
- Schultz, M., and C. P. Cowan. 2001. *Promoting Healthy Beginnings During the Transition to Parenthood*. Minneapolis: Society for Research in Child Development.
- Wallerstein, J., and J. Kelly. 1980. *Surviving the Breakup: How Children and Parents Cope with Divorce*. New York: Basic Books.
- Webster-Stratton, C. 2003. *The Incredible Years*. Toronto: Umbrella Press.

Senator BROWNBACk. Thank you, Mr. Berlin.

Thank you, gentlemen.

We're starting to delve into an area that I don't think we've done sufficient amount of research, as a government or as a society, based upon the vast social experiment that we've been conducting, basically, I think, since the 1960s, where we walked away from a society that really said, "OK, we're going to really culturally reinforce this notion of a two-parent family, held together, and for life," and then moved into a much wider definition of family, much more accepting cultural atmosphere, to a point where we are today. And I just don't think we've studied sufficiently what's the impact on society and what's the impact on children. And so that's why we're holding this series of hearings and trying to determine what is the impact and what should be done.

Just to get a baseline on this, I get different numbers on what are the percentage of marriages that—people that are married in 2004, what percent of those will end in divorce? And it seems like that should be a pretty straightforward number, but can one of you give me what that number is?

Dr. NOCK. We don't know about marriages of 2004, but life table estimates, which are the best predictions that we have, based on marriages of 1995—first marriages in 1995—have a 43 percent probability of—43 percent will end within 15 years. Some fraction of marriages disrupt after 15 years, Senator, but very few, relatively. So, within 15 years, we have a fairly good estimate of the total divorce experience of the cohort. So, at the moment, it's in the 40s—40, 45 percent, something like that.

Senator BROWNBACk. That's 1995 data, and you said divorce numbers have been trending down as a percentage, but—now, that may also reflect the increase of cohabitation and other lifestyle arrangements, is that correct?

Dr. NOCK. That's correct. There are compositional changes in the population, especially increasing cohabitation, that remove some people from the risk of experiencing a divorce. These estimates from the National Center for Health Statistics, though, that I just referred to—and I'll be happy to provide these in written answers, if you wish—but they adjust for such changes in the population composition.

So the downward trend in divorce is correct, it has been declining very, very minimally since 1982, but it is a very small change. We are probably at about the point we were in the late 1970s now, in terms the divorces-per-thousand-married-women. So it's unlikely that a modest decline will have much effect on our projections into the future. But then again, in all humility, demographers did not predict a baby boom, either.

[Laughter.]

Senator BROWNBACk. OK.

Dr. ZILL. I might add, though, Senator, that we would expect, actually, divorce to go down, because the age of marriage is going up, and generally people who marry at higher ages tend to have lower probability of divorce. Also, the general education level of the population is going up. So actually, in a sense, there are some factors that you would expect the divorce rate to go down, and perhaps it's

not going down as much as one would anticipate, given those changes. So there still is quite high incidence of divorce.

Senator BROWNBACk. Now, all three of you testified that the best place to raise children is in a stable, two-parent family. Is that correct? And every study I've read, that's the social science on this. Is that accurate? Does anybody deviate away from that, on the social science data? There's pretty much uniform agreement on that, is that correct, Mr. Berlin?

Mr. BERLIN. Yes, I think so. You know, there are qualifiers. They need to be healthy marriages. There's evidence that biologically intact two-parent families, the children do best there. Sometimes adolescents are more likely to have problems in remarriages. So the broad statement you made is absolutely correct, but there are some qualifiers.

Dr. NOCK. Also, Senator, there is some research from two research teams that suggests that when a divorce is preceded by great conflict—which is fairly substantial, about a third of divorces—children do better as a result of the divorce. In the typical divorce that is preceded by low levels of conflict and hostility, the child does worse. So the qualifications here are important. Overall, I think you're correct.

Senator BROWNBACk. The government gets a great benefit out of intact two-parent families, is that correct? All of you are testifying to that?

Dr. NOCK. Yes.

Senator BROWNBACk. If that's the case, we really see this trend take off in the 1960s, and then really went high, and now we've plateaued maybe and come down a little bit, based on a series of factors. Are there things that we were doing at the 1960s that we should go back to? Are there policy issues that changed in the 1960s that we should readdress to try to get at this issue, to have more stable two-parent families?

Dr. ZILL. Well, the changes that occurred in the 1960s—there's pretty good research—were not restricted to this country. There were trends in a number of countries, not only in divorce rates, but also in crime rates going up. And, of course, we know the political rebellion. So it seems to be some sort of a mega-cultural kind of change that occurred that—and I think it's—

Senator BROWNBACk. In the industrial societies.

Dr. ZILL. In the industrial societies, yes, right. And I think it's a little hard to put the genie back inside the bottle, in terms of just turning back the clock. I think that the issue of, how do we deal with some of the changes? For example, the different views, in terms of women's role and rights in our society, the importance of individualism—I think that's something that really needs to be addressed, individual satisfaction and satisfying one's personal view of what one's fulfillment is, as opposed to one's obligations to the society and to others in the society. I think that balance is certainly critical in the whole kind of behavior that the divorce revolution exemplifies.

Senator BROWNBACk. Let me maybe put a better point on it, then. What was happening prior to the 1960s that led to a long period of fairly stable marriages, of most marriages being stable, to where we don't have that situation today?

Dr. NOCK. The 1950s, the parents of the baby boom, this period of family life is now regarded as an anomaly, historically. Families before and families after were more varied, more diverse in both their trajectories over time, as well as their divorce probabilities. It is true, by the way, divorce rates have continued to rise. But they dropped during the 1950s. Fertility rose during the 1950s. Age at marriage dropped during the 1950s. So that in many traditional demographic trends relating to households and families, the 1950s were an unusual period, and there's great speculation about what that might be.

But the prevailing consensus on this is that, having grown up in the Great Depression, experiencing very, very modest economic circumstances, experiencing the war, and then coming of age in a time of affluence, by comparison, led to historically early ages of first marriage and very stable marriages that were predicated on a family wage system where one person was able to support the family.

That was not true, by the way, prior to the baby boom. It took two individuals to support the farm family or the small business of the 19th century and early 20th century. It's certainly not true now. But there was this period of our history where one person could support a family, where marriages were early, and where fertility was high. Whether that could be replicated is very debatable.

Senator BROWNBAC. Any of you other gentlemen have thoughts on this point?

Dr. ZILL. Well, a less rosy side to the picture, of course, is that women were economically dependent on men to a much greater extent in the prewar and even in the immediate postwar. So, in a sense, there was an acceptance of perhaps marriages that were less than ideal because of that economic dependence. And with the growing role of women in the labor force and somewhat greater economic independence, women were perhaps less willing to tolerate marriages that were maybe abusive or maybe less satisfying because they had some economic independence. So I think that's an element in the equation, as well.

Senator BROWNBAC. Recognizing the changes in society, are there things, other than what you've listed in your testimony, that we should be looking at to try to encourage stable two-parent families? If this is the best place to raise children, if all the social data points to that, if everybody agrees to it, are there other policy factors we should be looking at, that you have not identified, to try to create more stable family situations?

Dr. ZILL. Well, I think that we really are only beginning, in the sense of really educating young people about marriage and families, and I don't think many schools really address some of the issues we're discussing, and they need to do so. And particularly with the evidence becoming more compelling and consistent, it needs to be communicated. Furthermore, there needs to be a slant on that communication to understand that having children outside of marriage is not something that's wonderfully rebellious and good for children or anything like that; that, in fact, it's a loser strategy, that those ethnic groups and those religious groups in our society that are most economically successful are those that have very low rates of unmarried childbearing and low rates of divorce. And it's

ironic that some people—some scholars from some of these very groups say, “Well, it’s okay to have single-parent families. That’s just an alternative family type.” But, in fact, the behavior of their own group is such that divorce is low, and unmarried childbearing is low, and economic success is high.

And I think if we communicated to people, “If you want to advance as a group, if you want to do a favor to your kith and kin, then it’s not by fathering children outside of marriage, or bearing children outside of marriage; it’s not by living a life of ‘my pleasure above all.’ It’s by having some commitment to your children and taking the care and the effort to live in a marriage and raise those children.” I think those messages have not been well communicated.

In fact, one might say the mass media, right now, are communicating a very different message. Just look at what’s on the cable stations that appeal to young people, and I think—none of this is there at all.

Senator BROWNBAC. So why hasn’t that message been communicated? If this evidence is so clear, why hasn’t it been communicated?

Dr. Zill?

I mean, we communicate messages in our society about—we communicate to them about things we don’t like, like smoking or things like that. We’re very clear at communicating, and pretty good at it.

Dr. ZILL. Well, I think there’s this double standard. I think we feel okay if it’s something to do with physical health or the physical environment, but, once we go into the area of the social environment and moral behavior, that people start getting very reluctant to say things in that area. And I think that’s something that we need to change, and I think that’s something that Congress could take a lead in producing some of that change.

Senator BROWNBAC. Dr. Nock, do you have a thought on this?

Dr. NOCK. I would just add, Senator, on a slightly different note, there is empirical evidence—meager, but there is empirical evidence, nonetheless—that suggests that the so-called “marriage penalty” in our tax code is a disincentive. It’s a small one, but simulations as well as studies of Social Security records by various organizations have suggested that the tax penalty does—for two-earner married couples, middle-income families—in fact, act as a disincentive to marriage. And so, at a minimum, I would suggest that the evidence would encourage us to continue trying to repeal this aspect of the tax code.

Senator BROWNBAC. The National Science Foundation, which is under the jurisdiction of the Committee, funds research on the issue of marriage and its impact on society. I believe, Dr. Nock, you have some grant money that has come from NSF. Are there other research needs in this particular field that you would like to see us focus on?

Dr. NOCK. Thank you for asking that question. It’s a dangerous question—

[Laughter.]

Senator BROWNBAC. Ask a researcher.

Dr. NOCK.—to ask a researcher what we should fund.

I actually believe that we know way too little about the pathways to union formation.

Senator BROWNBACK. Pathways to what?

Dr. NOCK. To relationships, whether they are cohabiting relationships or marriages, what we used to call “courtship.” We know very little about this. The immigration patterns of the last decade or two have changed our understanding of how people enter into relationships. Culture has changed. The age at which people enter into relationships has changed. We know very little about what leads couples to transition from what we would—you and I might have called a “dating relationship” to a cohabiting one, and from a cohabiting one to a marriage, or what leads them not to. And so that’s one area I think we should investigate.

I also believe that the growing variety of household structures—including same-sex couples, remarried couples, multi-generational, blended, and more complex households—deserves much more research in order to understand the factors that are associated with them, that produce them, as well as their consequences.

And, finally, since you ask, I’ll offer a personal preference, which is that I know that the majority of services to married couples, as well as to people anticipating marriage, are provided by faith-based organizations—pre-marriage education, pre-marriage counseling, counseling in times of trouble, and so on. We have been afraid to investigate this issue. The Federal Government has avoided funding this type of research. I think it’s finally time to put some serious effort into understanding the role of religion in relationships.

Dr. ZILL. I would add to those recommendations, all of which I agree with, that we need to fund, in this area, more experimental and quasi-experimental research, as opposed to correlational research. I mean, correlational research has a great role, and that’s—a lot of the research that I have done is that. But it’s also the kind of study that Gordon talked about, MDRC is doing, where you actually try to get people—make use of some sort of random assignment. For example, in marital counseling you try to have some incentives so that, people whose marriages are in danger of breaking up, one group is randomly assigned to some kind of a new kind of marital counseling, and another group maybe is assigned to an alternative treatment, and we actually see, with the same kind of precision that we get in drug studies, where the causal factors are. Because it’s very difficult, with correlational studies, to completely answer these questions.

So I think we really need to have a program of imaginative experimental and quasi-experimental research sponsored by the National Science Foundation and also by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

Mr. BERLIN. I would just agree with that. I mean, if you stop and think about it, we’re talking about these broad normative changes that have occurred, you know, among all classes of people in the country, and even worldwide, in industrialized countries. If we want to try to change those broad, sweeping, normative developments with public policies, it’s obvious that there are lots of unknowns about whether that’s possible and whether you’d end up with unintended consequences. And we’ve all agreed that there’s this very strong relationship between growing up in a stable, two-

parent household; but that doesn't necessarily mean that policies designed to encourage stable, two-parent households would have the intended effect. And the only way to really get a clear answer to that and understand what the costs and the benefits are, and what packages of services might work, what kinds of messages might make a difference, would be to conduct some field tests of these new approaches.

And I think, to their credit, the Department of Health and Human Services has a couple of these underway. I think they're very important. But they won't succeed unless there's also enough money for the programs to actually run these initiatives. And right now those resources aren't available because they're tied up in the welfare reform bill.

But I definitely agree with Nick, that in order to really advance our understanding about what might work, the best thing we could do at this stage would be to run some social experiments.

Senator BROWNBACK. Dr. Nock, in your opinion, what, if anything, has the government done to contribute to the trends regarding marriage, divorce, and, more generally, the trend away from living in families? What has the government done to contribute to that?

Dr. NOCK. I would probably agree with most demographers on this subject, in that the factors that have produced these trends are long, widespread, secular trends. To the extent that government has played a role, it would be a small one, because we see these trends in all advanced Western societies, despite enormous variations in government organization, government policy. At the same time, I think it's an intriguing question whether or not public policy, and Federal policy in particular, could affect them, and has.

I know there has been documented evidence that the old AFDC system did influence the formation of single-parent households, minimally. It may have discouraged marriage, minimally. I know there's some evidence that our Federal tax code acts as a disincentive to marriage. Beyond that, it's hard to identify a single—

Senator BROWNBACK. No-fault divorce, state level? What do you think?

Dr. NOCK. These are at the state—there are enormous effects at state level, in terms of domestic relations laws, I believe. No-fault divorce is probably the best caution to all of us about venturing into domestic relations. I think that when Governor Reagan signed the first no-fault divorce law, he and his legislators thought that they were protecting the interest of women and children, they were minimizing the bitterness and hostility of divorce, they were equalizing the outcomes of divorce. I doubt very seriously that anyone involved thought that no-fault divorce might lead to more divorce. That is exactly the debate now. Thirty years after the passage of the first law, we're still debating whether or not no-fault divorce led to more divorce. And I would say half of those who investigate it say yes, and half say no. We'll never be able to sort this out.

I personally believe it probably did jeopardize women's interests after divorce; it treated men and women alike, despite the fact that men and women had very different economic circumstances before divorce. So, in my opinion, no-fault divorce was a negative consequence for women. That's also reinforced by my research in Lou-

isiana on two forms of marriage, one which has no-fault divorce, and one which does not. The divorces that have resulted in those two regimes produce very different consequences for women.

Fault-based divorce is faster than no-fault divorce. It's less contentious, and it results in better outcomes for women, is what we're finding at least. Ours is——

Senator BROWNBACk. Really?

Dr. NOCK. Well, it has been so long, we've forgotten the problems that motivated no-fault divorce, and there are very few judges on the bench who came from those times. A no-fault divorce takes, at a minimum, 6 months, and often longer. A fault-based divorce can take place in a matter of weeks. What we're finding in Louisiana is that the court will award fault-based divorces faster. But more importantly is that in fault-based divorces there tends to be alimony awarded.

Senator BROWNBACk. Tends to be what?

Dr. NOCK. Alimony awarded.

Senator BROWNBACk. And what about the percentage of couples that get divorced? Or is that fair to measure—compare the two?

Dr. NOCK. In my opinion, it's probably not, because the sort of couple who is attracted to the more stringent marriage regime, the covenant marriage, is very different to begin with. They're better educated, they're higher income, they're less likely to have been married before, they're less likely to have children before. In many respects, they have the advantages going into marriage that would predict lower divorce rates to begin with. But, even after we adjust for those preexisting differences, the outcomes of divorce differ. I mean, though the divorce rate is lower in the covenant-couple sample, the outcome of divorces are better.

Senator BROWNBACk. On Monday, Massachusetts will enter into same-sex unions in their state. Do we know any data from any countries of the impact of that on marriage, heterosexual marriage, in the United States?

Dr. NOCK. Last month, at the Population Association of America meetings, so far as I know the first empirical paper was presented on this subject from The Netherlands based on vital records, which is what you and I would think of as marriage and divorce records. Same-sex marriages have been legal in Scandinavia for a number of years now, so it is possible to study these. The researchers involved were not interested in the outcomes for children; rather, they were interested in marital dissolution rates.

The results are intriguing. They show that divorce rates are somewhat higher among same-sex couples—legally married, same-sex couples—than among heterosexual couples. They also find that divorce rates are higher among lesbian couples than among gay men. Beyond that, I think the results of this paper are descriptive, but, to my knowledge, it's the first paper. There is nothing done in the United States, because we have yet to have a same-sex marriage.

Senator BROWNBACk. What about its impact on—I've seen some data that suggest that you're going to—that it will have a negative impact on the number of heterosexual couples that will get married in the United States, that there's—that it tends to drive down the number of people that desire to get married—heterosexual couples.

Dr. NOCK. I'm not aware of any research in that line, sir.

Senator BROWNBACk. Either way?

Dr. NOCK. No.

Senator BROWNBACk. OK.

Gentlemen, thank you all very much. Appreciate you being here.

Call up the next panel, if you want to come on forward while I'm introducing the overall group.

Margy Waller is a visiting Fellow at the Brookings Institute. Previously, she was Senior Advisor for Welfare and Working Families at the White House Domestic Policy Council in the Clinton Administration. She'll discuss the impact of social-policy outcomes on the American family.

Patrick Fagan is the Fitzgerald Research Fellow in Family and Cultural Issues at the Heritage Foundation, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Health and Human Services during the Bush Administration. He will examine the relationship between family, community, and social problems, and will talk about the implications of a culture of rejection for children and the future of the Nation.

And the final panelist is Gerald Campbell, President of the Impact Group, a charitable organization established to explore the spiritual dynamics of homelessness and other dysfunctional behaviors. He served as a Senior Advisor to USIA from 1985 to 1990, and a Special Assistant to the Administration of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, from 1992 to 1993.

Thank you all very much for joining us today.

Ms. Waller?

**STATEMENT OF MARGY WALLER, VISITING FELLOW,
BROOKINGS INSTITUTE**

Ms. WALLER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I'm very happy to be here today. Thank you for having me.

I'm a Visiting Fellow at the Brookings Institution, and I should say that my testimony today reflects my own views and not that of others of the institution or the institution itself.

It is an honor to appear before you today to discuss the state of knowledge on marriage and the well-being of children. My testimony will review some important research findings and their implications for public policy. Of course, my prepared remarks have much more detail on both of these topics.

To begin, as the previous panel indicated, there is much evidence that children raised in a household with their married, biological, or adoptive parents do better than children in other family structures, yet we don't know much about why this is so. And, at the same time, it is important to remember that while children raised in single-parent households are at greater risk, most will not face serious problems.

The data that we do have about family structure and the well-being of low-income families suggest that Congress should proceed cautiously. While there is evidence that marriage increases household income, it may not be easy or even a good idea to encourage marriage for some single parents. The problem is figuring out which families might benefit from counseling and education.

Unfortunately, the research evidence does not answer questions like: How much of the advantage is the result of family structure, and how much from economic advantages? Is it marriage that makes the difference, or the kind of people who are likely to get married when they become parents?

The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study is developing a rich database of information about unmarried parents and how they differ from married parents. The researchers reviewing the data conclude that about a third of the unmarried parents would benefit from marriage programs, as they face no serious barriers to marriage, and most of them plan to marry or live together. But marriage promotion would not work, or could even cause serious harm, for another third of the parents and their children. The remaining third might benefit from relationship-building skills if the marriage initiatives also included employment and mental health services. So you can see that the target population may be smaller than generally thought, and somewhat difficult to identify without trained caseworker involvement.

Unfortunately, it appears that marriage can even create risks for these families. Children may suffer when their family structure changes, and living in a stepfamily can have negative effects, as well, for some children.

Finally, the research reveals that teenagers who have a non-marital birth are less likely to get married later in life. For this group, the answer doesn't seem to be marital counseling, but strategies that prevent pregnancy in the first place.

This summary of key findings reveals the possibility of unintended consequences from investment in marriage promotion as a means of improving child well-being. Many unmarried parents are at risk of factors known to contribute to marital disruption or conflict—domestic violence, unemployment, mental health problems, and others. If we encourage marriage for such couples before addressing these issues, we may put children at greater risk of experiencing marital conflict and a change in family structure, with all of its negative consequences.

Given the limited knowledge about how to support healthy marriages that improve child well-being, Congress should approach public investment with care. First, further experimentation and rigorous evaluation of marriage promotion are critical, so Congress should determine whether to provide resources, in addition to the Administration's existing research investment discussed by the last panel, and, if so, appropriate a one-time allocation to that purpose. Second, all marriage promotion activity must be developed in consultation with domestic violence prevention experts. And, finally, until we know more about encouraging marriage for unmarried parents, the best investment may be programs proven to reduce teen pregnancy.

The legislative vehicle for discussion of marriage promotion is the current welfare reauthorization debate. If Congress is committed to focusing on child well-being as a primary goal of welfare reauthorization, Members might consider adjusting the investment priorities reflected in pending proposals. While we are experimenting with marriage promotion to improve child well-being, social science already points to many proven programs that do not

present the same risk of unintended consequences. In particular, services designed to increase household income and economic security are known to improve the well-being of children.

While welfare reauthorization provides an opportunity to implement these strategies, all signs suggest it's unlikely that Members will agree on legislation this year, and current proposals are likely to reduce child well-being as a result of new mandates to increase work hours and otherwise limit state flexibility. This would, in turn, lead to reduced investment in more promising programs—like child care—and simultaneously decrease adult supervision of adolescents who are already suffering. Given these facts, the current best option for Congress to improve child outcomes through the welfare law would be a straight multi-year reauthorization of the current law.

Whatever happens, investment in marriage as a strategy to improve the well-being of children should be limited and dedicated to research. The priority should be sustaining programs known to work, while avoiding changes that create risk. Policymaking should support promising research and proven results, but Congress should not let funding get ahead of the science.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Waller follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MARGY WALLER, VISITING FELLOW,
BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify today. My name is Margy Waller. I am a Visiting Fellow at the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C. where my research focuses on poverty, welfare, and low-income working families. Please note however that my testimony today reflects my own views and not the views of any organization with which I am affiliated.

It is an honor to appear before you to discuss the state of knowledge on the impact of marriage and divorce on children, with a particular focus on policy interventions to improve the well-being of children in low-income households.

The administration proposes to encourage states to promote healthy marriages and in doing so to “place a greater emphasis in TANF [Temporary Assistance for Needy Families] on strengthening families and improving the well-being of children”.

There is little argument that the body of academic literature supports the conclusion that children do best when they live with their married mother and father, provided that the marriage is one of low-conflict. However, other findings have important implications for consideration of policy interventions to promote safe, healthy marriages in low-income households.

First, my testimony will review some important findings—and limitations of the research—for consideration in developing public policy to support the goals of healthy marriages and the well-being of children. Second, I will outline recommendations for public policy and Federal investment in light of the research, including implications for the pending reauthorization of the 1996 welfare law.

What the Research Reveals

While there is much evidence to support the conclusion that children raised in a household with their married biological parents do better than children in other family structures, scientific data answering the question of why this is so is scant.

Still, while children raised in single-parent households grow up *at greater risk* of emotional, social, educational, and employment difficulty, most children from single-parent households do not face these problems.

Furthermore, much of the research about the effects of family structure and transitions has focused on middle-income families, or national data sets controlling for income. There is much less information about the particular outcomes in low-income households, and not much is known about the effectiveness of marriage strengthening strategies for poor parents.

However, the data that we do have about family structure and the well being of low-income families and children suggest that we should proceed carefully as we attempt to fashion public policy in this arena.

- Children in families with married biological parents have lower rates of poverty than children living with single or cohabitating parents.
- A marriage simulation matching real single mothers and unmarried men who are similar in age, education, and race reveals that if it is possible to increase marriages to 1970 rates, the poverty rate would be reduced from 13.0 percent to 9.5 percent.
- The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study is developing a rich database of information about the characteristics of unmarried parents, and how they differ from married parents. Researchers reviewing the data conclude that while one-third of the unmarried parents face no serious barriers to marriage, marriage promotion would not work or could cause serious harm for one-third of the parents (and their children), and another third could benefit only if the marriage initiatives included employment and mental health services.
- Ethnographic research by Kathryn Edin and others reveals that low-income parents believe in marriage, but desire economic security prior to marriage. Education, employment, and economic status impact the likelihood of getting and staying married for both men and women.
- Income accounts for much of the difference between child well-being in married households and other family structures. Married and unmarried parents are different in a number of ways: age, education, income, levels of domestic violence and other relationship conflict, and use of substances. Parents who are not married at the birth of their child are disadvantaged on these measures, suggesting that marriage alone will not deliver the full set of advantages that families with parents married at the birth enjoy in household income or child well-being.
- Some research points to household and parental income as more important determinants for various measures of child well-being than family structure. Notably, children's lasting educational deficits have been found to be more closely linked to early and deep poverty, while their risk of behavioral problems may be more linked to the family structure in which they grew up.
- Children may suffer when there are family structure changes, and living in a stepfamily can have negative effects as well. Children in stepfamilies do not do as well as those living with married, biological parents, and may do no better than children in single-parent or unmarried, cohabitating households. There is some evidence that growing up in a single-parent household leads to better outcomes for children than living through family structure transitions.
- Surveys of unmarried mothers in low-income households find a higher prevalence of domestic violence than in the national population. Couples experiencing domestic violence should not be encouraged to marry.
- Children of immigrants are more likely than those of native-born Americans to be poor, despite the fact that they are more likely to live in a two-parent household and in families with full-time workers.
- Teenagers who have a non-marital birth are less likely to get married later and even if teen parents do get married, these marriages are highly unstable and far more likely to fail than marriages between older individuals. While teen mothers face a host of economic and social challenges, their children bear the greatest burden and are at significantly increased risk of low birth weight and pre-maturity, mental retardation, poverty, growing up without a father, welfare dependency, poor school performance, insufficient health care, inadequate parenting, abuse and neglect, and becoming a teen parent themselves.
- Studies of a variety of programs that are often called "abstinence-plus" provide strong evidence of effectively reducing sexual activity and pregnancy among teens. Interestingly, some of the most compelling results are from programs that involve teens in supervised community services. On the other hand, there is no strong evidence that "abstinence-only" programs delay sexual activity or reduce pregnancy among teens. The jury is still out, although there is a Federal evaluation underway.

Implications for Policy and Public Investment

A review of this research reveals the risk of unintended consequences from investment in marriage promotion as a means of improving child well-being, particularly in low-income households.

While we know that growing up in a household with biological parents in a low-conflict marriage is better for child well-being, we do not know why this is true. If we do not know exactly why it is true, then we are not certain how or whether to go about encouraging similar outcomes for children in single parent households.

For example, if marriage is encouraged and supported for step-parent families, it is not clear that children will be better off.

Many unmarried parents are at risk of factors known to contribute to marital disruption or conflict: domestic violence, unemployment, mental health problems, infidelity and others. If we end up encouraging marriage for such couples before addressing these issues, we put children at greater risk of experiencing marital conflict and a change in family structure with all of its negative consequences. If the policy goal is to encourage marriage, then the policy should also support programs intended to ensure that the marriage will last.

There are serious questions about which parent population to target. For example, does it make sense to encourage step-parent marriages for cohabiting households when we have little evidence that one family structure is better than the other? Should we promote marriage for teenage parents? Is marriage a positive step for parents struggling with unemployment, mental health barriers, or a lack of education and skills to be self-sufficient? Should we focus on doing more to prevent people from becoming unmarried parents in the first place?

An Agenda for Improving Child and Family Well-being

The social science research provides important lessons for improving child and family well-being, with policies narrowly designed to support marriage, and using a broader approach in the pending welfare reauthorization legislation.

Given the limited knowledge about how to support healthy marriages that improve child well-being, Congress should approach public investment and public discourse on the issue with care.

Policies Intended to Encourage Marriage

- **Marriage Promotion Experimentation.** Given the lack of social science research that provides a roadmap for marriage promotion and support among low-income families, Congress should proceed cautiously and with the goal of learning more about how to encourage marriage, while reducing the risk of harm to children. Research evidence that provides guidance for improving child well-being is growing, and the best investments are those that may indirectly promote marriage. (See below.) Congress should not put funding ahead of the science: a relatively small investment in marriage promotion research makes sense, if carefully targeted. The legislation should dedicate funding to experimental designs, focused on the strategies with promise—particularly those that combine counseling and education with barrier removal activities like education, training, and mental health services.
- **Domestic Violence Prevention.** The research evidence is clear that low-income mothers targeted by the marriage promotion initiatives are at high risk of domestic violence. Accordingly, all marriage promotion programs and experiments must include requirements that (1) the program design be developed in coordination with local, state, or national domestic violence prevention advocates or experts; and (2) all participants are advised that the program is voluntary.
- **Teen pregnancy prevention.** While promoting marriage for teens who become parents is not likely to improve child well-being, we know that giving birth outside marriage reduces the likelihood of marriage. Thus, one of the most effective marriage promotion investments is programs proven to reduce teen pregnancy. Unless new research results provide evidence of delayed initiation of sex and reduced pregnancy as an outcome of abstinence-only programs, the existing research suggests that resources should be directed to programs with proven effectiveness such as those that provide supervised community service opportunities for teens.
- **Public Discourse.** Since the research regarding the benefits of marriage for child well-being is quite slim, and applies to those children living with married, biological parents in low-conflict relationships, it is irresponsible to overstate the importance of marriage for child well-being. As we have experienced with the public debate over work-based, time-limited welfare reform, public understanding of policy shifts can impact culture and behavior. It would be a serious disservice to single parents and their children if the public comes to believe incorrectly that these children are necessarily worse off than they would be if their primary caretaker were to marry.

Welfare Reauthorization and Lessons from Research about Child Well-being

While the administration is apparently moving ahead of Congressional action by using existing funds for marriage promotion activities, the primary legislative vehicle for discussion of marriage promotion is the current debate over welfare reauthorization. If members of Congress and the administration are committed to focusing on child well-being as a primary goal of welfare reauthorization, they should shift the investment priorities reflected in pending proposals. Current knowledge of the benefits and risks of encouraging marriage for low-income parents is limited. This suggests that further experimentation and rigorous evaluation is critical. Since we have no evidence of what works, Congress should provide a relatively small appropriation dedicated to research purposes.

Overlooked for the most part in the marriage promotion debate is existing research on welfare and children that provides strong evidence of successful approaches to child well-being that policymakers should pursue in reauthorization. Some of these strategies may prove to support safe, healthy marriage indirectly, as well. In particular, programs designed to increase household income and economic security (by providing work supports like child care and transportation assistance or by improving employment income with education and training services) are known to improve the well-being of young children.

- Make work pay and increase household income by
 - providing new resources for education and training, including transitional jobs,
 - creating a new credit to reward states for job placement rather than caseload reduction, with extra incentives to place recipients in higher paying jobs,
 - allowing states to count education, training, and barrier removal activities as primary work participation, and
 - providing an appropriation (not just authorization) for a car ownership demonstration program and evaluation.
- Provide adequate funding to maintain current levels of child care assistance to working poor families and add significant new resources for eligible families not currently receiving a child care subsidy. (Of course, any changes in work participation rates would require additional funding for the children of working welfare recipients.)
- Protect families and children from the harm of income reducing sanctions by requiring outreach and review for alternatives to benefit reduction before eliminating household income. Do not require states to impose full family sanctions.
- Do not mandate expensive work participation requirements that create incentives for states to utilize unpaid work (workfare) activities for the purpose of fulfilling Federal requirements. Increasing work participation and work hours will lead to reduced state investment in more promising programs that are proven to improve child well-being. In contrast, increasing work hours decreases adult supervision of and interaction with adolescents who are already suffering academically when their parent(s) are participating in welfare-to-work activities.
- Make it easier for states to reform child support rules so that children receive more of the child support collected for them as a means to increase household income and reduce poverty.
- Allow states to provide legal immigrant households with “make work pay” supports, education, and other services intended to increase earnings.

Reauthorizing current welfare law appears more likely to produce better outcomes for children than House and Senate proposals

While welfare reauthorization provides an opportunity for policymakers to implement strategies and services likely to improve child well-being, all signs suggest that it is highly unlikely members can agree on legislation this year. The welfare law expired in September 2002, and Congress has passed six short term extensions of current law since then. Most recently, serious disagreements between members of the Senate and the administration led to the withdrawal of the bill from floor debate. The current extension will expire at the end of June.

These short term extensions create uncertainty for welfare administrators, program providers, and low-income families.

Furthermore, the current proposals are likely to reduce child well-being as a result of new mandates to increase work hours and otherwise reduce state flexibility. Since the proposals were introduced, many states and localities have created new marriage promotion initiatives. In 2002, some observers may have concluded that

state policymakers were overlooking the opportunity to promote marriage as part of welfare to work initiatives. For good or for ill, that is not the case today.

Given these facts and the policy choices under consideration, the current best option for members of Congress to improve child outcomes through the welfare law would be a straight, multi-year reauthorization of the current law.

If Congress nevertheless chooses to implement a marriage promotion experiment while reauthorizing current law, a balanced approach is critical. Members should couple a small, targeted experiment with additional funding for child care because it is a strategy *known* to improve child well-being.

Policymaking should support promising research, but Congress should not let funding get ahead of the science.

Selected References

Bachman, H.J., Coley, R.L., & Chase-Lansdale, P. L. (2003). Marriage or Partnering? Effects of Cohabitation and Family Structure Changes on Child and Adolescent Well-Being. Paper presented at the first annual conference of the National Poverty Center, Washington D.C. Working paper available at: <http://www.npc.umich.edu>

Edin, K. (2000) How Low-Income Single Mothers Talk About Marriage. *Social Problems*, 47 (1), 112–133.

Gibson, C., Edin, K., & McLanahan, S. (2003) *High Hopes But Even Higher Expectations: The Retreat from Marriage Among Low-Income Couples*. Center for Research and Child Wellbeing Working Paper # 2003–06–FF.

Hamilton, G. (2002) *Moving People from Welfare to Work: Lessons from the National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Education.

Haskins, R. & Sawhill, I. (2003) *Work and Marriage: The Way to End Poverty and Welfare*. WR&B Policy Brief #28. Washington, D.C.: Brookings.

Kaye, K. (2004) *Effects of Marriage on Family Economic Well-Being: Summary*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Kirby, D. (2002) *Do Abstinence-Only Programs Delay the Initiation of Sex Among Young People and Reduce Teen Pregnancy?* Washington, D.C.: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy.

Kirby, D. (2001) *Emerging Answers: Research Findings on Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy*. Washington, D.C.: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy.

Lichter, D.T. & Graefe, D.R. (2001) Finding a Mate? The Marital and Cohabitation Histories of Unwed Mothers. In Wu, L.L. & Wolfe, B. (Eds.), *Out of Wedlock: Trends, Causes and Consequences of Nonmarital Fertility*, 329. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

McLanahan, S. (2003) *Fragile Families and the Marriage Agenda*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton, Center for Research on Child Wellbeing.

McLanahan, S. & Sandefur, G. (1994) *Growing Up with a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

National Center for Children in Poverty. (2002) Letter to Members of Congress: Researchers discuss the effects of welfare reform on children's well-being. Available at: http://www.nccp.org/item_25.html

Parke, M. (2003) *Are Married Parents Really Better for Children? What Research Says About the Effects of Family Structure on Child Well-Being*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Law and Social Policy.

Parke, M. (2004) *Who Are "Fragile Families" and What Do We Know About Them?* Washington, D.C.: Center for Law and Social Policy.

Reardon-Anderson, J., Capps, R., & Fix, M. (2002) *The Health and Well-Being of Children in Immigrant Families*. Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute.

Seefeldt, K.S. & Smock, P.J. (2004) *Marriage on the Public Policy Agenda: What Do Policy Makers Need to Know from Research?* University of Michigan, National Poverty Center. Available at: <http://www.npc.umich.edu/publications/workingpaper04/paper2/04-902.pdf>

Sigle-Rushton, W. & McLanahan, S. (2003) *For Richer or Poorer?: Marriage as an Anti-poverty Strategy in the United States*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton, Center for Research on Child Wellbeing.

Thomas, A. & Sawhill, I. (2002) "For Richer or for Poorer: Marriage as an Anti-poverty Strategy." *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 21(4), 587–599.

Senator BROWNBACK. Thank you.

Mr. Fagan, thank you for joining us today.

STATEMENT OF PATRICK F. FAGAN, THE WILLIAM H.G. FITZGERALD FELLOW IN FAMILY AND CULTURE ISSUES, THE HERITAGE FOUNDATION

Mr. FAGAN. Thank you for having me, Senator Brownback. It's an honor to be here to testify today.

I think that the central message of the social science data is already covered in the first panel—it's fairly simple, and I think it's profound—that when parents belong to each other, the more that they do that, the more each individual in the family, both the parents themselves and the children, thrive; and the more that there is rejection between the parents, either in divorce or in out-of-wedlock births where eventually they each go their own way, the more the entire family suffers, and most especially the children. Not all children suffer the same way, but if you look at cohort groups overall, they all suffer to some extent. And none of them probably reach the capacity they would have reached had they had parents who did belong to each other.

I put a chart, into the testimony, that gives a picture of the extent that this form of rejection has grown over the last five decades. If we just take the beginning and end point, in 1950, if you take the number of children entering the Nation as the base, the number of children born that year, and, against that, measure the number that entered a broken family that year—and the two ways of entering it are being born out wedlock, where the family has not formed, or where the parents divorce—and in 1950, for every hundred children born, twelve children entered a broken family. By the year 2000, it has grown to sixty. So there's a five-fold increase.

What that indicates, actually, is there has been a huge shift in what I call the infrastructure of the culture, from a culture of belonging, overwhelmingly, for most people, to now overwhelming, for the children of this nation, it's a culture of rejection. And on any measure you take, that the indicators go down for each cohort involved.

Because of this new culture of rejection, most of our children will not attain the fullness of their capacity, and neither will the Nation attain the fullness of its capacity to fulfil its destiny and role. And though this is far removed from the point of this hearing, I think this cultural phenomenon is now a foreign policy issue, as well. To be the leader of the free world, which we are claiming, we need a culture we are proud of, and a source of domestic strength and happiness. And for our children, that is not the case.

Instead of achieving the fullness of their capacity, the children of parents who reject each other suffer in more emotional pain. It's not that they all suffer these things to great extents; there are varying levels, of course, and there are individual children who will not suffer this. But if you take the cohort outcomes for any particular group, you will find there's more emotional pain, ill health, depression, anxiety, shortened life span—more drop out of school, less go to college. They earn less income. They develop more addictions to drugs and alcohol. They engage in increased violence, or suffer it within their homes.

Society also suffers, with more gangs, more assaults, more violence against women and children. The safest place, by the way, for women and children is in the married family. It's not totally safe,

it's not without domestic violence, but any other structure outside of that has more.

There's an increased need for healthcare, for supplemental education, for addiction programs, foster care, homelessness programs, and on and on it goes. The expansion of all these social program budgets is directly linked, in my read of the data, to the breakdown of marriage.

And there's not a single area of government concerned, not a single social budget of a major social policy area, that has not grown in size when marriages fail at this level, or when parents—another way of saying that is, when parents reject each other, picking up the pieces is not just the work of the fragmented family and the extended family, but also of society and the taxpayer.

The breakdown has now reached such a level as to be massively expensive. And with these results, we can say that this cultural change, America's latest experiment in its history of experiment with freedom, but this experiment with freedom has been a big failure, especially for the children of those parents.

So the question then arises, How do we reverse the situation? And I don't think it's easy, by any means. As a nation, we need to set about restoring the conditions that will grow again a culture of belonging with all the ingredients that go into such a culture—some of these mentioned in the past panel: courtship, marriage, worship—key link within this—and forming communities of families where neighborhoods are places you like to come home to.

Looking at neighborhoods is a key issue. We've all—all of—anybody around my age, in their 50s, remember neighborhoods where kids played a lot more, where families visited each other a lot more, a neighborhood that sustained family life much easier. There's huge stress on marriages today because the demands for relational capacities are almost entirely on the marriage because the communities don't support them, don't provide this other support that makes human life so much more human and humane.

So George Washington, in his farewell speech—I want to segue into the issue of worship and religion—in his farewell speech to the Nation, he drew attention to the need for the American people to be a people of worship if our experiment with freedom and our Democratic form and Republican form is to succeed. But I think the social science data in this whole area gives a clear nod in his direction.

For instance, on something that the whole country and this Senate constantly talk, worry about, put a lot of budget money into, and all the rest, is grade point average and how kids are doing in school. Children from intact families that worship frequently—and intact, there I would include the intact cohabiting as well as the intact marriage where there's no rejection, living together—put those two groups together, and then you look at how frequently they worship, and what you find is that the children do best in grade point average significantly—and there's a chart in there, too—where they score significantly higher. And those who score lowest are those from fragmented families that don't worship at all, or very little. And then the ones in between have an in-between score.

And similar outcomes occur no matter almost what measure you take. This comes out of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, which is—or the Add Health—sorry—the Add Health survey, which is our largest survey ever done on adolescents, which we can track now through the third wave. These adolescents are now into their mid-20s.

So the big thing that I think that is needed, more than any particular program—if there is one program that's needed, it's right here in the Senate—it's a program of debate that will probably have to last many years. Because, given the sort of nation we are, we are not one people, we don't have a history of a particular culture. We are a political nation, and the Senate is the place where we most debate how we will go forward.

We've had an experiment that has failed. It's going to take a lot of debate and a lot of fleshing out, aided by all of the suggestions that have been made here—on programs, on data, on correlational, on experiments and quasi-experiments—so that these things can be fleshed out. And that debate and its consequences out into the media and elsewhere, I suggest that program of debate, which you are beginning, and others, by having hearings like this, will have a much bigger impact, because it will change the ideas and will form, gradually, a consensus again. It'll take quite some time.

Who knows what way it's going to end up. But you will gradually emerge a view of how we are going to move forward and restore the culture of belonging in our families, rather than a culture of rejection which we now have.

Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Fagan follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF PATRICK F. FAGAN, THE WILLIAM H.G. FITZGERALD
FELLOW IN FAMILY AND CULTURE ISSUES, THE HERITAGE FOUNDATION

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on the challenge that family life in America presents to the children and the leaders of our Nation.

The family is the building block of our society. It is the place where everyone begins life and to which they always belong. The more that members of a family belong to each other, the more each individual and each family thrive. When rejection occurs in the family, especially between the parents when they separate or divorce, or even when they never come together, the entire family and especially the children, suffers.

The accompanying extended remarks in the form of a booklet called "The Map of the American Family" illustrate in charts the trends and the dynamics of belonging and rejection in the United States over the last fifty years. These charts are mainly from Federal surveys and give a snapshot of what is occurring within America's families. (British data are used when there is no corresponding U.S. Federal survey . . . a situation that should be remedied.)

The effects of belonging, rejection, and indifference are illustrated in these graphs. National survey data repeatedly and consistently show that the highest levels of positive outcomes are in those families where the parents have always belonged to each other and to their children: the intact married family. These families (adults and children) are less likely to live in poverty, less likely to be dependent on welfare, more likely to be happy, and to have a host of other positive outcomes. Further, the children in these families are more likely to exhibit positive outcomes (such as higher grade point average) and less likely to exhibit negative ones (such as depression).

Though these charts are correlational—deliberately so, to give the best picture or snapshot of what is happening with America's children—the regression analysis and causative exploration by the Nation's top family sociologists repeatedly find that the intact married family is the best place in which children thrive.

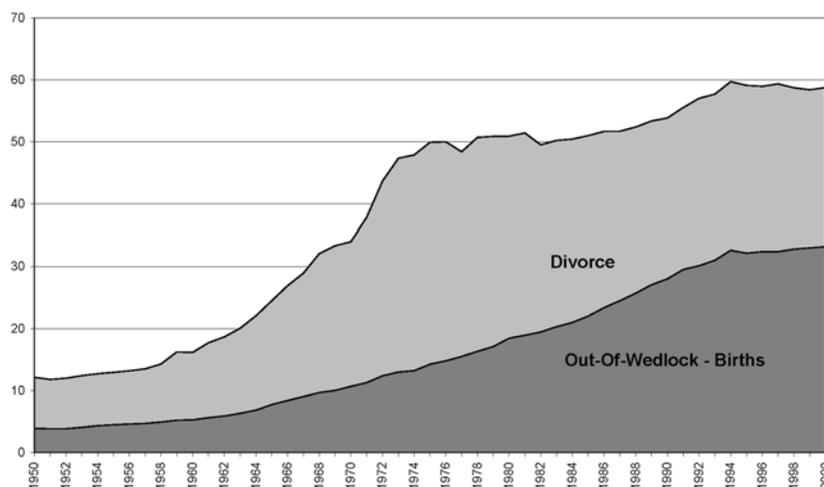
When parents reject each other by divorce or an out of wedlock birth that eventually ends in totally separate lives for the father and mother, the strengths of their children are not as developed as they could be, and more weaknesses occur in major outcomes such as deprivations, addictions, abuse and failure.

When fathers and mothers belong to each other in marriage their children thrive. When they are indifferent or walk away from each or reject each other, their children do not thrive as much, and many wilt a lot.

The chart below gives a picture of how many children have been affected by changes in family structure over the past fifty years, changes in the levels of belongingness and the levels of rejection during these five decades.

For Every 100 Children Born: Those Experiencing Rejection in Their Family.

Sources: CDC / NCHS Series Report



This chart shows that in 1950 for every hundred children born, that year, 12 entered a broken family—four were born out of wedlock and eight suffered the divorce of their parents. By the year 2000 that number had risen five fold and for every 100 children born 60 entered a broken family: 33 born out of wedlock and 27 suffering the divorce of their parents.

We must conclude that over the last fifty years America has changed from being preponderantly “a culture of belonging” to now being “a culture of rejection”.

Because of this level of the rejection by fathers and mothers of each other this growing cohort of children has not nor will not attain the fullness of its capacities. Neither can the Nation attain the fullness of its capacity to fulfill its destiny and role.

The children of parents who reject each other suffer: in deep emotional pain, ill health, depression, anxiety, even shortened life span; more drop out of school, less go to college, they earn less income, they develop more addictions to drugs and alcohol, and they engage in increased violence or suffer it within their homes.

Society also suffers with more gangs, more assaults, more violence against women and children, more sexual abuse of women and children, and much bigger bills for jails, increased need for health care, supplemental education, addiction programs, foster care, homelessness programs and on and on. The expansion of all these social program budgets is directly linked to the breakdown in marriage.

There is not a single area of governmental concern, not a single budget of a major social policy area that does not grow in size when marriages fail, or when parents reject each other. Picking up the pieces becomes not just the work of the fragmented family itself but of all taxpayers and the whole of society. The breakdown has now reached such a level as to be massively expensive. With these results we can say this cultural change—America’s latest experiment with freedom—has been a big failure.

Though it may seem far removed from the point of this hearing, this cultural phenomenon is now a foreign policy issue. To be the leader of the free world we need

a culture that we are proud of, a culture that is a source of domestic strength and happiness.

How do we reverse this situation?

As a nation we need to set about restoring the conditions that will grow again a culture of belonging, with all the ingredients that go into such a culture: courtship, marriage, worship and communities of families that form neighborhoods that are nice places to come home to: neighborhoods in which romance, courtship and marriage are normal and frequent. Behind this simple goal—some might, without grasping its import, say simplistic goal—lies a huge amount of work especially for everyone, including this body.

The Senate, which has played such a critical role so often in shaping the ideas that guide and correct the unfolding American experiment in freedom, and which has helped shape the ideals of this Nation so often, is now called again to play again its foremost role in bringing this about the changes needed: debate.

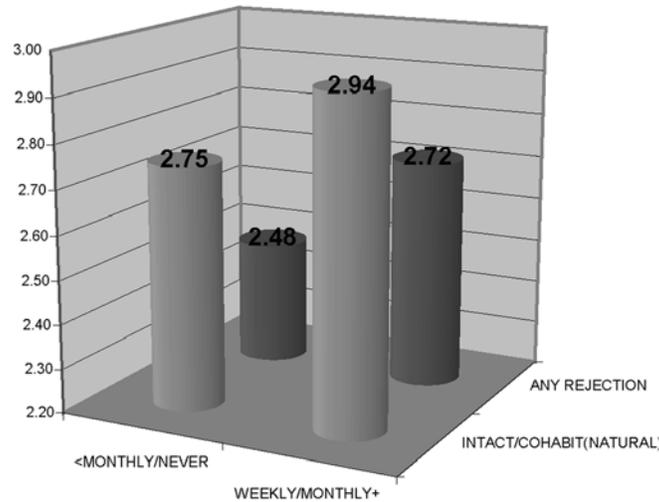
We are a political nation, founded on a political ideas and ideals that animate our constitution and our national history. And the Senate is the institution designed most to be that place where America debates the next form of its ongoing experiment with freedom: more than the House, more than the Supreme Court, more even than the Presidency. This is the preeminent institution of debate in this country—so at least was the intention of the Founders, and so still is the need of the people.

George Washington in his Farewell Speech to the Nation drew attention to the need for the American people to be a people of worship if this experiment in freedom is to work. The latest data show us that these families—those that worship most, are those that most belong to each other, that give us the most of what we want in all our social policies, and produce the least of what we try to prevent in all our social programs . . . but that is a topic for another hearing, one well worth having.

When mothers and fathers belong to each other and strive to belong to God in worship the greatest strengths emerge and the least problems are present. For instance on something the whole country and this Senate constantly talk, and worry about, and spend a lot of money on—education attainment and outcomes—children from the intact family that worships God most frequently has the highest Grade Point Average, while children from the fragmented family that worships least or not at all, as a group, has the lowest Grade Point Average, as the attached chart illustrates from the National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health, our biggest and most comprehensive survey ever of adolescent outcomes. A host of other outcomes illustrate the same basic point.

GPA English/Math by Category

Source: Adolescent Health Survey, Wave I. Adolescents grade 7-12.



There is much in the scientific literature that points towards religious practice as a great preserver and fosterer of marriage and family strengths.

Thus we increasingly have data pointing towards two fundamental strengths for this nation: love between fathers and mothers in marriage, and regular worship of God. Significantly both are premised on America's most fundamental premise, freedom: both marriage and worship can only truly happen with the totally free undertaking of the people involved. There is absolutely no room for any form of coercion in these great enterprises . . . hence the importance of the role of debate and persuasion, especially debate in the Senate.

In this time of an obvious failure of one phase of America's experiment with freedom, the challenge before you, the leaders of this nation, is how to lead America back to having a culture of belonging rather than being a culture of rejection; to being a country where people and families belong to each other and especially fathers belong first to the mothers of their children and mothers belong first to the fathers. Parents belonging to each other are what children need more than anything else this Nation can give them.

The first step on how to get there is being taken by discussions such as this. This and the debate that will follow among your colleagues is a major service to the whole nation.

I sincerely thank Senator Brownback and Senator McCain for inviting me to testify before this committee. It is a great honor for me. I hope my testimony has been helpful to you.

The Heritage Foundation is a public policy, research, and educational organization operating under Section 501(C)(3). It is privately supported, and receives no funds from any government at any level, nor does it perform any government or other contract work.

The Heritage Foundation is the most broadly supported think tank in the United States. During 2003, it had more than 200,000 individual, foundation, and corporate supporters representing every state in the U.S. Its 2003 income came from the following sources:

Individuals	52%
Foundations	19%
Corporations	8%
Investment Income	18%
Publication Sales and Other	3%

The top five corporate givers provided The Heritage Foundation with 5 percent of its 2003 income. The Heritage Foundation's books are audited annually by the national accounting firm of Deloitte & Touche. A list of major donors is available from The Heritage Foundation upon request.

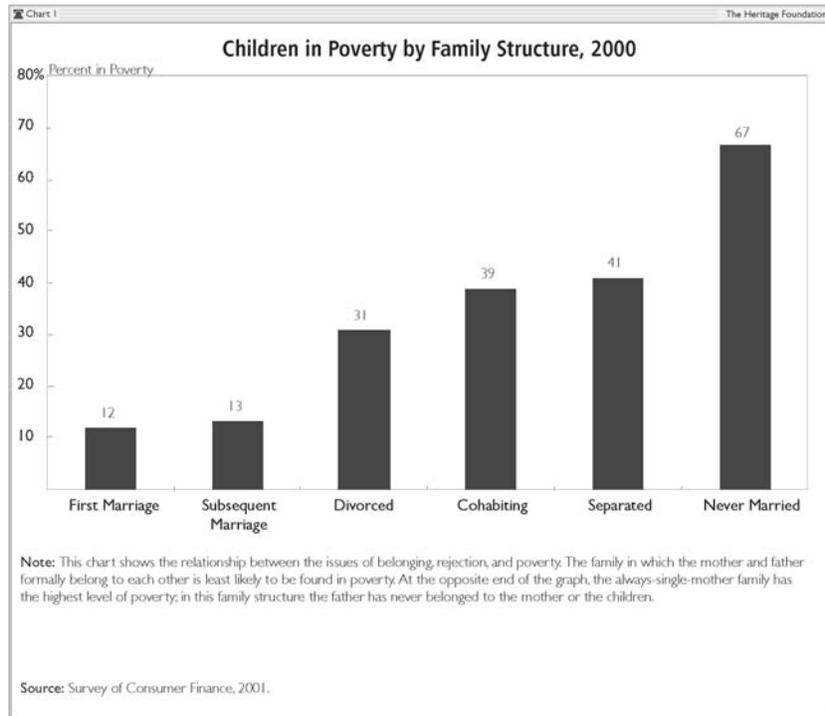
Members of The Heritage Foundation staff testify as individuals discussing their own independent research. The views expressed are their own, and do not reflect an institutional position for The Heritage Foundation or its board of trustees.

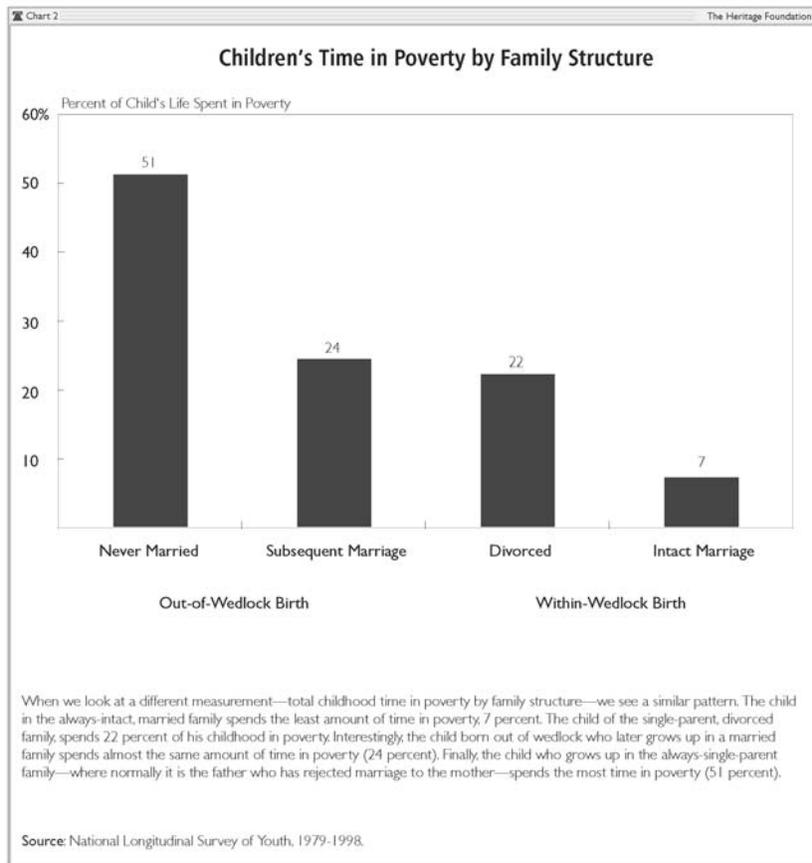
ATTACHMENT

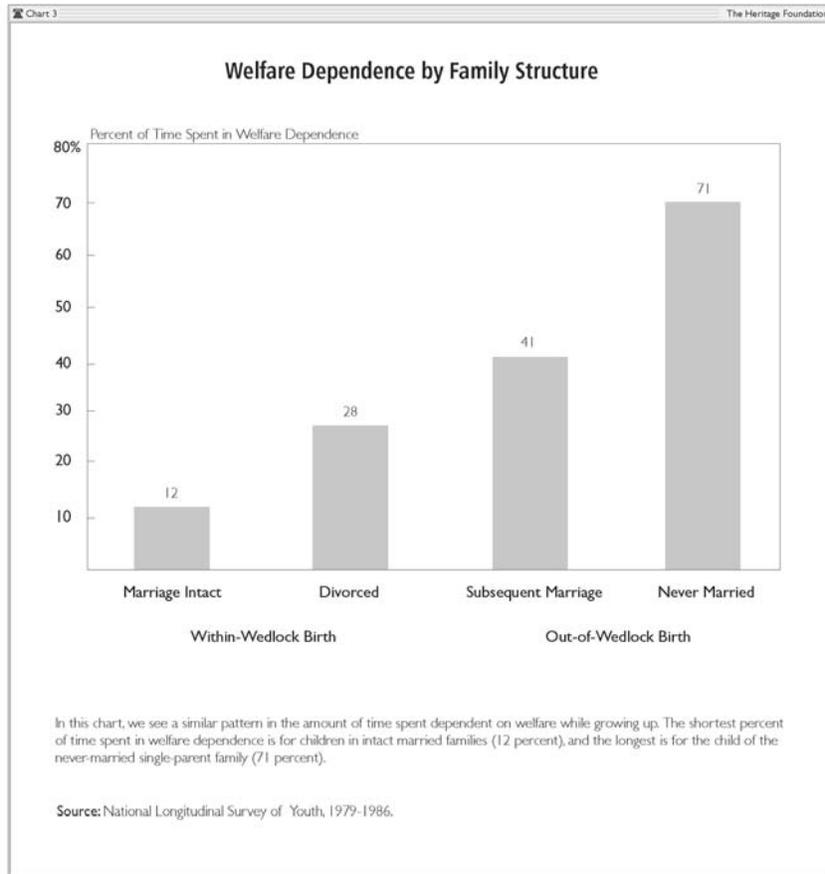
THE MAP OF AMERICA'S FAMILY CULTURE

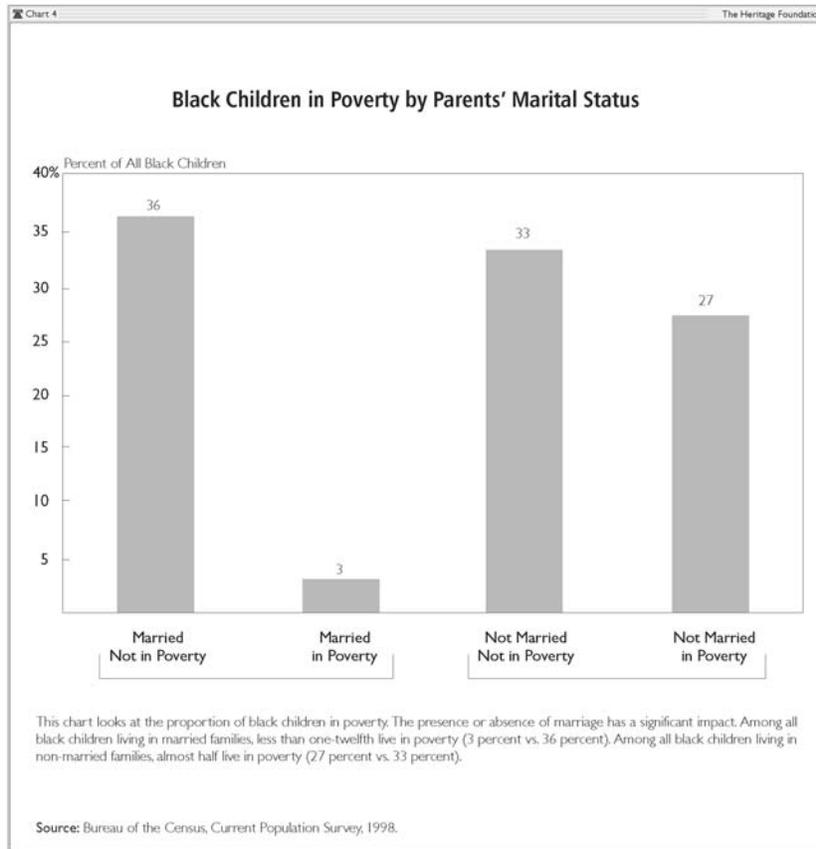
The family is the building block of our society. Family is the place where everyone begins life and to which they always belong. The more that members of a family belong to each other, the more each individual and each family thrives. When rejection occurs in the family, especially between the parents when they separate or divorce, the entire family suffers.

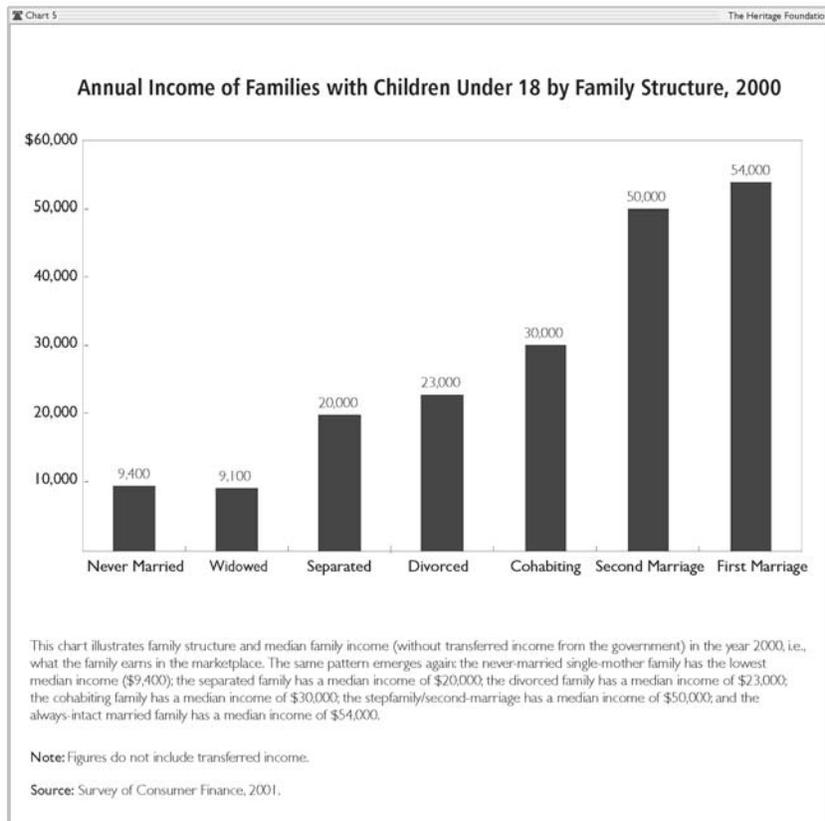
The following charts illustrate the dynamics of belonging and rejection. These charts are mainly from federal surveys and give a snapshot of what is occurring within America's families. (British data are used when there is no corresponding U.S. federal survey.) The issues of belonging, rejection, and indifference are powerfully illustrated in these graphs as we see the highest level of positive outcomes consistently occurring in the always-intact family, where the parents have always belonged to each other and to their children. These families are less likely to live in poverty, less likely to be dependent on welfare, more likely to be happy, along with a host of other positive indicators. Further, the children in these families are more likely to exhibit positive outcomes (such as dinner with their family) and less likely to exhibit negative ones (such as depression). For the well-being of the family, it is vital that the parents always belong to each other and the children to the parents.

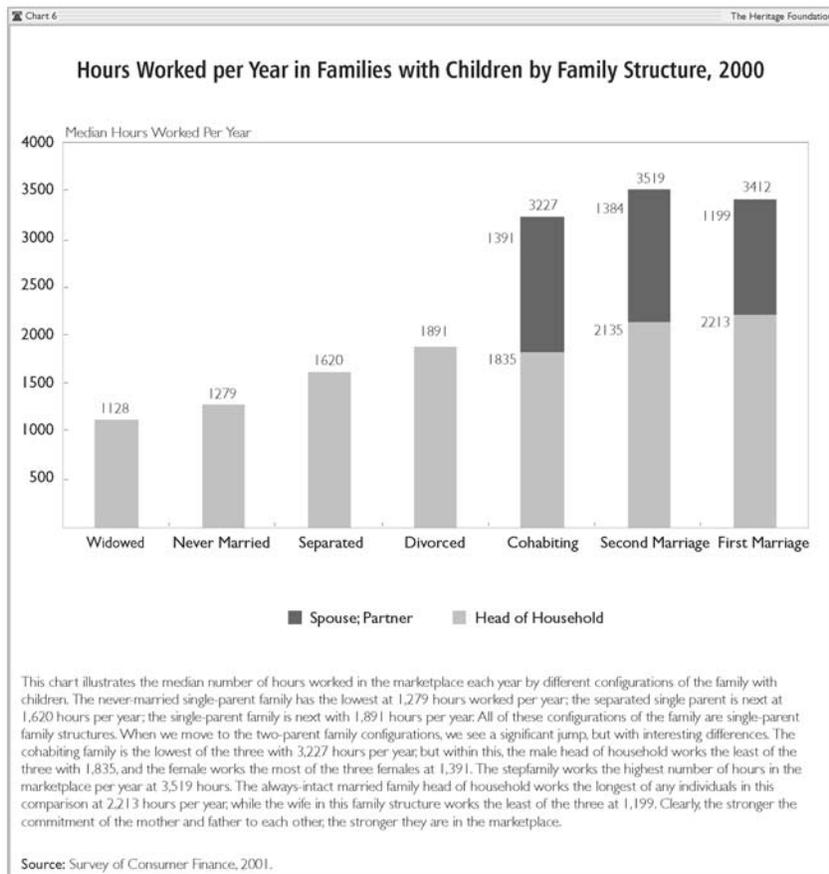


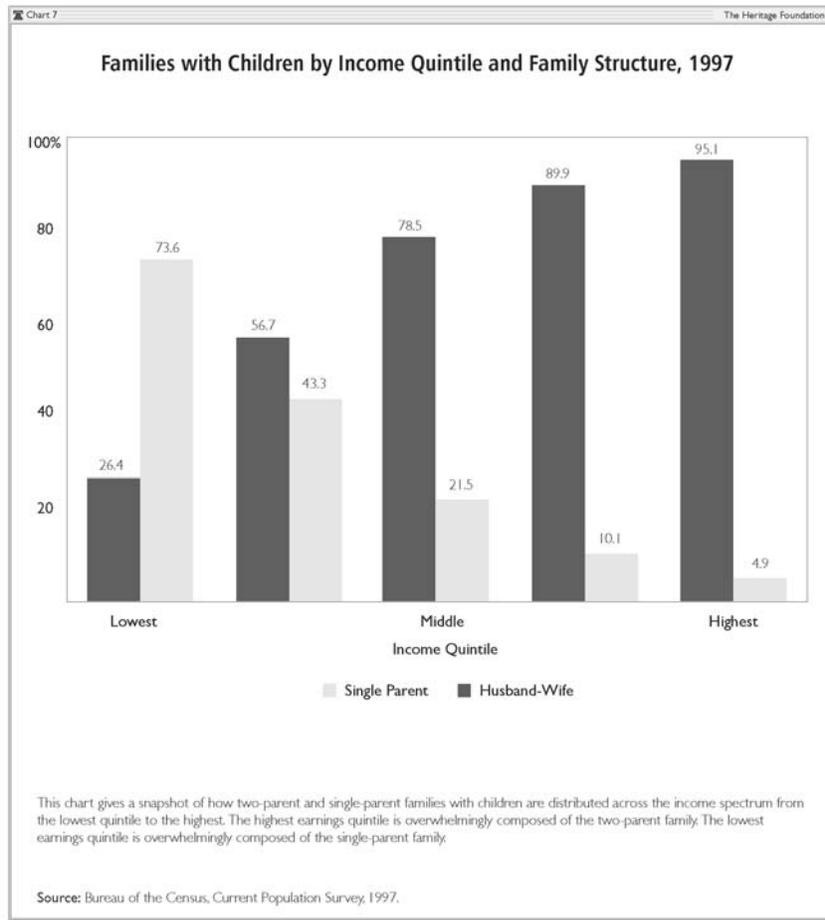


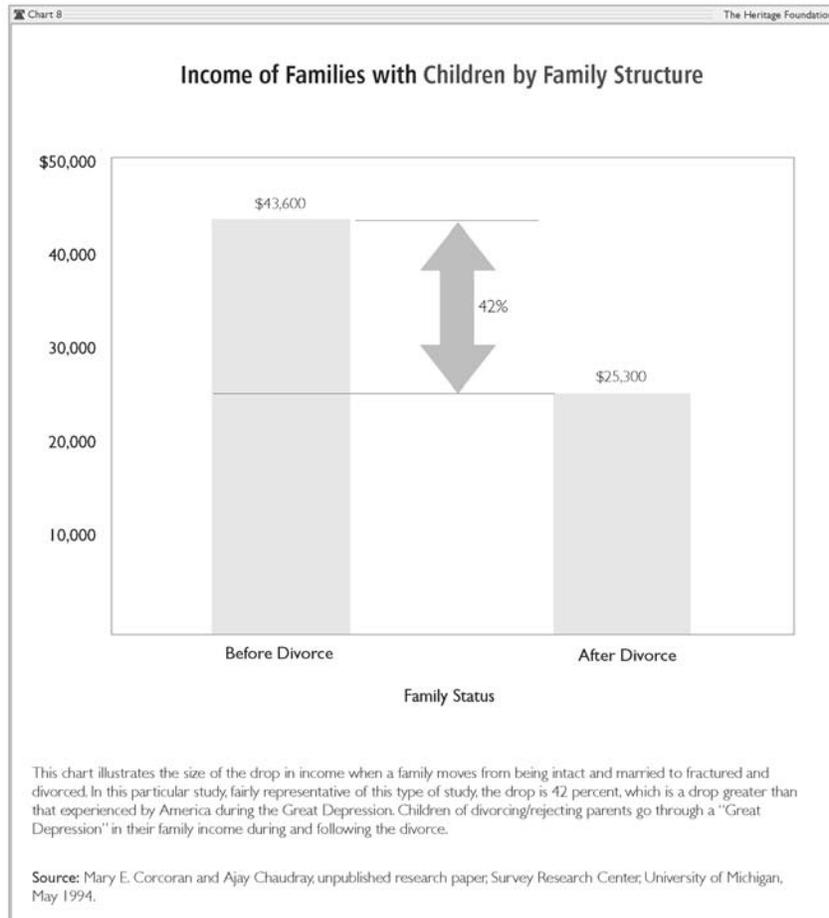


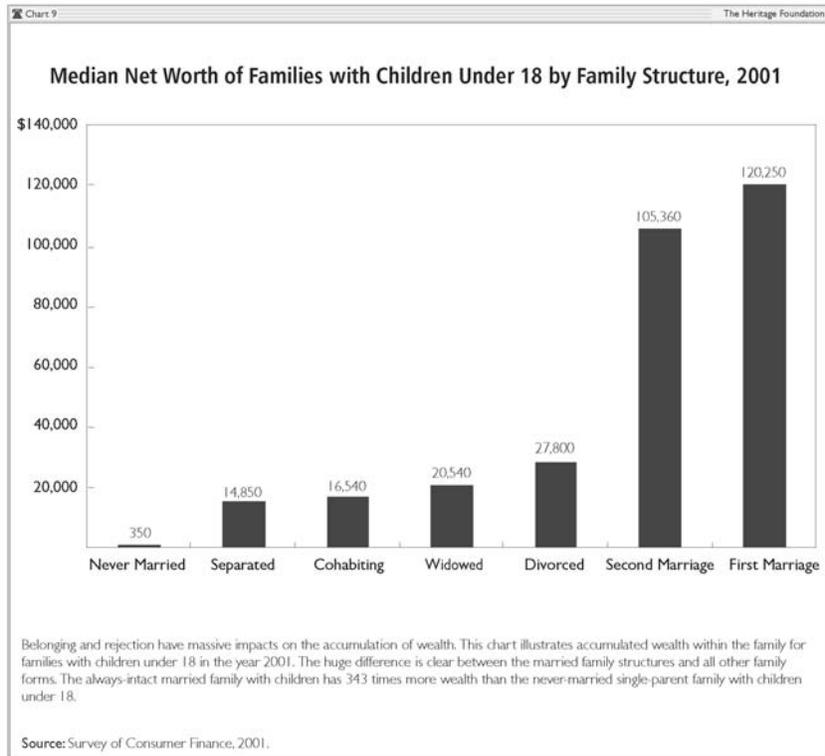


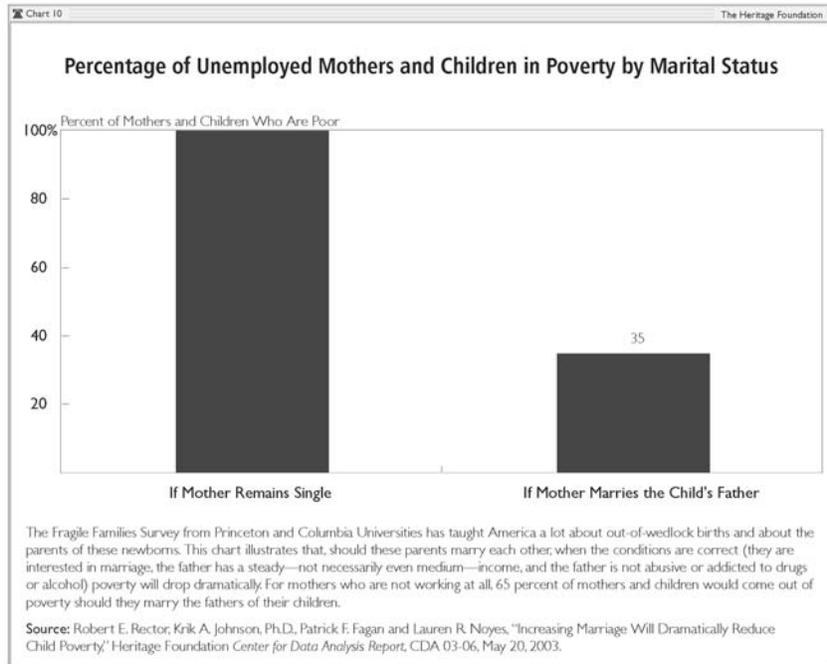


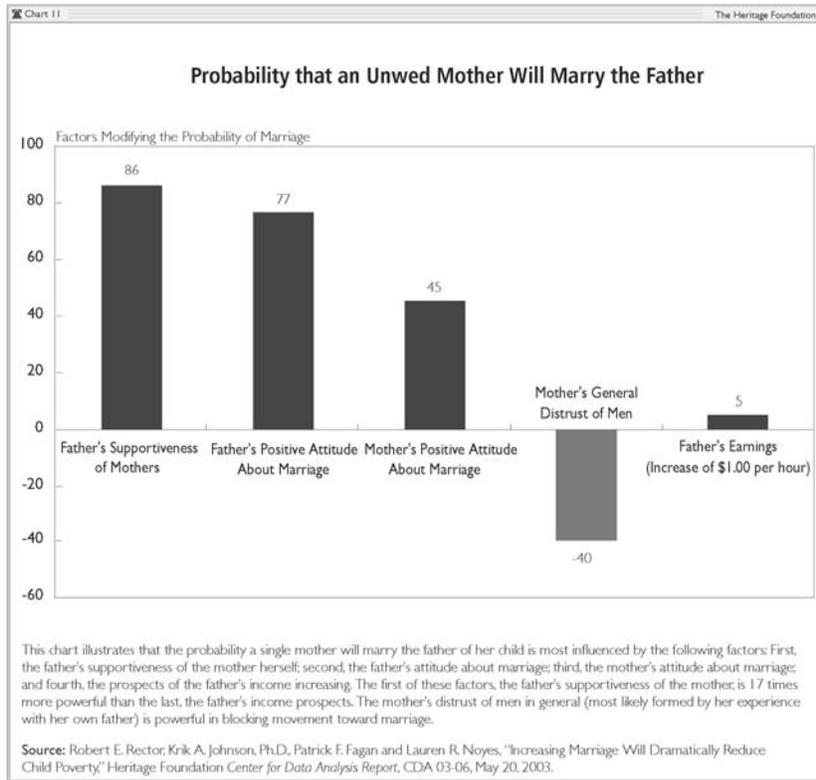


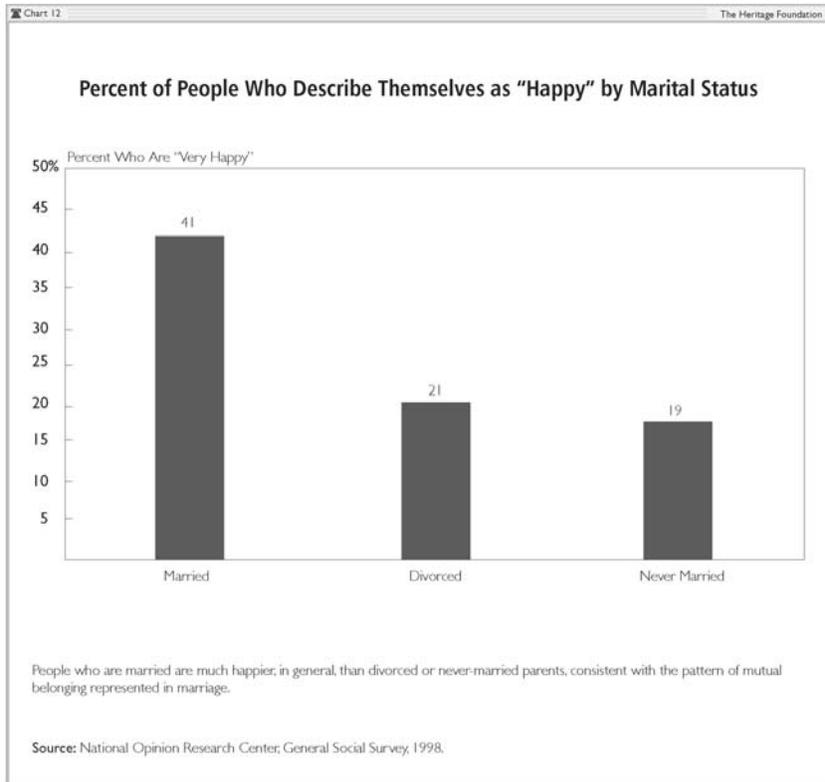


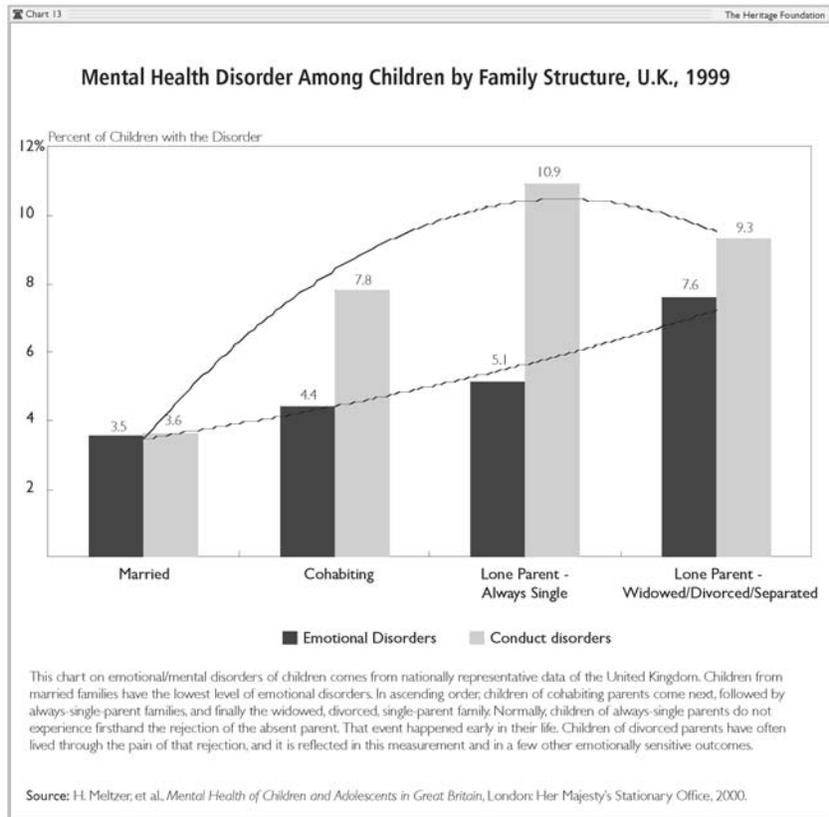


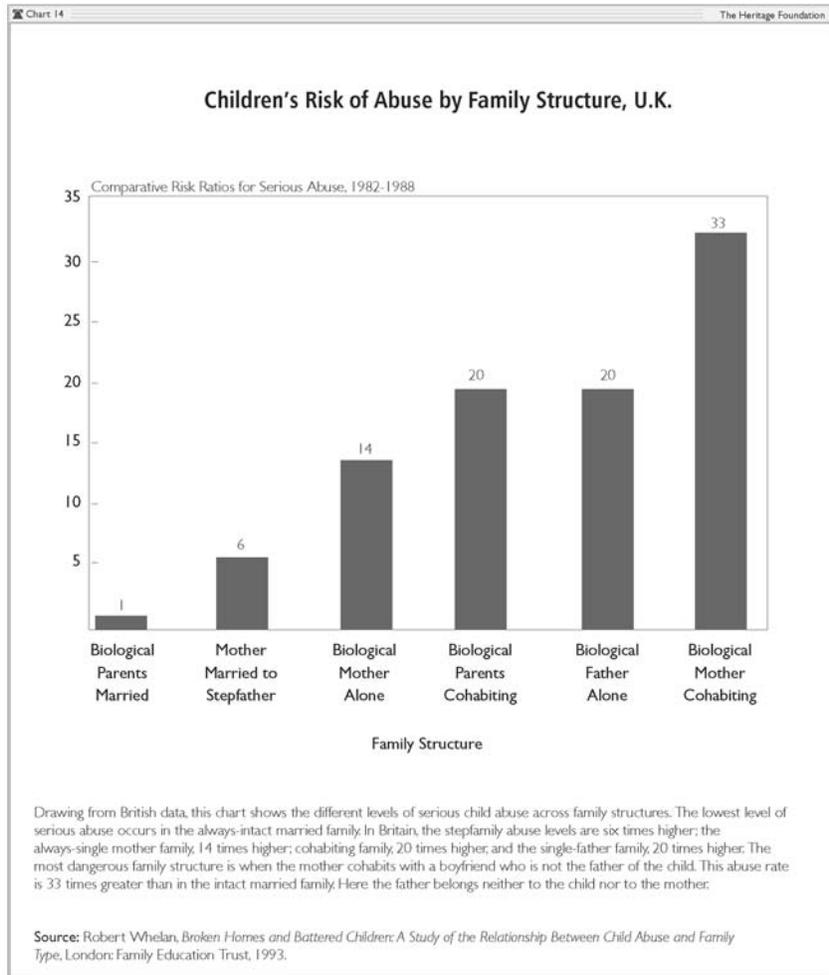


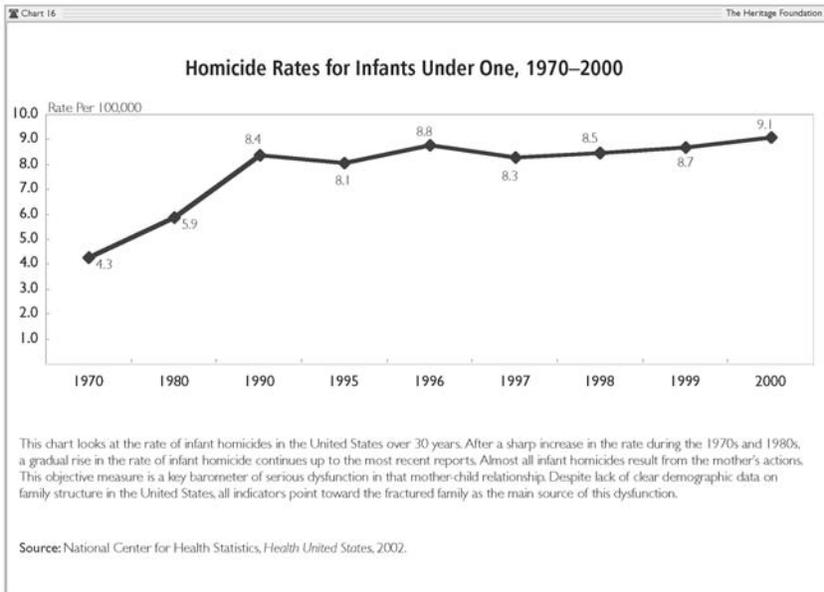
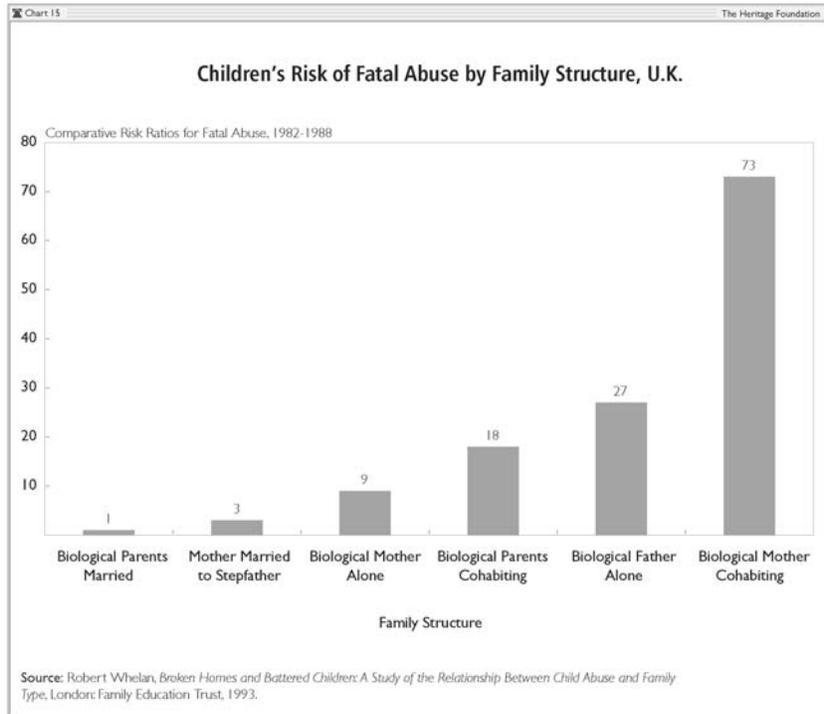


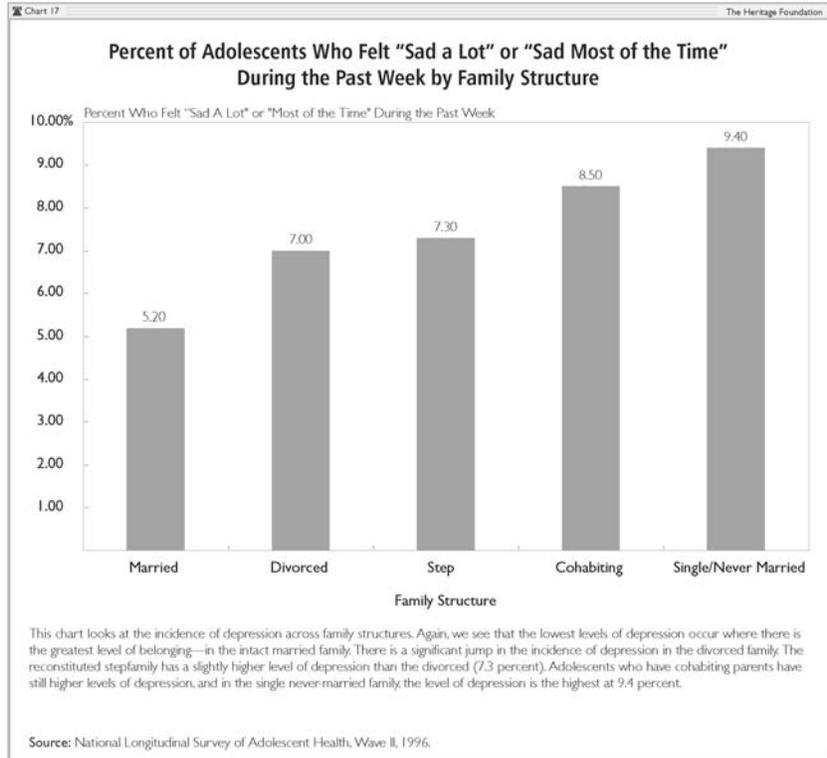


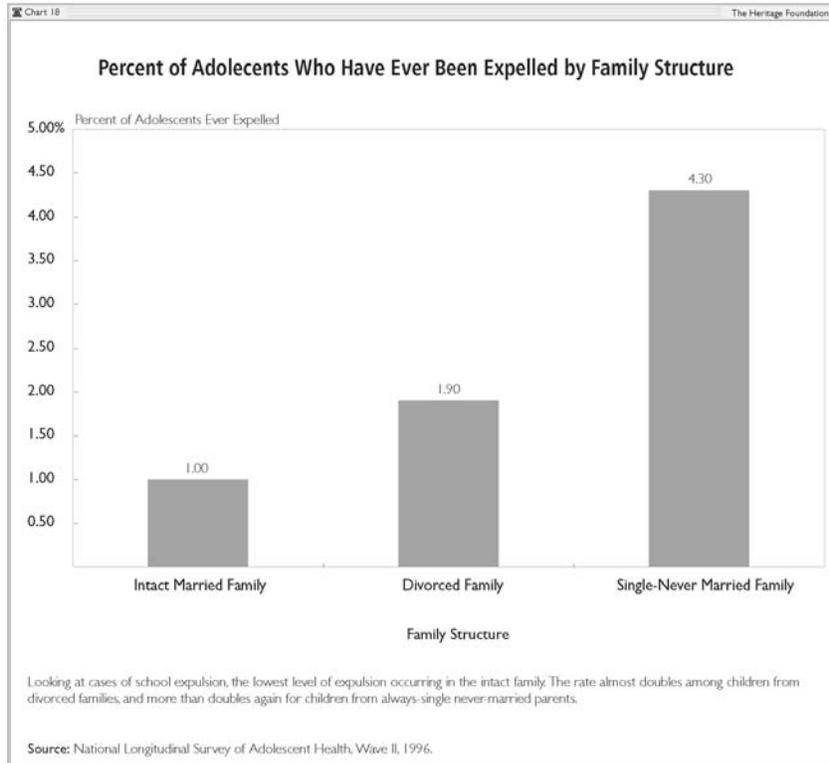


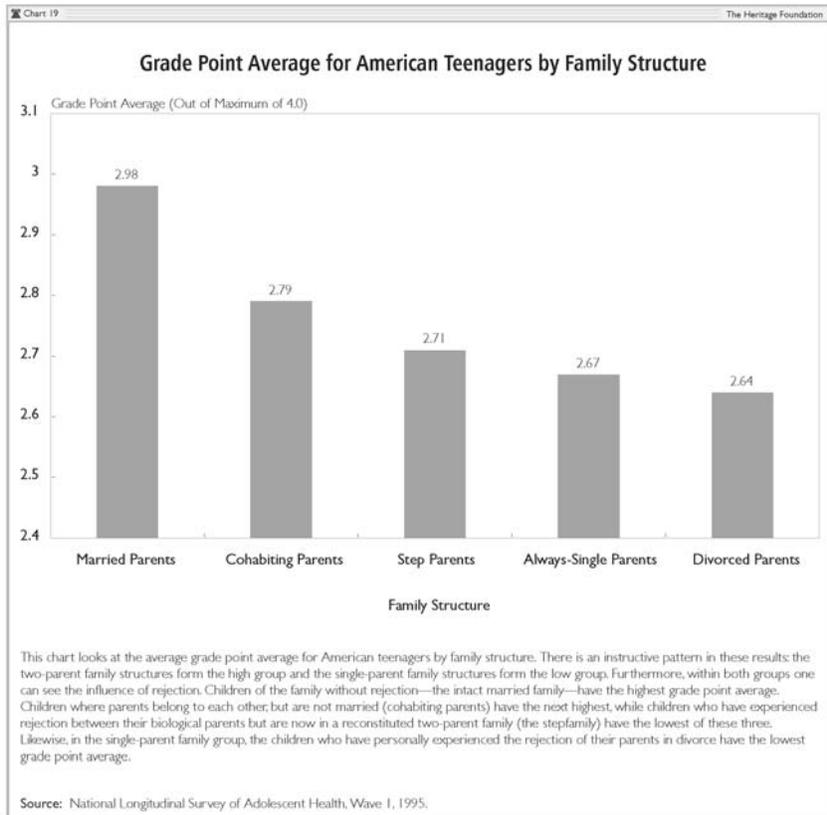


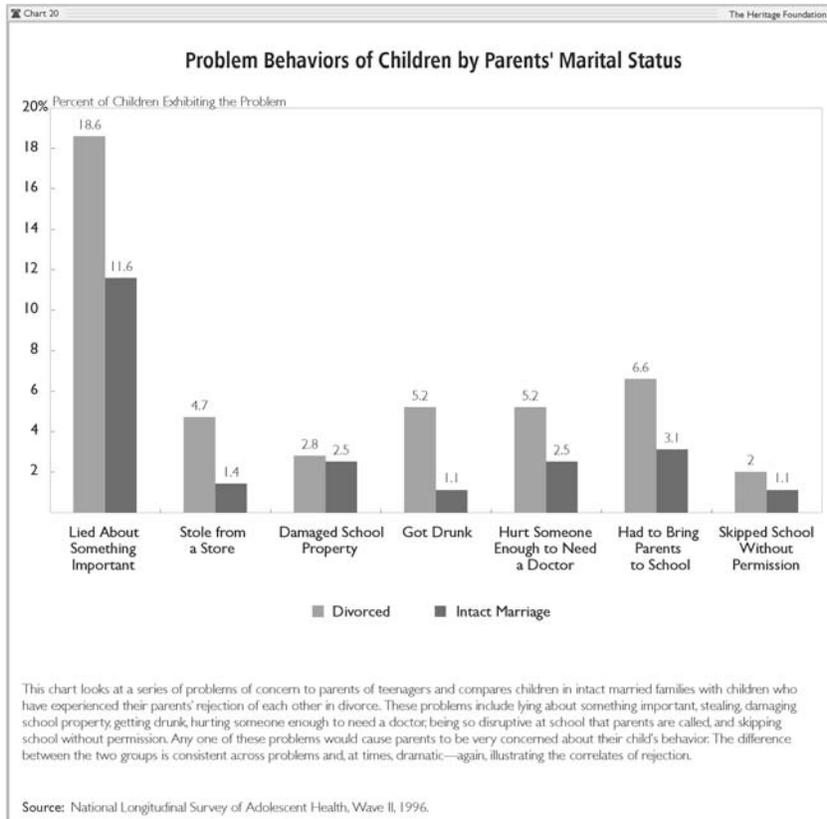


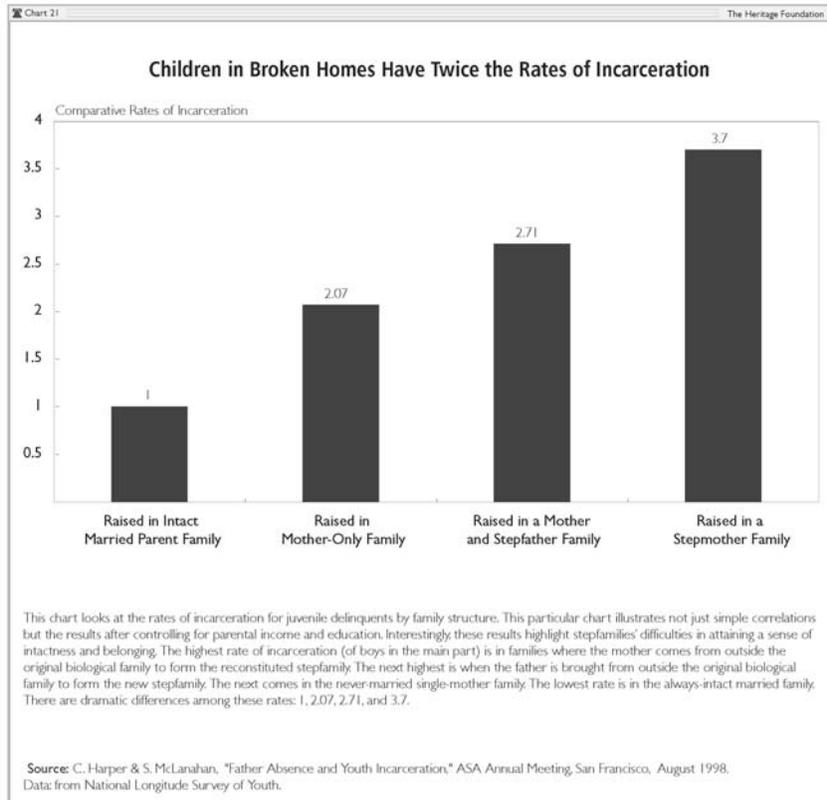


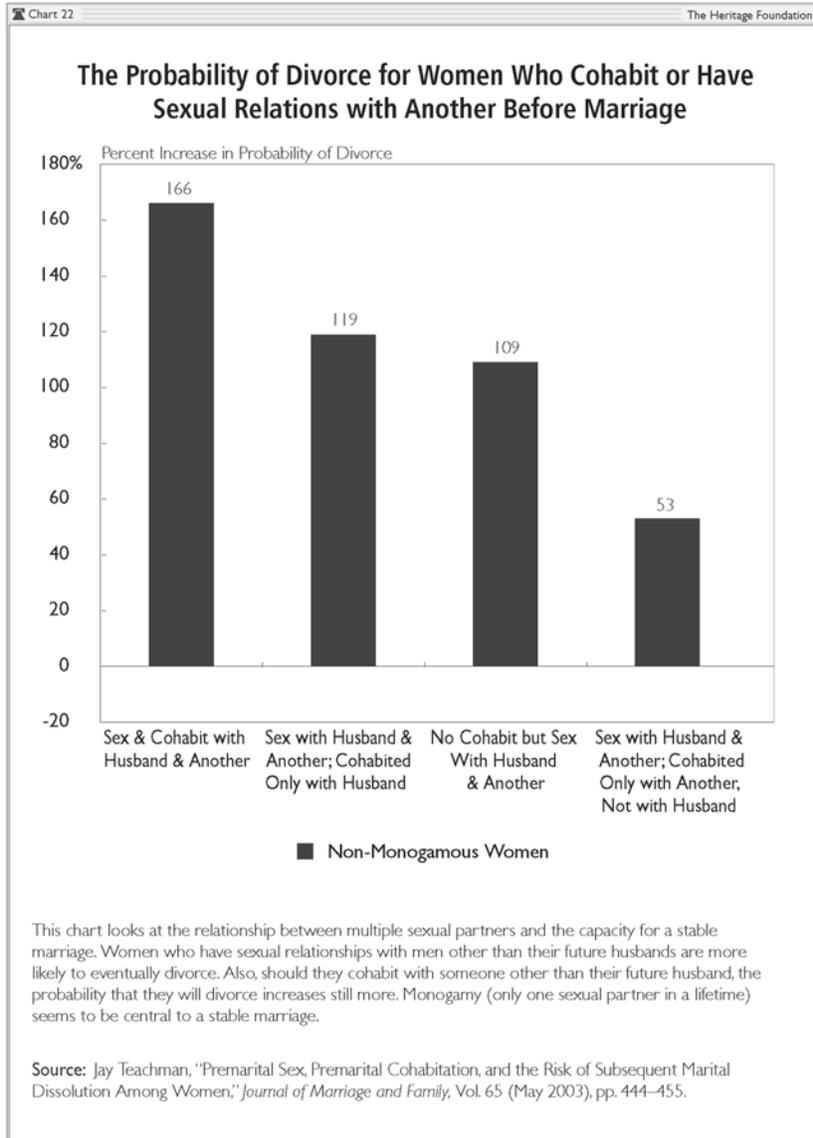


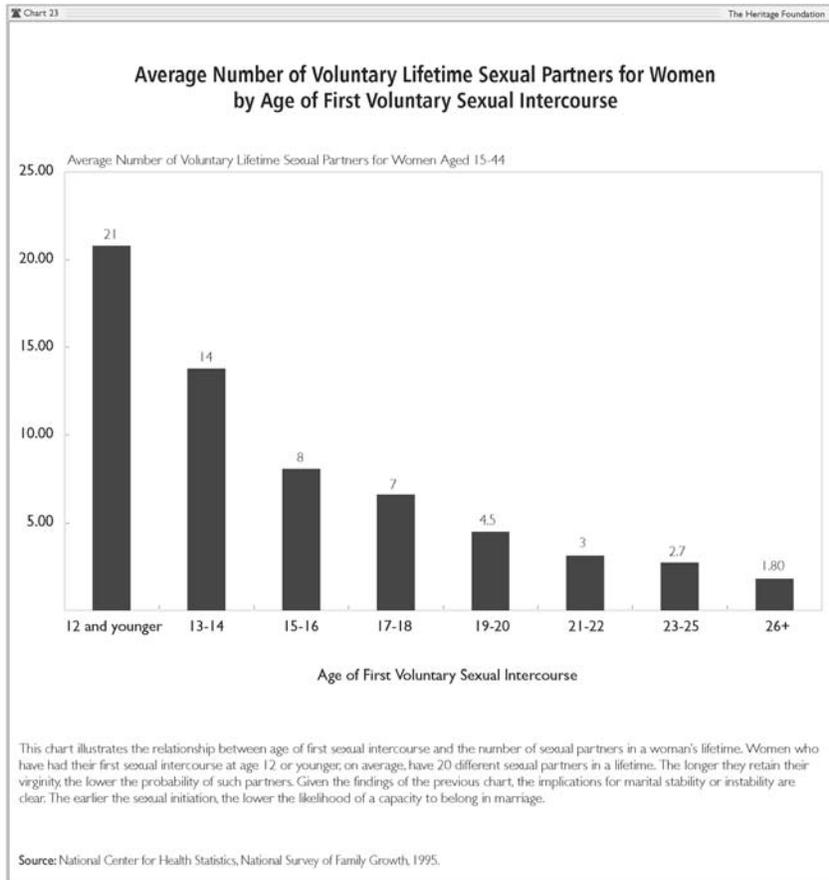


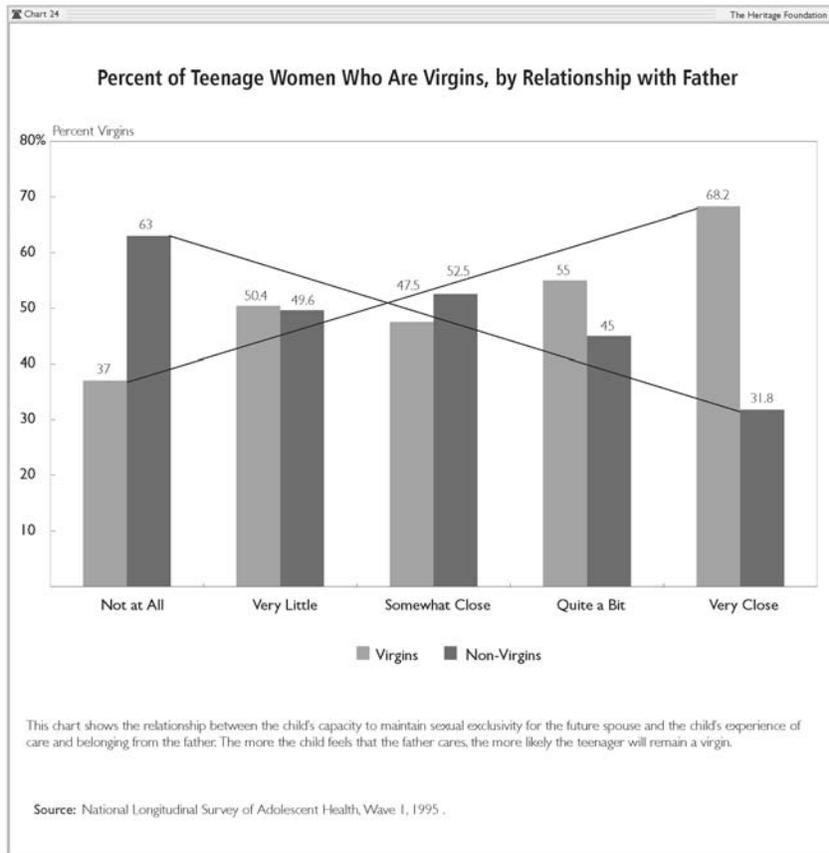


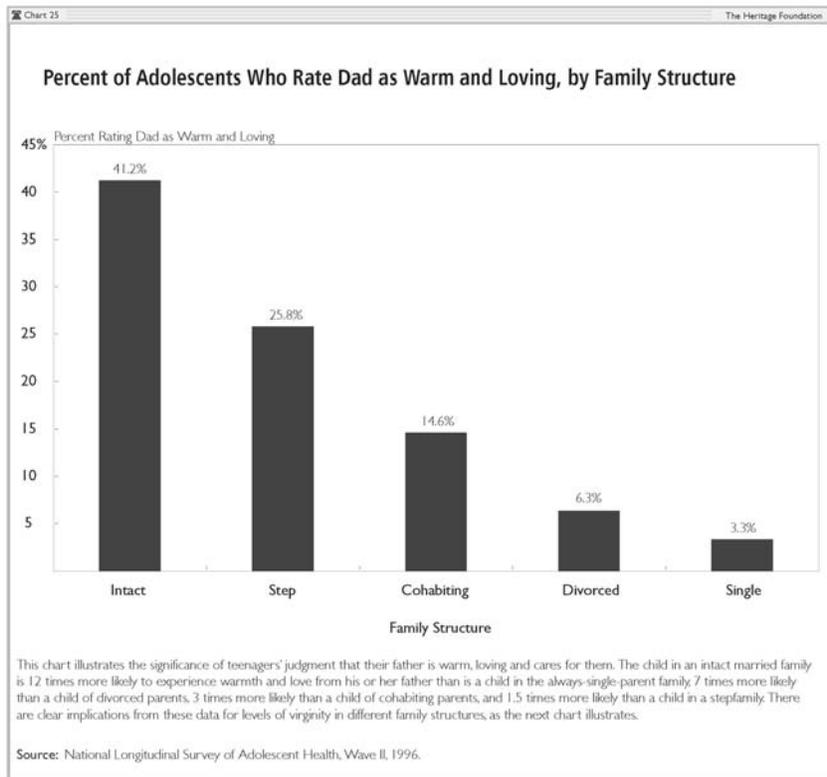


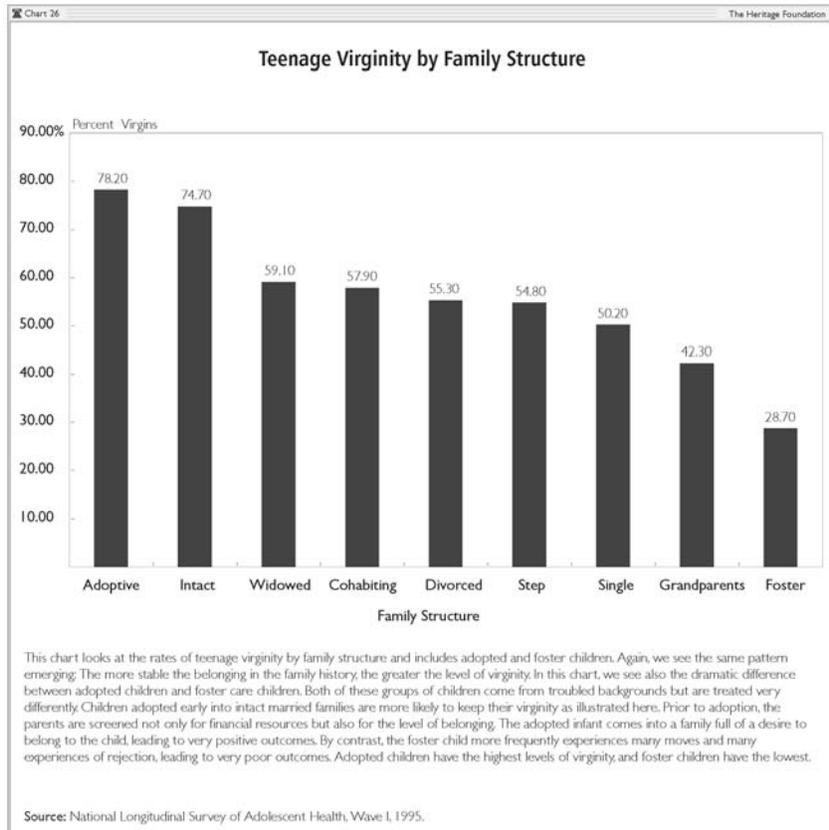


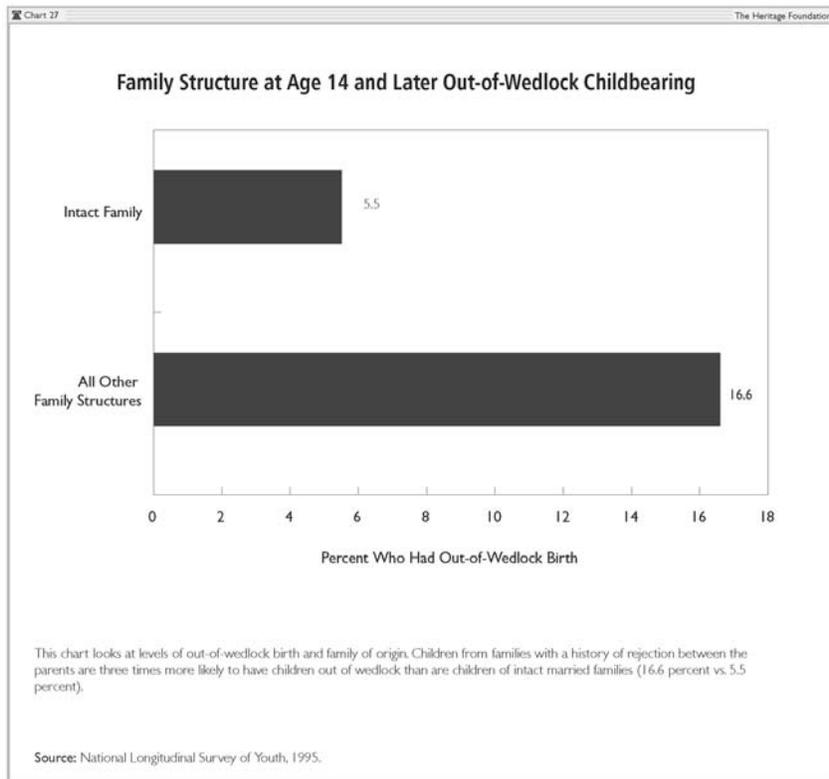


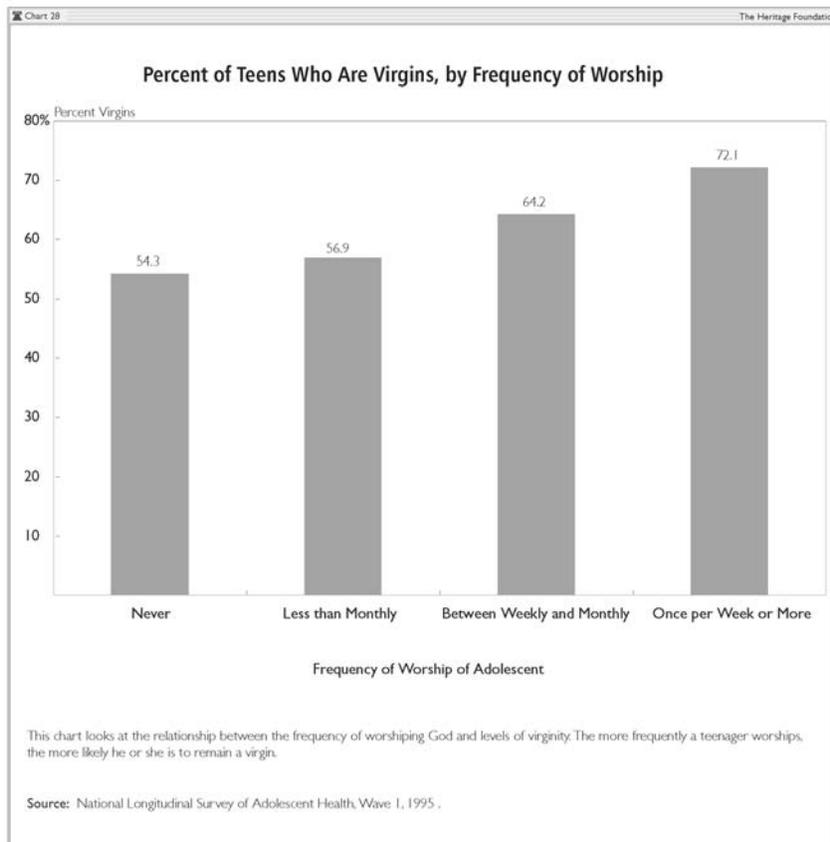


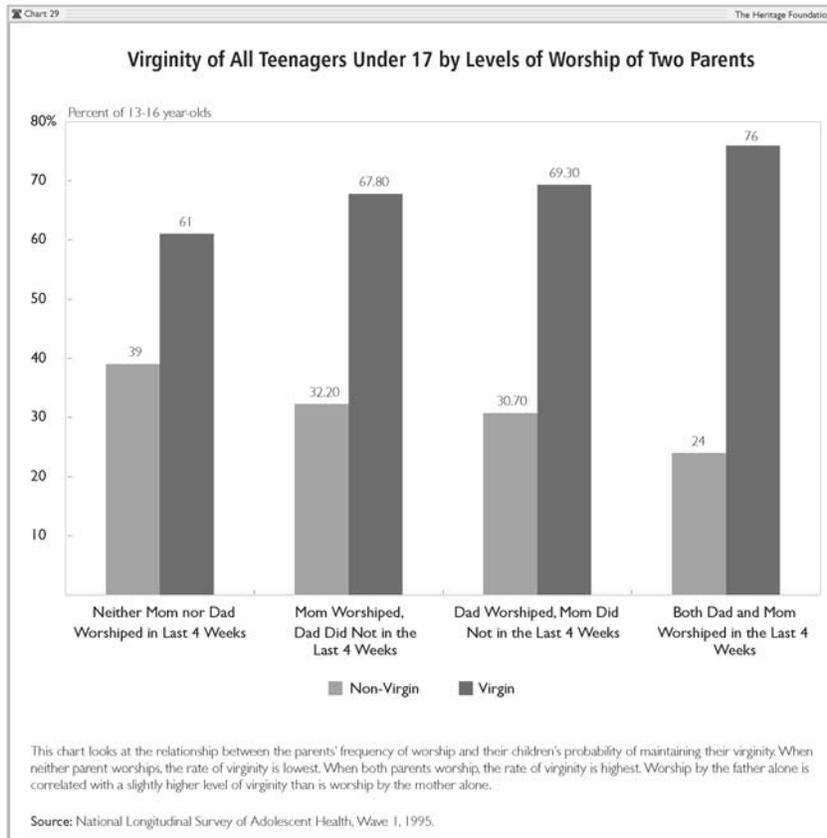


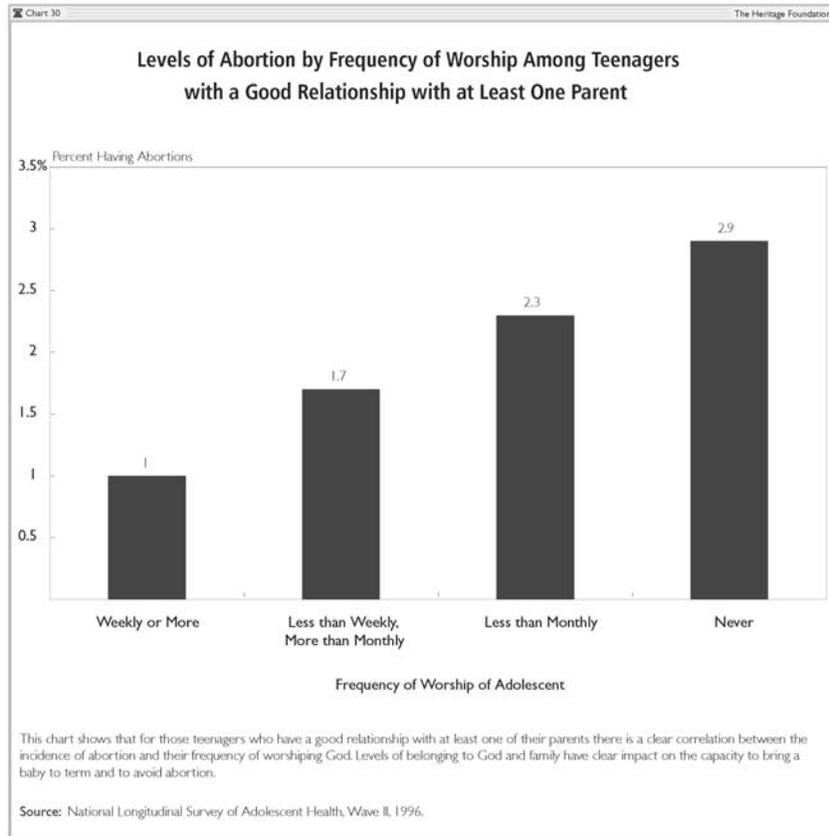


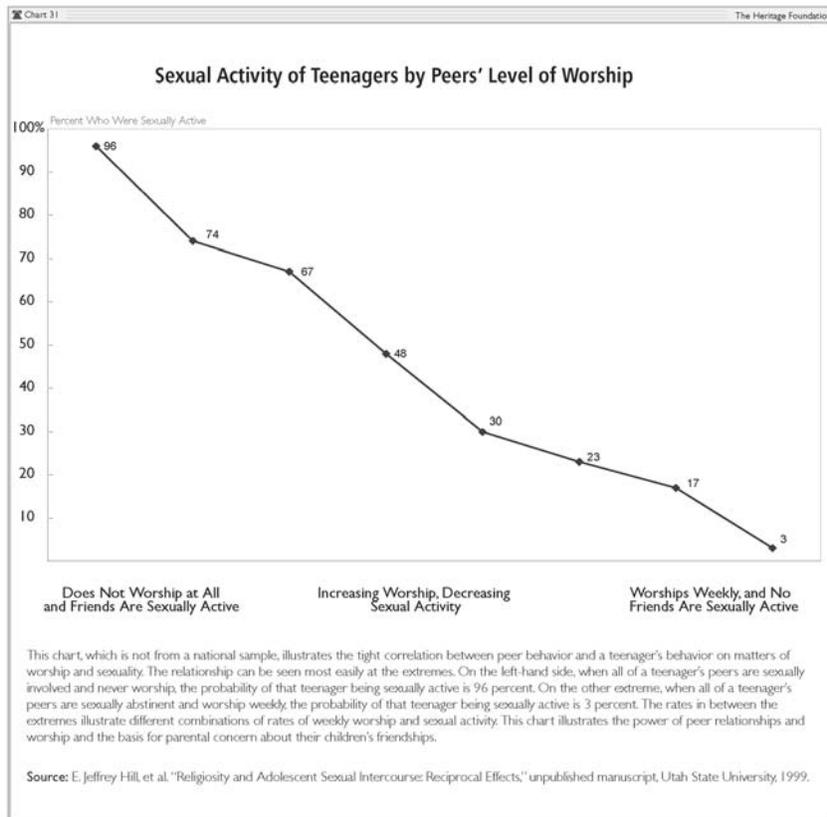


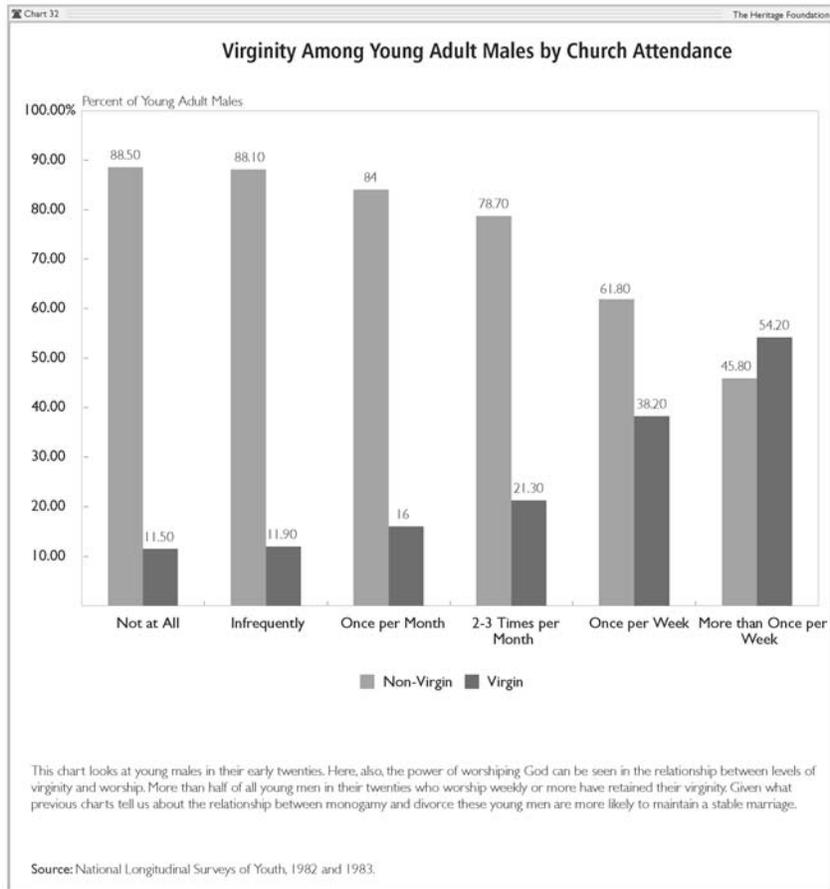


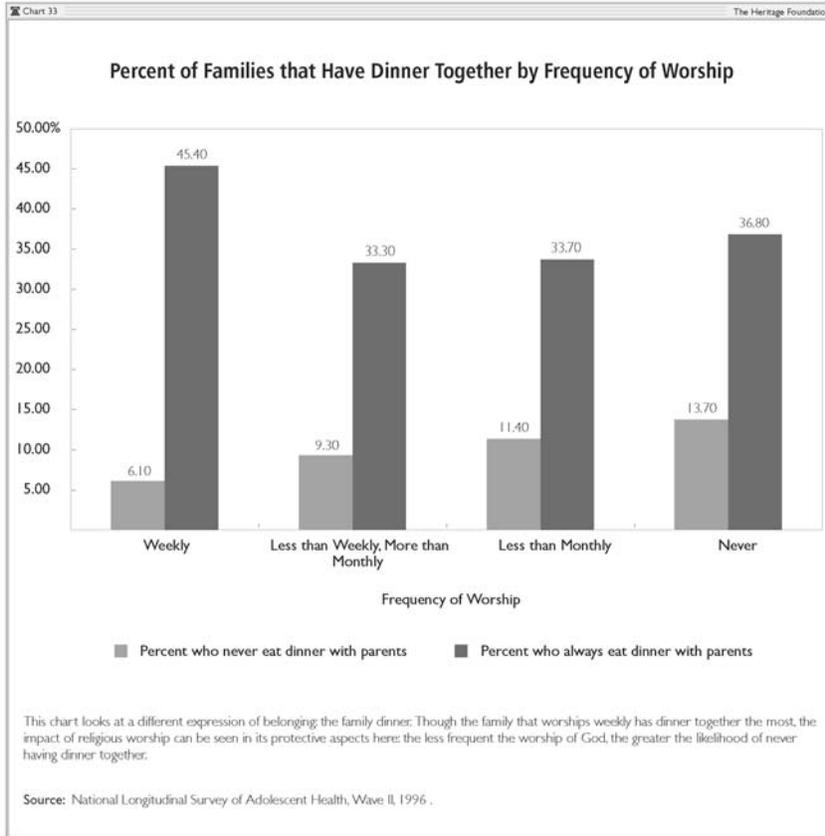


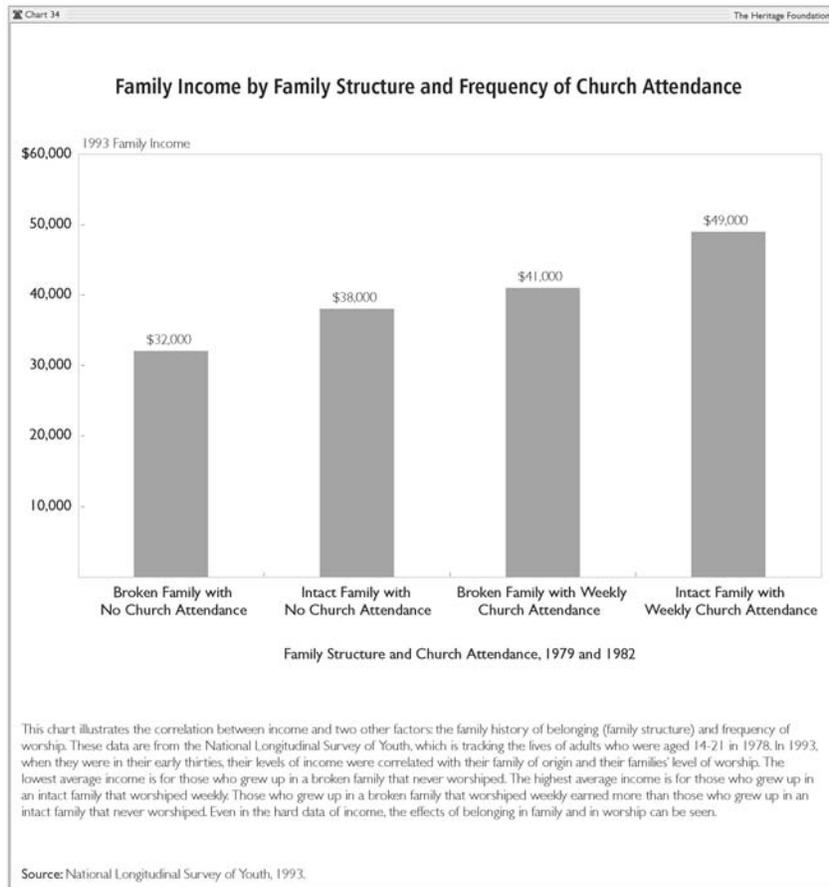


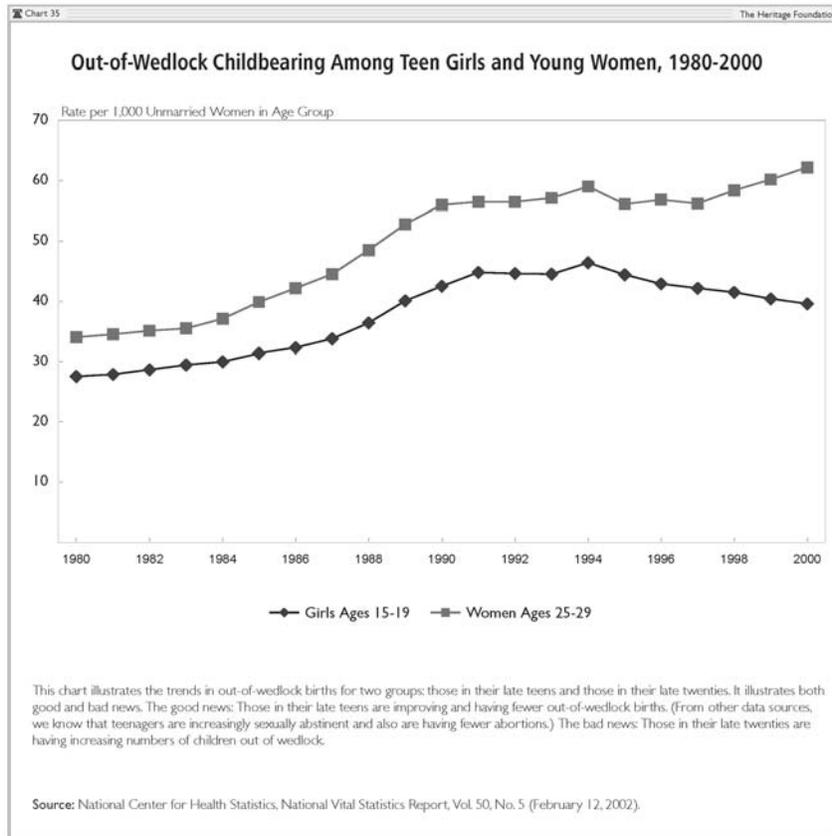


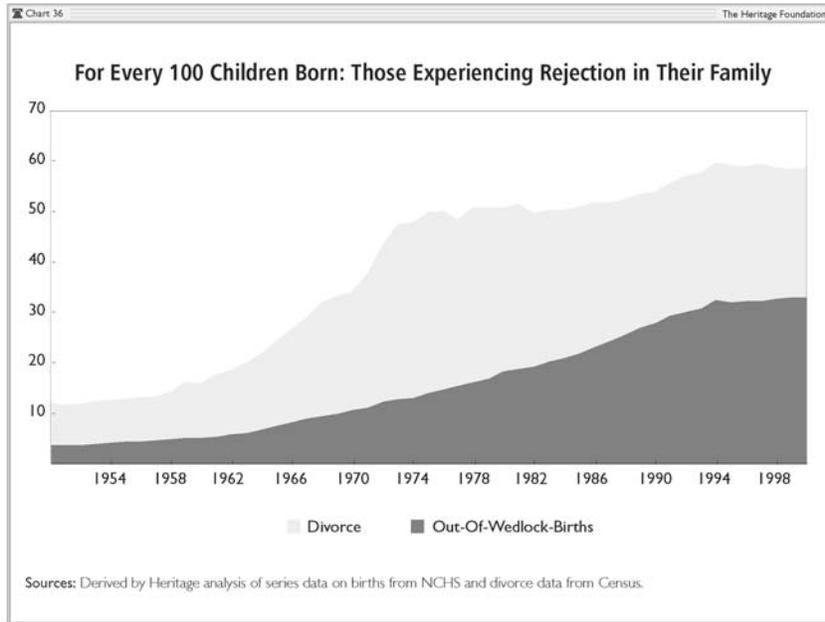


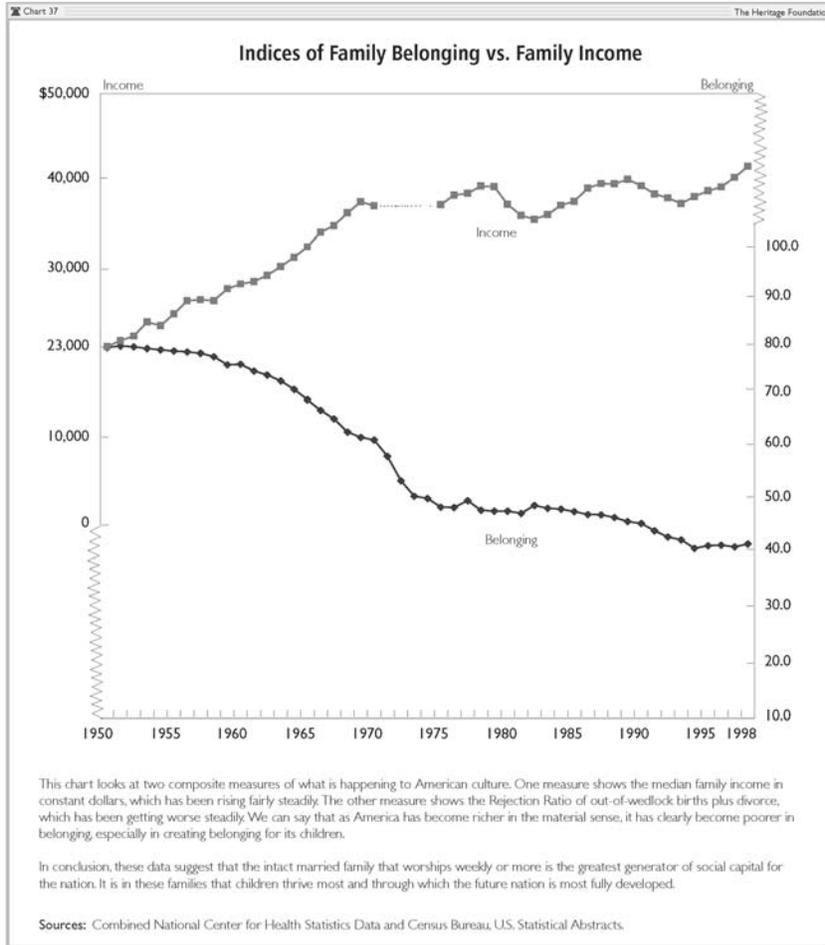












Senator BROWNBACk. Thank you. Very interesting thoughts. Mr. Campbell, thank you very much for joining us today. The floor is yours.

**STATEMENT OF GERALD L. CAMPBELL, PRESIDENT,
THE IMPACT GROUP, INC.**

Mr. CAMPBELL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'd like to go beyond the data, and ask a basic question. Why does this crisis exist?

Senator BROWNBACk. Mr. Campbell, get that microphone a little closer to you, if you would. Appreciate that, thank you.

Mr. CAMPBELL. Can you hear me now?

Senator BROWNBACk. Yes.

Mr. CAMPBELL. Can you hear me?

Senator BROWNBACk. Yes.

Mr. CAMPBELL. I'd like to go beyond the data, and ask the question, Why does this crisis exist? What is its root cause? Is it crisis of material conditions and circumstances, or is it a crisis of the spirit? Since it strikes rich and poor alike, the answer seems clear. But if it is a crisis of the spirit, is there a unique explanatory principle to guide us to understanding? I believe there is.

The principle to which I refer is the unmet need to belong. These words resonate with us all. They denote a crying out for love that springs from the depths of the human spirit.

My focus on the unmet need to belong began 14 years ago. For 5 years, after leaving the United States Information Agency, I roamed the streets of Washington, D.C., taking photographic images and recording stories of homeless people. This work expanded to include violent youth, substance abusers, gang members, and a wide array of issues associated with these people.

The unmet need to belong that I encountered reflects an inborn logic rooted in the existential depths of the human person. Its formal reality is revealed in a deep-seated yearning of the person to be united, through love—with others, through love and community. To authentically exist as a person is to coexist through love. Love constitutes the intrinsic meaning of human life.

Yes, every person cries out for love. But, at the same time, within the heart of every person there also resides a spiritual inadequacy, an unconditional incompleteness. The chilling truth is that no human being can reconcile the unmet need to belong, except through the love of another person. That's an irrefutable logic. One may cry out to belong, but it is only by being permitted that an individual can transcend their separateness and their spiritual alienation.

From this insight, a fundamental truth emerges about the root cause of the behavioral pathologies. The root cause of behavioral pathology, including the crisis we're discussing today, I believe, is rooted in the living dynamics of love and alienation that emanates from the existential core of the person. Within this nucleus, one discovers, at a single glance, the existential need of the person, which is a crying out for love and belonging, and the antithetical, yet primary, condition of the individual, the fact that they come into the world separate, that they are born alienated, and that they're crying out to overcome that alienation.

It is the struggle of the need for love to transcend the primary condition of separateness that I think is at the root of all social disorders. From this originating source, we can arrive at the intrinsic principle, I think, that governs human behavior. It goes something like this. To the extent that an individual is alienated from another, separate from another, at the spiritual level, he will be intrinsically compelled to do whatever is necessary to create at least some semblance of love or community in his or her life, no matter how imperfect it may be or how high its cost. Spiritual alienation cannot be tolerated by the human heart; it must be reconciled.

Now, when you go into the family, what is the center of gravity? Taking what I've just said, the center of gravity is the love between the father and the mother. That is the center of gravity for the whole thing. These relationships—the relationships, the intrinsic relationships, between the mother and the father generate, between them, a radiance of love that suffuses the life of the child. Joy ensues, separateness diminishes, and the child slowly opens to the nurturing potential of the civilizing virtues and an engaging life with others.

I've had many people on the street tell me this, "It's not the mother that I want the love from. It's not the father that I want the love from. What I want is to share in the love that they have for each other." This has been said over and over again.

And the intrinsic logic of this is indisputable, because if there is no love that is really secure between the father and the mother, there's separateness; and that separateness also fragments the life of the child. And so when you have discord in the marriage bond, then this love becomes seriously attenuated in the life of the child. The child feels alone, feels isolated, withdrawal occurs, spiritual alienation intensifies, and what the child begins to do is to look for a new center of gravity in his or her life.

And what happens? Well, an alienated boy may turn to substance abuse as a way of belonging, with a group—he'll go outside the family—or of numbing the pain that comes from being alienated. A lonely boy may be encouraged to sell drugs on the street by one who cares, a kind of "big brother"; or he may do so just to belong. A student may disrupt class to get the attention that was not received at home. Or a young boy may commit a violent act, even murder, to get the respect of others. What's surprising to most people is that murders in a gang occur because of the love that they get when they come back to the gang. It's about love.

Traditionally, public policy has dealt with material circumstances and conditions and a set of incentives and disincentives to change behavior or to change the conditions that underlie behavior. What I'm suggesting is that the crises or marriage and the family, as well as the crises of homelessness and gangs and substance abuse and youth violence and risky sexual behaviors—what I'm suggesting is that, at the core, these crises are a spiritual crisis.

And this poses a serious challenge to public policy, because the question arises, Can public policy address a spiritual crisis? It has never done before—it has not been organized to do that. But the question is, Can it? Can it get to the root cause of the issue, or is it going to be content with addressing material conditions and circumstances? If it does the latter, then all that can come out of the

policy is treatment, not prevention. Prevention requires that we go to the root cause, address the root cause as it is, in and of itself, and then we can begin to change the impact that that cause has upon behavior. If the root cause, as I am suggesting, is spiritual, then we have to have a way of addressing that type of thing.

Now, the spiritual crisis that I'm talking about is not to be confused with a moral crisis. It is deeper. It's an intellectual crisis. It's a crisis of ideas. What we have in our society is a war of ideas in which the notions of freedom, or the person, or responsibility, or love, or alienation, or marriage, or family, or root cause, or human purpose all have conflicting meanings. We don't really know what these things mean. But they do have a meaning, depending on the perspective you take.

And so what we have to do, then, is, I think, begin to engage the ideas that are at the root of our policy. The very fact that we look upon some of these problems in terms, solely, of material conditions and circumstances means that underlying this there's a philosophy involved, a philosophy of what man is, a philosophy of what freedom is, a philosophy of what the person is, what man's purpose is, and so on.

So what I'm suggesting is four things. Very briefly, I think we need a new political language, a new political lexicon, where we can begin to develop a way of talking about spiritual dynamics, such as I'm talking about, as well as the mechanical dynamics of human behavior. There are both. They do both exist. If you go out and you talk to someone on the street about what's going on in their lives, they don't talk about material conditions and circumstances; they talk about love, they talk about alienation, they talk about relationships.

So we need a new language. We need to recapture the word "spiritual" and take it away from its association with religion. We need to realize that "spiritual" is about ideas, it's about things that are not material. Alienation is a spiritual concept. Love is a spiritual concept. Freedom is a spiritual concept. We need to talk to people and collect stories about them so we can begin to develop this language that describes spiritual dynamics. We need to become concrete. We need to humanize these problems.

The second point is that we need a leadership that will begin to take this language and engage debate to encourage new research along these lines, new conversation to widen the intellectual horizons. I think a small nucleus of Members in the House or Senate, or both, could begin to do this. This is a long-term project. It's not unlike the kind of project that, when I was at USIA, we conducted overseas, in Eastern Europe. It was a 60-year project.

Senator BROWNBACK. Mr. Campbell, if you could conclude, here, I'd appreciate that, so we could go to some questions.

Mr. CAMPBELL. And then, finally, we have to recognize that the best means to address this problem, I think, is to be able to reach beyond programs into the hearts and minds of people themselves, because that is where the energy resides that's going to make a difference in the family. It's in the individual who is married, the individual who lives that on a daily basis. And that's why using language as a means of reaching out and changing the dynamics in

this country is, I think, a different kind of approach, but one that would be beneficial.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Campbell follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF GERALD L. CAMPBELL, PRESIDENT,
THE IMPACT GROUP, INC.

THE UNMET NEED TO BELONG: CRISIS OF MARRIAGE, THE FAMILY, AND CULTURE

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a great honor to be here today.

For over a quarter century, Americans have been generally quiescent as a "crisis of marriage and the family" has raged in silence across the land. No longer can this dispassion stand firm. The family is too troubled to concede such luxury. Its structure is fragmented. Its intrinsic dynamics have gone awry. Its integrity labors under great stress. That is our collective judgment today. That is our collective fear. And we struggle to make it otherwise.

A Human Tale

Unquestionably, the story of this crisis is a sad tale. The vast array of empirical evidence and information presented here today supports that conclusion. But considered in isolation, scientific assessments portray a sterile and cold reality. They sketch a crisis disengaged from freedom and dignity, an abstract reality without human personality. Such is not the milieu of this crisis. Much more is involved. The individual is an organic unity, not a collection of discrete pieces. It has a spiritual center—the person.

To appreciate the full significance of this story—and to better transform a destructive energy into an ethos of reconciliation—we must explain why this crisis exists and what efficiency, or root cause, creates it. Somehow we must be able to see beyond the labyrinth of quantitative data and objective correlations into a seething spiritual energy that flows quietly through the inter-subjective relationships of marriage and the family.

The Unmet Need to Belong

A phrase that aptly expresses this energy is "the unmet need to belong." These words denote a spiritual dynamic. I first became aware of this need through my studies of the homeless, violent youth, substance abusers, gang members, and individuals engaged in risky sexual behavior. It is a spiritual dynamic whose presence has become all too pervasive and disruptive in our national life and culture.

These words—"the unmet need to belong"—have reference to the authentic person. They contradict the common view that the individual is essentially self-contained, that it is ego-centric, that its relations are a matter of mere choice or convention. Instead, the "unmet need to belong" symbolizes the person as intrinsically relational. It is a spiritual dynamic that reflects an inborn logic rooted in the existential depths of the person. It discloses the formal reality of this logic as a deep-seated "yearning" of the person to be united with others through love in community. All this goes to say that the very being of the person is a transcendental inclination to belong. To authentically exist as a person is to co-exist through love. Love constitutes the intrinsic meaning of human life.

A violent teenage offender, incarcerated for murder, explained belonging to me this way. He said: "To me—from what I can see and the life I've lived and know on both sides of the fence . . . and the negative things I've done and the positive things I've done . . . everybody needs love. I can't see in my mind where a human being could live without love, regardless of the ways of getting it. I'm not talking about whether you get it this way or that way. I'm talking about love in general. I think every human being needs love."

It is this insight into the nature of the person that enables us to explain why the crisis of marriage and the family exists.

The Root Cause: A Dialectic of Belonging

Considered abstractly, the causal origins of this crisis are rooted in the living dynamics of love and alienation that emanate from the existential core of the human person. Within this nucleus, one discovers at a single glance the central impulse of the person—"a crying out for love and community"—and the antithetical, yet primary condition of the individual—a spiritual alienation, or separation from others. It is the struggle of this existential impulse to transcend the primary condition of spiritual alienation that forms the dialectical nucleus of all social disorders.

From this insight, we can deduce the following principle of human behavior: to the extent that an individual is alienated from another, he or she will be intrinsically compelled to do whatever is necessary to create at least some semblance of love or community in his or her life, no matter how imperfect it may be, or how high its cost. Spiritual alienation cannot be tolerated by the human heart. It must be reconciled.

Example: A Mother and a Child

To illustrate the outlines of this dialectic, let's begin with the most innocent of human encounters, the relationship between a mother and a newborn child.

The newborn child symbolizes separateness as an original condition. Each person enters the world alone, spiritually isolated from others. But separateness is not merely a brute fact. From birth, the child has an innate sense of his or her separateness and struggles to mitigate its alienation by being accepted and loved by the mother. Its outstretched arms and legs, beseeching the mother for love, is a powerful symbol of this struggle. The mother, aware of her identical need, accepts this plea and extends the warmth and comfort of her person to the child.

It is by virtue of this mutual gift of one person to another—each “crying out” for the love of the “other”—that both mother and child alleviate their separateness, their spiritual alienation. Each stands in a relation of gratitude to the other. A loving, enduring, and dynamic relationship has begun to be forged.

As a child is brought into loving relations, they slowly open themselves to the nurturing potential of the civilizing virtues. In this way, they are set on a path that will lead to a more complete and engaging life with others. But, if the child is not permitted to belong—if the child is not the beneficiary of the gift of self, of loving relationships—the training and discipline necessary to instill the virtues will itself become a source of coercion. Slowly, ever so slowly, the distance between the child and the mother will increase. And, since love has not intervened, the child will easily retreat into an egocentric existence where hedonistic and utilitarian self-indulgence can easily become a lifelong affliction.

Marriage and the Family: A Matter of Freedom

At this point, it is beneficial to raise a question about personal freedom. Is the nature of personal freedom to be found in the creation of a self-sufficient ego—an ego that is alone and distant from the intrinsic life of others? Or is freedom to be more fully expressed in an integral self, a relational self, a self that is united to others through love in community? These questions are not merely about matters of choice. Rather they are about the intrinsically relational nature of the person and the “unmet need to belong.”

If freedom is reflective of egocentric, self-contained existence, it follows that the structure and living dynamics of the family will become a fractured totality. It will degenerate into increasing fragmentation. The family will be akin to a conventional organization of individuals, related by mutual interests, but characterized by individual autonomy, like so many billiard balls on a table. It will lack intrinsic cohesion.

But, if freedom has an intrinsic relationship to the person and “the unmet need to belong”, it will realize itself through the building of loving relationships. Family unity will reach into the inner being of the person. It will evolve as a community of love. It will be intrinsically spiritual and replete with richness.

And so, the fundamental question that will determine the future of marriage and the family can be stated this way: What shall we do with our freedom? Shall freedom be intrinsically relational and, like the person, be enriched with love, or should it reflect the autonomous individual and remain self-absorbed?

Love: A Center of Gravity

The center of gravity in the family lies in the quality of intrinsic relationships that unite husband and wife. These most intimate relationships range all the way from the gift of self through love, truth, justice, fidelity, and solidarity to simple helpfulness and mutual associations of domestic life. When qualitative relationships cement the existential reality of husband and wife, a radiance of love is generated and suffuses the life of the child. The “unmet need to belong” in the child finds a degree of fulfillment and separateness diminishes. A degree of restfulness ensues.

But when love does not unite husband and wife, the radiating presence of love to the child becomes seriously attenuated. The child is automatically placed in the position of the autonomous self. The loving bonds within the family, bonds that alone can alleviate existential aloneness, are fractured or weakened. The child feels alone and isolated and, because of the intrinsic dynamics of “the unmet need to belong”, begins a new, possibly destructive, journey. The look for a new center of gravity begins.

Emergence of a Secret Life: A Dialectic of Indifference

Alienated by a fractured relationship between mother and father, young persons begin to look outside the family for love and understanding. They begin to form their own social networks, their own support groups, their own friends. They enter into dialectical relationship with strangers, defining new needs, developing new interests, and discovering new ways of alleviating internal conflicts. They engage in give and take with others. They make an advance here and a retreat there. The art of compromise evolves and erosion begins to eat away. Little by little, the dynamics of existential yearning forge a new inner substance, a new consciousness, a new set of sensibilities, a new moral horizon, and a new set of behavioral imperatives.

Out of these convulsions, the young develop a keen sense of what acquires duration for them, of what satisfies their felt needs and perceived good. They struggle to balance unfulfilled desires and outer demands. They seek to resolve internal conflict. They reach out for approval with others. They want to be included and accepted. They want to be recognized as something special. They want to stand out. Above all, they want to be loved and, in particular, they want to be loved by someone they cry out to love.

Having judged carefully how to fit in, how to belong, how to be united with others, they become less and less constrained from within. They become more and more open to entreaties from without. Tomorrow's hopes and dreams often collapse and find expression in today's needs. Time stops its seemingly intractable flow to the future. Its continuity—a flow of past, present, and future—is dissolved into discrete moments, each slightly tinged with hedonistic seductions, each crying out like a siren song laced with the lure of pleasure, advantage, or other reward. Time has become the here and now. But it is a here and now that is not only deceptive, but also alluring, imperious, and dangerous.

Bit by bit, this nascent web of relationships begets a secret inner life, a haughty life that swallows up previous innocence. A new, clandestine, and seductive center of gravity emerges. It is driven by the existential need to belong. Yet this need has an elusive side and can easily tempt one to descend into a darkness where impersonality and servitude take command. Here, where the allure of authentic relationships was anticipated, only existential retribution and sorrow is to be found.

For our part, we notice in our children traces of silent disengagement. We perceive in them qualities and dispositions that never were—the brooding, the vacant smiles, the ill humor, the crankiness. We perceive subtle departures in attitude, interests, and behavior. We discern an unpleasant indifference to past friends and activities that once caused happiness and joy. We detect vague incongruities between the past and the present.

We take note of these changes, but confusion clouds our thoughts and fear forces a wavering judgment. We are flushed with uncertainty and torments of doubt. Seeing only through blurred outlines, our hearts refuse to acknowledge that we have arrived at the crossroads. We resist suggestion that our children have retreated into the distance. We seek solace and strength in what remains familiar about them. But we also take notice that a subtle metamorphosis has occurred. Something about them is different. Something about them is troubling. Yet, we fail to realize that we cannot penetrate the obscure shadowy depths of their now secret lives. Without ever knowing what has happened, they have become lost to us. They have become strangers.

This same dialectic can be written of either husband or wife. It is an existential dialectic that flows out of the intrinsic structures and dynamics of the human person.

The Human Person: A Spiritual Inadequacy

The chilling truth is that, like the helpless infant and the young, no human being can reconcile spiritual alienation—"the unmet need to belong"—except through the love of an other. One may cry out to belong, but it is only by being permitted that an individual can transcend their separateness, or spiritual alienation.

The simple truth is: within the heart of every person resides a spiritual inadequacy, an unconditional incompleteness. No individual, regardless of socio-economic or other conventional status, has an intrinsic capacity to become self-sufficient.

The mythology of the self-contained individual—a myth that shapes and distorts much of our culture and socio-economic life—is only a mask that enshrouds an inner emptiness and aloneness. It is the same mask worn by Citizen Kane whose lust for power denied him the fulfillment he sought. It is the mask worn by Tom and Daisy in *The Great Gatsby*. It is a truth that permeates the paintings of Edward Hopper and the photographs of Robert Frank. It is the cry of anguish unleashed by the spirals of the cotton picker, the pain of the rural and urban Blues artist, the social

voice of 1960s R&B, and the modern prophets of the street, the poetic artists of Rap and Hip Hop.

Neither power, nor wealth, nor reputation can free a man from this aloneness. Behind every Horatio Alger story is a human tragedy waiting to unfold. Only love is liberating. Only love can make man free.

Only by being permitted and affirmed through the love of the other can alienation be mitigated and the person made whole. Such is the intrinsic logic of the human person. Such is the intrinsic logic of freedom. Such is the intrinsic logic of marriage. And such is the intrinsic logic of the family.

Impact of Spiritual Alienation: The Stories of Youth

The impact of fractured relationships between husband and wife—father and mother—on the spiritual life of the child is immense. Examples abound. An alienated boy may turn to abusive substances as a means of belonging to a group or of numbing the pain that comes from not belonging. A boy or girl may join a gang as a substitute for the family he or she never had. A lonely boy may be encouraged to sell drugs on the street by one who cares—a kind of big brother—or he may do so just to belong. A student may disrupt class to get the attention that was not received at home. A young girl may decide to have a child in order to love and to be loved. A group of estranged teenagers may steal a car to satisfy their need to be with others and, in doing so, will test and verify the strength of their bonding. Or a young boy may commit violent acts—even murder—in an attempt to gain the respect of others.

The following are excerpts taken from recorded, free-flowing non-structured conversations I've had with troubled youth. They, each in their own way, underscore the spiritual dynamic of "the unmet need to belong." Here's one:

"My biological father, he was never around. He had his own house . . . he had other kids. So . . . he came around only on holidays. I called them holidays because that's the only time I see him at all. And when I'd call . . . try to go over to his house . . . it was no, or wait, or something. He was rejecting me all the time and when I wanted to go places with my mother or my stepfather it'd be the same thing—rejection!"

Here's another:

"I'd rather be with people I didn't know . . . because they seemed to care about me more than my own family cared about me."

And another:

"My family didn't care so I'd just do my own thing. All my attention . . . everything was towards gangs. That's all I wanted . . . gangs were my life, you know what I mean, because I loved them and they loved me."

And another:

"I committed my crimes because of him . . . because I wanted that acceptance from him. And that's where a lot of crimes come from . . . they want acceptance from other people. They want to feel big and be seen as being big in the eyes of others. They don't want to be seen as scared, or weak, or feel rejected by anybody. Because that's what they're scared of—scared to be alone!"

And another:

"Separating teen pregnancy, substance abuse, gangs, and violence is a waste of time because I've got them all in my life. They all revolve around the same thing . . . it all revolves around love . . . that's all I really needed. I gang banged for love and attention. I did drugs because I was lonely and needed some understanding. I did violence to gain the love of someone else. I got females pregnant because I wanted love and attention. So, they all stem from the same thing . . . love and understanding."

And finally:

"And I'd tell the parents—get to know your kids . . . get to know us . . . ask us about us . . . ask the kids: 'Who are you, really.' They might think it's a joke at first, but just ask them: 'Who are you really.' What do you like? What kinds of things do you like to do? What don't you like. What do you want to be in life? How do you feel? Am I a good parent to you? . . . Listen to them when they say: 'I don't feel that you love me enough. I don't feel that you give me enough recognition. Can you understand what I'm going through.' . . . Talk to them. Understand the kids. That's all parents need to do. Just get down to their level."

Lest we have forgotten, let me state in concise terms what is at issue in these stories: whenever a nation's young people become spiritually alienated, the collective future of the entire society—including all that for which preceding generations have struggled and died—is called into question.

To be sure, the precise way these spiritual forces might impact tomorrow cannot be foretold. But we can reasonably expect that whatever happens will neither be desirable nor welcome.

Culture and Society: An Ethos of Spiritual Alienation

To an extent that would have seemed impossible only a few decades ago, America has been transformed by spiritual alienation. Individuals today carry greater burdens in their hearts than they do on their backs.

Reflect for a moment. Who is unaware that our national language has become coarse and shrill, self-righteous and judgmental? Who is unaware that our legal system has become excessively litigious, that competition takes precedence over cooperation, that bureaucratic control prevails over genuine human interaction? Who is unaware of the pervasive atmosphere of cynicism and distrust, violence and fear, intemperance and injustice, isolation and aloneness, spiritual emptiness and indifference?

All these are forces of spiritual alienation. They dishonor our national life. Yet they are the spiritual dynamics shaping our future.

Plato argued: "the state is man writ large." This statement could be amended to read: "the state is marriage or the family writ large." Whatever happens in our own lives, and the relations that govern marriage and the family, also takes place in the state or culture. Conversely, if there is an ethos of alienation ranging throughout society and culture, a dialectical exchange will penetrate the family, impacting the relationships between husband and wife, father and children, mother and children, and even among children. It will suffuse and fragment the general life of the entire family.

The exigencies of the "unmet need to belong" flows through the family and into society and the culture. Once outside the family, they shapes our relations with other individuals. The same dialectic continues on a new battlefield. Children want to be accepted by their friends. Parents seek acceptance outside the home. The person who feels alienated at work, brings that alienation back into the home. The child who is bullied at school becomes alienated and seeks refuge wherever possible. Each person struggles to find a way to belong with whomever they associate. The struggle to belong is the central quest of life.

Even ideas impact the structures and dynamics of society and the relations between husband and wife, mother and father, and children. And they determine the formation of the child. They do so by defining our aspirations and goals, and the meaning of the freedom and dignity of the human person. They define our sense of responsibility and our future. The utilitarian notions that define success in society, and the hedonistic notions that define pleasure, are brought into the home and affect relationships within the family. Our common practical materialism places primacy on having and doing over being, on things over persons, on subservience over personal creativity, on manipulation and control over openness and service to others. Our understanding of the quality of life emphasizes economic efficiency, excessive consumerism, physical beauty, and pleasure over spiritual qualities.

There should be no doubt. Ideas have consequences. Insofar as they promote spiritual alienation, ideas have the capacity to seep turmoil into the life of the person, unleash fragmentation into the dynamics of marriage and the family, and effect widespread disruption throughout society and culture. Yet, insofar as they promote loving relationships, they have the capacity to heal the spiritual alienation and rid the aloneness that undermines personal existence.

Decisions: The Concreteness of Spirituality

The question of personal freedom was raised earlier. It must be raised again. What are we to do with our freedom? How shall we exercise creativity? Shall freedom be used to create a self-sufficient ego, alone and distant from the intrinsic life of others? Or shall freedom heed the intrinsic call to belong and create an integral self made whole by the love of others? Is the human person intrinsically relational or merely an opaque density? These are our choices. Only one choice is responsible. Only one leads to freedom.

The crisis of marriage, the family, and culture is a spiritual crisis. To alleviate this crisis, we must choose. But simple practical choices will not suffice. Success requires that choice be proportionate to the nature of the crisis. For this reason, the choices to be made must be spiritual.

But, what are spiritual choices? What do they look like? Are they something set apart from other choices?

The answer is simple but difficult to grasp. In essence, spiritual choices are about the quality of relationships we establish with others. They give a dimension to choice that either generates alienation or qualitative relations with others. They bring an aspect of transcendence to the concrete.

Alienation or love, aloneness or brotherhood, indifference or compassion, emptiness or purpose, pride or humility, judgment or mercy—these contradictory qualities depict the unavoidable spiritual choices each person must face in every concrete situation and every moment of their lives. Whether rich or poor, socially placed or displaced, educated or uneducated—whether Caucasian, Afro-American, Hispanic, Asian, or Native American—each person must struggle along an inescapable yet perplexing path in order to come to terms with these transcendent and universal challenges.

There is an unavoidable concreteness to these spiritual choices. Indeed, spiritual qualities constitute the very substance of every thought we consider, every action we undertake, and every relationship we establish. Too often we forget how concretely it matters whether our thoughts, actions, and relationships are suffused with alienation or love . . . indifference or compassion . . . judgment or mercy. And yet, it is the dialectical clash of these destructive and perfecting qualities that shapes our lives, shape our marriages, shape our families, and impact the lives of whom ever we encounter.

A display of personal indifference will not only sour one's own life. It can easily cause radical and enduring disruption in the lives of others. And, when the dynamics of alienation gain the ascendancy and begin to ripple throughout society, they can easily acquire the momentum to unleash a collective intensity that can quickly fragment and distort the spiritual fabric of a marriage, the life of a family, the integrity of our Nation's most fundamental institutions, and the "living dynamics" of our entire society.

Freedom, like the person, also depends upon the quality of relationships individuals have with one another. Wherever spiritual alienation exists, freedom—and the person—have already been diminished.

The Crisis of Marriage and the Family: A Crisis of Public Policy

The crisis of marriage and the family poses a serious challenge to public policy.

Traditionally, social policy has rested on two practical assumptions. The first is that causes of human behavior are correlated to the material conditions and circumstances of the individual. The second is that behavior can be rectified through the management of a complex system of material incentives and disincentive whose purpose is to alleviate the impact of risk factors on the life of the individual.

These assumptions are adequate for a treatment strategy. The material conditions and circumstances of the individual can indeed be changed and the life of the individual be improved. But they are inadequate as a foundation for a strategy of prevention.

Prevention requires, more than anything else, a clear apprehension of the nature and root cause of the threat in question. Without a substantive articulation of these formal and efficient elements, there will invariably ensue an incongruity of means and ends, and a failed result.

But, here lies the critical challenge for public policy. The crisis of marriage and the family—not to mention a host of other behavioral problems, including: homelessness, substance abuse, youth violence, gangs, and risky sexual behavior—is a spiritual crisis. It is a crisis rooted in "the unmet need to belong."

The question is: can public policy address a spiritual crisis? Can it complement its characteristic focus on improving the material conditions and circumstances of the individual and begin a new initiative that will enhance the quality of relations among persons? It is my judgment that it can.

Towards a Strategy of Prevention

The crisis of marriage and the family—a spiritual crisis—is essentially a crisis of intellect and of truth. It is at bottom a "war of ideas" in which fundamental notions like freedom, the person, responsibility, love, alienation, marriage, family, root cause, and purpose have conflicting meanings. Yet, these contradictions are never discussed or even acknowledged in policy debate. Whether the person is intrinsically relational or not makes a fundamental difference in how issues are addressed. Yet, those differences are never addressed. The same can be said for other ideas such as freedom, responsibility, and so on.

To address this crisis—and to prepare the way for a strategy of prevention—it seems to me four things must be addressed:

A. A New Political Language Reflecting the Spiritual Dynamics of Behavior

There is a great need to enrich our political lexicon by making way for a new political language that includes a recognition of the contribution of both spiritual dynamics and mechanical dynamics, including their interrelationship. An understanding of the spiritual dynamics of love and alienation is as important to comprehending social dysfunctions as are correlations, material conditions, and circumstances. We also need to reclaim the word spiritual—and disassociate it from its religious connotations—so that we can meaningfully debate in the public forum the intrinsic dynamics of such ideas as freedom, the person, responsibility, belonging, love, alienation, dignity, and their impact on human behavior and interaction. The intrinsic content of these ideas is as critical for understanding policy issues as are extrinsic factors. Policy debate would be further enriched if, as the debate deepens, there is an effort made to reach out to the creative community—the artists, lyricists, dramatists, and others. They are keenly aware of the cultural and spiritual dynamics that operate in our society and culture.

B. A New Political Leadership

Armed with a new political language, policy debate in the Congress on critical issues like marriage and the family—and homelessness, youth violence, substance abuse, gangs, risky sexual behavior, and even obesity—will begin to take on new meaning. New questions would be asked at hearings. A new body of knowledge would emerge. Research would be encouraged along new lines. People never before involved in public policy—philosophers, artists, musicians, experts in culture, for example—would enrich the debate. Intellectual horizons would expand. New possibilities for action would emerge. The constraints that currently stifled public policy would be lifted. Individuals would become engaged. A small nucleus of Members of the Senate and the House would be sufficient to begin the development of this language.

C. Mass Means of Communication

As a new language is developed and utilized, new ideas would be introduced into the public forum. Senate and House resolutions, Member's speeches, floor statements, Dear Colleague letters, Special Orders, and other means of congressional communications—much of which is transmitted over the C-Span television network—could be employed. This language would engender a dialogue among religious, community service organizations, business, fraternal and student organizations, government agencies and departments, and think tanks. A new dialectic of ideas would emerge. Over time, ideas would be circulated through newspapers, magazines, television, radio, drama, musical lyrics, and other modes of expression that impact popular opinion. A national dialogue would evolve.

D. Hearts and Minds

Ideas sufficiently profound would strike a resonance with the “hearts and minds” of individuals throughout the country. The more profound the more striking the resonance. The “cry for freedom”—an idea located in the mysterious depths of the human spirit—resonated throughout Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union and unleashed a democratic revolution that is still ongoing. In a similar way, a new political language of community will reach beyond institutions and programs into the “hearts and minds” of individuals. It can have a profound transformative effect on the spiritual dynamics of the person, the family, the society, and eventually the culture. In this way, untold energies would become involved in bringing about change.

In conclusion, let me admit that many will judge the prospects I have set forth to be overly ambitious and insufficiently practical. And that should come as no surprise. History records that the “hounds of cynicism” are always on guard along the pathway to human betterment.

And yet, it would be wrong to allow ourselves to be deterred by these forces. Cynicism should be challenged wherever it is found. Indeed, a mighty and revolutionary power already lies dormant within the spiritual depths of each individual—within their hopes and dreams, their existential desires and talents, and their intrinsic “crying out” to belong with others through love in community—and this spiritual potential is waiting patiently for the trumpets to call.

If we can begin to tap into that source of strength—and introduce subtle changes in the prevailing assumptions that shape how we think, act, create, and relate to one another—a new creative dynamic can slowly be unleashed that will give greater

substance and new creative energies to the living dynamics of our families, our neighborhoods, our institutions, and our entire society. Such is the power of dialogue in the hard practical life of man.

Senator BROWNBACK. Thank you, Mr. Campbell. And that's a very thought provoking and, I think, accurate description—discussion.

Mr. Fagan, I want to go to yours first. I was looking at that chart that you put in the first of your testimony of where we were in the 1950s, 1960s—early 1960s—and then this thing just takes off like a rocket on the number of children—for every hundred children born, those experiencing—you title it “rejection” from their family, it goes on a virtual direct ascent forward. What happened, then, that caused that to occur?

Mr. FAGAN. Could I have the Encyclopaedia Britannica length?

Senator BROWNBACK. But, I mean, there obviously must have been something in this period of time, because you're going from 1962 to 1972, a ten-year time period, and you go from 20 percent of the children experiencing family rejection to 50 percent in a ten-year time period.

Mr. FAGAN. Sure. I think one of the central, but, by no means, the only—each one, each issue, was built on something that leads before that's underneath. But on the behavioral level, which is the most surface of all, the huge difference that happened here—Francis Fukuyama, in his book, *The Great Disruption*, which is probably the biggest analysis of these trends, not only in this country, but right across the developed West—the thing that he, from regression analysis, regression upon regression, pinpoints, is a sexual revolution occasioned by the development of mass marketing of contraceptives of many different sorts, which then changed the nature of the sexual relationship, the relationship between the sexes, and the orientation of marriage away from being just within—our sexuality just being within marriage, to, essentially, it moving outside. And I would be inclined to agree that that was one of the big phenomena. Now, what caused that is a—you can keep going back further. But that is the huge attitudinal, behavioral, market, economic, sex role, marital—within marriage, outside of marriage—phenomenon that occurred.

Senator BROWNBACK. Ms. Waller, would you agree with that?

Ms. WALLER. I think it's something more than that. And some of the folks on the last panel—some of the last panelists, I think, addressed some of those issues.

I would commend to you a summary of the literature that I cite in my references, which was prepared by some of the researchers at the University of Michigan, and they identify a number of explanations for the decline of marriage mentioned in the last panel.

Senator BROWNBACK. But I want to get right—if we could—if you could focus in on that number of children that are then in a either out-of-wedlock or divorced situation and how it just took off in that ten-year time period.

Ms. WALLER. Your question goes to what was the cause?

Senator BROWNBACK. Yes, what happened there?

Ms. WALLER. Well, I still think—I think women's economic independence was an important factor, a change in social norms about the expectations regarding sex outside of marriage, cohabitation

outside of marriage, divorce itself, a changing expectation of what marriage means to couples—that is, whether it's about economic dependence, which I think it had been for quite a long time, to an expectation that there should be something for both individuals, a kind of a compatibility, relationship satisfaction. The standards are higher.

In some communities, particularly in low-income African-American communities, I think the lack of what would be called “marriageable men,” those men who have jobs or have good economic prospects, was another factor.

Senator BROWNBACK. Are there policy issues we could do now to take this number down from the nearly 60 percent level, Mr. Fagan, that we could see that number go down as precipitously as we saw it go up?

Mr. FAGAN. Well, if you define policy in its broadest sense, the way I would, but a sense that I don't think government normally defines it, which is the strategy one takes, even the cultural strategy, the fundamental ideas—normally when we talk about policy we're talking about individual programs packaged together to deliver goods.

And actually if you look at the evaluation research on this, it is a sad and sorry state. Evaluation research on how good government is at doing these things is not good.

I was Deputy Assistant Director at ASPE, Planning and Evaluation, and I remember getting a cross section of the staff together when I first went there to look over precisely in this social-policy area. And we got together once a week for about 2 months. At the end of 2 months, I did—I broke a rule deliberately. I said to the staff, “Look, you know I'm a conservative Republican, and I suspect most of you are good liberal Democrat bureaucrats. And the only reason I bring that up is, I may be biased. Tell me what's working.” Zero. The staff could not find—and ASPE probably is the biggest repository of evaluation data.

Now, there are some thing where—I didn't go in looking for that. I come out of a background as a clinical psychologist, working in programs, knowing there are certain things that work. But when you get to the macro level of Federal and state government, it is a very sorry state in government's capacity in policy to effect changes behaviorally here—that what I think is probably going to be much more effective is a change in the culture itself. Dr. Nock did refer to that the 1950 were very—were probably, you know, a halcyon era, where things are very good.

But there was, before, a great breakdown in marriage, in the 1800s. And then it came right back up again. We've seen this. And if you look further back over history, there are things in the culture, totally outside government, where leaders led, not through programs, but through ideas. The ideas that take hold are much more powerful than any government program, in my estimation.

So that's why I suggest that actually the biggest program is a debate here in the Senate, to flesh out and change the ideas. Whatever ideas are controlling us, are dominant, are clearly not working for the best for our children. We bought into, we're locked into ways. We maybe—programs may tinker around the edges. It's not a strategic sea change in the way we're approaching. And that, I

think, is where, I would suggest, Mr. Campbell is touching on some of these deeper things. But that is very much in the culture. And the role of the Senate, I think, would be to head toward those things which would provoke a much wider debate by raising these issues, these deeper issues.

When I put the—if I put the research in terms of structure and correlations, as the chart book that I have as the extended testimony, I get resistance from people who are out in the field working, good social workers who are probably, at the core, liberal on policy, using the political terms, than I am. But if you put it in the deeper terms of belonging and rejection, their attitude toward the data totally change; the capacity to talk about these deeper things is very, very different because you're getting to more universals.

People know that rejection never helps anybody. There's nobody who has been improved or strengthened by being rejected. We know it in the workplace. It makes us more anxious, makes us less productive. We know what it's like at home. We know what it's like when it happens between friends. All of these things weaken us, weaken us socially. What we do grow in strength by is when we're together.

So to come back to your question, What can people begin to do to be more aware of how they drive wedges between themselves and increase the probability of rejecting each other? What are the ways you've got to build belonging to each other within marriage and outside of marriage? There are lots of things in the data. I think the data and the research is very provocative. Clearly, what I'm saying is not something that everybody would agree with. But that itself, I think, is reason for engagement in debate, because we do have to change the ideas that are leading us to have 60 percent of our children reaching age 18 without "mom and dad." And behind every one of those is that rejection.

Senator BROWNBACK. You know, it's—I mean, it seems to me that that's a key reason and a thing that we've got to start talking about in here. And you raised that we need to have a debate in the Senate. I think we clearly need to have a big discussion on this as a nation. And the data's here, it's in every family. My—you know, you see it everywhere.

Mr. FAGAN. It's in every family, yes.

Senator BROWNBACK. And, you know, the closer you are—and I'm close to a number of people that have had this sort of alienation. It is so tough. And yet then we pretty quickly break it out into partisan categories, "OK, I'm going to win on this one, and you're going to lose on that one," and then we're back in the soup here of what we know best how to do, which is fight with each other, but where we generally get the least amount of results. But if you could back up and just say, "You know, wait a minute, none of us like where this situation is today. This just isn't good. It isn't good for society, it's not good for America, it's not good for the world, it's not good for kids, it's not good for anybody," OK, what—how do we unravel the fight position that everybody gets in, and how do we get to a more basic stance of—I mean, we've got a big problem here. How would you start to really engage that?

Mr. Campbell, I'm very taken by your thoughts. I think they're accurate. I also see them in my state. We had a survey a couple

of years ago in the *New York Times*. They were surveying high school students about suicide. And half of the kids in high school that they had surveyed either knew somebody close that had committed suicide, or they themselves had thought of committing suicide. And I thought, well, that's—that might be New York's survey, but it isn't Kansas. So I started doing a bunch of high school meetings, and met with senior classes in different places across the state. The same number. It's about half.

And I was just—I was stunned at it, at first, and then you just ask the students just a little bit, “Well, why? Why are you even thinking about suicide? I mean, you live in the greatest nation on the face of the Earth, you've got opportunities, you've got your life ahead of you.” And almost all of them would come down to some real alienating thing inside of them, you know, “I broke up with this person. I don't know where my Dad is. I this, I that,” and it was just—it was a real deep interior spiritual alienation that was there within them. And they'd cry. They'd cry right there in front of me.

The principal of the high school would be astounded that this is going on in his own school, or her school, and she didn't even know about it, like it was—it was like this thing that was so obvious, but nobody would even dare touch it, because, “How do I deal with this?” Just they—they didn't know how.

And so I'd get—a lot of times, the school administration, afterward, would be apologizing to me, and say, “Well, I don't know if these kids really know what they're talking about. I'm not sure about this or that.” And when you really look at it, it was enormous, and a huge impact.

I hope these hearings can maybe start us on some sort of new level of discussion about this. Actually, I think the debate we're engaged in on the institution of marriage across the country in the issue of same-sex unions is, in a way, going to probably stimulate the debate here that we've not seen stimulated for 40 years. But this has been building, it's a trend, and now we've got an enormous issue in front of us. And I think you're going to see people start to talk a lot more about that central alienation that we've had grown between the marital union that's happened.

Mr. CAMPBELL. What's interesting about suicide is that if you take the 12 years of the Vietnam War, you had 54,000 deaths. But if you take a 12-year comparable period, the number of suicides in the United States is around 360,000.

Senator BROWNBACK. In just this—what, this last 12-year—or the most recent 12-year cohort?

Mr. CAMPBELL. Just take—I did this about 4 or 5 years ago. But the rhetorical question, you know, Why is it that we are a country who has so many people committing suicide? And then when you take homicides, when you put that with it, it's a huge number. And yet, at the same time, we are blessed with all these material, you know, circumstances. And so there's something deeper going on, and it seems like there's an incongruity between what we are looking for inside and what we can express outside, and that leads to all kinds of things. And—

Senator BROWNBACK. Well, we are both physical and spiritual beings, and we're much better at addressing the physical than we

are the spiritual being, and that's always been a difficult debate in this country.

Mr. CAMPBELL. Could I make one more point?

Senator BROWNBACK. Yes, please.

Mr. CAMPBELL. Very quick? The reason why I got—when I was involved with the United States Information Agency doing public diplomacy, the reason why I got involved in the homeless was because people overseas were concerned—that we brought here—wanted to see the homeless. And they had never been here before. And that struck me as very important, because, in talking with them, I found out that what was happening was that we were transmitting pictures of the homeless, and then gangs and violence, overseas, that we were very quietly presenting to the world a different image of this country than they had ever seen before. And when you begin to talk about terrorism and the conflicts that we currently have, part of what this is all about is that we are projecting something that isn't very pretty to the world, and they see it on a day-to-day basis.

And so what we're talking about here has national-security implications.

Senator BROWNBACK. Oh, it does. As I travel around the world, you get a number of people commenting on the U.S. culture, as much as any of it.

Thank you very much. You remind me of a gentlemen I met in Marysville, Kansas, who was 107 years old. And I got to meet and talk with him. He had served in World War I. His son was there, and took me in. And his son was not a spring chick, either. When your dad's 107, you're not going to be young either. But I asked him, I said, "What's the biggest thing you've seen change in our country in the years you've been here?" And he didn't have to think at all. He just said, "You know, the thing I've seen change is that when I was younger we had a lot less, but we were a lot happier." That was his conclusion of the years that he had observed. And I thought, there's something wrong with that picture if that's the case.

And we really do need to have a good debate, and we need a good language about it. And, frankly, I don't think it's much of a debate, more than it is, How do we find common ground to move on and address this?

You've all been very helpful. I appreciate that. I am hopeful we can talk about these issues much more in much greater depth, and address them.

Thank you very much for coming. The hearing's adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 4:05 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X

TESTIMONY OF THE CHILDREN'S DEFENSE FUND ON THE IMPACT ON CHILDREN OF PROPOSED FEDERAL MARRIAGE INITIATIVES

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

The Children's Defense Fund (CDF) appreciates the opportunity to submit this testimony on the issue of proposed Federal marriage promotion initiatives.

CDF is a leading private, non-profit organization with a more than 30 year history of advocating for children, particularly poor and minority children and those with disabilities. The mission of CDF is to Leave No Child Behind® and to ensure that every child has a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start, and a Moral Start in life as well as successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities. Under the leadership of Marian Wright Edelman, CDF's President and Founder, the organization has been a strong and effective voice for those who cannot lobby or speak for themselves. Issues of family structure are of vital interest to CDF, given the importance of family in the lives of children and the influence of parents on children's well-being. As such, we feel it is critical to thoroughly examine the advisability and likely effects of President Bush's proposals to invest Federal resources in marriage promotion.

Background on the Administration's Marriage Promotion Proposal

In the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996, promoting marriage was defined as one of the major purposes of welfare reform. However, because states were not required to spend Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds on marriage programs, they were granted significant flexibility in meeting this goal. Throughout the TANF reauthorization debates of 2002–2004, the Bush Administration has been much more insistent in advocating for marriage promotion to play a more central role in welfare programs. Reauthorization bills recently passed by the House of Representatives and awaiting action on the Senate floor each propose to spend \$1.6 billion over five years to promote marriage, including matching funds that states must provide out of already-stretched budgets. Allowable uses of marriage promotion funds include activities such as research, demonstration projects, pro-marriage public advertising campaigns, programs in marriage education and divorce reduction, and marriage mentoring. Both the House and Senate bills also mandate that in order to participate in TANF, states must have a marriage promotion program and must set "specific, numerical, and measurable performance objectives" for meeting program goals. At the same time as this money was being dedicated toward promoting marriage, efforts to include or increase funding in TANF bills for basic income support programs with proven effectiveness in helping families (such as transitional jobs, tribal welfare programs, and childcare) have been opposed or defeated by the Administration and some Members of Congress on the grounds that these investments are not necessary and that there are not enough funds available.

In addition to the proposal to redirect TANF funds for marriage promotion activities, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has already begun to spend significant resources on marriage promotion by redirecting monies from programs whose purposes are only tangentially related to issues concerning marriage. Roughly \$100 million in grants and contracts is being awarded for this purpose using funds appropriated for the Child Support Enforcement Program, the Refugee Resettlement Program, Child Welfare Programs, and the (Native American) Social and Economic Development Strategies Program, among others. Shifting funds from proven strategies and critical work supports such as child care into marriage activities that do not have the same likelihood of meeting the needs of the TANF population is of enormous concern to CDF.

Social Science Research on the Effects of Marriage

The base of social science research on marriage has grown dramatically in recent years. A consensus has emerged that healthy marriage appears to be related to

some positive outcomes for both children and adults. A significant body of research demonstrates that children living with their married biological or adoptive parents are less likely to experience poverty, food or housing insecurity, behavioral or emotional problems, or academic difficulties when compared to children living with single or cohabiting parents.¹ In one study, the odds of experiencing psychological problems were 39 percent greater among sixteen-year-olds whose parents had divorced compared to those whose parents had stayed together.² Adults in satisfying marriages are less likely to be depressed or dissatisfied with their lives than those who are unmarried,³ and more likely to enjoy longer, healthier lives.⁴

Recent research also suggests, however, that many of the positive outcomes that are related to marriage may not be due to marriage itself. Instead, these outcomes may be due to differences in the characteristics of people who marry versus those who do not.⁵ For example, studies have shown that upbeat, happy people are more likely to get married than people with an unhappy disposition.⁶ Another recent study found that cohabiting parents are less likely to work, are less well-educated, and are younger than married parents.⁷ The characteristics of those who tend to marry, including being happy, employed, and better educated, have been shown to lead to better outcomes for families.⁸ Promoting marriage among those who would not otherwise have married will not magically imbue them with the personal characteristics responsible for many of the apparent benefits of marriage.

Concerns about the Administration's Proposal

Although marriage can entail some benefits for families and their children, promoting marriage through TANF involves a very complex set of issues and requires a deep understanding of the fundamental realities of the lives of Americans living in poverty. Furthermore, in the course of implementing marriage promotion programs, the Administration must ensure that TANF recipients and their children are not inadvertently harmed, either via these programs themselves (for example, by ignoring, precipitating or prolonging domestic violence) or through a diversion of funds away from much-needed social services and safety net programs. If, as stated, the goal of Federal marriage promotion programs is to improve child well-being, than child well-being must be front and center in the development and implementation of these programs and policies. Any legitimate marriage promotion proposal must address key concerns including whether marriage can be considered a "cure" for poverty, the need for economic supports and education/training among families living in poverty, the fact that current marriage programs are not well evaluated, and issues of domestic violence.

1. Is marriage a "cure" for poverty?

On its own, marriage is unlikely to pull substantial numbers of people out of poverty. In fact, research suggests that marriage has limited utility in this regard.

One in four American children live with an unmarried parent (27 percent in March 2002)-a figure that has more than doubled since the early 1970s. The majority of these children live with their mothers; of all children in the United States, 23 percent live with their mother only. Single families are disproportionately poor. Forty percent of female-headed families lived in poverty in 2002 and nearly two-thirds of all poor children live with a single head of household.⁹

Some conclude from statistics such as these that the solution to child poverty is to encourage more marriage, but marriage would not lift the majority of these chil-

¹For a brief review of this literature, see Parke, M. (2003). *Are Married Parents Really Better for Children?*, Couples and Marriage Series, Brief No. 3. Washington, DC: Center For Law and Social Policy. Available at www.clasp.org.

²Chase-Lansdale, P. L., Cherlin, A. J., & Kiernan, K. E. (1995). The long-term effects of parental divorce on the mental health of young adults: A developmental perspective. *Child Development*, 66, 1614-1634.

³Myers, D. G. (1999). Close Relationships and Quality of Life. In D. Kahneman, E. Diener, N. Schwarz (Eds.), *Well-being: The Foundation of Hedonic Psychology*. New York: Russell-Sage Foundation.

⁴Waite, L. J., & Gallagher, M. (2000). *The Case for Marriage*. NY: Doubleday.

⁵Same as footnote 1.

⁶Same as footnote 3.

⁷Acs, G. & Nelson, S. (2004). *Should We Get Married in the Morning? A profile of Cohabiting Couples with Children*, Assessing the New Federalism, An Urban Institute Program to Assess Changing Social Policies, Discussion Papers. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute. See also Manning, W., & Brown, S. (2003). *Children's Economic Well-Being in Cohabiting Parent Families: An Update and Extension*. Bowling Green, OH: Center for Family and Demographic Research, Bowling Green State University.

⁸Ricciuti, H. N. (2004). Single Parenthood, Achievement, and Problem Behavior in White, Black, and Hispanic Children. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 97, 196-206.

⁹CDF calculations based on Census Bureau data.

dren from poverty. Cause and effect are often unclear in analyzing marriage and poverty; parents who stay together generally start out better off financially and emotionally than parents who split up. A study by the Census Bureau showed that, even before the father departs, child poverty rates are 75 percent higher in families that later break up than in those where the marriage remains intact.¹⁰ Taking these dynamics into account, Donald Hernandez, former chief of the Census Bureau's marriage and family branch concluded that overall child poverty rates for both Blacks and Whites would still be two-thirds of what they are now, even if all fathers who do not live with their children and children's mothers were reunited with them.¹¹ Marriage, while economically beneficial, would not end the majority of child poverty.

Nor is it the case that unmarried women will inevitably be poor. Sweden and Denmark have much higher rates of out of wedlock births, but much lower rates of child poverty and hunger as compared to the United States.¹² These countries and many others spend a greater proportion of their resources providing a safety net for families with children than does the U.S. Rather than focusing on marriage as a cure-all for child poverty, these countries are ensuring that their children do not become poor in the first place.

2. Boosting the economic stability of families living in poverty should be primary

a. Policy changes that boost the economic prospects of low-income families should come before marriage promotion.

Prior to spending large sums of money on marriage promotion programs, the Bush Administration should invest in programs that increase the economic and educational status of Americans living in poverty. The promotion of marriage should not and must not be used as a substitute for such programs.¹³ Unmarried couples living in poverty face many barriers and obstacles including sporadic or no employment, lack of affordable housing, lack of access to childcare, transportation problems, difficulty in purchasing food and household necessities, and many other stressors. Poor married couples often face similar obstacles, illustrating that even with investment in marriage promotion, families will continue to need an economic safety net. Helping single parents succeed requires policies aimed at boosting their educational and economic prospects. Once economic stability has been achieved, marriage may become a more attractive option.

Data from the "Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (FFCWB)"¹⁴ highlights the fact that for unmarried mothers living in poverty, economic stability is seen as a prerequisite to marriage. FFCWB is the first national study of unmarried parents, their relationships and the well-being of their children. 3,712 of the children in the study were born to unmarried parents. Three quarters of the unmarried mothers in the study had incomes below 200 percent of poverty. The results of this study showed that the majority of unwed parents were strongly connected to each other at the time of their child's birth and that the majority expressed positive attitudes about and high hopes for marriage. Nonetheless, few of these couples had married one year later. More intense follow-up questions with a subset of this sample revealed that these couples considered marriage viable only after they had achieved economic stability. Employment was highly prized as was economic security and the accumulation of some assets.

Several other studies are consistent with the conclusion that the lack of economic stability is an impediment to marriage. Researchers have found that the inability of poorly educated, low-skilled men to economically support their families is a major influence on the fact that they often do not marry the mothers of their children.¹⁵

¹⁰U.S. Bureau of the Census. (1991). "Family Disruption and Economic Hardship: The Short-run Picture for Children", Table C, Series P-70, No. 23, *Current Population Reports*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office. Available at www.census.gov.

¹¹Hernandez, D. J. (1993). *America's Children*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

¹²Coontz, S., & Folbre, N. (2002). Marriage, poverty, and public policy. *Poverty Research News*, 6, 9-11.

¹³See also Ooms, 2004, and Barbara Whitehead's testimony before the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee hearing on *Healthy Marriage: What Is It and Why Should We Promote It?*, held on April 28, 2004.

¹⁴Parke, M. (2004). *Who Are "Fragile Families" and What Do We Know About Them?*, Couples and Marriage Series, Brief No.4. Washington, DC: Center For Law and Social Policy. Available at www.clasp.org.

¹⁵Testimony of Theodora Ooms before the Senate Committee on Finance, Subcommittee on Social Security and Family Policy hearing on *The Benefits of a Healthy Marriage*, held on May 5, 2004.

One study of the marriage market found that in the 1980s, at age 25, there were three black women for every black man with adequate earnings.¹⁶ According to the researchers who conducted the FFCWB study¹⁷ the poor want to marry but like their wealthier peers, they want to marry well; otherwise they fear that their relationships will not last. Indeed, they have some basis for this fear: a large body of empirical research shows that education and employment are positively associated with marriage and negatively associated with divorce.¹⁸

There is also some direct evidence that the relationships of unmarried low-income parents can be strengthened if their incomes are increased. One source of such evidence is an evaluation of the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP).¹⁹ MFIP employed a strategy that combined financial incentives to work (in the form of greater earned income disregards) with mandated participation in work-focused activities for TANF recipients. As a result of higher employment combined with these wage supplements, MFIP participants experienced increased income which was shown to have a stabilizing effect on marriage and to decrease domestic violence. Married parents participating in MFIP were 38 percent more likely to remain together after three years than those in a welfare program that lacked these additional economic supports and incentives. A follow-up study found that the impact remained strong even after seven years.

Clearly, for those living in poverty, economic stability is a priority and a pressing need that weighs heavily in their family choices. Unfortunately, many low-income Americans lack sufficient resources and skills to lift themselves and their families out of poverty. Encouraging women in this position to marry as a way out of poverty leaves them extremely vulnerable and without control over their lives and the lives of their children. For example, a mother who marries the father of her child may find herself in a violent relationship that she cannot “afford” to leave for fear that her low skill level and inability to get a job will leave her and her children hungry and living on the streets. Placing these children in a violent home is often more detrimental than the poverty which the mother sought to escape in the first place. Another mother may marry the father of her child and go on to have two additional children with her husband, only to be left by him a few years later. If this mother has been caring for her children while her husband developed a resume and job skills, she will be left with more children and further limited opportunity for financial stability. Policies that support single mothers in their own skill development and economic independence present an opportunity to escape poverty permanently. In order to best help TANF recipients, the Administration should support a package of programs aimed at increasing the economic prospects of these families and their children. Specifically, when TANF is reauthorized, States should also be allowed to count education and job training as “work” for longer periods of time in their welfare programs. Getting an education is a prerequisite for obtaining a job that pays a living wage. In addition, substantially more money should be provided to pay for childcare for the poor. It is a fact that parents cannot work if their children are not cared for, so child care is the most basic support needed to allow a family to develop economic independence. States should also “pass through” to families a greater proportion of the child support money that is paid on their behalf. There are numerous other policy and legislative changes that would help lift poor children out of poverty. These include raising the minimum wage, extending tax cuts that benefit low-income families and increasing the number of families that can obtain housing vouchers. Only after changes like these have been made should the Administration spend large sums of money promoting marriage.

b. Removing marriage penalties from social service programs can simultaneously encourage marriage and provide income supports for the working poor

While investing limited Federal resources in unproven marriage promotion schemes is ill advised, the Federal Government should certainly not create barriers to healthy marriages. As such, the Administration should pursue anti-poverty strategies that remove marriage penalties from TANF and other programs targeted at

¹⁶ Lichter, D. T., McLaughlin, D., LeClere, F., Kephart, G., & Landry, D. (1992). Race and the Retreat From Marriage: A Shortage of Marriageable Men? *American Sociological Review*, 57, 781-799.

¹⁷ Testimony of Kathryn Edin before the Senate Committee on Finance, Subcommittee on Social Security and Family Policy hearing on *The Benefits of a Healthy Marriage*, held on May 5, 2004.

¹⁸ Garfinkel, I., & McLanahan, S. (2003). “Strengthening Fragile Families”, in *One Percent for the Kids*, Isabel Sawhill (Ed.). Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.

¹⁹ Miller, C., Knox, V., Gennetian, L., Dodoo, M., Hunter, J. A. & Redcross, C. (2002). *Reforming Welfare and Rewarding Work: Final Report on the Minnesota Family Investment Program*. New York: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation.

the poor. If encouraging marriage is the goal, building disincentives to marriage into TANF and income support programs is counterproductive. Many states have begun this process by changing their welfare program rules in various ways including by removing restrictions on two-parent family eligibility, eliminating marriage penalties in computing welfare benefits, or suspending child support arrearage collections if non-custodial and custodial parents marry. An additional example of a program that has benefited from marriage penalty relief is the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) program, which is widely cited as one of the most successful anti-poverty tools available. In the EITC, marriage penalties occurred when two people with earnings married and their combined, higher income placed them at a point in the EITC "phase-out range" at which they received a smaller EITC (or no EITC at all) than one or both of them would have received if still single. A reprieve for low-income families that phased out some of the EITC marriage penalty in the 2001 tax package was nearly eliminated in the 2004 tax debate in the House of Representatives, but was retained at the last minute. The Bush Administration should make clear its support for maintaining and expanding this version of marriage penalty relief. This represents a positive step in the direction of supporting marriage while simultaneously providing income supports to the working poor.

3. Further marriage promotion programs should not be funded until current programs are evaluated

There is little evidence currently available that can address the question of whether marriage promotion programs are likely to be successful among those living in poverty. One reason for this is that most prior relationship and marriage skills programs have targeted white middle and upper-class couples who are engaged or already married. Almost nothing is known about how these programs need to be modified if they are to be used with poor/minority populations and with couples who may not exhibit high levels of relationship commitment. Couples living in poverty are likely to experience unique relationship stressors arising from their economic circumstances that make them dissimilar to the couples that have participated in marriage promotion programs to date.

A second reason why it is unclear whether marriage promotion programs are likely to be successful is that, in general, few such programs have been rigorously evaluated. This point is frequently made by experts in this field, including a majority of the scientific witnesses at a hearing on marriage before the Senate Finance Committee in May, 2004.²⁰ Recognizing a need for increased evaluation of marriage programs, the Administration recently awarded several multi-million dollar contracts to prominent research organizations (*e.g.*, MDRC and Mathematica Policy Research) to conduct large marriage promotion test projects which would include rigorous scientific evaluations. The results of these studies will not be known for some time.

Given that it is currently unclear whether marriage promotion programs targeted at low income individuals will be successful, the best course for the Administration to take would be to proceed slowly and cautiously. Officials should allow trial programs that have already been funded to proceed, these programs should be rigorously evaluated, and only then should decisions be made concerning allocations of additional funding for marriage promotion. It is standard practice that major initiatives begin with pilot studies prior to full-scale project implementation and the commitment of millions of dollars. New marriage initiatives should not be funded before the results of projects that are already underway are known.

The Administration must also ensure that any marriage programs it does fund in the future are empirically-based, continually refined, and scientifically evaluated. There are many marriage promotion and pre-marital pregnancy prevention programs operating in the United States at the moment that do not meet these criteria.²¹ Scientifically-based programs that can be shown to produce results are the only marriage promotion activities that are worthy of federal support.

4. Domestic violence must be addressed in marriage promotion programs

Domestic violence is a tragic reality for many women on TANF and marriage promotion programs must be particularly sensitive and responsive to this issue.

Although such violence can be a problem for all American women, those living in poverty or on welfare experience dramatically high levels of abuse. In the general population, about 22 percent of women experience domestic violence at some point

²⁰Testimony of Scott Stanley, Theodora Oorns, and Ron Haskins before the Senate Committee on Finance, Subcommittee on Social Security and Family Policy hearing on *The Benefits of a Healthy Marriage*, held on May 5, 2004.

²¹For some examples, see U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2002). *Strengthening Healthy Marriages: A Compendium of Approaches*. Washington, D.C. Available at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/region2/index.htm>.

in their adult lives, while most studies estimate that the lifetime prevalence of violence among welfare recipients is in the range of 50 percent–60 percent.²² Estimates of the percentage of TANF recipients experiencing recent violence consistently range from 15 percent–25 percent.²³ It is also quite common for children in households where domestic violence takes place to witness this violence or to be victimized themselves. A great deal of research now documents that exposure to domestic violence has serious negative effects on child development and can result in attachment problems, cognitive and emotional deficits, anti-social behavior and posttraumatic stress disorder, among other problems.²⁴

Unfortunately, research documents that the majority of TANF recipients who experience domestic violence are unlikely to report this fact to welfare caseworkers. Many states do not track reports of domestic violence but where data does exist, the rates are between 5 percent and 10 percent of the caseload, which suggests significant under-reporting. This is consistent with evidence that in general, domestic violence advocates are four or five times more likely than welfare caseworkers to obtain reports of domestic violence from women.²⁵

With such a large percentage of the welfare caseload experiencing domestic violence, any marriage promotion programs that are targeted to women on welfare must pay serious and comprehensive attention to this issue. The Administration has made some assurances that domestic violence issues will be taken into consideration when these programs are implemented,²⁶ however their proposals to date have failed to include comprehensive and detailed information about violence prevention efforts and safeguards. While, the Senate TANF bill contains some requirements that domestic violence experts be consulted in developing marriage promotion programs, these protections are conspicuously absent in the House bill. The Administration must do more to ensure that domestic violence is not treated as a sidebar in the discussion of marriage promotion. Fully half of the adult women on the TANF rolls are likely to be affected by domestic violence at some point, as are their children.

It is likely that the majority of these women will not inform caseworkers of this fact, even as they turn to welfare as a crucial source of income while they seek to escape their abusers.

Aggressively promoting marriage in this population of women can have dangerous consequences. In order to minimize this risk, experts in domestic violence must be integrated into every facet of marriage promotion program development and implementation. At a minimum, caseworkers must be extensively trained to evaluate women for domestic violence and in no case where a woman has suffered abuse should she be encouraged to remain with or marry her abuser. An even better solution is to hire domestic violence experts to discuss this sensitive issue with TANF clients and to provide counseling and other forms of assistance if needed. If the goal of these funds is truly to promote only healthy marriages, the Administration's marriage promotion proposal must be amended such that domestic abuse counseling is an allowable use of marriage promotion funds.

Members of the Administration have also said that participation in marriage promotion programs will be completely voluntary.²⁷ However, some marriage programs may subtly coerce women to marry, whether or not they are portrayed as voluntary. For example, nine states and one tribal agency offer welfare recipients financial incentives or "bonuses" to marry.²⁸ For women living in poverty who are in desperate need of income, this could be very tempting and may push them toward marrying an abusive partner. Incentives for marriage such as these must not be allowed as

²² Lawrence, S. (2002). *Domestic Violence and Welfare Policy: Research Findings That Can Inform Policies on Marriage and Child Well-Being*. New York, NY: National Center for Children in Poverty.

²³ Raphael, J., & Tolman, R. M. (1997). *Trapped by Poverty, Trapped by Abuse: New Evidence Documenting the Relationship Between Domestic Violence and Welfare*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Research Center on Poverty, Risk, and Mental Health.

²⁴ Same as footnote 15.

²⁵ NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund. (2002). *Surviving Violence and Poverty: A Focus on the Link Between Domestic and Sexual Violence, Women's Poverty and Welfare*. Washington, D.C.: NOW Legal Defense. Available at <http://www.legalmomentum.org/issues/wellsurviving.pdf>.

²⁶ Testimony of Wade Horn before the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, Subcommittee on Children and Families hearing on *Healthy Marriage: What Is It and Why Should We Promote It?*, held on April 28, 2004.

²⁷ Same as footnote 18.

²⁸ Ooms, T., Bouchet, S. & Parke, P. (2004). *Beyond Marriage Licenses: Efforts in States to Strengthen Marriage and Two-Parent Families*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Law and Social Policy. Available at www.clasp.org.

a component of marriage promotion programs because they may inadvertently push financially vulnerable women into making poor life choices.

Conclusion

The Administration asserts that the over-arching purpose of marriage promotion programs is to improve the well-being of American children who are living in poverty. Given that it is clear that marriage promotion is not the most consistent and proven direct path to reach this goal, the Administration should ensure adequate investments have been made to meet the employment, child care and education needs of single parents before investing scarce Federal resources in this unproven method. As we have described, if marriage promotion programs are to succeed at improving child well-being, they must be designed very carefully and must address a series of important issues. Of particular importance, in order to avoid unintentionally harming women and their children, marriage programs must be designed to address the high levels of domestic violence experienced by women on welfare and their children. Domestic violence experts must be integrated into all levels of program planning and implementation, they should be hired to counsel women who have experienced abuse, and domestic violence counseling must be an allowable use of marriage education funds. In addition, all marriage programs must be voluntary and TANF recipients must not be subtly coerced into marriage via financial “bonuses” if they marry.

As we have described, marriage programs targeted at individuals living in poverty are rare and those that do exist have not been evaluated. The Administration should allow currently funded trial programs in marriage promotion to be assessed prior to funding new programs in this area. All programs, regardless of when they are funded, should be empirically (rather than ideologically) based, scientifically evaluated and continually updated and revised as new information becomes available.

Given the problems surrounding domestic violence and program evaluation as well as the unmet need for basic services among those on welfare, spending large sums of money on marriage promotion programs does not represent a wise use of funds. Rather, the Administration should invest in programs that will provide TANF recipients with the skills and resources they need to lift their families out of poverty. These families need education, training, child care, substance abuse treatment, a greater proportion of the child support money that is paid on behalf of their children, help with transportation, and other forms of assistance to support them in their efforts to find work and earn enough to support their families. They also need relief from “marriage penalties” that act as disincentives to marry. In the fight against poverty, marriage promotion programs should be seen as secondary to programs that more directly help families escape poverty.

ATTACHMENT

PREPARED STATEMENT OF WILLIAM J. MURRAY, CHAIRMAN,
RELIGIOUS FREEDOM COALITION

Civil unions: A boon for gays or a bane for the American culture?

Date published: 1/18/2004

ON PAPER and without forethought as to human nature, civil unions for gays sound harmless. However, civil unions cannot be reserved for “same-sex” couples, and that is the real danger.

The California and Vermont civil-union laws, because they are contractual laws, could not pass legal standards unless they were offered to any two people. Many heterosexual couples, when they see that civil unions offer financial advantages while being very easy to dissolve, will choose this alternative to marriage.

Thus, civil unions will promote cohabitation not only among homosexuals and lesbians but among heterosexuals as well. The civil unions grant privilege without responsibility. The group most likely to utilize civil unions is not same-sex couples but rather the elderly.

About one million elderly adults in America currently cohabit—about half a million couples. They do not marry because of inheritance, tax, and other, mostly financial, issues. Civil unions will legitimize these relationships in the eyes of the states and allow medical and social benefits they do not now have.

For example, one partner may have superior medical-insurance benefits because of having worked for the Federal Government or for a large corporation. His or her partner would become eligible for those same benefits under the terms of a civil union.

Civil unions will quickly become popular with young couples as well. A man will be able to share his insurance benefits with his live-in partner but can ask her to leave at any time because they are “not really” married.

Within a few decades civil unions could overtake marriages as the preferred arrangement of those who want a live-in relationship. Sound impossible? Right now only 60 percent of marriages are conducted in the church and sanctified. The rest are conducted by government officials such as judges. These marriages are secular in nature and have nothing to do with the biblical base of marriage vows. Why would these 40 percent bother to marry at all if they can have the same “privileges” of marriage in a civil union, without the potential difficulties of divorce? This group will also move toward the civil union.

The fact is that the vast majority of homosexuals will not want to use civil unions. In the Dec. 1 issue of *The Weekly Standard*, Maggie Gallagher rightly points out that General Motors, with more than 342,000 employees, has only 166 people who have applied for health insurance for a same-sex partner. What will that figure be if the plan is opened to heterosexual couples that are simply shackled up together in civil unions? These figures should also give us pause in understanding how few homosexuals there really are compared to the power of their voices in Washington.

The problem with civil unions does not lie just in giving same-sex “couples” the privileges of marriage, but also in establishing a second class of marriage using another name that will bestow benefits to couples who want to shack up without ever really getting married.

The homosexual aspect of civil unions that is perhaps most dangerous lies within the confines of our public school system and what will be taught in sex-education classes. If same-sex civil unions are legal, will the educational system, which is basically run by the radical National Education Association, force “how-to” homosexual education on the youth of the nation? The answer is of course, the NEA will do just that. Already the NEA is working to promote “safe” homosexual-sex classes in the schools. Civil-union laws will empower that organization to push for more illustrative classes.

Lastly, even though civil unions go by a different name than marriage, they do give an important legal stamp of approval to homosexuality, which is why the majority of homosexuals are pushing this issue, even though they wouldn’t actually want to be involved in a civil union. Once same-sex unions are sanctioned by law, it becomes very difficult to voice any disapproval of homosexual behavior in the schools or the workplace.

Will a boy who refuses to date another boy be singled out for psychological treatment by school authorities because he is “homophobic”? Will a teacher who voices any disapproval of homosexual behavior be more likely to face lawsuits and loss of employment? Will refusing to date someone of the same sex prove prejudice and result in workplace discipline? We have already seen cases of Federal employees being threatened and punished for refusing to attend pro-homosexual seminars.

Congressional leaders are beating a drum that says only that the word “marriage” is important and that as long as that word is protected they have won the battle. This is far from true. Creating a second class of marriage by another name is a danger to our society.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF IRENE WEISER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
STOP FAMILY VIOLENCE

WELFARE REFORM AND MARRIAGE INITIATIVES

Marriage Diaries

Pending legislation that would reauthorize the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) Program includes a proposal by President Bush to spend \$1.5 billion on government marriage promotion programs. This proposal is a waste of taxpayer money that will increase the risk of domestic violence, fail to stop the rise in poverty, and do nothing for the institution of marriage. Women are 40 percent more likely to be poor than men. And women on welfare need education, job training and child care more than ever to be able to compete in the marketplace. To squander \$1.5 billion on unproven programs urging marriage upon poor women, particularly in this economy, is fiscally foolish and morally reprehensible.

Kansas—“I was married to a verbally abusive man [who] was also an alcoholic, which explains a lot of what happened. . . . verbal abuse does not show physical signs, but there are definitely scars that remain far longer. Many women have come from abusive relationships but did not have the education I did, these

women need opportunities to gain [an] education [in order] to allow them to better themselves and become self supportive for their children as well. There must be a way for women to gain success from within themselves.”

Of particular concern are the increased risks of domestic violence associated with such a program. The reality is that as many as 60 percent of women welfare recipients are survivors of domestic violence. These women need economic security so they can escape abuse, not government pressure to remain with their abusers. The Administration claims that it would never pressure someone to marry, or remain with, her abuser. But there are no provisions in the House marriage promotion proposals to ensure that officials will screen out couples in abusive relationships. It is therefore vital that if marriage promotion provisions are ultimately passed, the protections included in the Senate bill be retained and or strengthened and be included in any final welfare reauthorization bill. Trying to escape an abusive relationship can be one of the hardest things for a woman to do, particularly when a woman is financially dependent on her abuser. Women need to hear about how to leave the relationship, not get lectures on how to work through typical marital strife or cash incentives that risk further danger.

Mississippi—“Marriage isn’t the answer . . . I thought it was, then that one vicious man taught me with violence that marriage wouldn’t fix everything. And I’m grateful I got out before it led to my son’s or my [own] death. We were lucky . . . but there are plenty of women who get trapped thinking that marriage is the only way to make it and provide for their families. . .and some of these women pay with their lives to the husband they trusted.”

Government marriage promotion sends the message that the way out of poverty for women is dependence on someone else to act as a breadwinner, rather than economic self-sufficiency. They divert welfare funds from basic economic supports; coercively intrude on private decisions; place domestic violence victims at increased risk; waste public funds on ineffective policies and inappropriately limit state flexibility.

Oregon—“Receiving state assistance has literally been a form of survival for my family and me. We would not have made it without these supplement programs in place.. When I divorced, I decided it was better to be poor by myself than to be married to someone who was potentially dangerous to me and my family, and someone who was not reliable or even trustworthy financially as well. This is my story; I hope it helps you to understand that being unmarried with children can ultimately be very good and empowering for some families.”

These *Marriage Diaries* have been collected by the organization Stop Family Violence, and they provide real examples of how critical it is not to coerce women into marriage as a means to move them out of poverty, but rather to provide them with education, job training, child care, domestic violence-related services, and health care—programs that will help move them out of violent relationships, as well as out of poverty. Unproven marriage promotion programs divert precious funds away from what we know works.

Inside, you’ll find narratives submitted by women from Arkansas, Florida, Kansas, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Montana, New Jersey, Oregon, Texas, and Virginia. These powerful stories (a small sample of the hundreds received from around the United States) show the importance of public assistance—including education, training, counseling, child-care, food stamps and health care—in helping women escape domestic violence and become self sufficient. For more information on marriage promotion, as well as diaries from other states, please contact Irene Weiser at Stop Family Violence at iw@stopfamilyviolence.org or visit www.stopfamilyviolence.org.

Arkansas

I know this is hard to believe. I couldn’t believe it either. On the day of our wedding, my husband-to-be threw me down a flight of steps, and said; “Now you know how it’s going to be and who’s the boss.” Up to that moment in our relationship, he had been perfectly charming. I went through the service and it took six months and many beatings before I got out of the marriage.

Florida

I am a 34-year old mother of one. I met my abuser at age 15 and married him at age 17. I felt financially and emotionally trapped in this marriage—unable to escape the abuse. After 16 years of being with the abuser, I finally got the courage to get out because of the effect on my daughter and fear that I would be dead either by his hands or due to my own through depression

[from] my living conditions. Due to public assistance, I was able to leave and am attending college full time. I will get my degree next year and become a teacher. At which time, I plan to teach and continue my degree in law so that I may be able to help those who were in a situation similar to my own. The welfare system needs to be available to women in these situations in order to be able to get out and make a better life for themselves and their children. I believe education needs to be pushed, not marriage, and that is my story.

“Hello, my name is Suzanne and this is my story. I was married in 1984 to someone that I had known since I was 5 years old. We went to the same grade school and high school. One month after we were married, my husband tried to kill me with a razorblade. I was in shock for a while after that. You see, I did not come from an abusive family and had never experienced something like this and had never known anyone that had been abused. I was embarrassed and convinced that it must have been my fault. I was young and didn't know any better. The abuse didn't stop and it wasn't what you would call the 'normal' pattern of abuse. My abuser is what they call in domestic violence circles a 'cobra'. You never know when they will strike or for what reason. He actually never needed a reason—he just hit me.

About 2 yrs after we were married, I had a son. When my son was 3 weeks old, my husband had a screaming fit over his bassinet and that was it. I picked up my child and left him (for the first time). He went to a treatment program for alcohol and drugs and stopped drinking and abusing drugs. But the abuse did not stop. I left him twice in the next few years but in 1990 decided to try it again for my son. We moved to another city and the day that we moved, he threw a phone book at me and broke my nose. But I went anyway. During this time, I went to my church to seek help, but instead of help, they told my husband that I had told them about his abusive behavior. As you can imagine, that was not a good idea. I was beaten for that.

In 1992, he left me with 2 mortgages on 2 houses and one income. I eventually lost my job due to stress and in 1995, I received a phone call from my 9-year-old son that he had a brother, who I wasn't the mother of. That was the straw that broke the camel's back. I filed for divorce and it was final in November of 1995. I also ended up having to file bankruptcy and went through a foreclosure.

In 1997, I moved back to my hometown and went back to college. At that time, I started working as a case manager under the Welfare Reform Act. I helped women who had been in similar situations learn to rely on themselves instead of the abuser. I helped them get jobs and go back to work. I helped them regain their self-esteem.

In 2002, I graduated from college with a B.A. in English and am currently in my second year of law school. My goal is to help women who have experienced the same things that I have. No one should have to go through the things that I did alone. Most of the women that I dealt with in my caseload had little or no education and multiple children, each from a different father. They never had anyone who could teach them how to take care of themselves. Most have no family members that are financially or emotionally able to help them. Offering these women financial incentives to marry the men in their lives is not the answer to their problems. Education and jobs are what is going to help them. Teaching them how to proud of themselves is what is going to help them, not encouraging them to rely on someone else.

My ultimate goal is to offer my legal services to people who cannot afford them. My story is not unique. What is unique is my drive to rise above my past and change my life, for the better. I knew that the only way I could increase my income and better my life for my son and myself was to go back to college and get my degree. I truly believe that I have a moral obligation to help other women overcome their abusive situations and realize their true potential and become self-sufficient and successful. But take it from someone who is there right now and continuing the fight—it is not easy. Our society, to this day, frowns on single women still and does not encourage women to stand on their own two feet.

Thank you for letting me share!”

Kansas

In my first marriage I had no access to money to leave. My husband controlled the finances. He counted my change from the grocery store. I got three different jobs in two years. He called one and told them I quit. He beat me up so bad that I was fired from the second one for missing work. I finally got out with the third one.

My second marriage was abusive as well. I believed in working for a good relationship. My husband and I attended church regularly. When he started beating me

I thought the minister could help. The minister told me he was a good guy and I should give him some time to change. I did, but the abuse continued. I tried to leave him several times. Once I got away for four months. I was living on my own and started attending a different church. My husband started attending the new church as well, even though I had a restraining order against him. The minister there was impressed with my husband's work ethic and contribution to the church. He encouraged me to give him another chance. He said he would provide counseling. In the counseling the minister told my husband he was wrong, that his actions were a sin. But he counseled us together and never spoke to me separately. He never asked me if things were still going well. They weren't. He was becoming more and more unpredictable. I wanted to move away, to leave him, but I had no money. I worked a good job and made over \$30,000 a year, but my husband refused to pay any of our bills and continued to run them up. I was only able to escape when a friend offered me a place to stay in another town and enough money to move. I also was able to get a new job in the new town. Without those things I would have been forced to continue being a good wife, being raped, and being beaten."

I was married to a verbally abusive man [who] was also an alcoholic, which explains a lot of what happened, and is still happening. Verbal abuse does not show any physical bruises, but there are definitely bruises of another sort. I divorced this man over 6 years ago, but our 4 children are still suffering. After I left him with our 4 children (whom he had heavily influenced against me), I was in a low paying job, renting a 2 bedroom house, not receiving any child support, and on welfare. At that time, welfare was the only way I could support my 4 children. My ex-husband called me awful names in front of our children and in the front yard of my home when he would come pick them up for his visitation. This continued until I obtained a better paying job and could move away from him. I was able to get off welfare at that point. But the verbal abuse continued, by phone and e-mail. After he called me a b**** on the phone to our daughter, I charged him with harassment. He pled guilty and was ordered to go through anger management, but it was nothing more than a slap on the wrist since it was not enforced. He filed for a change of custody after our children had been with me for almost 5 years. He lied to the court about his work history, and was successful in coercing our children into hating me. Now, he has another failed marriage, been through alcohol treatment for only 5 days, still drinking, and my children have finally seen him for what he really is. I have been remarried for 5 years and am in a successful job.

I did not want to be on welfare because I knew that was not what would sustain my children or me. I had an education before all this began so I just needed to put it to use after I could get out of the chains of the verbally abusive relationship. I remarried because I found someone who was loving, patient, and not abusive. He has helped me to overcome some of the abuse. But he has been very patient in this process, since I still have a lot of the abuse to work through. As I said before, verbal abuse does not show physical signs, but there are definitely scars that remain far longer. Many women have come from abusive relationships but did not have the education I did, these women need opportunities to gain [an] education [in order] to allow them to better themselves and become self supportive for their children as well. There must be a way for women to gain success from within themselves. Forcing them to marry when they are not ready or to try to remedy another situation is not the answer. My success came from me, not from the government or any government program. Do I still have the verbal abuse to contend with from my ex? YES. This will always be there until HE learns how to help himself. No government program will stop him from being abusive. What have my children gained from this? From their dad, hate. From their mom (me), unconditional love and support. They now realize I have been there all along for them. But they still have scars, just like me.

Louisiana

"I was married to a man for 8 months, [and] had known him less than a year when we got married. I thought he was my soul mate. I discovered after a few months that he was an alcoholic, and when cocaine was around he 'had' to have some. One night after drinking about half a fifth of whiskey and snorting some coke, he physically threw me out of the house. I didn't go back then, we divorced, but he continued to stalk me and threaten my family and me. After he 'dried out' for several months, our relationship started again. He promised to never drink again. Long story short, he starting drinking again and violence became a part of my life. Not only was there the emotional, mental, and financial abuse, there was more physical abuse. I have stared down the barrel of a .357, being promised that he would take

my life in a second. I have had that same .357 fired into the concrete floor of our house and had bullet fragments & concrete miss my left eye by less than an inch. I have been beaten, had teeth knocked loose, [and] been told that he would kill me and everyone in my family if that's what it took. The last night I spent in our house, he choked me, screamed in my ear that women didn't deserve respect that they were worthless, except for one thing—sex, had my head slammed into the concrete floor, had my clothes torn off my body, [and] had bruises and scratches on various parts of my body. He then told me to get the ** out of his house and life. I immediately threw on clothes and grabbed my purse—the whole time praying I would get out of the driveway before he could open the safe containing an SK47 and an AK47 along with lots of ammo. By the grace of God I escaped and survived. I am a very low statistic. We had counseling and he would tell the counselor exactly what they wanted to hear, just as he would tell me that he would quit drinking, get a job and start treating me the way I deserved to be treated—like a human. But he never did. Please, please do not tell these women that marriage is the solution for them and their children. Marriage is NOT a solution—it can become the end to the lives of their children and them or it can make those children orphans.—Gail Kilman”

Massachusetts

I'm a therapist who currently works in a battered women's shelter; prior to this I did family stabilization (short-term, intensive home-based work w/at-risk youth and their families). While the vast majority of my clients have been poor, single-parent families, the idea that marriage will come to their rescue and to imply in any way that the lack of a legal commitment is the root of the problem is pathetically naive and absurd. These women do not need a legal commitment to a man who is also poor, who is often abusive, and often abusing substances. First of all, good luck even finding the father(s) of the women's children. These are women whose lives are often at risk because these men have been at worst dangerous and violent, at best irresponsible and non-committal. How about starting with teaching boys to be responsible, caring, sensitive, committed partners and teaching girls to be empowered, in control of their own lives, teaching them they have choices? How about starting with quality, honest, sex education that includes information about birth control and HIV protection? How about expanding outreach and mental health services in schools and communities so that the trauma epidemic can be addressed and young people can heal and get in the driver's seat in their lives? What century does Bush think he's living in?

“In 1980 I divorced my first husband because he was a violent alcoholic. Back then, there was a program called the W.I.N. Program, I believe in stood for Women In Need. This Program was handled through the local welfare office in Southbridge, Massachusetts. The program allowed me to attend a secretarial program at the MacKinnon Training Center; it reimbursed me for my mileage, provided day care for my 3 yr old son. It also helped restore my self-esteem and self-worth. Before completion of the course, I finished all the necessary curriculum and was hired on a temporary basis at a hospital as a ward clerk to fill in for someone out on maternity leave. I took the position to obtain the experience and to have something on my resume. However at the end of the eight weeks she decided not to return and the job was offered to me. I stayed at the job for five years, during which time I passed the National Unit Secretary Exam. I then went to work for my local school department in the Business Office, starting out as a clerk, I worked there for 16 years and left as the Secretary to the Asst. to the Superintendent, transferring to the Police Department as Records Clerk. By the way, I have been remarried for the past 17 years. I do know that should anything happen to my husband, I can and will be able to take care of my daughter and myself.

So instead of looking to marry off people on welfare, you should be looking to make them productive human beings with a sense of pride and purpose. Those people will then pass on to their children the same sense of pride and purpose making this country a more productive place. I strongly agree that there needs to be welfare reform. However, I take GREAT OFFENSE to the Cupid Project as another male way of insulting and degrading the women of America. Our constitution states, “All men are created equal. . . .” Let us all live by that and provide single/divorced parents male or female with the assistance and education to support their families—instead of just marrying them off and making them a MAN'S responsibility.”

Mississippi

“I am now a single mother of two children. Granted I was never married, but it was very close, and I was very lucky to get out of it. My experience began when

I only had one child. I tried my best to make ends meet on my own when my son's father ran away from us . . . but it was difficult. I am well educated, but finding jobs that paid well enough to pay the bills, afford daycare, and provide the basic necessities was hard. I got re-involved with an ex-boyfriend from high school, who was at this time my closest friend. I thought I knew everything about him. Things were going quite well until we agreed to get married. Then things really changed.

I was no longer allowed to dress as I chose . . . I became a Barbie doll for him. I was not permitted to have any friends, though he brought many over. I was forbidden from speaking my opinion because it was not my place. He made me quit my job and stay at home with my son, which wasn't so bad. But his temper and drinking problems escalated until I was afraid to move without permission. I was trapped with a son I couldn't provide for without this man's help. There were many battle wounds throughout my home. Holes in the walls to mark just how bad it could be . . . holes through the doors to remind me that even locking my son and I up away from him, was not a safe alternative. Everything I owned and had worked so hard for was broken in front of me. Dishes were shattered on walls behind me as I dodged them time after time. My little boy got cut in the back of his head from one of the plates that missed me and hit the wall, only to ricochet to him where he hid. He has scars on his knee where he was cut by other broken dishes when he crawled away. His lip had been split by being hit so hard in the face when at 1 year old, he mimicked the words that came out of my fiancé's mouth. But I was still too scared to leave him. I figured I'd never make it on my own. How could I raise a child without someone's help?

One day when I went shopping with a friend who I rarely ever saw . . . I came home to find the house in complete darkness, a busted pipe in the hallway leaking water all over my carpet, and every phone in my home was clipped neatly near the phone plug. That was when I knew I had no choice but to leave. I called the cops, who weren't too willing to help . . . but they put patrols out. I lived in fear. My son and I slept on a mattress in the living room so that we would have numerous routes of escape. Our door was barricaded nightly. I found myself completely in debt and looking at being on the street if I couldn't repair the damages my fiancé caused. I found we had been 3 months behind in rent, though he never mentioned it to me.

I finally sought help. [I] applied through the states job program to find work. [I] applied for medical assistance for my son, received food stamps to feed us, got daycare assistance so I could afford to work, without paying it all to the daycare centers, and sought counseling for myself. The state services provided all these venues to help guide me and get me back on my feet. After all, I had a child to raise.

Now I am working at a decent job in a new state. I have two children, who make my life worth living, and make me more determined than ever to protect what is in there best interest. I am receiving WIC and am applying for Medicaid here so that my children can see a doctor when they need since my work doesn't provide insurance. I am a hardworking mother just trying to do her best. I understand I have never been married, but my experience was just the same. I trusted and loved a man who I had known for 10 years . . . and I never knew how cruel, angry and violent he was until we were almost at the altar.

No, I have no intention of marrying anyone for a long time. Because I have two very important children to look after . . . and no man will ever hurt my kids again. It was very hard for me to first apply for any public assistance money that the government provides . . . but I had to. I do everything I can on my own, but I do need help. Losing this kind of assistance, which only helps to put back the pieces broken in someone's life isn't fair. I never asked for a man's cruelty, but I got it anyways. Marriage isn't the answer . . . I thought it was, then that one vicious man taught me with violence that marriage wouldn't fix everything. And I'm grateful I got out before it led to my son's or my [own] death. We were lucky. . . but there are plenty of women who get trapped thinking that marriage is the only way to make it and provide for their families . . . and some of these women pay with their lives to the husband they trusted. I refuse to be one of those women. I am stronger. That experience was almost 3 years ago. I am almost able to make it on my own now, but I wouldn't be able to say that if the public assistance wasn't there to help out when I needed it. Please take that into consideration before doing something that will lead to the demise of women like me. There are reasons that some women are single mothers by choice—and it's usually fear and love. They fear what they already had to endure . . . and they love their children too much to do it again. Thank you."

Montana

I am a Crime Victim Advocate who works in the criminal justice system. Just last week a woman came into my office to receive an Order of Protection against her

husband. The story she told me is a good example of why this legislation is a bad idea. Because this woman did not have potatoes ready for dinner one night, her husband became angry and violent. He gave her a black eye in front of their children. The next Sunday she went to church (one that professes to be very community-oriented, and tight-knit) and NOT ONE PERSON asked about her eye. Her mother, who does not belong to the same church, called the pastor to ask that he intervene with the husband (who respected the pastor). The next time this woman saw the pastor, he said to her, "You just need to do what he says." Over the next few days, several women from the church visited her and insisted that she return to the husband, despite the violence. When she came to my office, she was distraught about the violence, but even more so about the attitude of her church community. She knows she needs to leave this relationship or she and/or her children will get seriously hurt, but she is also in fear that God will strike her down for breaking up the family. She is also concerned that she will be unable to support her children when she leaves the relationship. She is reluctant to go on welfare, having been told that it is bad to take handouts from anyone outside the church, but she knows that neither she nor her children are safe within their church—and they must eat and have a roof over their heads. She has not been allowed to hold a job while married to this man, and has few job skills.

This is not an unusual story of those we hear in my office—of the 1,500 people or so we talk to a year, we frequently hear stories of women who are forced to live in poverty by their abusers (I remember one woman who was not allowed to buy shoes for herself or the children, and so came to my office in flip-flops on a snowy day); who are not allowed to develop their job skills while in the marriage, and so, if they choose to leave the violence, must go on welfare to survive; and who are abandoned by church communities that hold rigid gender expectations—and thus, perhaps inadvertently in some cases, support abusive behavior by the men in the church. Additionally, throughout the country, women are threatened by social services with [the] removal of their children if they "allow" themselves to be abused in front of them. Yet, if they don't allow it, and get divorced, legislation such as this threatens both women and their children with more severe poverty. This is an unacceptable double bind.

We must protect women in this country by not forcing marriage upon anyone. [Marriage] is not the solution to poverty or violence. Job skills, child care, and a focus on the person who perpetuates the violence rather than the victims of violence are the only ways that women living in poverty will be able to leave poverty and begin to support themselves.

New Jersey

"I am 42 years old and I am a survivor of an 11 year marriage to an abuser. I survived because I was able to receive food stamps and cash assistance. I was also fortunate enough to meet a woman who ran a group for battered woman. For the first time in my life I was told I DIDN'T need a man to be okay. I was taught from my parents that marriage made you who you were as a person. My marriage showed me I was worthless, stupid, ugly, and needed to be beat into submission.

I now work under that wonderful woman Geri Esposito Reale and I spend countless hours empowering women to depend on themselves and to begin their journey alone. Our Agency gives woman a choice in their future. I can remember living in a trailer counting bread and eating less so I could feed my children because the man I entered into marriage with almost destroyed my soul. I thought many times about the security I left when I ended my marriage. I knew my children would eat, I never knew, however, if they were going to watch their father drag me by the hair or spit in my face. Marriage for many women is worse than prison. Living in this relationship for many, includes having no money, he controls it all. Having nothing that belongs to you alone including your thoughts, opinions and your body. Everything you do or say is subject to his approval. I survived and raised three children because I was empowered by welfare and the Cumberland County Women's Center to further my education, to begin to think whole thoughts, and have feelings that were all mine. I was empowered to break the ridiculous notion that I needed a man to be whole.

Ending Domestic Violence is to begin to empower women to depend on themselves. Marriage is a dangerous place for an abused woman."

I was married to an abusive alcoholic and had a child with him. The courts gave him visitation [rights] even though I had a restraining order against him. I made a home and a life for us and though it wasn't easy it was a lot better than the abuse we suffered. The last thing a women needs to feel is that she can't make it on her

own. We should be encouraging these women instead of keeping them down. They need to feel secure and made to feel that they can accomplish things on their own instead of feeling that the need to depend on others.

Oregon

“To Whom It Concerns:

I would like to start off by just saying that I have been married and divorced twice. So as far as the theory that marriage is an answer to all problems, I would have to strongly disagree. In my particular case, it actually made things worse. Instead of just carrying the weight of my children, I began to have to pull more than my share of responsibilities. Which is typical for a woman, however, not at all realistic for a good, lasting, strong, healthy relationship. We are taught to have to learn to deal with this. There is only so much a person can take.

A marriage should be a sacred union between two people who vow to work together no matter what obstacles [arise]. Not an ongoing battle to protect yourself and your family from your own husband. There are men in this world today who spend bill money on drugs, or other women, or who go out with their buddies all the time. There are men who refuse to hold down a job. There are men who owe most of their checks for child support in prior marriages. There are men with no skills who don't earn enough to provide for their families. Not having enough finances is the root of bitterness, resentment, and finally anger or rage. That is when abuse can start to take place. A lot of the time the abuse factor is already there as well.

There are controlling husbands who will not allow their wives to have a job, or go to school. There are men who won't help out with the kids. You see, there are a number of reasons why marriage is not the answer, in fact quite the problem in certain situations. It is unhealthy for children to grow up in an environment that is counter-productive. Where only one parent is making all of the efforts for the whole family. One cannot survive on bread alone. It takes two willing people in a marriage. Children will grow up to mimic this thought process and ultimately become a part of the vicious cycle.

Receiving state assistance has literally been a form of survival for my family and me. We would not have made it without these supplement programs in place. When I divorced, I decided it was better to be poor by myself than to be married to someone who was potentially dangerous to me and my family, and someone who was not reliable or even trustworthy financially as well. This is my story; I hope it helps you to understand that being unmarried with children can ultimately be very good and empowering for some families. I feel that if there was more affordable housing for people this could also make a huge difference for the better.

Respectfully,

From someone who remains hopeful”

I spent 15 years with an abusive husband. When I was finally able to extract myself from this nightmarish existence I was forced, for survival's sake, to receive welfare. I had a son to raise and no means of support. When I attempted to attend college, so as to become employable in a family wage job, I was immediately removed from the state aid. The message my removal from welfare sent was received loud and clear: We don't want you educated; “We don't want you independent; we want to force you to return to a violent husband.” Well, I was one of the lucky ones. I didn't return (I would rather have died than returned to the violence), and I eventually got my college degree, but I did so in abject poverty. I spent much of my time not knowing if I would have enough to eat, have electricity, or be able to clothe my son.

If I had stayed with this man as the, “system,” would have preferred, I would be dead today. Please do not continue to send battered women the message that I was sent, that abusive marriage is the place to stay if you want financial security. Women do deserve to be educated, independent, and live violence free. These are rights routinely afforded men.

S. Star

Texas

Mine was a second marriage, four years following my divorce. The wealthy, controlling man I married, promptly took over my life. After two beatings with two trips to the emergency room, I began divorce proceedings. Then my troubles really started. He felt that because he was wealthy (and I wasn't) he could get away with anything. He constantly harassed me by phone (until I had it changed), and at work

by calling my boss and telling him lies about me. He brought lawsuits against me for libel. He sued many of our friends, saying they had libeled him. Then he called me at work and told me that he had hired someone to follow me and he would eventually kill me with a baseball bat! This was after I had obtained a warrant to keep him away from me. In the midst of all this he remarried (90 days after our divorce), but his harassment of me continued. He would follow me in his car to and from work. The police at the time (1986) would do nothing, saying that only after he did something could they take any action. He refused to pay me the court ordered divorce settlement, saying, "Sue me!" I finally had to quit my job, and move to Ohio. But the phone calls and letters continued, until about two years later he died of a heart attack. Only then did my life return to normal. There is a constant fear of being hunted, [and] being physically and psychologically abused. At the time it seemed that no one could help me. I am so grateful that now women in that position have shelters, and some of the laws have changed to perhaps stop cases of similar terror. All terrorists are not from other countries. . . many of them are married to abused women . . . and appear to their communities to be model citizens.

The Ruppert Wedding Album

Hi, my name is Cyndy. I had my first child in March of 1994, and was on welfare during my pregnancy and for a short time following. This assistance helped me greatly. I was able to get the medical attention I needed and buy formula and food. This allowed me to eventually become self-sufficient. However, I knew I needed an education to be able to get a good paying job, one that would sufficiently support my child and I, so I signed up for college. During this time, I met a man with whom I fell in love with. After my first semester of college, I found out I was pregnant with my second child. My boyfriend at the time asked me to marry him. So we married in February of 1996. My husband worked in the semi-conductor industry making \$86,000.00 a year. At that time, I didn't know how much money he made, but I thought we would make it as a married couple, and that our relationship would benefit our family. In the spring came a new semester, but my husband discouraged me from returning to school. He said that since I was pregnant, I should return to work to help support our child. I did not return to school, but instead received training to become a real estate agent. Upon completion of the courses, I prepared to take my real estate exam; only to discover my husband would not pay the fees required to do so. He then told me, it would be better if I stayed home with the kids while he worked.

The physical abuse started when I was 5 months pregnant. My husband pushed me into a playpen in the heat of an argument while my son was in the playpen. My husband then started calling me repeatedly, up to 12 times a day from work. With each phone call, he would become more and more angry until he was cursing at me and humiliating me. When I was 6 months pregnant, I received my first beating. It started in the kitchen and finished in the bathroom. He was hitting me on my back and head as I was bent over with my arms wrapped around my stomach trying to protect my unborn child. He took the phone off the hook and did not allow me out of the bedroom for the remainder of the night.

A friend of mine suggested counseling, and my husband and I went to a local Christian Counseling Center to seek help. The first thing my husband told me was that I didn't need to mention anything about his hitting me, because after all, I was partially responsible. I did mention it to our counselor during one of our sessions, and he then refused to go back. Marriage counseling won't work unless both partners really want the help.

The violence continued even after we separated, and he was never arrested for any of it. If he had paid his support, I would not have qualified for food stamps or Medicaid. This assistance helped me tremendously during this time in my life. My ex-husband would not provide medical insurance for our child, even though he had a full-time job and had his other children on his insurance [plan]. Without Medicaid, my child would not have had access to good medical attention, which he needed for his eczema and other health problems. My oldest child had asthma, and I wouldn't have been able to afford his medication without Medicaid. The food stamps helped our family as well. I was able to feed both of my children and myself.

Marriage is not the answer. Education, childcare, and temporary financial help are. I have since gone back to school and on June I will receive my associate's degree. My plan is to go to a four-year university in the fall of 2004 to receive my Bachelor's degree in Government with an emphasis in legal studies. My children and I have lived violence free since January 1998. I have chosen not to marry for now, but if I do I know I must take serious precautions. I don't ever [again] want my children and I to be exposed to living in a violent household. As a matter of

fact, my children have told me they prefer [that] I do not marry until they are grown up and gone. They feel safer knowing it's just us. Your legislation to encourage single mothers on welfare to marry will not solve the problem, but may actually add to it, and affect and endanger the lives of countless women and children. If anything, increase financial funding for single mothers going to college to obtain an education [in hopes of] better supporting their children. Give them a chance to save money and receive assistance simultaneously so they may become self-sufficient and in turn teach their children the values of a good education.

I'm Kerry Bibens-Gray and that's my story. Thank you.

Virginia

"I was married to an abusive man. Marriage did not help keep me out of poverty. My (now ex) husband wanted to control all of the money, including the money I earned [money] from working, and [saved] the money my parents had set aside for me to attend college. He refused to pay our rent on time even though he made twice as much as I did. He was always making threats on my life and was physically and emotionally abusive as well. I finally realized that I might lose my life if I continued to stay in this marriage, so I escaped with our son in 1999. My infant son and me had to stay in a shelter for battered women for a few days because I was afraid of what my husband would do to us when he found out that we had escaped and I had taken out a protective order on him. When I petitioned the court to get legal custody of our son, my husband said that he didn't want to pay child support and that nothing would make him happier than to see me spend my last dime in the courts.

He was able to get legal aid to represent him while I had to empty my savings account, take out a bank loan, max out my credit cards, and drain my college account in order to pay for my attorney's fees. Thank god the judge saw through all of my ex-husband's and his family's lies and gave me sole custody of my son and supervised visitation to my ex-husband. I have since had to declare bankruptcy, which has a very negative impact on one's credit rating, as a result of all of the thousands of dollars I've had to shell out in attorney's fees. My ex-husband continues to use the court system to harass and control me. I have been forced to appear in court at least 75 times in the past five years because my ex-husband continues to ask the court for custody, even though custody was decided years ago. I had to go on public assistance for a period of time and even lost my apartment after I was forced to declare bankruptcy.

I now have two children and my ex-husband continues to abuse the judicial system and harass me by bringing me to court almost every month. Trying to get women to marry abusive men is not going to solve anything—it just creates more problems.

Signed, Angela D. Sargent"

PREPARED STATEMENT OF LISALYN JACOBS, VICE PRESIDENT; AND SHERRY LEIWANT,
SENIOR STAFF ATTORNEY, LEGAL MOMENTUM

Welfare Reform and Marriage Initiatives

Legal Momentum (formerly NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund) appreciates the opportunity to submit this testimony on the issue of TANF Reauthorization and building stronger families.¹ We adhere to our long held belief that anti-poverty efforts must focus on initiatives that will empower individuals to become economically self-sufficient and permanently free them from poverty.

Legal Momentum is a leading national not-for-profit civil rights organization with a 31-year history of advocating for women's rights and promoting gender equality. Among Legal Momentum's major goals is securing economic justice for all. Throughout our history, we have used the power of the law to advocate for the rights of poor women. We have appeared before the Supreme Court of the United States in both gender discrimination and welfare cases, and have advocated for protection of reproductive and employment rights, increased access to child care, and reduction of domestic violence and sexual assault.

Our testimony today focuses on why, from a policy perspective, government involvement in personal issues of family formation would not reduce poverty, but would create a dangerous precedent for the individual liberty of all Americans. Emphasis on marriage and family formation sidesteps the underlying causes of poverty, particularly the poverty of women and children—such as lack of job training and

¹The authors would like to thank Shawn Chang for his invaluable assistance in completing this testimony.

education, ongoing sex and race discrimination, violence and lack of child care. At a time of huge budget deficits and high unemployment it is irresponsible to spend over a billion dollars on untested, unproven marriage promotion programs. Further, government involvement in highly personal decisions such as marriage is a departure from our most basic principles; a threat not just to poor women, but to all citizens who believe that liberty entails making fundamental personal decisions without governmental interference. In addition, because of the prevalence of violence among women forced to turn to public assistance, promotion of marriage can raise particular and severe dangers. Finally, the amount of money currently being spent on marriage promotion by the Department of Health and Human Services is enormous, over \$100 million. The programs currently being funded have not been reviewed or tested to see if they are useful or successful. Common sense dictates treading cautiously in this area and waiting for the results of the programs already funded before throwing another \$1.6 billion at promotion of marriage among the poor.

Poll after poll shows that most Americans are against the government's involvement in individual decisions regarding marriage and oppose use of scarce public dollars to promote marriage. This is not surprising as Americans value their personal privacy and their right to make personal decisions free of government intrusion, and most adults who have experience with intimate relationships are rightfully skeptical that the government can or should try to influence them. Opposing use of scarce public dollars for this purpose is not the same as being "anti-marriage," but rather recognizes that there are some issues that should not involve government. In addition, it is important for those in Congress to remember that there are currently more non-marital families than married families in America. These include single, separated, divorced, widowed, cohabitating, gay and lesbian, and extended families, among others. Members of Congress are elected by members of these families as well as by those in traditional nuclear families and should care about supporting the well-being of all families, regardless of how they are constituted.

I. Federal and State Marriage Proposals

Both Federal and State initiatives with respect to marriage are alarming in their invasion of personal privacy and, at the same time, raise serious questions about the effective use of scarce government funds, the competence of government to administer programs dealing with intimate decisions such as marriage, and the very real possibility that marriage promotion programs will be administered in a way that discriminates against women. (A Federally funded marriage promotion program in Allentown, Pennsylvania did just that, offering employment skills training to the men but not the women in that program.) We are particularly concerned that scarce public funds will be diverted away from desperately needed economic supports, child care and job training into questionable programs unlikely to have any positive effect in reducing poverty.

Federal Initiatives: Current law allows but does not require states to use Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) funds for marriage promotion and for initiatives aimed at decreasing out of wedlock births. Proposals to reauthorize the TANF program (the House passed H.R. 4 and the Senate Finance Committee bill, PRIDE) include significant funding for marriage promotion initiatives. Although there is no new TANF funding for economic support in either bill, they both authorize \$100 million a year in specifically dedicated Federal TANF funding for a Marriage Promotion competitive grant program. States would be required to match the \$100 million and would be allowed to use their basic Federal TANF allocation to do so, thus potentially diverting an additional \$100 million of TANF funds from economic support to marriage promotion. Both bills also authorize an additional \$100 million a year for new TANF demonstration project funding to "be expended primarily" on "Healthy Marriage Promotion Activities." Finally, both bills create a fatherhood program funded at \$20 million (in H.R. 4) a year "to promote and support involved, committed, and responsible fatherhood, and to encourage and support healthy marriages."

Both bills also add new requirements that in order to participate in TANF, states must have a program to "encourage the formation and maintenance of healthy 2-parent married families" and must set "specific, numerical, and measurable performance objectives" for promoting such families. This language suggests that in order to qualify for any TANF funding, states might have to set numerical goals for increasing the state marriage rate and reducing the state divorce rate.

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is already spending a great deal of money on marriage promotion—over \$77 million in contracts and over \$25 million in grants. Grant money has been taken from appropriations for the

Child Support Enforcement Program (\$2.4 million),² from the Refugee Resettlement Program (\$9 million),³ from Child Welfare Programs (\$14 million),⁴ from the (Native American) Social And Economic Development Strategies Program (SEDS) (\$40 million),⁵ from the Assets For Independence Demonstration Program (\$16 million),⁶ and from the Developmental Disabilities Program (\$3 million).⁷

It is difficult to see why Congress should even consider hundreds of millions of dollars in new funding for marriage promotion before the results of the Administration's evaluation projects are in. It is surely putting the cart before the horse to start a major new social program when the program's potential effects are largely unknown and demonstration projects to identify and evaluate the effects are just getting off the ground. Last year, the Administration awarded contracts to several prominent national organizations to conduct large marriage promotion test projects with rigorous evaluation methodologies: Mathematica Policy Research, (\$19 million over nine years for the Building Strong Families demonstration and random-assignment evaluation project; MDRC (and other secondary contractors) \$38.5 million over nine years for the Supporting Healthy Marriages demonstration and random-assignment evaluation project); and RTI International and the Urban Institute (\$20.4 million over seven years for evaluation of community wide initiatives to promote healthy marriage).⁸ Until the results of these projects are known, Congress should not even consider marriage promotion funding.

Even ignoring that the test results are not yet in, it is still difficult to see why Congress should consider additional marriage promotion funding when there seems to be no need for it. As detailed in the attached Legal Momentum memorandum on "HHS Marriage Promotion Activities", the Administration has already committed tens of millions of dollars in existing funding to marriage promotion, and takes the position that there is no limit on the funding that it can make available for marriage promotion under its child support demonstration project authority.

HHS has also issued a "Compendium" of approaches for achieving "marriage promotion" goals, which is a likely indicator of the recommendations it would make to states for spending marriage promotion funds were such spending to be required. This Compendium suggests that states consider completely unproven and coercive methods, such as paying a \$2,000 cash bonus to poor couples who marry and reducing welfare payments to poor couples who choose not to marry. ("Strengthening Healthy Marriages: A Compendium of Approaches," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (August 2002), available at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/region2/index.htm>.) The Compendium includes marriage promotion organizations that clearly should not receive large grants of tax dollars. Some of these organizations recommend reducing the divorce rate by restricting the right to divorce. Some teach that the husband should be the leader/breadwinner, and the wife the follower/homemaker. Several are for-profit commercial ventures which claim that they can help couples avoid divorce for a substantial fee. It is irresponsible for legislators to enact a program that threatens to divert government money intended to help the poor to fund the untested programs of such organizations.

Even witnesses at the Senate Finance Committee hearings on marriage promotion who spoke in favor of marriage conceded that we don't yet know what works. Ron Haskins, Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institute stated that "we know so little about marriage promotion programs, especially with poor and low-income families." Theodora Ooms of the Center on Law and Social Policy stated, "Given the lack of research on marriage related interventions, policy makers should proceed cautiously . . ." Even the Chairman of this Committee, Senator Charles Grassley of Iowa stated, "Do marriage programs effectively reduce dependence and foster a family's well-being? We don't know. There is still a great deal of uncertainty around the effectiveness of marriage promotion programs."

²See HHS 5/9/03 press release "ACF Approves Child Support Demonstrations in Michigan and Idaho," available at http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/acf_news.html; and HHS 7/4/03 press release "ACF Approves Child Support Demonstration In Virginia," available at http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/acf_news.html.

³67 Fed. Reg. 45131-45136 (July 8, 2002); 68 Fed. Reg. 34617-34726 (June 10, 2003); 68 Fed. Reg. 43142-47 (July 21, 2003).

⁴68 Fed. Reg. 34609-34614 (June 10, 2003).

⁵67 Fed. Reg. 59736-59746 (Sept. 23, 2002); 69 Fed. Reg. 8266-8288 (Feb. 23, 2004).

⁶<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ocs/fy2003ocsfunding/section2a.html>

⁷68 Fed. Reg. 41816-41828

⁸See October 3, 2003 ACF press release "ACF Announces Four New Projects to Study Healthy Marriage," available at http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/news/press/2003/release_101003.htm; Ooms, Bouchet, & Parke, "Beyond Marriage Licenses: Efforts in States to Strengthen Marriage and Two-Parent Families. A State by State Snapshot", Center for Law and Social Policy (April 2004).

With such a high degree of uncertainty around what works with respect to marriage promotion, with millions and millions of dollars already being spent on marriage promotion programs, why spend billions more of taxpayer dollars on these programs before the results are in on which may give direction to a whether such initiatives are successful and what types of programs work?

State Initiatives: As noted above, since 1996, states have been free to use TANF dollars to support marriage and two-parent families, although most states have not done so. States have instituted programs that range from a simple waste of public dollars to outright discrimination against struggling single parent families. These examples demonstrate the risks in pushing states to do more to promote marriage. For example:

- In Oklahoma, former Governor Frank Keating earmarked 10 percent of the state's TANF surplus funds to fund the \$10 million Oklahoma Marriage initiative, which includes pre- and post-marital counseling to Oklahoma families, a marriage resource center, a marriage mentor program, and the creation of a Marriage Scholars-in-Residence.⁹ The initiative also contains a specific "religious track" under which the state's religious leaders sign a marriage covenant, thereby committing themselves to encourage pre-marital counseling for couples in their house of worship. A few months after Keating made his proposal, the state hired a pair of "marriage ambassadors" with a \$250,000 a year salary to give "relationship rallies" on school campuses as well as meeting with ministers and set up a research project. Last September the state spent \$16,000 flying in pro-marriage speakers from around the country for a two-day conference. It also developed a workshop called Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) that is offered in schools and community centers.¹⁰ Three years after Oklahoma implemented its marriage promotion programs, the state's divorce rate has remained unchanged.¹¹
- West Virginia's state TANF plan adds a \$100 marriage incentive to a family's benefits if there is a legal marriage in a household where both individuals receive welfare assistance payments. Since West Virginia's monthly TANF benefit for a family of three is \$328, this \$100 per month bonus makes a significant difference in economic support and gives children in poor married families a significant economic advantage over children whose poor single mothers have been unable or unwilling to marry.

Programs such as those described above divert funds from direct support of poor families or provision of services needed to support employment. Programs like that in West Virginia discriminate directly against poor single parent families. Endorsing or increasing funding for such programs is bad public policy.

II. Welfare Reform Reauthorization Should Not Focus on Marriage

Welfare reform reauthorization should focus on ending poverty. In order to accomplish that goal, we must focus on the barriers to economic self-sufficiency rather than marriage by investing in education, training and work supports to help families and individuals get to a point where they can survive and prosper, whether married or not.

A. *The American Public Overwhelmingly Rejects Governmental Involvement in Personal Decisions to Marry.* According to the PEW Forum on Religion & Public Life opinion poll, there is broad opposition to government programs aimed at encouraging marriage. Nearly eight in ten Americans (79 percent) want the government to stay out of this area, while just 18 percent endorse such pro-marriage programs. While those with a high level of religious commitment are more likely to favor these programs, fully two-thirds (66 percent) in that category do not want the government to get involved.¹² In addition, Americans also strongly reject any proposal that would divert welfare resources for the poor into marriage promotion programs. A recent poll conducted on behalf of the National Campaign for Jobs and Income Support shows that a mere five percent of those surveyed select marriage promotion as the number-one welfare priority for Congress, while fully 62 percent cite work sup-

⁹Supra Note 156.

¹⁰Tyre, Peg. "Oklahoma is fighting its sky-high divorce rate with controversial, state-funded "marriage ambassadors." Newsweek, Feb. 18, 2002, U.S. Edition.

¹¹Ross, Bobby Jr. "Divorce rate stays steady, study shows" The Daily Oklahoman (2/10/2002). Citing that for every 100 marriage licenses issued in 2001, the state granted 76 divorce petitions.

¹²The PEW Research Center for the People & the Press and the PEW Forum on Religion & Public Life, "American Struggle with Religion's Role at Home and Abroad," News Release, March 20, 2002. at 3.

port for people moving from welfare to good jobs as the top priority.¹³ Similarly, a poll conducted for the Ms. Foundation found that less than three percent of Americans believe the principal goal of the welfare system should be to promote marriage and discourage out-of-wedlock birth.¹⁴ By contrast, giving people the skills needed to achieve self-sufficiency received the most support. Most recently, a survey conducted for the Annie E. Casey Foundation also found that proposals to promote marriage through welfare programs do not meet with even superficial public support. A solid 64 percent of those surveyed reject proposals to provide financial bonuses to mothers on welfare who marry the father of their children, and over 70 percent believe pushing people to get married is the wrong priority for Congress.¹⁵

B. Reauthorization Should Not Coerce Low-Income Women into Giving Up Their Fundamental Rights to Privacy. The Supreme Court has long recognized an individual's right to privacy regarding decisions to marry and reproduce as "one of the basic civil rights of man, fundamental to our very existence and survival."¹⁶ Significantly, this constitutional right equally protects the choice *not* to marry.¹⁷ Reproductive privacy, initially honored as a right of marital privacy,¹⁸ has been firmly established as a protected right of the individual, irrespective of marital status.¹⁹ According to the Supreme Court, "if the right of privacy means anything, it is the right of the individual, married or single, to be free from unwarranted governmental intrusion into matters so fundamentally affecting a person as the decision whether to bear or beget a child."²⁰ Furthermore, the U.S. Supreme Court has specifically rejected the use of the welfare system to try to influence the marriage decisions of a child's parents. In *National Welfare Rights Organization v. Cahill*, 411 U.S. 619 (1973), a New Jersey welfare provision that limited benefits to families where there were two adults "ceremonially married to each other" was struck down as a violation of the Constitution's Equal Protection Clause. The Court held that penalizing children by restricting welfare benefits to them because of the marital decisions of their parents "is illogical and unjust."

Government programs promoting marriage may invade this right to privacy and may encourage the kind of differential treatment of children in non-marital families that the Supreme Court condemned in *NWRO v. Cahill*. They certainly pose concerns regarding voluntariness and coercion. It is critical that if Congress insists on funding these programs with tax dollars, that they neither require nor encourage incentives for states to coerce low-income women into trading away their fundamental rights to marry or not to marry. As such, Federal mandates on states to set numerical goals are not appropriate. Obviously, voluntariness is key to a non-coercive program, and strong protections regarding non-coercion should be included, although it is hard to conceive of provisions that would genuinely protect voluntariness in a program that supplies a lifeline to desperate families in need of help in supporting their children. Along the same lines, states must not be permitted to discriminate based on marital status or family formation. To that end, TANF reauthorization should include language that prohibits states from treating equally needy families differently based on marital status or family formation. This will correct discriminatory policies and practices against married families, without swinging the pendulum to permit discrimination against single or cohabitating families.

C. The Staggering Prevalence of Domestic Violence Among Women on Welfare Presents an Insurmountable Challenge to "Healthy Marriage" Promotion within TANF. When considering marriage promotion within the context of TANF, Congress must face the reality that violence is one of the main causes of women's poverty. Domestic violence makes women poor and keeps them poor. Violence is not an exception to the rule for poor women; it is an overwhelming reality. Study after study demonstrates that a large proportion of the welfare caseload (consistently between 15 percent and 25 percent) consists of current victims of serious domestic violence.²¹

¹³Peter D. Hart Research Associates. "TANF/Welfare Survey Findings." National Campaign for Jobs and Income Support Memo, April 12, 2002, at 1.

¹⁴Ms. Foundation for Women. "Americans Say Welfare Should Provide Self-Sufficiency Skills, Move People Out of Poverty—Not Promote Marriage." (February 6, 2002) at 1.

¹⁵Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc. "Memorandum to Advocates for Low-Income Families."

¹⁶*Skinner v. Oklahoma ex rel. Williamson*, 316 U.S. 535, 541 (1942).

¹⁷*Loving v. Virginia*, 388 U.S. 1, 12 (1967).

¹⁸*Griswold v. Connecticut*, 381 U.S. 479, 495 (1965).

¹⁹*Eisenstadt v. Baird* 405 U.S. 438, 453–54 (1972).

²⁰*Id.* at 453.

²¹See Jody Raphael & Richard M. Tolman, Taylor Inst. and the Univ. of Mich. Research Dev. Ctr. on Poverty, Risk and Mental Health, *Trapped by Poverty, Trapped by Abuse: New Evidence Documenting the Relationship Between Domestic Violence and Welfare*, 12 (1997).

Between half and two thirds of the women on welfare have suffered domestic violence or abuse at some time in their adult lives.²² Moreover, by an overwhelming margin, these women's abusers are most often the fathers of their children.

For these women and their children, marriage is not the solution to economic insecurity. For them marriage could mean death or serious injury; it will almost undoubtedly mean economic dependence on an abuser. In the population as a whole, many battered women are economically dependent on their abusers; 33–46 percent of women surveyed in five studies said their partner prevented them from working entirely.²³ Those who are permitted to work fare little better. Ninety-six percent reported that they had experienced problems at work due to domestic violence, with over 70 percent having been harassed at work, 50 percent having lost at least three days of work a month as a result of the abuse, and 25 percent having lost at least one job due to the domestic violence.²⁴ Thus, battered women are overwhelmingly either economically dependent on the abuser or are economically unstable due to the abuse.

Those who would promote marriage in every circumstance sometimes claim that marriage decreases domestic violence. This idea ignores many realities of domestic violence. Most importantly, married victims are less likely to report the abuse. In addition, separation and divorce frequently incite batterers to increase the frequency and level of violence.²⁵

The experience of Oklahoma, clearly the leader in spending public dollars for marriage promotion, is instructive. In a survey of Oklahoma families, referred to in testimony by the Director of Public Welfare in that state when testifying before Congress, it was discovered that almost half (44 percent) of the state's divorced women cited domestic violence as a reason for their divorce.²⁶ More than half (57 percent) of Oklahoma's divorced welfare mothers, the prime target of government marriage promotion efforts, cited domestic violence as a reason for their divorce.²⁷ Oklahoma is by no means unique. Around the country, in survey after survey, low income women report high double digit domestic violence rates.

Should the government encourage women to get married or stay married to men who abuse them? Certainly, proponents of government marriage promotion do not intend this. But common sense suggests that this will be the inevitable result of a government "get married and do not divorce" message, especially when success is measured by superficial statistics such as the divorce rate.

Congress itself has repeatedly recognized that domestic violence is a serious national problem and has made efforts to minimize the severe risk to women and children from that violence, most recently by reauthorizing the Violence Against Women Act in 2000. But marriage promotion for TANF recipients ignores the reality of domestic violence. It ignores its pervasiveness: assertions that proponents intend to promote only "healthy marriages" lose credibility in the face of the reality that as many as two-thirds of TANF recipients report incidents of domestic violence. Surveys of low-income women in several cities show that two of the four main reasons for not marrying are fear of domestic violence and fear of a power imbalance.²⁸ Requiring marriage promotion programs to consult with domestic and sexual violence experts and child advocates on the development and implementation of policies, procedures, and training necessary to appropriately address domestic and sexual violence and child abuse issues, as specified in PRIDE, will provide some security. But even these safeguards will not make marriage promotion within TANF safe. Furthermore, the House passed version of H.R. 4 lacks even the most rudimentary protections for domestic violence victims; domestic violence is not mentioned in the leg-

²² See Mary Ann Allard, *et al.*, McCormack Inst., *In Harm's Way? Domestic Violence, AFDC Receipt and Welfare Reform in Mass.*, 12, 14 (1997) (64.9 percent of 734 women); Ellen L. Bassuck, *et al.*, *The Characteristics and Needs of Sheltered Homeless and Low-Income Housed Mothers*, 276 JAMA 640 at 12, 20 (1996) (61.0 percent of 220 women); William Curcio, *Passaic County Study of AFDC Recipients in a Welfare-to-Work Program: A Preliminary Analysis*, 12, 14 (1997) (57.3 percent of 846 women).

²³ See United States General Accounting Office, Report to Congressional Committees, *Domestic Violence: Prevalence and Implications for Employment Among Welfare Recipients*, 7 (1998).

²⁴ See Joan Zorza, *Woman Battering: High Costs and the State of the Law*, 25 Clearinghouse Rev. 421 (1991).

²⁵ See Einat Peled, *Parenting by Men Who Abuse Women: Issues and Dilemmas*, Brit. J. Soc. Work, Feb. 2000, at 28.

²⁶ "Marriage in Oklahoma, 2001 Baseline Survey on Marriage and Divorce," at 16, available at http://www.okmarriage.org/pdf/survey_report.pdf

²⁷ Private communication to NOW Legal Defense & Education Fund from Oklahoma official; copy available upon request.

²⁸ Kathryn Edin, Joint Center for Poverty Research Working Papers, *What Do Low-Income Single Mothers Say About Marriage?*, Aug. 9, 2001, available at http://www.jcpr.org/wpfiles/edin_WP_ediforweb1-31.pdf.

isolation and, therefore, use of marriage promotion dollars to keep women in abusive marriages or to help persuade them to marry their abuser is a very real threat. Finally, our review of current grant applications to HHS for marriage promotion funds indicates that very few programs include any consideration of domestic violence issues in their applications.

Those who say that marriage promotion will only be done in relationships where there is no violence are clueless about the dynamic of domestic violence and the very clear truth that most women who are victims of violence are ashamed and afraid and extremely unlikely to offer the reveal the violence in their lives to others. Many victims fear the potential consequences of acknowledging the abuse: the stigma of being a domestic violence victim; the very real possibility of losing their children to child welfare agencies; the possibility that disclosure of violence will escalate the abuse. Marriage promotion programs, no matter how “sensitive” to domestic violence on paper, cannot change the fact that those promoting marriage will probably not know about violence in the relationship they are trying to make legally permanent. Thus, programs that push poor women into marriage with the fathers of their children may inadvertently legitimize abusive situations; similarly, programs that discourage divorce may increase the already deep shame and social pressure to remain with the abuser that women who are married and are being abused often feel. A governmental message to poor women who are violence victims that there is something wrong with being unmarried will make it even more difficult for women who are trying to leave an abusive relationship to do so. The complexity of domestic violence and the danger to women who stay in or formalize abusive relationships make any government-sponsored marriage promotion program extremely problematic.

TANF currently includes a Family Violence Option (FVO) allowing states to confidentially screen for domestic violence, refer to services, and modify or waive program requirements that would be unsafe or unfair to victims of domestic violence. Although nearly all states have adopted some version of the FVO, not all states have done so. With such an overwhelming correlation between violence and poverty, it is both troubling and illogical that Congress would consider mandating marriage promotion and providing significant financial incentives for states to fund marriage promotion while not requiring states to address domestic violence through the FVO. At a minimum, Congress should require all states to screen for domestic violence and refer individuals to services and should invest TANF dollars in case worker training, a study of best practices with respect to addressing domestic violence in TANF, and dissemination of those best practices to all states to help them address this very real barrier to economic security.

D. Marriage Does Not Address the Root Causes of Women’s Poverty and Is Not a Reliable Long-Term Solution to Women’s Poverty. Common sense tells us that two incomes are better than one and thus more likely to move people off of welfare. But a closer look at the facts shows that marriage is not the simple solution to poverty that it is made out to be.

First, forming a two-parent family does not guarantee economic security. Forty percent of all families living in poverty are two-parent families. Thus, two-parent families are not immune to poverty or the economic stresses single parent families face.

Second, due to death and divorce, marriage does not ensure women’s economic security. Approximately 40 percent of marriages end in divorce²⁹ and 12 percent end due to the husband’s death.³⁰ Among women currently on welfare, about 40 percent are married or were married at one time: 18.4 percent are married; 12.3 percent are separated; 8.3 percent are divorced; and about 1 percent are widows. A significant number of divorces and separations are due to domestic violence. In these cases it is futile to claim that marriage would provide security, economic or otherwise. Indeed, there is no simple causal relationship between single motherhood and poverty.

The reasons that women, more than men, experience an economic downfall outside of marriage include: primary care giving responsibility for children which—without attendant employment protections and due to lack of quality, affordable, accessible child care—makes unemployment or underemployment inevitable; discrimination in the labor market; and domestic violence. Without addressing the factors that keep women from being economically self-sufficient, marriage and family formation advocates are merely proposing to shift women’s “dependence” from the wel-

²⁹The National Marriage Project, *Annual Report: the State of Our Unions: the Social Health of Marriage in America, 2000* (June 2000), available at <http://marriage.rutgers.edu/NMPAR2000.pdf>.

³⁰United States Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, Series No. P20-514, *Marriage Status and Living Arrangements: March 1998 (Update)* (2000), available at <http://www.census.gov/prod/99pubs/p20-514u.pdf>.

fare system to marriage. That certainly does not promote individual responsibility, nor is it a policy solution for genuine, reliable, economic security.

On the other hand, a policy that invests in education, training and work supports empowers women to achieve true economic security. In 2000, only 1.2 percent of single mothers with a college degree who worked full-time year round lived in poverty. Less than eight percent of single mothers with some college working full-time lived in poverty.³¹ This is by far the best poverty reduction statistic; a clear indication of what strategy will work best in lifting families out of poverty.

In fact, the approach to marriage advocated by H.R. 4 and PRIDE has it backwards. Economic security is more likely to lead to successful marriage than is marriage likely to lead to economic security. The outcomes of the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) support this conclusion. MFIP reached welfare-eligible single and two-parent families and focused on participation in employment services for long-term welfare recipients combined with financial incentives to encourage and support work. These work supports include child care, medical care, and rewarding work by helping the family to develop enough earning power to survive financially without cash assistance before cutting off their benefits. A study comparing the economic progress of those in the standard AFDC welfare program with MFIP participants found that only 14 percent of AFDC recipients compared with 25 percent of families in the MFIP program were out of poverty within 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ years and the MFIP families had on average \$1,400 more in annual income. After 36 months MFIP participants were 40 percent more likely to be married than participants in the standard AFDC program, and nearly 50 percent less likely to be divorced after five years. The MFIP program shows that allowing families to combine welfare and work, and providing work supports to help individuals become economically secure, are approaches that will strengthen marriage and reduce divorce.³²

Investments in education, training and work supports can both empower women to achieve economic security (thereby economically empowering couples as well) and strengthen marriages. If Congress takes this approach it can enable individuals to achieve their own goals, without invading their privacy or endangering their families.

Conclusion

The solution to poverty is not to interfere with basic privacy rights of poor women but rather to focus on economic self-sufficiency. Decisions regarding marriage and childbearing are among the most private decisions an individual can make. Congress must not use women's economic vulnerability as an excuse for attempting to control their decisions regarding marriage and childbearing. Fighting poverty and promoting family well-being will depend on positive governmental support for proven policies that support low income parents in their struggle to obtain and retain good jobs, while at the same time providing the best possible care for their children. That in turn is the best way to insure healthy and stable families.

³¹ Neil G. Bennett, *et. al.*, National Center for Children in Poverty, *Young Children in Poverty: A Statistical Update*, June 17, 1999, available at <http://cpmnet.columbia.edu/dept/nccp/99uptext.html>.

³² Manpower Demonstration Research Corp. (MDRC), chap. 6, available at <http://www.mdrc.org/Reports2000/MFIP/MFIP-Vol-1-Adult.pdf>.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF TIMOTHY J. CASEY, SENIOR STAFF ATTORNEY; AND LISALYN JACOBS, VICE PRESIDENT, LEGAL MOMENTUM

Recent Marriage Promotion Studies

The Bush Administration and its allies are touting two new marriage promotion studies as proof that domestic violence is not a concern and that marriage promotion works. These claims are false.

The Administration's initiative would add marriage promotion to the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program. Study after study demonstrates that a large proportion of the welfare caseload (between 15 percent and 20 percent) are current or recent victims of serious domestic violence,¹ and that between half to two thirds of the women on welfare have suffered domestic violence or abuse at some time in their adult lives.²

A new Heritage Foundation study concedes these high domestic violence rates but argues that they are irrelevant because the marriage promotion initiative won't target welfare recipients but rather will target so-called "fragile families"—unmarried parents of newborns—for whom, Heritage asserts, domestic violence rates are much lower than for welfare recipients.³ But there is absolutely nothing in the Administration's proposal that restricts or targets the proposed funding to fragile families, the Administration itself has never made such a claim, and the Administration has funded many marriage promotion programs that target welfare recipients as a group.

Heritage also claims that marriage promotion programs have been shown to reduce domestic violence, a claim that the Administration itself does not make. Heritage does not cite a single study to support its claim, offering as the sole evidence a statement from an Oklahoma official that not a single instance of domestic abuse "linked" to the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative has been reported.

Even assuming this statement to be true, this proves absolutely nothing about whether even the Oklahoma program has reduced domestic violence—and, as former Oklahoma Governor Frank Keating recently explained to the Senate, that program makes unusual efforts to address domestic violence, by working closely with the Oklahoma domestic violence coalition, training all providers of marriage promotion services on domestic violence issues, and providing information about domestic violence services to all program participants.⁴ Much less is there any evidence about the effects on domestic violence of other programs in other places which lack the protections that are in the Oklahoma program. What is more, the Administration has not proposed to require these protections in its marriage initiative, and is currently funding many marriage promotion projects without requiring that they include domestic violence protections.

Heritage also argues that marriage protects women from domestic violence because unmarried mothers report a higher rate of domestic violence than married mothers. But it is much more plausible to suppose that domestic violence discourages single mothers from marrying their abusers than to suppose, as Heritage appears to do, that an abuser will cease his abuse if the woman he is abusing marries him. Further, it is simply indisputable that many married women are victims of domestic violence, as domestic violence is one of the main reasons that roughly half of all marriages end in divorce. The Oklahoma marriage program that Heritage cites recently conducted a study which found that domestic violence was given as a reason for their divorce by 44 percent of the state's divorced women and by 57 percent of the divorced women who had been welfare recipients.⁵

Concerning divorce, the Administration is hailing another new study as proof that marriage promotion programs reduce divorce. According to Dr. Wade Horn, Assistant Secretary for ACF, who appeared at an April 5 press conference touting the

¹See Jody Raphael & Richard M. Tolman, Taylor Inst. and the Univ. of Mich. Research Dev. Ctr. on Poverty, Risk and Mental Health, "Trapped by Poverty, Trapped by Abuse: New Evidence Documenting the Relationship Between Domestic Violence and Welfare," 12 (1997).

²See Mary Ann Allard *et al.*, McCormack Inst., "In Harms Way? Domestic Violence, AFDC Receipt and Welfare Reform in Mass.," 12, 14 (1997) (64.9 percent of 734 women); Ellen L Bassuck *et al.*, "The Characteristics and Needs of Sheltered Homeless and Low-Income Housed Mothers," 276 JAMA 640 at 12, 20 (1996) (61.0 percent of 220 women); William Curcio, "Passaic County Study of AFDC Recipients in a Welfare-to-Work Program: A Preliminary Analysis," 12, 14 (1997) (57.3 percent of 846 women).

³Melissa G. Pardue and Robert Rector, "Reducing Domestic Violence: How the Healthy Marriage Initiative Can Help," Heritage Foundation Background No. 1744 (March 30, 2004), <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Family/loader.cfm?url=/commonspot/security/getfile.cfm&PageID=60606>

⁴http://health.senate.gov/testimony/86_tes.html

⁵Communication from Oklahoma official, copy available upon request.

study, the study refutes critics who have said that there is no proof that marriage promotion reduces divorce.⁶ This dubious study proves nothing.

The new study evaluates the impact of the Community Marriage Policy (CMP) program that is operated by an organization called Marriage Savers, <http://marriagesavers.org/>.⁷ The study was conducted by the Institute for Research and Evaluation of Salt Lake City, whose director, Dr. Stan Weed, was one of the study's authors. The Institute has no website, and its capacity for performing evaluative research is unknown.

The CMP program lobbies clergy to sign pledges that they will not marry any couple unless the couple first takes "rigorous marriage preparation of at least four months during which couples take a premarital inventory and talk through relational issues it surfaces with trained mentor couples, who also teach couple communication skills." The CMP study compared 122 counties in which Marriage Savers reports that some clergy have signed such pledges with 122 other counties selected by the study's authors. The executive summary reports that "counties with a Community Marriage Policy had an 8.6 percent (average) decline in their divorce rates over four years, while the comparison counties registered a 5.6 percent (average) decline." Based on this finding, the evaluators assert that "[t]he simple explanation of the results is that Community Marriage Policies are successful and lead to reductions in divorce rates."

Only the study's executive summary has been released and the summary contains less than even barebones details. (For example, only one of the counties with a CMP program is identified.) Dr. Weed refused our request for a copy of the full study.

Dr. Weed appears to have thin research credentials. We were unable to locate any other evaluation studies conducted by Dr. Weed or his Institute.

Moreover, Dr. Weed appears to be a partisan of the CMP program, not a neutral evaluator. The Salt Lake Tribune reported on January 12 that he and the Marriage Savers director had met with leaders of the Mormon Church to urge that the church adopt the CMP program.⁸ Dr. Weed's Institute also reported on its 2002 tax return that it had received \$46,737 from Marriage Savers, raising serious questions about his objectivity in evaluating the Marriage Savers CMP program.⁹

Dr. Weed's expertise and objectivity are especially crucial questions given that the study methodology was so highly subjective. The finding of positive results for CMP rests entirely on a comparison of the CMP counties with counties without CMP selected by the evaluators. A different set of selections might well have yielded contrary results.

Dr. Horn's endorsement of the CMP study as proof that marriage promotion works shows that the Administration still embraces the simplistic and dangerous message that marriage is good and divorce is bad, a message which is contrary to the Administration's repeated claim that it intends to promote not marriage per se but only "healthy marriage." If healthy marriage is the goal, a marriage promotion program's success must be measured by whether it increases healthy marriage, not marriage per se. But even taken at face value, the CMP study offers no evidence that the CMP program increases healthy marriage. The study focused exclusively on divorce rates. There was no effort to measure the prevalence of domestic violence or the quality of the marriages in CMP communities, or to assess how the CMP program affected domestic violence.

There are also separation of church and state concerns. These arise from the possibility, apparently envisioned by Dr. Horn when he appeared at the April 5 press conference promoting the CMP study, that CMP is one type of program the Administration would like to fund through the marriage promotion allocations it has requested from Congress. In fact, Dr. Horn has already provided Federal funding to an Idaho marriage promotion program seeking to model the CMP approach. The separation of church and state issue is this: the CMP program relies on obtaining commitments from churches not to marry couples unless and until the couples have completed a four month long premarital marriage education program. It is entirely appropriate for churches to adopt such a policy if they so choose, and for Smart Marriages or similar organizations to use their own private funds to encourage churches to make this commitment. But a central premise of the separation of church and state that is embodied in our Constitution's First Amendment is that

⁶<http://marriagesavers.org/Press%20Release.htm>

⁷Stan Weed *et al.*, "Assessing the Impact of Community Marriage Policies on U.S. County Divorce Rate," executive summary available at <http://marriagesavers.org/Executive%20Summary.htm>

⁸"Could 'Marriage Policy' Cut Utah's Divorce Rate", The Salt Lake Tribune (Jan. 12, 2004), link to article available at <http://nl.newsbank.com/nl-search/we/Archives>

⁹Tax return available at <http://www.guidestar.org/index.jsp>

government must avoid entangling itself in religion. Using public funds in an attempt to influence churches as to the conduct of their internal affairs violates the values underlying this fundamental First Amendment principle.

