Lori Kowaleski-Jones
Nicholas H. Wolfinger
Editors

FRAGILE FAMILIES AND THE MARRIAGE AGENDA

Springer

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With 31 Figures

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Preface

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Marriage has become part of America's political agenda. President Bush promised "unprecedented support to strengthen marriages" (Ooms 2002). Numerous states have recently passed pro-marriage legislation, including financial incentives for marriage and provisions for marriage education (for an overview see Gardner et al. 2002). Louisiana, Arizona, and Arkansas have attempted to limit the availability of divorce via "covenant marriage" laws; similar legislation has been considered in more than 30 states. Many of the reforms to the welfare system included in the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act were designed to increase marriage and reduce out-of-wedlock childbearing. For example, time limits on benefit receipt were enacted in part to increase the cost of remaining single for low-income women (Edin 2000a). More recently, the Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families announced that it will support various new research projects for helping couples develop the skills necessary to form and sustain successful unions (Health and Human Services News 2004). Inherent in all of these marriage promotion policies is the premise that marriage is better for children and adults than are single parenthood and cohabitation.

Many people see government involvement in family policy as a response to the American family "crisis." Some point to the large number of non-

traditional or "fragile" families, generally defined as unmarried women with children. Primarily on account of divorce and out-of-wedlock births, there were ten million single mothers in America in 2000; more than one and a half million of these women had unmarried live-in partners (Fields and Casper 2001). One of the primary concerns with these non-traditional families is their precarious financial status. In 2003, 28% of female-headed families were poor, compared to only 5% of two-parent families (DeNavas-Walt et al. 2004). Economic deprivation while growing up increases the risk of various adverse outcomes, including poor physical health and reduced academic achievement (McLoyd 1998). Not all of the deleterious effects of non-traditional families can be linked to poverty: irrespective of economic well-being, children growing up without both biological parents have lower rates of high school completion and higher rates of premarital fertility (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994).

Some contend that marriage is the solution to many of the problems faced by single-parent families (Waite and Gallagher 2000). Unwed mothers who get married indeed experience substantial gains in income (Lichter et al. 2003). Others suggest that government programs designed to raise marriage rates may cause more problems than they solve (Solot and Miller 2002). It has been argued that poor socioeconomic prospects for lower-class men have driven down marriage rates in this population (Lichter et al. 1992; Lloyd and South 1996; Wilson 1987). Consequently, marriages resulting from governmental interventions may well fail to solve the social problems that have inspired much of the pro-marriage agenda. Furthermore, such marriages may be plagued by high levels of domestic violence and divorce (Edin 2000b). These issues, at the center of the controversy over governmental efforts to promote marriage, highlight the need for more information about the causes and consequences of non-traditional family forms.

CONTENTS AND GOALS OF THIS VOLUME

This volume explores issues related to fragile families. It is based on a collection of papers presented at the 2003 Rocco C. and Marion S. Siciliano Forum, an annual lecture series at the University of Utah on the state of American society. Past participants have included David Gardner, former president of the nine campus University of California system, Alejandro Portes, Howard Harrison and Gabrielle Snyder Beck Professor of Sociology at Princeton University and former president of the American Sociological Association, and Karl Rove, Special Assistant to President George W. Bush.

The keynote speaker at the 2003 Forum was Sara McLanahan, Professor of Sociology and Public Affairs at Princeton University and former president of the Population Association of America. Her address, "Fragile Families and the Marriage Agenda," provides the cornerstone of this volume. McLanahan's paper articulates many of the issues surrounding the current controversy over the state of marriage. Eight other original papers on a variety of topics related to fragile families provide the balance of the volume.

The book begins with McLanahan's address. She observes that governmental programs to promote marriage make assumptions about people's willingness to participate, the programs' efficacy, and their potential benefits to children in fragile families. Using data from a national sample of new parents and their children, McLanahan offers qualified evidence that the government's marriage promotion programs may indeed succeed in their goals.

The second part of the book presents theoretical, public policy, and legal perspectives on the value of marriage. Dawne Moon and Jaye Cee Whitehead explore the discursive links between public images of and policies toward marriage, and the prevailing feminist and sociological views. Their analysis suggests that marriage is a political construction that consecrates and sanctifies particular forms of intimate life. By contrasting popular culture representations contained in the 2003 television show *Married by America* with government efforts to promote marriage, Moon and Whitehead suggest that the state uses marriage to avoid its own responsibilities to poor families.

Brent Miller, Rayna Sage, and Bryan Winward observe that teenage pregnancy and childbearing in the United States have declined by about one fourth since 1991, but remain far more common than in other developed countries. Furthermore, teenage mothers have become less likely to be married. Miller and colleagues assess the evidence linking early childbearing to parental well-being and evaluate public policy proposals to reduce teen pregnancy.

Lynn Wardle reviews three effects of American family law on fragile families. First, he discusses how fragile families are often invisible to family law. Second, he reviews family law principles and reforms intended to help fragile families. Third, he considers family law doctrines that have been detrimental to fragile families, either by contributing to their proliferation or by exacerbating the plight of existing fragile families.

Next the book examines some of the causes and consequences of child well-being in fragile families. A large body of research documents that single parenthood is associated with behavior problems and reduced academic achievement among offspring. Rachel Dunifon and Lori

Kowaleski-Jones observe that little research has examined racial differences in the influence of single parenthood on children. They find that that growing up in a single parent family is associated with negative outcomes for white, but not black, children.

Many children who grow up in poverty do so in households headed by divorced mothers. Matthew McKeever and Nicholas Wolfinger explore how changes in women's human capital and labor market participation have affected the incomes of divorced women since 1980. Using newly developed statistical methods for studying income distributions, they find that improvement in family income for these women can largely be attributed to growing levels of human capital in conjunction with declining family sizes. Although the proliferation of mother-headed families has contributed to economic stratification, income polarization has not occurred within the population of divorced women.

Mikaela Dufur and Kelly Troutman focus on a specific adolescent risk behavior, high-intensity work, and theorize that adolescents in certain fragile families will work more hours because of financial need, while teens in others will extend their work hours to avoid unpleasant home environments. Their results suggest that scholars hoping to understand fragile families must take different family structures and processes into account.

The final portion of the book addresses a historically understudied group, fathers in fragile families. Renata Forste explores the family circumstances of unmarried fathers. Although many of these men are involved with their children, both interpersonal and economic factors have prevented them from marrying the mothers. Instead, most of the mothers and fathers have intermittently engaged in non-marital cohabitation.

Paul Florsheim and Le Ngu identify developmental factors associated with positive fathering among a sample of young men aged 15 to 19. Despite significant individual and social disadvantages, these fathers developed relational capacities associated with positive parenting. These capacities included a growth-oriented perspective on the co-parenting relationship, a commitment to shared responsibility for maintaining this relationship, and a willingness to empathize with their co-parenting partners. They conclude by discussing the importance of studying unexpected successes for the development of effective interventions.

The authors of this volume come from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds, and employ both qualitative and quantitative data. The variety of analytic approaches has yielded a diverse set of findings about fragile families. We hope that they contribute to current political and academic debates over the value and viability of marriage in contemporary American life.

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Acknowledgments

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Administering the Forum requires extensive support by the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences. Dean J. Steven Ott helped to bring this event to fruition. Becky Murphy did much of the behind-the-scenes coordination. Together, their efforts greatly enhanced the quality of both the Forum and this volume.

In the Department of Family and Consumer Studies, Cathleen Zick provided endless assistance with the events surrounding the Forum. We thank her for all of her hard work on the conference and resulting volume. We also thank Ken Smith for providing early leadership on this book project. Finally, Sonja Anderson and Suzanne Petrucci provided proofreading assistance, while Alisa Cox made the index.

Contents

Chapter 1

FRAGILE FAMILIES AND THE MARRIAGE AGENDA

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Abstract: The Bush Administration is proposing to spend 1.5 billion dollars over the next five years on programs to promote "healthy marriages." The new programs are based on three assumptions: (1) that unmarried parents will participate in programs designed to promote marriage, (2) that participating in the programs will increase marriage, and (3) that children will be better off if their parents marry. This paper uses data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study to assess whether these assumptions are consistent with what we know about unmarried parents and whether the new marriage programs are likely to be successful. I argue that parents are likely to participate if services are provided around the time of the birth, that improving parents' relationship skills is likely to increase marriage, and that we can be guardedly optimistic about the effects on children.

Key words: marriage, non-marital fertility, parental relationships, child well-being, social policy

1. INTRODUCTION

The Bush Administration is proposing to spend 1.5 billion dollars over the next five years on programs to promote "healthy marriages." Some of this money will be spent on media campaigns to provide young adults, and the general public, with information about the benefits of marriage. Other money will be spent on programs to prevent divorce among married couples. And last, but not least, a major portion of the new funds is earmarked for fragile families, unmarried parents who are raising their child together (Garfinkel and McLanahan 2003). The term fragile family underscores the

biological and social ties between these parents and their child, and their precarious economic status.

Policy makers care about fragile families for several reasons. First, these families have been growing at a rapid rate (Figure 1-1). In 1960, non-marital births accounted for six percent of all births; today, they account for one of three births. Children are a public resource and thus any major change in their living arrangements merits our attention. Some people argue that the increase in non-marital childbearing is not a serious problem insofar as it is occurring in all western industrialized countries (Figure 1-2). The Scandinavian countries, as well as France and the U.K. have higher percentages of non-marital births than we do. However, whereas in Sweden over 90 percent of non-marital births are to cohabiting parents, in the U.S. only 40 percent fit this description (Figure 1-3). Further, the dissolution rate of cohabiting unions is higher in the U.S. than in other countries. By the time American children reach age 15, over half of them will have lived in a lone-mother family, defined as a family in which the mother and child are living alone (Andersson 2002) (Figure 1-4). Thus a second reason for concern is that fragile families are likely to be (or become) lone-mother families. These families have high poverty rates and poverty is not good for children. Moreover, while lone mothers are worse off than married mothers in practically all the industrialized countries, relatively speaking, their poverty rates are highest in the U.S. (McLanahan and Carlson 2001) (Figure 1-5).

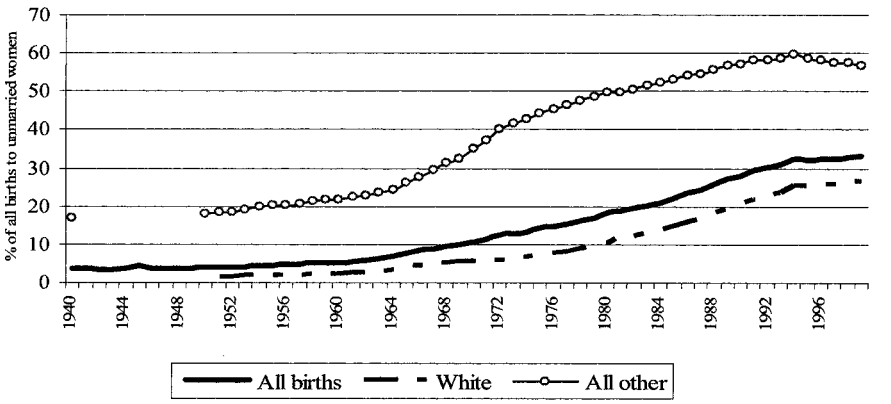

Figure 1-1. Percent of Non-Marital Births in the U.S.

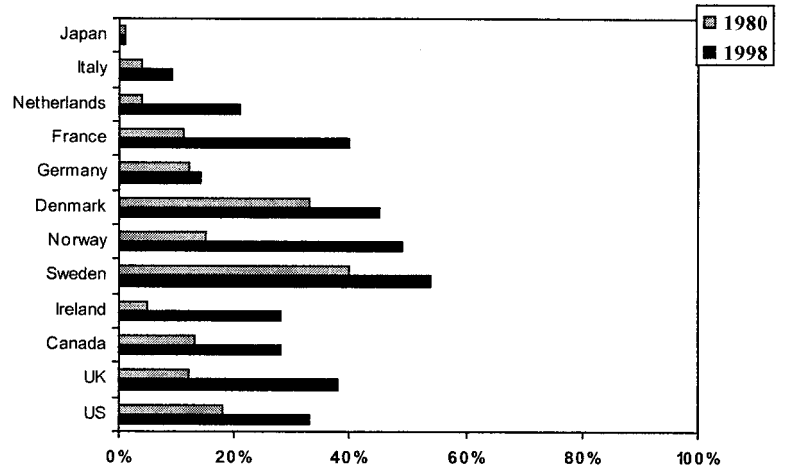

Figure 1-2. Percent of Non-Marital Births in Other Countries.

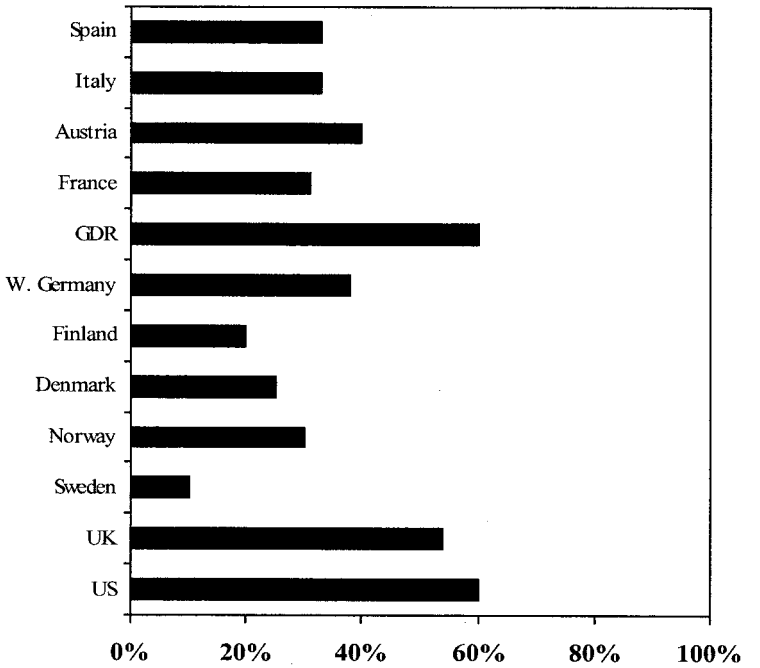

Figure 1-3. Percent of Non-Marital Births to Lone Mothers.

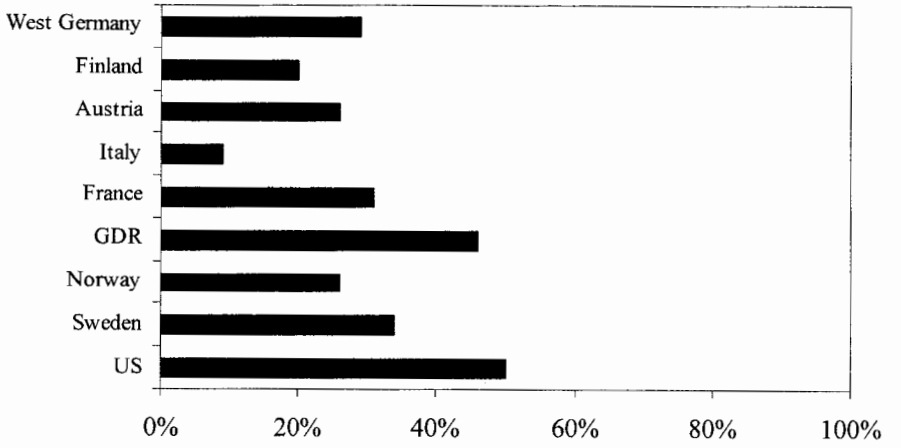

Figure 1-4. Percent of Children Exposed to Lone Motherhood.

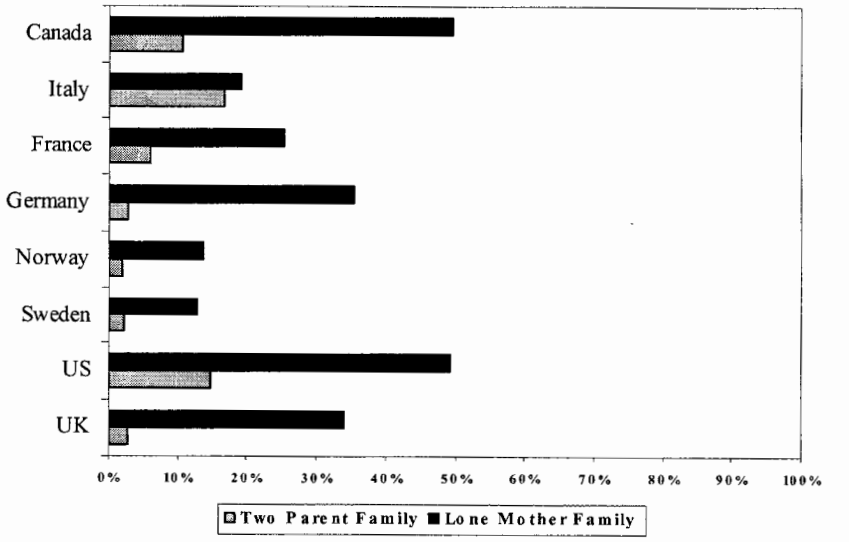

Figure 1-5. Poverty Rates by Family Structure.

So what is the Bush Administration planning to do to promote marriage, and how are the new marriage programs likely to affect fragile families? Wade Horn, the director of the Administration for Children and Families

(ACF), states that the mission of his organization is to "support activities that help those couples who choose to marry develop the skills and knowledge necessary to form and sustain a healthy marriage" (ACF 2003). The primary components of the new marriage programs are education in communication and interpersonal skills. There are several approaches to building these skills, ranging from counseling to mentoring to role-playing exercises. Some analysts have argued that the new programs should also offer employment and mental health services while other analysts have argued that couples who marry be exempted from any existing tax penalties.

Mathematica Policy Research (MPR) has recently received a nine year contract from the ACF to offer technical assistance to local programs that want to provide relationship skills training (Building Strong Families Project). Eventually, MPR will select and evaluate six different sites, using random assignment. While it is much too soon to know whether the new marriage programs will work, it is not too early to examine some of the basic assumptions behind the initiative to see if they are consistent with what we know about fragile families and their attitudes and behavior.

As currently envisioned, the marriage programs are based on three assumptions. The first assumption is that unmarried parents will participate in programs designed to promote marriage. All social programs face the problem of whether prospective clients will participate. Unless people are sufficiently motivated, the program will fail and there is a long list of interventions that have failed for just this reason. Thus, knowing whether parents are likely to participate is fundamental to knowing whether the marriage programs will be successful.

A second assumption is that participation will increase marriage. The marriage programs are based upon a particular theory of why couples marry, and it is important to determine whether this theory applies to this particular population. Most theories of marriage assume that marriage comes before childbearing and that the decision to marry is closely linked to the decision to have a child. In the case of fragile families, the decision to marry occurs *after* the birth of a child. Thus, the factors that determine marriage may be different for these parents. Finally, and most importantly, the marriage programs assume that children will be better off if their parents marry. Clearly this is the most important assumption of all. If parents marry, but children are worse off, the initiative will have failed.

Each of these assumptions has its supporters and critics. First, there is some evidence (Brown 2000; Bumpass et al. 1991) that many unmarried parents desire to marry, which suggests that they will participate in the programs. Opponents, however, disagree. They claim that most parents will not participate because their relationships are casual or because they prefer cohabitation to marriage.

Regarding the second assumption, evaluations of the counseling and role-playing approaches provide some evidence that relationship enhancement programs increase marital satisfaction and stability. This evidence is impressive because it is based on experimental data (Cowan et al. 1998; Stanley et al. 1999). Critics point out, however, that these experiments have been conducted on married, middle class couples and that it is unclear whether the positive results can be generalized to other couples. Critics also question whether the focus on building relationship skills is merited. They argue that low wages and high unemployment pose much stronger barriers to marriage.

With respect to the third assumption, there is widespread disagreement among researchers about whether marriage will make children better off. On the one hand, a substantial body of evidence indicates that marriage has numerous benefits for adults. Linda Waite summarizes this literature in her presidential address to the Population Association of America (Waite 1995) and in her book with Maggie Gallagher (Waite and Gallagher 2000). Research also shows that, on average, children who grow up with both of their biological parents are more successful across a broad range of outcomes than children who grow up with only one parent (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994). On the other hand, many analysts believe the benefits of marriage are overstated. They argue that the positive outcomes typically associated with marriage are due to pre-existing characteristics of the people who choose to marry (and not divorce) rather than to marriage itself. Finally, some critics point out that not all parents are suitable for marriage and that the new programs may increase children's exposure to drugs, alcohol and domestic violence.

Data from the *Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study* can be used to examine these assumptions. The study has been following a cohort of approximately 4,900 new births, including 3,700 births to unmarried parents and 1,200 births to married parents for the past three years. Births were sampled between 1998 and 2000 in 20 cities and 75 hospitals throughout the U.S. (McLanahan et al. 2001). When weighted, the data are representative of all births in cities with populations greater than 200,000. To maximize response rates, mothers were interviewed at the hospitals shortly after giving birth. Sixty percent of the unmarried fathers were interviewed at the hospitals as well. Follow-up interviews with both parents planned for when the child is one, three and five years old. The three and five-year surveys include in-home child assessment. In addition to the core survey, qualitative data on 75 couples that participated in the larger survey also being collected. The qualitative as well as the quantitative interviews collect extensive data on parents' relationships, their attitudes and expectations as well as their

economic capabilities. These data are an excellent resource for examining many of the questions surrounding the marriage initiative.

Before examining these questions, Table 1-1 compares the basic demographic profiles of new unmarried parents with those of new married parents. Unmarried and married parents are different in ways that cannot (or are not likely to) be altered by a marriage program. And these differences are potentially important. For example, unmarried parents are predominately black, whereas married parents are predominately white. Unmarried parents are mostly in their early twenties, whereas married parents are mostly in their late twenties and thirties. Finally, unmarried parents are much more likely than married parents to have children by another partner. Multiple partner fertility can pose significant barriers to marriage and is something that program administrators need to consider in designing their programs.

Table 1-1. Parents' Demographic Profile.

	Married (%)	Unmarried (%)
Race		
White	45	17
Black	13	44
Hispanic	32	35
Other	10	4
Age		
< 20	4	27
20-24	20	39
25-29	30	17
30 +	46	18
Multiple Partner Fertility	26	62

2. ASSUMPTION # 1 – PARENTS WILL PARTICIPATE

The key issue of unmarried parents' willingness to participate in the new program is whether relationships are casual or committed; and, if committed, whether parents are interested in marriage. To shed light on this issue, it is useful to note how parents described their relationships at the time of their child's birth. The results are striking and strongly contradict the claim that these are casual relationships. Nearly 80 percent of parents were romantically involved at birth and over 50 percent were living together (Figure 1-6).

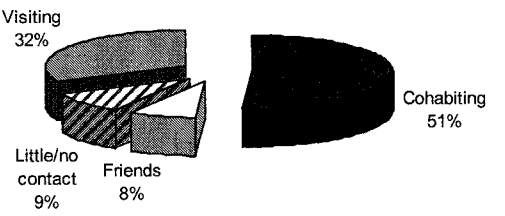

Figure 1-6. Unmarried Parents' Relationship Status at Birth.

Further, the vast majority of unwed fathers were committed to their children (see Table 1-2). Over 80 percent provided financial support during the pregnancy and a similar percentage helped out in other ways. In four out of five births, the child was taking the father's surname and 84 percent of fathers were planning to sign the birth certificate. Finally, over 90 percent of the fathers were planning to help raise the child.

Table 1-2. Unmarried Fathers' Commitment: Percent of Fathers that

	Total (%)
Gave money / bought things for the baby	81
Helped in another way	79
Visited the baby's mother in the hospital	77
Child will take father's surname	80
Father's name is on the birth certificate	84
Mother says father wants to be involved	92
Mother wants father to be involved	96

While the evidence presented thus far indicates that relationships are not casual, it does not answer the question of whether parents are likely to participate in the new programs. Table 1-3 shows the parents' response to a question regarding their chances of marriage. Most parents said their chances of marriage were either "good or almost certain." Fathers were even more optimistic than mothers, probably because the men interviewed were more committed than the men unavailable for interview. Some have suggested that parents' responses may have been affected by the "warm glow" associated with the birth of their child. The qualitative interviewers, however, found similar responses several months later, although they did note that parents' plans for marriage were very vague and distant. As a final

test of whether parents would participate in a marriage program, they were asked directly whether they would be interested in such a service (see Table 1-4).

Table 1-3. Parents' Expectations of Marriage: Percent Who Said Their Chances Were

	Mothers (%)	Fathers (%)
Almost certain	37	50
Good	22	25
Fifty/fifty	16	15
Not so good	9	5
No chance	17	5

Table 1-4. Parents' Views of Marriage Programs: Percent Who Said They Were

	Mothers (%)	Fathers (%)
Very interested	24	25
Somewhat interested	29	38
Not interested	47	37

Despite their "high hopes" for a future together, very few parents in the study had married by the time of their child's third birthday (Table 1-5). Only 21 percent of the cohabiting couples and 11 percent of the "visiting" couples were married. Further, breakup rates were very high; 38 percent of cohabiting couples and 51 percent of "visiting" couples were no longer together three years after the birth. Breakup rates for married couples were much lower, about 10 percent.

Table 1-5. Relationship Stability.

	1 year	3 years
Cohabiting at Birth		
Married	15%	21%
Broken up	21%	38%
Romantic at Birth		
Married	11%	15%
Broken up	32%	51%

3. ASSUMPTION #2 – RELATIONSHIP PROGRAMS WILL INCREASE MARRIAGE

To examine the second assumption—that relationship enhancement programs will increase marriage—it is important to note what parents said about marriage and their relationships at birth (Figure 1-7). The idea is to see

if married parents and those who married after birth had more favorable attitudes and relationship skills at birth than parents who stayed unmarried. The results indicate that attitudes and relationship quality are associated with marriage. At birth, over 80 percent of married mothers and 90 percent of married fathers agreed with the statement "marriage is better for children." Unmarried parents were less positive than married parents, but those who married later on were more positive at birth than those who did not marry. Parents were also asked whether their partners were fair, affectionate, non-critical and encouraging (Figure 1-8). These items are similar to the kinds of behavior the marriage programs are attempting to increase. Interestingly, unmarried parents who married after birth reported having higher quality relationships (at birth) than either married parents or parents who did not marry. Again, these comparisons indicate that relationship quality is associated with subsequent marriage among unmarried parents.

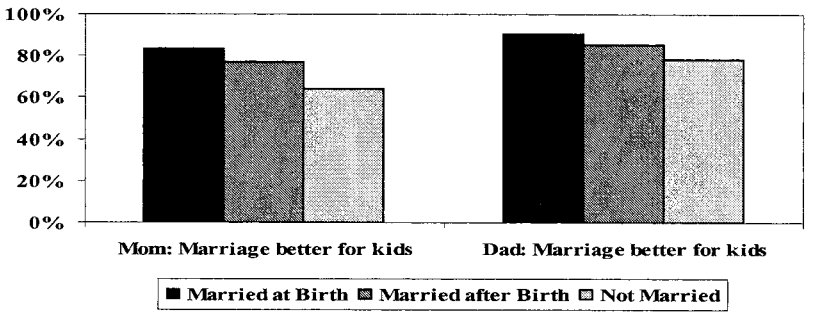

Figure 1-7. Attitudes toward Marriage.

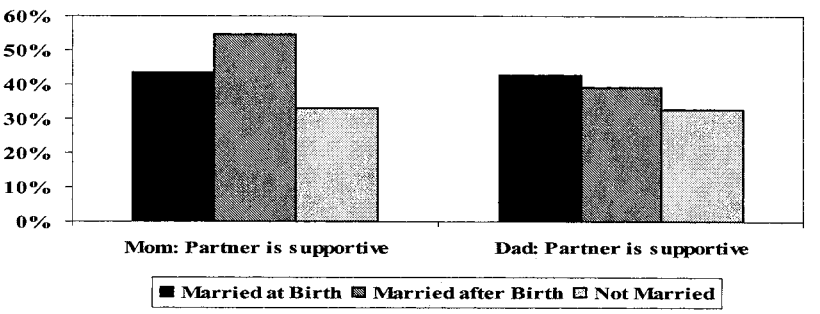

Figure 1-8. Partner Supportiveness.

Another dimension of relationship quality is conflict and trust (Figure 1-9). To measure conflict, parents were asked how often they and their partner disagreed about money, sex, friends and fidelity. Married parents and parents who married after birth reported less conflict at birth than parents who did not marry. To measure trust, parents were asked whether they agreed with the statement "Men (women) cannot be trusted to be faithful" (Figure 1-10). Again, the data show that, at the time their child was born, gender distrust was lowest among married mothers and highest among mothers who did not marry. The pattern was somewhat different among fathers. Men who married after birth reported higher levels of distrust at birth than men who did not marry.

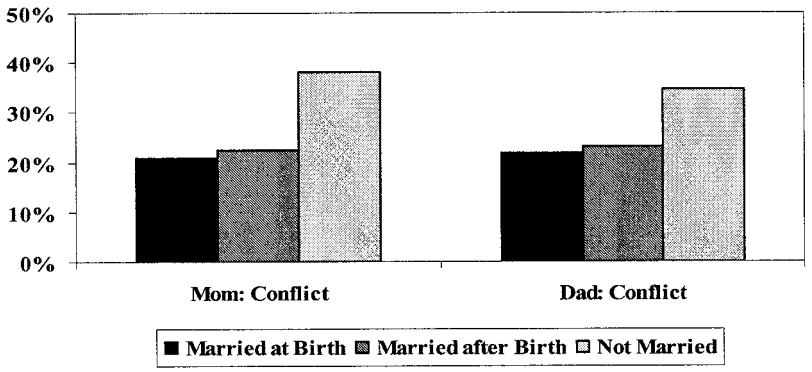

Figure 1-9. Parental Conflict.

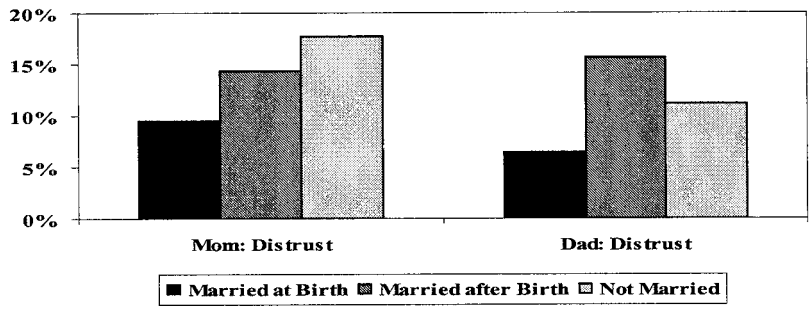

Figure 1-10. Distrust of Opposite Sex.

As noted earlier, many people believe that economic resources are more important barriers to marriage than relationship quality. Thus, as with attitudes and relationship quality, economic resources were measured at birth. Regarding education, unmarried parents were twice as likely as married parents to lack a high school degree (Figure 1-11). The reverse pattern was true for having a college education. Unmarried parents that subsequently married were better off than other unmarried parents, but the difference was small as compared with the differences between married parents and both groups of unmarried parents. Regarding employment, the mother was asked if she had worked in the year before she gave birth and whether the father was working at the time of birth (Figure 1-12). There were no significant differences among married and unmarried mothers, but fathers' employment status was related to marriage. Fathers who were married at birth and those who married after birth were more likely to be working than fathers who did not marry. The gap in hourly wages was also large (Figure 1-13). Whereas married mothers made about $12.50 an hour, on average, unmarried mothers made between seven and eight dollars an hour. Married fathers also made more than unmarried fathers. As was true for education, unmarried parents that married after birth were more similar to other unmarried parents than they were to parents who were married at birth. Indeed, the difference between unmarried parents was not significant.

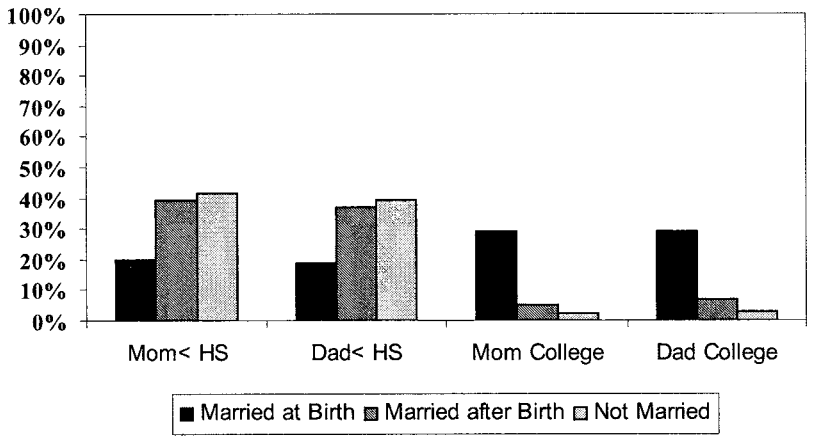

Figure 1-11. Education.

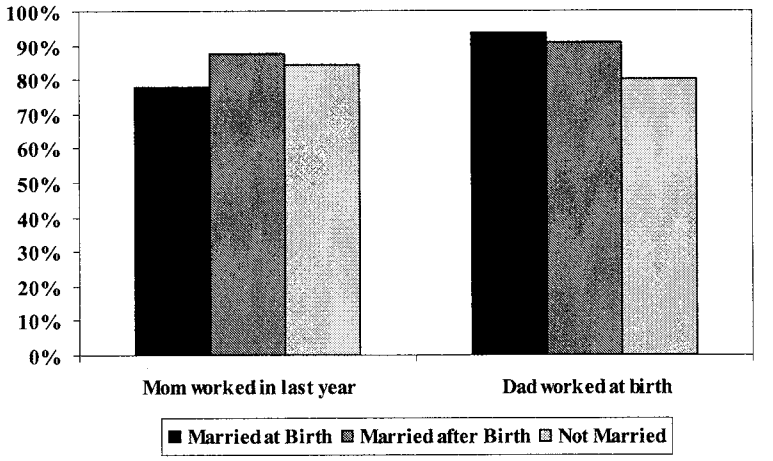

Figure 1-12. Employment.

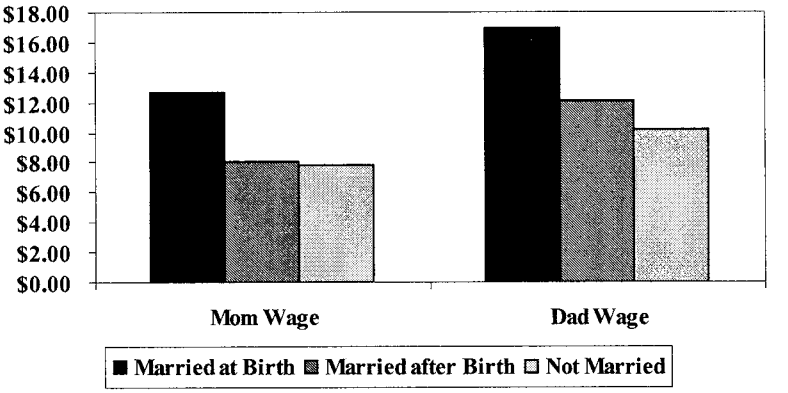

Figure 1-13. Hourly Wages.

Finally, to address the question of whether marriage is likely to put children at serious risk, the study looked at whether marital status was associated with substance abuse and violence. Figure 1-14 shows that, at the time their child was born, the incidence of drug and alcohol problems was very low among all parents. About one percent of married mothers and about three and a half percent of unmarried mothers reported that drugs or alcohol

had seriously affected their relationships at work or at home in the past year. There was no difference between unmarried mothers who married and those who did not. Drug use among fathers, however, was associated with marriage. Not only did married fathers have fewer drug problems than unmarried fathers, the men who married had fewer problems than the men who did not marry. Figure 1-15 looks at domestic violence and incarceration, as reported by mothers. Less than five percent of mothers said they were "hit or slapped" by the father in the past three months, with married mothers and mothers who married after birth reporting much less violence than other unmarried mothers. One of the most striking findings in the study was the high rates of incarceration among unmarried fathers. Whereas 10 percent of married fathers had spent some time in jail or prison, over 25 percent of fathers who married after birth and over 40 percent of fathers who did not marry had been incarcerated. The high rates of incarceration among unmarried fathers and the strong association between incarceration and marriage indicate that changes in the incarceration policy over the past 20 years, such as mandatory sentencing and longer stays, may have played a role in discouraging marriage. Not only does incarceration reduce the number of men who are available for marriage, the skills that lead to successful coping in jail or prison are likely to be very different from the skills that lead to a successful relationship. Time spent in jail or prison is likely to undermine the skills that the marriage programs are trying to develop.

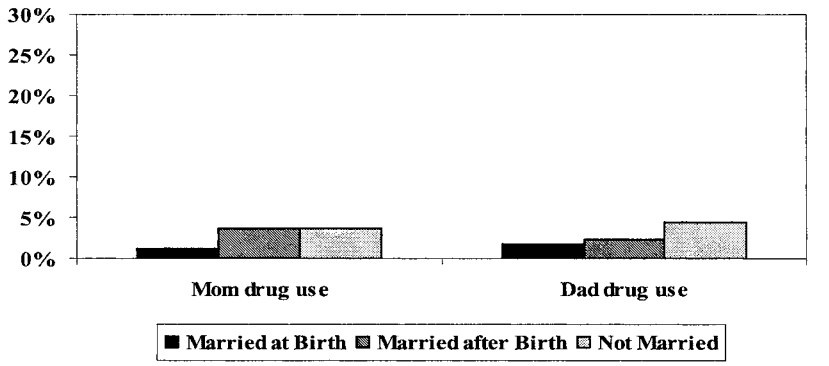

Figure 1-14. Problems with Drugs or Alcohol.

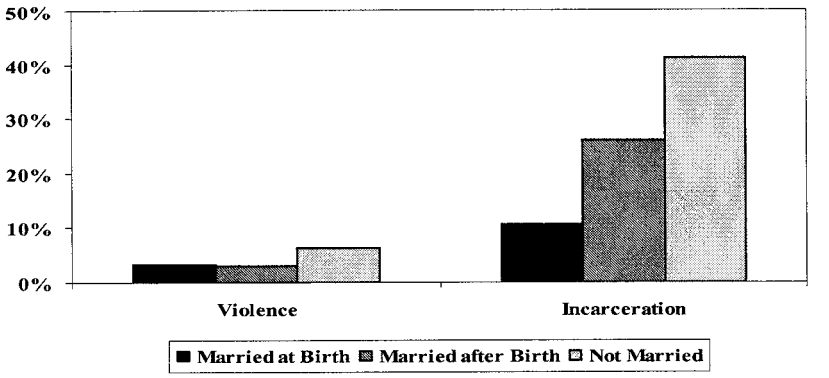

Figure 1-15. Violence and Incarceration.

To assess the relative importance of some of these factors, a regression analysis was conducted and the results were used to simulate how much marriage rates would change if unmarried parents were given the same characteristics as married parents (Table 1-6). This purely theoretical exercise can be used to assess the relative importance of the factors that are associated with marriage.

Table 1-6. Simulations.

Observed marriage at one year	10.9%
Change in marriage attitudes	2.1 pts.
Change in relationship quality	2.0 pts.
Change in conflict	~
Change in mothers' trust	0.6 pts.
Change in fathers' earnings	1.3 pts.
All changes together	16.9%

The analysis shows that if unmarried parents had the same attitudes as married parents, marriage rates would increase by 2.1 percentage points. Though small, this effect is about a 20 percent increase over current marriage rates. If unmarried parents had the same relationship quality as married parents, marriage rates would again increase by about two percentage points, and if unmarried mothers were as trusting of men as married mothers, they would increase by about half a percentage point. In all, relationship quality improvements would increase marriage by nearly five percentage points, which is nearly 50 percent above the base marriage rate of 11 percent for this population. What about economic barriers? According to the analysis, if unmarried fathers had the same earnings as

married fathers, marriage probabilities would increase by only 1.3 percentage points. In sum, while economic factors do affect marriage, they are less important than relationship factors, at least among unmarried parents. It is important to keep in mind that the parents in this sample were all unmarried when their child was born. Since it is known from prior research that people with good economic prospects are likely to marry, the people in this sample with good prospects are likely to be different in some other way that makes them less marriageable. Thus, whatever caused them to not marry when they learned the mother was pregnant may account for their relatively low marriage rates since birth.

4. ASSUMPTION #3 – CHILDREN WILL BE BETTER OFF

The third assumption behind the marriage initiative—that children born to unmarried parents would be better off if their parents wed—is the most important assumption and the most difficult to test. While there is widespread agreement that children raised by two married biological parents do better on all sorts of outcomes than children raised by one parent, there is considerable disagreement about how much of the advantage is due to marriage per se and how much is due to the kind of parents who marry and stay married as compared with the kind of parents who divorce. As the previous figures have shown, parents who are unmarried when their child is born are very different, and much more disadvantaged, than parents who are married at birth. They are younger, much less educated, and less financially secure. They also report higher levels of conflict and distrust, more problems with drugs and alcohol, and more domestic violence. Marriage programs can reduce some of these differences, but they are not likely to eliminate them all.

Figures 1-16 through 1-18 look at parenting quality and poverty status of unmarried parents, distinguished by whether or not they had married by the time their child was three years old. Although indicators of parenting and poverty do not measure child well-being directly, they are likely to be good indirect measures. It is known, for example, that cognitive stimulation and warmth are good for children while harsh parenting is bad and poverty is harmful (Duncan and Brooks-Gunn 1997). To measure cognitive stimulation, parents were asked about reading, telling stories and playing games with the child. To measure warmth, questions asked about hugging, kissing, and singing songs. To measure harshness, the parent was asked whether they spank the child. It is noteworthy that because all of the parenting indicators are based on mothers' reports, they are less than ideal

measures. When the child is three years old, visits will allow for direct observation of parenting behavior. The children's cognitive and emotional development will also be addressed. In the meantime, the study is dependent on what information the mothers provide.

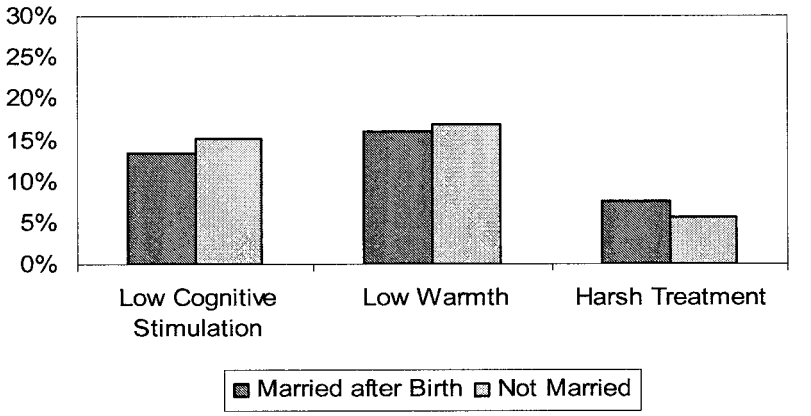

Figure 1-16. Mothering at One Year.

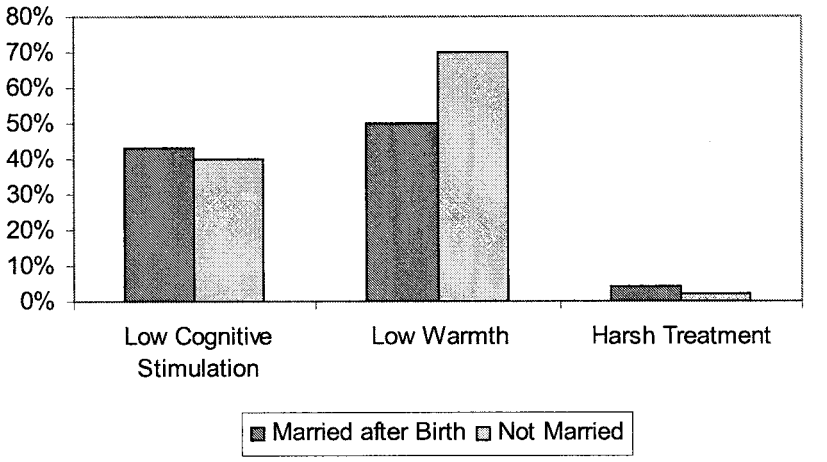

Figure 1-17. Fathering at One Year.

In Figures 1-16 and 1-17, the first two bars show the scores for cognitive stimulation, the second two bars show scores for warmth, and the third two bars show scores for harshness. All of the scores are adjusted for differences in parents' age, race/ethnicity, and education. A high score indicates poor parenting. As before, the data distinguished between parents who married sometime after the birth of their child and those who had not married.

For mothers, the story is very simple: marriage is not related to mothering quality among parents who were unmarried at birth. Nor is there a difference between unmarried mothers and mothers who were married at birth. For fathers, the story is more complicated. While there are no differences in cognitive stimulation, fathers who marry sometime after the birth of their child show more warmth and more harshness than do fathers who do not marry. The difference in harshness or spanking is disturbing since it suggests that marriage may expose children to harsh parenting. Since child development specialists argue that strict parenting is not harmful if the parent is also warm and loving, it is important to examine whether fathers who spanked were also high on warmth. After recoding this indicator to measure harshness combined with low warmth, there is no difference between the two groups of fathers. Basically, nearly all the fathers who were high on harshness were also high on warmth.

Finally, measures of poverty rates for the three groups of parents suggests that parents who marry after birth have lower rates of poverty than parents who do not marry, but not as low as parents who are married at birth (Figure 1-18). This finding is important and suggests that marriage alone cannot eliminate the income gap between married and unmarried parents, although it can take them part of the way.

5. IMPLICATIONS FOR MARRIAGE PROGRAMS

So are the assumptions behind the Bush Administration's new marriage initiative correct? And given the evidence, how should the programs be designed? First, the data indicate that many unmarried parents are likely to participate in the marriage programs, especially if offered these services around the time of the child's birth. Unmarried parents have very high hopes for their relationship and want to raise their child together. Thus, they are likely to respond positively to programs that help them build their communication and relationship skills. Middle class, married parents often pay for these services and find them useful, and unmarried parents would likely feel the same. The timing of the interventions is critical, however. The breakup rate of these new parents is high during the first two years of the

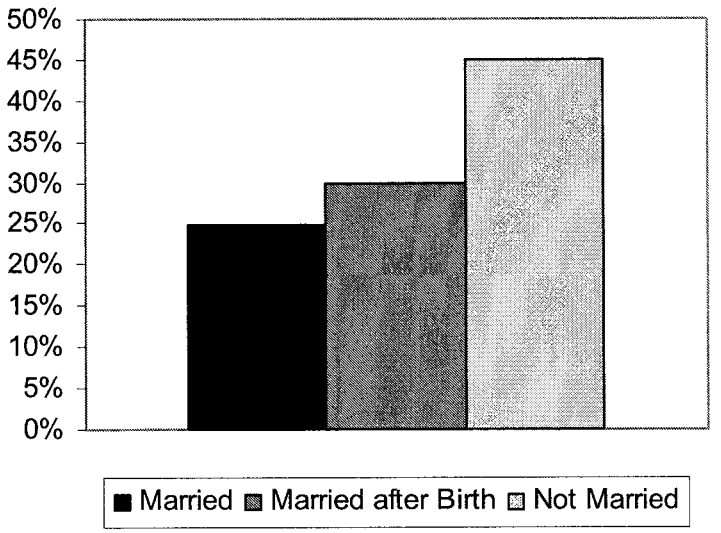

Figure 1-18. Poverty at One Year.

child's life. Thus, if programs want to reach the parents, they must do so at, or possibly before, the birth of the child.

Second, the evidence suggests that increasing relationship skills is likely to have a small, but significant, effect on marriage. Changing attitudes towards marriage and dealing with the issues that underlie women's distrust of men would make the effect even larger. Although this point has not been demonstrated in this analysis, marriage programs could have important spillover effects on other programs such as job training and mental health services. While previous attempts to increase human capital among high school dropouts have been extremely disappointing, especially for men, the birth of a child may provide the motivation that has been missing in the past. The relationship with the mother may also be an important motivator.

Finally, the data are not definitive about whether the new marriage programs will make children better off. On the one hand, they indicate that poverty rates will be lower, though not as low as they are among married parents. On the other hand, they indicate that marriage may not change parenting quality very much. Insofar as the measures of parenting quality are not good, these findings should be viewed as tentative. In sum, we can be guardedly optimistic about how children fare under the new marriage agenda.

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Chapter 2

MARRYING FOR AMERICA

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Abstract: Contrasting two examples, we examine the ideology of marriage, seeing marriage itself as the product of social scripts and bribes, which foster the illusion of choice. We analyze the languages used in a reality television program called *Married by America* and the announcement of President Bush's proposed welfare reform act, to show how internalizing the ideology of marriage induces individuals to take on responsibility not only for the failings of their own relationships, but for the failings of marriage as an institution and of American society as a whole. This ideology is critiqued from a historical perspective.

Key Words: marriage, welfare reform, ideology, culture, media, United States

If Americans ever took marriage for granted as a stage of life as natural and inevitable as puberty or dying, it seems they no longer do. From recent welfare reforms to struggles over same-sex marriage at the local, state, and federal levels, the engineering of marriage has been a central concern. The meanings and effects of marriage are subject to speculation and wild assertions, while much critical thought about the institution has fallen out of academic consideration in many circles where it is most needed, if we are to understand the effects of the policies we endorse. In this paper, we wish to think critically about the meaning of marriage in contemporary debates; we discuss not quantifiable individual outcomes but the ideologies behind marriage. We discuss some of the meanings Americans attribute to marriage, how marriage is represented in public discourse as the key to transforming individuals and solidifying the nation, and how it comes to create scapegoats for individual- and national-level crises.

Without disputing the necessity of human relationships and communities, many scholars of marriage see this institution not as a fact of life to be taken for granted, nor as a necessary feature of a functional society, but as a type of relationship that is central to many people's lives but none the less

operates ideologically. Collier, Rosaldo and Yanagisako (1997: 79), for example, include marriage in the family when they argue that the latter "is not a concrete 'thing' that fulfills concrete 'needs' but an ideological construct with moral implications." As such, an analysis of the family from this perspective "can lead to a more refined analysis of historical change in the American or Western family than has devolved upon us from our functionalist ancestors." As an ideological formulation, marriage operates to make certain social arrangements and distributions of power and legitimacy seem natural and inevitable, while masking forms of relating that might be more effective or satisfying for the individuals within them and the society of which they are part.

At a moment when policy makers and scholars debate whether President George W. Bush's initiative to force marriage among welfare recipients is "sound policy or just good intentions,"[1] we seek to intervene by examining how American marriage ideology uses the illusion of free choice to create scapegoats for its own crises and those of the nation as a whole. We bring generations of scholarly critiques of marriage to two sites of contemporary marriage discourse: a popular 2003 "reality television" program, *Married by America,* and Bush's rhetoric as he unveiled the marriage initiative in his 2002 welfare reform proposal.

In recent years Americans have experienced a series of fiscal crises sparked by a substantial increase in the federal budget deficit. In light of that particular crisis, President Bush has proposed changes to the welfare system to virtually require poor people to marry. Bush's welfare proposal comes at a time when sociologists and popular culture increasingly link marriage to economic success, healthy children, and disciplined citizens. Since the explosion of "the feminization of poverty" associated with increasing female heads of household since the mid 1980s, many sociologists of the family have focused their research on the effect of marital status on poor women and their children's life chances. Many of these studies conclude that poverty levels decline with increasing rates of marriage (Waite 1995, 2000; Waite and Gallagher 2000). The public conversation about marriage extends beyond academia and formal state institutions and finds a forum in the proliferation of "reality" television programs geared toward exploring American marriage as a complicated but necessary precondition for human economic and emotional fulfillment.

How does American marriage ideology make certain members of the population seem responsible for the state's fiscal problems, problems of which they are disproportionately the victims? We explore how some Americans willingly imagine marriage as a romantic and pleasant phase of natural life, while others require more incentive. In an effort to explain this process, we first summarize sociological perspectives on marriage and offer

an avenue for understanding marriage as a set of bribes offered by both the state and society to produce normalized citizens. We juxtapose the representation of marriage informing welfare policies with one present in the mass-mediated social sphere. We begin by looking at a dramatization of the American marriage ideal by analyzing *Married by America,* then compare it to George W. Bush's announcement of his Welfare Reform Agenda in February 2002, to see how he uses marriage as an instrument to shift the responsibility for poverty from the state to the individual. By juxtaposing these two very different contributions to the public discourse on marriage in America, we show how in each case the ideology of marriage fosters the illusion of choice to create scapegoats for crises of the nation.

In both of the cases we examine here, marriage is central to the ideological construction of "America" and what it means to be "American." In defining these norms, powerful actors often neglect certain American ideals (such as individual liberty or the separation of church and state; see, for instance, Williams and Demerath 1991) when these ideals fail to serve the needs of those whose authority guides the production of this ideology. In this narrative, as we shall see, non-marital sexuality and the vulnerable people who represent it become scapegoats for crises of the nation.[2] The difference between the subjects of the two marriage narratives is not simply one of "class", in the strict materialist sense of the term, but vulnerability. People who, for whatever reason, do not mirror the American marriage ideal and affirm its naturalness become scapegoats, treated as pathological for their failure to conform.

In both the television program and the federal policy, people invoke marriage as a key to American national crises. And in both cases, in representing marriage, they invoke what we call the American marriage ideology. This ideology consists of three elements: scripts, bribes and the illusion of free choice. We define *scripts* as socially created ways of doing things that are learned, but come to feel natural to the person employing them (Gagnon and Simon 1973; Goffman 1959).[3] Scripts are socially structured discourses that individuals take as their own and enact as they live their lives. In both of the cases we examine here, these scripts are gendered, holding out different expectations for men and women. Drawing on Foucault (1977), we see these scripts as reproducing social power; rather than seeing power only at work in forcing people to do things against their will, we see power at work in shaping people's will in the first place. The power at work when people internalize these scripts is what Foucault calls "disciplinary". These scripts do the work of ideology as they come to feel like natural common sense, fostering the illusion of individual choice and obscuring alternatives. Individuals who take the script as their own allow themselves to become scapegoats, to take individual responsibility for

structural problems, be they contrived in the context of a television show or developed out of larger social structural problems.

In the following analysis, we explore how the promise of benefits *bribes* (or coerces) people to imagine marriage as an appropriate solution to national and personal economic problems. Already disciplined to see the marriage ideal as their own and to follow its scripts, many Americans take on individual responsibility for the marriage's successes and failures, subscribing to marriage ideology even when their lives fail to meet its ideals, because it promises them numerous rewards, including a certain respectability as well as financial and administrative incentives. One such reward for marital conformity is that these parties may go about their lives with little scrutiny, representing normative America rather than being portrayed as a national problem. Those who have been less well-served by the state, on the other hand, have less to gain by entering its formal institutions. If individuals fail to reproduce power themselves by willingly taking marriage ideology as their own, the state now offers them an explicit monetary enticement, more coercive than a bribe but seeking to preserve the logic that following the marriage script is a matter of free choice.

In both of the cases we examine, scripts and bribes create *the illusion of free choice.* While *Married by America* celebrates free choice, the Bush administration attempts to enforce a particular script where it does not emerge as a more-or-less automatic consequence of class and status reproduction. In fact, Bush offers an explicit, rather than implicit, bribe to induce poor people to submit to procedures of state discipline in exchange for economic benefits, overtly offered but never guaranteed. In effect, he reproduces the ideological assumption that poor people have freely chosen to be poor, and can freely choose otherwise. While making the consequences of turning down the choice ever more severe, the administration nonetheless maintains the illusion of free choice while producing potential scapegoats for the nation's problems. With the use of bribes and scripts, marriage enters the American imagination as a personal choice when it is, in fact, a demand of the normative order.

1. MARRIAGE AS AMERICA'S SOLUTION: HISTORICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

The popular American imagination posits marriage as a personal union between a man and a woman, the definition of a successful relationship. From this point of view, marriage exists as an intimate choice, a mystical

happenstance and a private bond, often eluding calculated reason. This common sense view may assume that marriage is natural, that children by design require one man and one woman to raise them properly, that no life is complete without marriage and childrearing in the contemporary, modern nuclear family (Stacey 1991).

Many scholars have pointed out that this commonsense view is ideological rather than simply descriptive, which is to say, it reflects what certain people feel families *should be* (while masking alternatives) rather than what families *are* in reality, what kinds of arrangements actually do or would provide people with the needs commonly assumed to be met by the family. Scholars of the family have long pointed out that marriage and family patterns change over history, that marriage is a social form rather than an arrangement dictated by nature. D'Emilio and Freedman (1988) trace the vast changes in American marital and family patterns from the pre-colonial era through the colonial era, Westward expansion, the industrial revolution and the contemporary age, showing how beliefs about the meanings of marriage and family have changed. Far from purely an intimate bond, for instance, marriage has been an economic relationship, where the family's livelihood depended upon the production of workers for its own economic survival (see also D'Emilio 1983). With a more contemporary focus, scholars such as Skolnick (1991) and Stacey (1991, 1997) have shown how family patterns evolve with economic and social changes. Both discuss, for instance, how divorce became increasingly likely as more women became able to support themselves economically, thus loosening their dependence on men and unhappy or violent marriages.

Although this sense of history intervenes in an important way into family ideology, it is not the only intervention. Other scholars have drawn from these historical insights to examine how ideologies of the family and marriage serve to benefit men by giving them power over women and making this power seem natural. Theorists such as Rubin (1975), Hartmann (1979) and Pateman (1988) have shown how capitalism and liberal contract theory both serve to further the notion that men are the only human beings with inherent rights. Rubin, for instance, points out that gender definitions themselves work to make men's power seem natural:

> . . . from the standpoint of nature, men and women are closer to each other than either is to anything else—for instance, mountains, kangaroos, or coconut palms. The idea that men and women are more different from one another than either is from anything else must come from somewhere other than nature (1975: 179).

The definition of men and women as mutually exclusive and complementary operates as an ideological underpinning for patriarchal heterosexual

societies. Ethnographic studies and historical examinations of heterosexual family patterns (Collier, Rosaldo and Yanagisako 1997; Hochschild 1989; Rubin 1983; Thorne 1992) have recounted the many ways that ideologies of the family give men power over women, giving men access to rights and freedoms that are denied to women.

Both the historicist and feminist-theoretical schools of thought are explicit in their belief that men and women should do equal work and receive equal rewards for it, both in families and in public life. In the recent wave of scholarship on the family, many sociologists and demographers have by and large neglected critiques of marriage, tending to focus on the logical patterns that predict who will get married to whom, the larger social predictors of divorce, and the effects of marriage as a social institution. These scholars are wise to conduct this research, to cut through some of the ideological saber-rattling and see what really happens in families. However, many of these scholars' assumptions about families and marriage neglect history, often allowing their own assumptions about how families *should be* to stand in for a coherent, historically-informed theory.

Many sociological analyses of marriage assume that stable marriages are the building blocks of a functional society, that other family patterns reflect the dissolution of individual values and society as a whole. These scholars explain why marriage seems to have weakened as a social institution in the United States by explaining such trends as high divorce rates and the increasing age of first marriage. Because these trends tend to be associated with poverty, many sociologists understand these demographic trends as social problems themselves, as the cause of poverty rather than an effect. Some sociologists find that married people experience financial and emotional benefits from marriage. For instance, Waite (2000) uses data from the General Sociological Survey to compare never-married, previously-married and currently-married men and women on scales of happiness and well-being to assess the utility of marriage. She finds that married people, male and female, do better or the same as the non-married on all of the happiness and financial well-being scales. Lichter, Roempke and Brown (2003), analyze data from the 1995 National Survey of Family Growth to argue that while marriage is not an economic benefit for all couples, it is positively correlated with lower rates of poverty and welfare use.

One of the most forceful arguments about the necessity of marriage is that it increases the financial and emotional well-being of children. McLanahan and Sandefur (1994), for example, argue that while marriage is only part of the answer to the problems that children face in the United States, the evidence clearly indicates that children are more healthy, educated, and stable if they are raised by a married couple. Popenoe (1996) distorts this argument in his endorsement of heterosexuality as the only

healthy family form, arguing that children only develop correctly in the presence of one man and one woman. He argues that the declining participation of fathers in their children's lives leads to increased levels of juvenile delinquency, teenage pregnancy rates, and violence against women.

Sociologists engaged in this debate are presented with a peculiar problem: if marriage (and marriage alone) holds so many benefits for both children and adults, why are divorce rates so high? In response to the question, an analysis of what some call "culture" enters as a possible explanation to the declining normative investment in marriage. These sociologists focus on the values that individuals possess that might predict a decrease in their devotion and trust of the institution of marriage. They argue that American culture as a whole is less supportive of marriage because of the rise of the "culture of divorce" (Gallagher 1996; Waite 2000; Whitehead 1997). In Waite's (2000) perspective, the culture of divorce explains why even though marriages work well for individuals (in terms of financial success and overall happiness) there are fewer marriages—because it is easier to get a divorce when couples experience temporary hardships. Gallagher (1996) argues that this culture of divorce explains that some Americans still desire marriage, but are unable to achieve it because American culture in general remains unsupportive. From Whitehead's (1997) point of view, Hollywood and capitalism create a consciousness that draws people away from marriage by advocating a permissive and irresponsible way of life. She argues that the family must rise against capitalism and reclaim values of loyalty, commitment, and obligation.

These approaches employ a very limiting definition of culture that keeps them from examining their own assumptions about marriage. They treat culture as residual explanation, a line of reasoning to explain what they see as a problematic situation when more concrete explanatory measures fail. Then, given culture as a residual explanation, Whitehead especially goes so far as to define it narrowly as popular media to find the cause of what disturbs them, neglecting that culture works through all forms of thought, giving meaning to all aspects of life as it defines people's choices and strategies (see, for instance, Bonnell and Hunt 1999; Geertz 1973; Swidler 1986, 2001). In effect, Whitehead blames the media for causing divorce, neglecting the cultural factors that dispose people to marry in the first place, as well as broader socioeconomic conditions.

While D'Emilio and Freedman, Skolnick, Stacey and the like draw from a different set of data to see divorce as a result of the historical conditions allowing for women's decreased dependency, these "pro-family" sociologists and demographers echo Parsons (1961), seeing marriage as integrating individuals into a functional society and seeing culture as the coordination of individuals' beliefs to legitimate it. For these authors,

culture is relevant to the study of marriage as a diagnosis of an assumed social problem of failed marriages. This model works by assuming that the institution of marriage fulfills its function if particular individuals value it, and the culture as a whole is supportive of these individual values. It neglects the role material and social conditions play in shaping "culture," regardless of whether they define the latter as systems of thought or simply as mass media images. While feminists have long challenged this functionalism by asking *for whom* marriage functions (see, for instance, Fraser 1989; Hartmann 1979; Pateman 1988; Stacey 1990; Thorne 1992), we focus not on marriage's micro-level benefits to men, but on its macro-level contribution to administering the population without addressing structural and economic problems at their root.

Although many sociological analyses of marriage provide firm evidence for the Bush administration to advocate marriage as the solution to poverty, they do not capture how marriage works to shift the burden of poverty from the hands of the state to the poor themselves. To understand how marriage fosters individual-level solutions to social-level problems, we first turn to a dramatization of the American marriage ideal. In the example we analyze here, we see people who have internalized the scripts central to this marriage ideal, who see it as natural and true, and who thus collaborate in scapegoating individuals for the failures of the institution. Rather than seeing mass media as the cause of social conditions, we see this television program as a dramatization of a culture that perceives itself to be in crisis, and a venue in which the crisis may show itself to be resolved.

2. DRAMATIZING THE AMERICAN MARRIAGE NARRATIVE

The reality television program *Married by America* produced its own limited crisis in American marriage, which it remedied by citing American marriage ideology. True to its genre, the show was technically unscripted, but the characters in this dramatization followed the social scripts that accompany marriage ideology, having internalized these scripts such that they feel natural, like enactments of personal choice. As each competing couple failed and was eliminated from the show's contest, at least one of the members was scapegoated, blamed for the relationship's failure. Meanwhile, the program reproduced gender ideologies as, in the end, it affirmed that American marriage ideology is natural and true by showing the alternative the show itself offered was doomed to failure.

Starting in the late 1990s with *Who Wants to Marry a Millionaire?,* American television producers launched a series of reality television

programs (such as *Joe Millionaire, The Bachelor, The Bachelorette,* and *Mr. Personality)* pitched towards American television viewers' dwindling sense of public efficacy and anxieties over the strength of marriage bonds. All of these reality television programs shared a basic premise: beginning with a single but attractive man or woman, television viewers and producers were charged to find the one and only perfect life partner for the protagonist to marry. In tandem, television producers in the United States created a set of competitive reality television programs in search for an ideal representative of America (such as *All American Girl* and *American Idol).* In each of these programs, contestants were selected on their potential to embody American-ness, and American viewers are asked to settle the competitions by granting celebrity status to some "common" yet true American.

The Fox network's program *Married by America* combined both formulae by exploring the insecurity of the American marriage ideal at the same time it considered what it meant to a true American couple. It epitomized a trend in U.S. television programming by asking its viewers to think of themselves *as* Americans (Anderson 1991). Although it was known as a reality television show, its importance did not come from reflecting a recognizable reality to viewers, but from the show's playful creation and fulfillment of a desire to toy with anxieties about marriage and national security. This show was explicitly on the edge. Viewers were not expected to support the televised whirlwind courtships and arranged stranger marriages the show presented, but to laugh at the failures and bloopers that emerged from altering the traditionally private aspects of monogamous coupling.

Married by America offered what its announcer called an "experiment in arranged marriage." The show began with five people seeking partners. The parents and family of each person seeking a partner interviewed three prospective mates in hope of finding a good match. American viewers voted for the best match for each bachelor and bachelorette. These couples were engaged on television before actually meeting (or even seeing) each other—each man slipped a ring on his fiancée's finger while she stood behind a screen on stage. After the engagement, the five couples drove to an upscale ranch-resort to begin their videotaped courtships. They were to be judged and eliminated by a panel of three "relationship experts"; for the last two couples, viewers would select a winner by internet vote. If the elected couple decided to marry they would receive $100,000, a large house, and a sport utility vehicle. In a period of three real-time weeks the ideal-typical American courting process was condensed as each couple began with a first date and hoped to end with a marriage.

In *Married by America,* Fox producers combined a sense of reality and seriousness with a paradoxical sense of entertainment, experimentation and

play. The opening voiceover of each episode attempted to capture the audience with the sense they were participants in a grand experiment with profound consequences, saying:

> What if the first face you saw in the morning and the last face you saw when you went to bed at night was the face of a total stranger? What if you changed everything you knew about love and marriage? What if you abandoned your ordinary life to embark on an extraordinary experiment? These five couples did just that. Committing to marry complete strangers, sight unseen. Bound to live with their fiancées on a secluded 300-acre estate. The lives of these new couples will be forever intertwined. You will witness every move they make as personalities clash and passions ignite. They must learn to love each other for better or for worse. The clock is ticking as each hour brings them closer to their wedding day.

In one sense, this introduction invited the audience to understand the situation before them as so extraordinary that it must be a joke, a playful experiment in an otherwise serious life decision. It thus introduced *itself* as a crisis in marriage: amidst much public discussion of marriage in crisis, could American society sink so low as to take this plunge?

The program also retained a sense of gravitas by appropriating marriage traditions for its three-week, televised arranged courtships and would-be marriages. Once the episodes began to follow the couples' progress, each episode began by formally moving the couples along the steps of courtship, constructed as stages of advancement, and each episode ended with the elimination of the couple judged least compatible. First, the five couples lived in separate suites in the estate's main house and were given a suitable first date (such as mountain climbing, horseback riding, or biking). After one couple was eliminated from the contest, the remaining four couples took the "next step" in forming a marriage, testing their compatibility in a domestic situation, by living in private villas on the estate. In the next episode, each remaining couple was taken to meet each member's parents, and in keeping with the patriarchal tradition of marriage, each groom asked the bride's father or "father figure" for "his daughter's hand in marriage." After three couples had been eliminated, the final two couples flew to Las Vegas for bachelor and bachelorette parties, where strippers tested the potential for future marital fidelity and provided an opportunity for mourning the imminent loss of sexual freedom.

The traditional and naturalized progress of marriage preparation masked the skillfully contrived and plotted events of the Fox marriages. The show set the limits of these relationships, all the while retaining the illusion of free choice. This illusion of free choice masked marriage ideology's effects of

social normalization, of fostering conformity. For example, while *Married by America* was a public event, the success of the specific marriages was understood as the formation of a private, intimate bond between a man and a woman. When one couple had sex almost as soon as they were alone together, speculations flew as to whether their "passion" would be a strong enough foundation for a marriage. At the same time, individuals who did not wish to share a bed, kiss, or have sex quickly enough (the last, by the show's logic, should happen within the first week or two of meeting each other) were accused, implicitly or explicitly, of being frigid (if they were women) or potentially gay (if they were men), or simply lacking the commitment to make it work. In either case, individuals, rather than the structure of the courtship, were scapegoated for the failure of the relationship. In a sense, the show performed a magic analogous to that performed by marriages outside the television studio. Marriage is a public, state-held contract (generally) between a man and a woman, but individuals who have internalized the marriage script mistake this state contract for a purely private and natural progression in monogamous relationships, as a testament to an underlying truth (Foucault 1980).

Consequently, the show's tension resides in the question of whether a couple formed by a public vote on television can exhibit the same truth and authenticity allegedly found within more traditional couples. *Married by America* centrally revolved around a search for the *truth*: are these couples really in love and committed or are they solely motivated by the prize money? The show's host made this tension explicit as the contestants arrived at the ranch by proclaiming, "This is where the truth of your relationship will come out. This is your proving grounds for your life together as a couple." When one couple underwent counseling from sociologist Pepper Schwartz, Schwartz urged them to honestly unearth their sexual desires and fantasies in order to reveal the true source of their happiness, seeing that truth as the only solid foundation for a lasting marriage. The wedding itself was dubbed "the moment of truth," a test of whether the couples were devoted to "making it work." If they just stayed in it for the money, viewers were led to believe, then the marriage would not be based on the true bond of love and attraction—it was not a *true* marriage and thus it would fail.

The producers of *Married by America* provided an illusion of privacy to suggest that these couples' commitment *could* be authentic, if the individuals had "what it takes." At the same time, the publicity of each coupling satisfied a public interest in married couples' interactions. The show portrayed each relationship as private to the extent that each couple had its own domestic space in which to enact its couple-hood dramas, even though the show was clearly a public affair. Cameras ran constantly—prime time

viewers could watch individuals make advances and be rebuffed, watch couples fight and have sex; on occasion, a person ran to the bathroom for escape from the camera's panoptic eye. The show's judges occasionally confronted couples about intimate moments they saw in the videotapes, further disrupting the illusion of privacy. Nevertheless, each couple's drama was edited to look as much like a private affair as possible.

The couples seemed authentic to the extent that they followed a marriage script, which well-disciplined individuals should follow as if by instinct. This script was most readily apparent when we look at the gender roles advocated by the show's editors and producers in their assembling the footage into a story for viewers to follow. We see this script, for instance, when the five couples began their journey to the resort. As all of the brides-to-be waited outside of their hotel, each was picked up by her prospective groom in a sport-utility vehicle. In all but one case the man loaded up the luggage, opened and shut the car door for his fiancée and drove her to the estate. Kevin and Jill, the one couple where the woman drove, were the brunt of jokes upon their arrival.

As the show continued, the intensity and importance of naturalized sex difference increased and the scripts became more significant. For example, Denise and Stephen (the third couple to be eliminated) could not seem to "find the chemistry and passion" in their relationship. Denise told Stephen he seemed gay because he did not want to kiss her, and she expressed worry that he must think that she needed to lose 30 pounds. Stephen claimed to find Denise attractive, but told America that he was turned off by her desire to initiate affection. Alone in front of the camera Stephen confessed:

> I'm the type of guy that likes to do the chasing, and I like Denise to do the running. If she would have just relaxed and put her head down on my chest then, um, I would have perhaps kissed her, it would have felt more comfortable (3/24/03).

While gendered expectations of masculine pursuit (and feminine flight!) felt to Stephen like his own natural desires, such expectations become even more pronounced when another couple, Kevin and Jill (one of the final two pairs), discussed Jill's past modeling for *Playboy* magazine. Kevin erroneously assumed that Jill would willingly give up nude modeling once they were married:

> I just feel that now that I am engaged to her and now that I am going to be marrying this woman, I don't want her to be seen in a magazine again. I don't want her body open to everyone else; that is how I feel (3/30/03).

Kevin saw his desires to control his fiancée's body as his own personal taste, and similarly, his fellow finalist Tony worried that his fiancée Billie Jean might not be "wife material" because of her wild, "party girl" behavior.

In all of these examples—the three most promising couples by the show's logic—men understood their gendered expectations as individual proclivities rather than systematic, socially pervasive examples of the power of men over women in marriage. Although heavily scripted in American culture (and perhaps even by the show's producers), the last three men to survive the cut all represented their desire to chase, lead, control and have sole access to the bodies of "their" women as their own personal feeling and preference.

Interestingly enough, lacking this expectation may have been what led to the failure of the first couple eliminated, Matt and Cortéz, to make the cut. In the ride to the ranch, Matt himself observed that the show's producers assumed that the men would do the driving, and offered to let Cortéz drive. When Cortéz later said she preferred a man who was more dominant and controlling, Matt said he thought that sounded "messed up." No "chemistry" formed between them, and the couple was first to be eliminated—and viewers never again got to hear Matt's egalitarian critique of the show. Likewise, when another woman took charge of her situation, rebuffed her fiancé's sexual advances in their first few nights together and asked him to sleep on the couch, one of the judges called her frigid and the couple was the second to be eliminated.

Given the disadvantages three remaining women (Billie Jean, Denise, and Jill, respective fiancées of Tony, Stephen, and Kevin) might face with the marriages into which they were about to enter, why would they be excited to lose their individuality, the freedom to initiate sex, and control over their own bodies? On *Married by America,* the possible disadvantages of entering into marriage were outweighed by their sense of fulfilling a life-long dream. Finalists Billie Jean and Jill enacted a script they had studied their entire lives as they prepared for their upcoming wedding ceremony, and each expressed elation at experiencing "every girl's dream." In speaking alone to the camera about trying on wedding gowns, Billie Jean expressed this childhood excitement, "It just felt like a Cinderella story right in front of my face. I felt so beautiful. I felt like a princess. I can't wait! This is going to be the happiest day of my life. I swear to God" (4/7/03). Likewise, Jill expected a "storybook ending. . . this is the happiest ending ever. I have found the guy. I fell in love. I have everything that I have ever wanted" (4/7/03). Both women's dispositions were socially scripted; unlike the men, they recognized the script and saw it as good. In spite of Tony's reservations and distance, and in spite of the heated arguments between him and Billie Jean, the latter still remained convinced of the script's magic,

convinced that enacting the script would transform her life and her relationship with Tony into a fairy tale. Similarly, Jill expressed reservations about Kevin's conservatism and close ties to his conservative family, but still saw marriage to him as a "storybook ending." The script contained its own bribes, differing for men and women, which were more real than the prize money.

It is this recognition that makes the marriage script work differently for women than for men. For a woman, to recognize the marriage script's work in her life did not threaten its power so long as she complied anyway. In the show's logic, for a man to recognize the script proved more threatening to marriage ideology, since this recognition itself meant an abdication of power. The gender egalitarian Matt failed, ever so slightly, to follow his script and his relationship to Cortéz never got off the ground. His failure reinforced the marriage script—refusing to be controlling, refusing to let Cortéz unquestioningly follow his lead—meant that there could be no relationship. This dramatization of American marriage ideology provided scripts for people to "freely choose," while obscuring alternatives (such as gender equality or a happy and complete unmarried life), and portraying those who challenge it as failures (by immediately removing them from the program).

While Jill, the *Playboy* model, expressed belief in the storybook ending, the tensions between her refusal to repudiate nude modeling and her desire to marry Kevin still needed to be resolved, even as they made the walk to the altar. She resolved them, in fact, by refusing to marry him, remarking that she loved him too much and that marriage was too serious for them to rush into, and asking him to try to make the relationship work on their own, without the prize money bribe, outside of the show's contrived and rushed context. In resolving their own tension, she thus resolved the tension the show created, the anxiety that the American ideal of private, individual marital choice might not be any better than a public, television-arranged marriage after all.

This is the crux of the illusion of choice: one's ability to choose her or his marital partner creates the illusion that participation in the institution of marriage as a whole is a personal choice, when in fact these dispositions are linked to state policies and social structure by the disciplining of gender/marriage scripts. The illusion of personal choice is shattered in President Bush's welfare reform proposal. We see the material underpinnings of the American ideal at work where they fail. When the ideology of Americans' economic self-sufficiency does not match the reality of high poverty rates and unemployment, we see what family historians might predict, that marriage is not always the most rational choice a person or couple can make. Welfare policies that seek to promote matrimony rely

on American marriage ideology as a guide, seeing marriage not as an effect of certain economic conditions, but as the solution to a flagging economy.

3. MARITAL DISCIPLINE AS STATE POLICY

Looking at the narratives at work in a dramatization of the American marriage ideal helps us to see what narratives are at work in government policy. Again, we see marriage ideology in the combination of scripts and bribes, but while the Bush administration's welfare policy disrupts the illusion of free choice with respect to marriage, it works to make poverty itself seem to be a matter of free choice. In the early 2000s, the Bush administration's increased military spending combined with tax cuts resulted in a $304 billion deficit forecast for 2004 (*Times Union* 2003). In an effort to respond to the budget crisis, Bush decreased state funding for the poor, posited marriage as the solution to the problems associated with poverty, and earmarked $300 million of his budget for state-implemented marriage promotion programs (Bush 2002). The $300 million per year he earmarked for state-led marriage promotion programs would fund workshops for single Americans that "include pre-marital education and counseling, as well as research and technical assistance into promising approaches that work" (White House Office of Press Secretary 2003: 1). Bush invoked premarital counseling programs that address serious marital problems by "teach[ing] couples how to resolve conflict, to improve communication, and, most importantly, to treat each other with respect" (Bush 2002). The Department of Health and Human Services already channeled federal funding into what are called "Fatherhood Initiative Programs," and separate programs existed in some states to help single mothers find and keep husbands (Boo 2003).

These workshops and programs effectively provided participants with a particular marriage script. They would help individuals to work on themselves, so that single mothers and absent fathers would learn with state support what they had apparently not learned well enough by informal means: therapeutic techniques—explicit scripts—for marital discipline, which Bush coded as "self-restraint." In the speech, he expressed the hope that the poor and unmarried would undo what he posited as their ignorance and learn the rewards of ceasing to be poor and unmarried. He expressed hope that they would learn that it

> . . . is more rewarding to be a responsible citizen than a welfare client: it is better to be a breadwinner and respected by your family. . . . Too many families are strained and fragile and broken. Too many Americans still have not found work and the purpose it brings (Bush 2002).

According to the proposal, these problems could be solved by the discipline of marriage, so that ceasing to have these problems became an enticement to marriage. As Bush defined it, marital discipline included learning effective techniques in dealing with conflict, learning patience, and practicing self-sacrifice while enhancing independence.

Although these skills are certainly laudable, Bush placed hope in therapeutic techniques to solve the problem of poverty in America. Of course dual incomes and sharing childrearing responsibilities are likely to be advantages for any family, but the assumption that marriage can solve the problems of poverty is rooted in a vague sense of hope rather than experience. For example, Boo (2003) writes about a state-sponsored marriage class for welfare recipients in Oklahoma City, where women were taught to begin sentences with statements such as "I hear you saying. . ." to help keep arguments from getting out of hand. The rare woman who found a potential husband discovered that, on $250 per week, he was less concerned with marrying than with taking care of his son and keeping the car he needed to do his job from being repossessed. The marriage class encouraged women to learn the American marriage script, to learn communication skills and to understand the state's calculus that two paychecks were better than one, but the teacher of the class mourned that few men were available to help enact the state's pro-marriage policy. Even so, the ideology of marriage made it seem credible that following the marriage script should result in certain benefits.

The promise of a better life served as a bribe to marry. A bribe is an incentive held out to entice someone to make a certain choice; by offering enticements, Bush effectively created the illusion of free choice, that by accepting the bribe and choosing to follow the marriage scripts he offered, poor people could choose not too be poor anymore. A second bribe held out to entice poor people to marry was the hope of more successful children. In his 2002 budget, he proposed "strengthening families" to help raise richer, more stable and more successful kids. In a speech in February, 2002, he tacitly invoked the work of sociologists such as Popenoe, Waite, and McLanahan and Sandefur in his argument for increased state-sponsorship of marriage, remarking:

> Statistics tell us that children from two parent families are less likely to end up in poverty, drop out of school, become addicted to drugs, have a child out of wedlock, suffer abuse or become a violent criminal and end up in prison (Bush 2002).

Assuming that childhood outcomes and wealth are simply functions of marital status and obscuring the fact that the overall differences among children from one- or two-parent families are not absolute and that most

children do have satisfactory outcomes (Furstenberg and Cherlin 1991; Hetherington and Kelly 2002; McLanahan and Sandefur 1994), he used the promise of successful children entice poor people to marry and resolved to "give unprecedented support to strengthening marriages." Again, Bush created the illusion of personal choice, assuming: (1) that staying married is always simply a matter of personal commitment, (2) that children of unhappy marriages are always better off than children in one-parent families (see Amato et al. 1995; Stacey 1997 for critiques of this perspective), (3) that poverty will always be alleviated, rather than exacerbated, by couples staying married, and (4) that only family structure affects children's outcomes, and not effective schools, accessible healthcare, and meaningful job opportunities. Masking all of these assumptions and preventing people from questioning them, Bush's plan posited both exiting poverty and raising better children as bribes for individuals to choose to follow his approved marriage scripts.

These scripts operate as a mode of power to entice individuals to work with the state in administering the population, to make economic conditions for individuals and the nation both seem to be matters of individual free choice rather than state policy. Bush could posit marital discipline as the solution to the nation's economic crisis through the discourse of "compassionate conservatism," which helped to obscure the ideology of American marriage at work not only at the individual level, but also at the national level. In the February 2002 address, he offered each of his fellow Americans the opportunity to "be a soldier in the armies of compassion. . . to make America a hopeful and strong and decent country for all of us." This discourse subtly released the state from its social responsibility by positing the helpful neighbor model: "In times of personal crisis, people do not need the rules of a bureaucracy; they need the help of a neighbor" (Bush 2002). The helpful neighbor stood in the place of state assistance, as Bush posited scaled-back state assistance as "a compassionate welfare system that knows the true strength of country lies in the hearts and souls of our fellow citizens" (Bush 2002). This romantic language helped to obscure alternative analyses, such as the view that state assistance itself is the mark of a compassionate, strong and functioning society.

Bush's own speech reveals the fact that free choice is an illusion when it comes to marriage. Positing single mothers as "heroes" in the face of men's irresponsibility, he sought to strike a chord with the more feminist-leaning public, while solidly blaming poor men for the nation's poverty. He invoked Sherrie Jordan, "a mother of four and former welfare recipient," overwhelmed with her own sense of possibility, earning the respect of her fellow citizens and her nation through work. Bush effectively conceded that Jordan was not responsible for her unmarried status. Yet the burden of

meeting the state's requirements falls disproportionately on women like her, as the pool of "marriageable men" in many poor communities dwindles due to disproportionate rates of death and illness, incarceration, and unemployment (Wilson 1987).

Why would Americans answer the Bush administration's call to imagine marriage as the solution to the problem of poverty? Marriage ideology perpetuates the illusion of individual choice and empowerment while obscuring alternative arrangements which might better serve Americans' needs. Bush's welfare proposal addressed the situation where the scripts which discipline people of means—such as the contestants on *Married by America*—failed to work on those without means, to whom marriage was not necessarily a feasible or rational choice. With its explicit deal, however, Bush's policy offered the promise, in the words of one of the women Boo (2003: 106) observed, of "a healthy, wealthy, normal-lady life", in exchange for behaving like those with more resources—as if behavior creates resources and not vice versa.

When President Bush announced his welfare reform proposal in 2002, he effectively blamed the poor for the federal budget deficit as well as their own poverty when their social and economic conditions, some of which were direct effects of state policy, prevented them from marrying. Bush made unmarried poor people into scapegoats, positing their main problem as a lack of appropriate marriage skills. His welfare policy sought to coerce people to marry by using federal funds to pay for required marriage skills courses.

The Bush administration's welfare policy scandalized many liberals, and a large part of what people found offensive was the self-consciousness of the bribe, using money to entice welfare clients to marry. On *Married by America,* the prize money threatened the illusion of free choice and the sense of "truth" behind marriage, but in Bush's proposal this kind of truth was deemed irrelevant. Although the truth of marriage is offered to poor people as sacrifice and discipline, in its televised ideal the authenticity of the marital bond was seen to rest within the specific couples' commitment to ignoring the prize money and learning how to love. In either case, both definitions (Swidler 2001) serve the ideology of American marriage and effectively blame individuals for the failings of both the institution and society.

4. PERSONAL SECURITY, NATIONAL SECURITY

These two examples may seem at first unrelated, but we find their comparison instructive. Both show how the American marriage ideal works ideologically to mask alternative social arrangements. In *Married by*

America, gendered marriage scripts, with their implicit bribes, were internalized, so contestants seemed free to choose whether to marry. In the case of welfare policy, when economic conditions could make marriage a less viable option, explicit incentives were offered to bribe (and coerce) people to follow marriage scripts, creating the illusion that leaving poverty was a matter of free choice.

While in the American ideal marriage seems rooted in the truth of individuals' feelings, *Married by America* gave the viewing/voting public the opportunity to exercise its own individual choices, while catering to the public's supposed desire to find hope in apparently ideal marriages. By giving viewers the opportunity to cast votes as to which couple should marry, Fox infused *Married by America* voters with a sense that they would change individuals' lives with their votes. Giving directions to the viewers, the host explained:

> The final vote is in your hands. Over the past weeks you have seen two relationships grow and change. Based on everything you have witnessed you must decide which of these two couples has the potential to form a lasting marriage. . . . Your votes will decide their fate tonight. . . . The future of these couples is once again in your hands. Your votes could change their lives forever (4/7/03).

But in the end, the viewing public was assured that its votes could not determine something so personal as a marriage. In each of the two final couples an individual called it off, thus saving the American marriage ideal's image of personal choice. The "experiment in arranged marriage" failed, thus affirming the correctness of American-style marriage.

In this dramatization of the American marriage ideal, we learn that marriage "really is" a matter of personal choice, as well-disciplined Americans freely choose their partners. With such an ideal in place, we can see how the President's placing responsibility for the United States fiscal crisis not on state and corporate policies and practices, but on the potentially-married person, can seem compassionate rather than coercive. It offers the illusion that individuals can choose to exit poverty at will just as freely as they would chose a marital partner. It is when the illusion of personal choice is disrupted that the state must resort to a financial bribe. The financial incentive seems to encourage particular choices, but it also reveals the economic structure behind marriage.

Bush's welfare policy skillfully masks alternatives. It masks alternative ways to address the fiscal crisis, such as increasing state revenue through a more progressive tax structure, or dismantling components of the American economic system for which poverty is both inevitable and essential. Poor individuals are bribed to take on responsibility themselves for their own

poverty and relative lack of options and opportunities. Not only does this program mask alternatives to solving the state fiscal crisis and poverty in general, it also masks alternative family arrangements. Marriage, with the backing of the state, emerges as the one moral and effective way to organize intimacy. It renders unthinkable alternatives such as community parenting, or parenting and family structures not organized by sexual desires between men and women, and the like—even if, as some have argued, these alternatives might avoid the problems of isolation and gender hierarchy fostered by traditional marriage arrangements (Barrett and McIntosh 1990 [1982]; Nardi 1999; Stacey 1991; Weston 1991).

Marriage offers a zone of personal security and ensures that people will not have to live alone. Marriage also offers a zone of national security, assuring Americans that if the nation gets married we will protect ourselves by regulating the population and distancing ourselves from dangers associated with poverty. Bush offered marriage as a magical solution to economic inequality, crime, addiction and other economic and social problems that are actually built into the American economic system. The Fox television network and President Bush both construct marriage as a national, public contract while at the same time fostering the American belief in marriage as a private, intimate, and sacred bond between a man and a woman. The slippage between these two simultaneous definitions of marriage allow it to perpetually seem both an individual freedom and a social necessity. You have to do it even if you don't want to, but who wouldn't want to?

By juxtaposing two enactments of marriage ideology as they were presented to the American public, we have examined tensions inherent in current American notions of the marriage ideal. For instance, in both cases we see the tension between marriage as an economic arrangement versus marriage as rooted in the truth of feelings and the tension between marriage as self-denial versus self-actualization (Swidler 2001). These tensions structure both the American ideal of marriage and the way it is packaged into a program for disciplining the poor (Hays 2003). We have examined how marriage disciplines people to follow its gendered and class scripts with bribes that make it seem a matter of individual choice. In doing so, we have shown how the notion of individual choice itself secures both the institution of marriage and conservative economic policy, giving people an incentive to take individual responsibility for the nation's economic problems.

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ENDNOTES

1. Roundtable discussion, Rocco C. and Marion S. Siciliano Forum on Fragile Families and the Marriage Agenda, University of Utah, October 2003.
2. Note that to "represent" non-marital sexuality in this sense is not the same as to "practice" it. People less subject to scrutiny may practice non-marital sexuality relatively safe from the public eye, without anyone deeming it necessary to make an issue of it. Certain classes of vulnerable people, however, such as poor women of color, come to represent non-marital, un-American sexuality regardless of their beliefs or sex practices.
3. We see these scripts as creating what Foucault (1977, 1980) called disciplined subjects, as producing people socialized to comply with social norms as if these norms were natural, and thus to perpetuate the system of power.
4. We borrow the concept of the *bribe* from Halley (1993).

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Chapter 3

TEEN CHILDBEARING AND PUBLIC POLICY

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Abstract: Rates of teen pregnancy and childbearing in the United States have declined by almost one third since 1991, but the U.S. still far exceeds other developed countries, and teen mothers have become less and less likely to be married. It is increasingly well documented that early parenthood is related to a variety of adverse consequences, such as learning deficits for children, decreased educational attainment and employment of parents, lessened probability that parents will marry, and increased welfare dependency. This paper reviews and assesses the evidence linking early childbearing to adverse consequences, then concludes by describing public policy proposals to reduce teen pregnancy.

Key words: teen pregnancy, teen childbearing, policy, welfare dependency

1. INTRODUCTION

About 80 percent of teen pregnancies, defined as occurring between the ages of 15-19, and 60 percent of all pregnancies in the United States are unintended at conception (Alan Guttmacher Institute 1999; Henshaw 1998). When adolescent females give birth, approximately 80 percent are unmarried, compared to 34 percent of women of all ages (Ventura et al. 1999). Martial status is strongly related to pregnancy intentions and pregnancy outcomes; about three quarters of pregnancies that occurred in 1995 among married women resulted in live births, compared to less than half among unmarried women (Ventura et al. 1999).

In the United States, childbirth is the most common outcome of teen pregnancy. Fifty-seven percent of teen pregnancies result in live births, while 29 percent of teenage pregnancies are terminated via abortion. Just over 14 percent result in miscarriages (Henshaw 2003). Teen pregnancy can

be conceptualized as the sum of the following components:

TEEN PREGNANCY = MISCARRIAGES + ABORTIONS + LIVE BIRTHS

Pregnancies among adolescent females have been on the decline since they peaked in 1991, when they reached a high of 117 pregnancies for every 1000 females between the ages of 15-19 (Henshaw 2003). Since 1991 the U.S. teen pregnancy rate has dropped 31 percent, equaling 86 pregnancies per 1000 or 800,000 per year (Henshaw 2003). Parallel declines have occurred in both teen abortion and birth rates (see Figure 3-1).

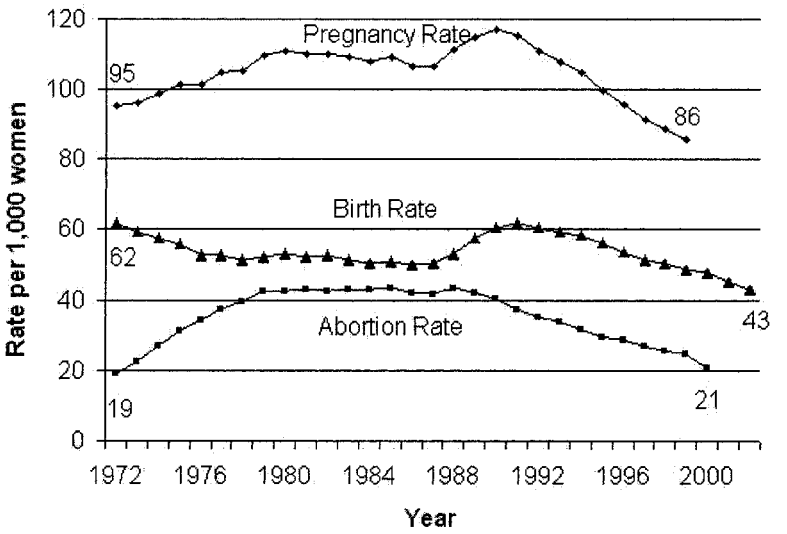

Figure 3-1. United States Pregnancy, Birth, and Abortion Rates.

Among developed counties, United States teen pregnancy and birth rates are among the highest in the world (Singh and Darroch 2000). In the Netherlands the teen pregnancy rate is very low (about 12 per 1000 females) and many other European countries have teen pregnancy rates under 40 per 1000 (Singh and Darroch 2000). For Australia, Canada, New Zealand and select additional European counties, the rates are moderate, between 40 and 69 per 1000. Of developed countries, only the Russian Federation along with its neighbors Belarus, Bulgaria and Romania compare to the United States (see Figure 3-2). These nations all have teenage pregnancy rates that exceed 69 per 1000 females.[1]

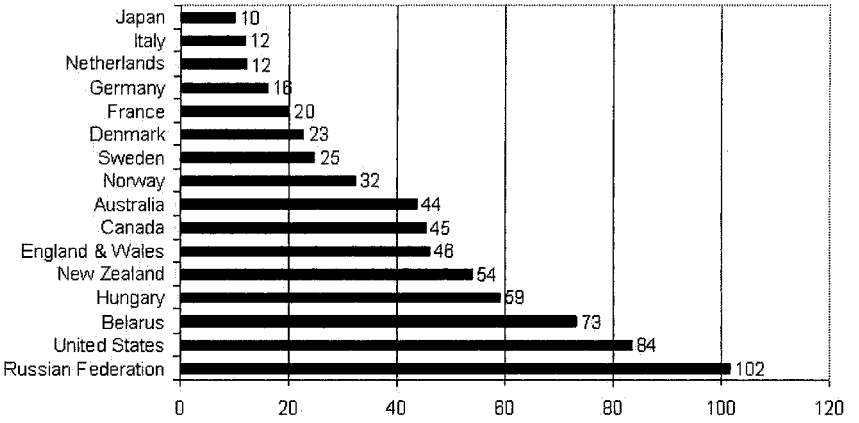

Figure 3-2. Teen Pregnancy for Selected Countries.

Many researchers have focused on the individual, family, and community characteristics believed to be related to having unprotected sexual intercourse and becoming pregnant or causing a teen pregnancy (Kirby 2001; Kirby and Ryan 2004; Miller et al. 2001, 2003). Teen females who are older, black or Latino, have poor grades, or lack educational plans are more likely to be sexually active and to neglect contraceptive use. Further, teens who were physically or sexually abused, have low religiosity, use controlled substances, or who display psychosocial deviance are at higher risk than others. At the family level, low parental education and income, living in a single parent home, lacking parental support or supervision, and having parents with permissive sexual values all have been associated with sexual activity and non-use of contraceptives. Permissive peer sexual values and low neighborhood SES are other notable risk factors. Adolescent females who exhibit or experience a greater number of these risk factors are more likely to experience early childbearing than those with fewer of these characteristics (Small and Luster 1994).

2. CONSEQUENCES OF TEEN CHILDBEARING

2.1 Teen mothers

Teen pregnancy and childbearing problems are compounded by the fact that many pregnant teens face the responsibilities of parenthood alone. As shown in Figure 3-3, rates of teen births to mothers who were not married increased dramatically, from 15 percent in 1960 to about 80 percent in 2000 (Ventura and Bachrach 2000). Teen mothers who have children outside of

marriage are at a greater disadvantage both before and after giving birth. Teens who come from poverty or low-income situations are more likely to be sexually active and less likely to use contraceptives (Miller et al. 2001). Low-income adolescents make up 38 percent of women ages 15-19, but they account for 73 percent of all pregnancies among 15-19 year olds. Nearly 60 percent of all teen mothers live in poverty at the time they give birth (Alan Guttmacher Institute 1994). Women who become pregnant as teenagers are also less likely to become married later on, compared to those who postpone childbirth (Bennett et al. 1995).

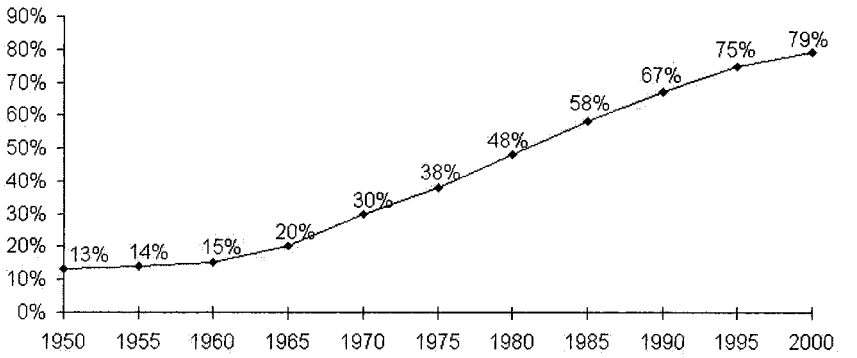

Figure 3-3. Percent of Non-Marital Teen Births in the U.S.

Single mothers of all ages have lower educational attainment. Teen mothers are less likely to obtain a high school diploma. Among teens that give birth, only 30 percent earned a diploma by the age of 30, compared to 85 percent of those who postponed childbirth (Hotz et al. 1997). Corresponding to their lower education, teen mothers have lower employment rates and significantly lower earning potential. Typically, earned wages of adolescent mothers account for only one-third of their total income; the remaining two-thirds comes from child support, extended family support, and public assistance (Garfinkel et al. 2002).

Adolescents who get pregnant also are at greater risk than older mothers for medical complications. Adolescent pregnancy has been linked to maternal weight gain, pregnancy-induced hypertension, anemia, and sexually transmitted diseases. In addition, teen mothers are more than twice as likely as adults to die of pregnancy-related complications (Committee on Adolescence 1999).

2.2 Children born to teenage mothers

Women who have unintended pregnancies are both less likely to receive prenatal care, and more likely to expose developing fetuses to harmful substances such as alcohol and tobacco (Brown and Eisenberg 1995). Because only about 20 percent of all teenage mothers intended to get pregnant (Henshaw 1998), their unplanned children suffer higher rates of infant death and lower birth weight than infants who were planned; they are also more likely to experience abuse and/or neglect, further compromising normal development (Brown and Eisenberg 1995).

Adolescent childbearing also affects the type and quality of care and nutrition received by young children. About 60 percent of older mothers, compared to only 38 percent of adolescent mothers, describe their children's health as "excellent" (Wolfe and Perozek 1997). Based on these figures, the children of adolescent mothers might be expected to spend more time in the care of a physician, but the opposite is true; children of adolescent mothers see a physician about half as often (2.3 versus 4.8 times a year) as children born to older parents (Wolfe and Perozek 1997). Factors such as motivation, peer support or influence, and community context are responsible for at least one third of this difference. In spite of their infrequent doctor visits, adolescent mothers spend 20 percent more for children's medical care than do adult mothers. Of the $3,700 in medical services spent annually per child by adolescent mothers, about one half comes from public assistance (Wolfe and Perozek 1997).

Children of adolescent mothers also are more likely to grow up in homes in which parents provide less emotional support and cognitive stimulation. Parental affection, books, games, and educational toys are less available, on average, especially in homes were the mother is working increased hours or the child's father is absent. Children born to younger teenage mothers score lower in cognitive tests of mathematics, reading recognition, and reading comprehension than children born to parents in their early twenties (Hotz et al. 1997), even after controlling for differences in mothers' socioeconomic backgrounds. When children of teenage mothers enter school, they are 70 percent less likely to be rated at the top of their class (Hotz et al. 1997). As school performance lags, perhaps in part due to lower levels of cognitive stimulation at young ages and inferior nutritional and emotional support, children of adolescent mothers are also more likely to drop out of high school than peers with older mothers (Haveman et al. 1997). Over half of this difference can be attributed to the effects of adolescent childbearing and closely related factors (Maynard 1997).

There are serious economic consequences to being raised by a teenage mother. Most teenage mothers are single when they give birth and are more likely to remain single well into their 30s. Single mother households have a median income of $18,000 per year, compared to over $50,000 per year for

two-parent families (McLanahan and Schwartz 2002). Family income is related to the type and quality of neighborhoods children live in, the schools they attend, and their frequency of moving. As they grow older, children of teenage mothers are at greater risk for running away from home (Moore et al. 1997) and sons born to teen mothers are more likely to spend time in prison (Grogger 1997). Children of teenage mothers also are more likely to become parents themselves before age 19, and are more likely to bear children out of wedlock compared to children born to older women.

2.3 Fathers involved with teen births

Almost two-thirds of fathers of children born to teenage mothers are over 20 (Elo et al. 1999; Landry and Forrest 1995). There is little other information available about adult males who father adolescent pregnancies.

The teenage males who father approximately one-third of adolescent pregnancies can be somewhat better described. Adolescent fathers are significantly over-represented in the blue-collar labor force and are under represented in white-collar occupations (Buchanan and Robbins 1990). These fathers are similar to teenage mothers in that they also tend to complete less schooling by age 27 as compared to those who waited to father children until 21. Studies have documented the early involvement in delinquent activities and/or illegal drug use by teenage fathers (Stouthamer-Loeber and Wei 1998; Thornberry et al. 1997). Over a span of 18 years following the birth of a first child during adolescence, young fathers earn about one-quarter less than men who delay fatherhood. More than half of this deficit can be directly attributed to early childbearing and related factors (Brien and Willis 1997).

Non-residential father involvement like physical interaction and regular financial support is important for positive child outcomes (Lamb 2002; McLanahan and Carlson 2002; Pleck 1997). On average, non-residential fathers earn wages sufficient to offset as much as 40-50 percent of welfare support to adolescent mothers and their children (Carlson and McLanahan 2002). Policy researchers have argued that establishing paternity, increasing support orders for qualifying families, setting fair awards, and enforcing collection of those awards would significantly reduce state obligations to poor families (Garfinkel et al. 1998). However, only about 15 percent of never-married teen mothers are awarded court-ordered child support, and most of those receive less than half of the amount awarded (Case et al. 2003). Teen fathers often are unable, rather than unwilling, to provide financial support for their children (Sorensen and Zibman 2001). Current calculations of support obligations fail to consider the demands of second

families, and poor fathers are more likely to be targets of support orders because their children are more likely to be involved in welfare dependency than children whose fathers are more financially secure (Garfinkel et al. 1998).

2.4 Consequences for society

Direct economic costs of adolescent childbearing are estimated at about $7 billion annually (Maynard 1997). Direct costs include welfare and food stamp benefits ($2.2 billion), medical expenses ($1.5 billion), loss of tax revenue ($1.3 billion), foster care ($0.9 billion), and incarceration expenses ($1 billion). If these costs were combined with other disadvantages faced by adolescent mothers, a total savings of between 13 and 19 billion dollars per year could be achieved if teenage childbearing were reduced.

Table 3-1. Consequences of Teen Parenthood in the United States.

Persons Affected	Consequences
Adolescent Mothers (Compared to older mothers)	
	1. Less likely to marry the father of their first child
	2. More likely to become divorced
	3. Twice as much time spent as a single parent prior to age 30
	4. More likely to drop out of school
	5. Less likely to earn a high school diploma
	6. Work more hours at a lower rate of pay
Adolescent Fathers (Compared to older fathers)	
	1. Less likely to earn a high school diploma
	2. More likely to work in a blue-collar occupation
	3. More likely to experience low earnings
	4. More likely to engage in delinquent and criminal behaviors
Children of Adolescent Parents (Compared to children of older parents)	
	1. More likely to be born premature and low birth weight
	2. More likely to experience serious medical conditions at birth
	3. Less likely to receive quality medical care and nutrition
	4. Less likely to receive emotional support and cognitive stimulation
	5. More likely to drop out of school
	6. More likely to become involved in delinquent and criminal behavior
	7. More likely to bear children out of wedlock
Society	
	1. Increased financial burden to taxpayers and extended families
	2. Additional strain on the resources of governmental programs

Beyond the economic loss to society, adolescent childbearing also strains the time, resources, and effectiveness of public programs. Controlling for various background factors, researchers estimate the combined direct and indirect cost of adolescent childbearing at approximately $21 billion per year

(Maynard 1997). These large public costs are partially responsible for generating a concerted public policy focus on reducing teen pregnancy. A summary of the major consequences of teen parenthood to mothers, fathers, children, and society is shown in Table 3-1.[2]

3. PUBLIC POLICY EFFORTS

How can public policy decrease the incidence of teen pregnancy and create healthier environments for children reared by adolescent mothers? Finding solutions for adolescent pregnancy is difficult, beginning with defining the problem itself. Consider this list of volatile issues: adolescent sexual intercourse, contraceptive use, pregnancy, abortion, adoption, and the rights of children versus those of parents. Paraphrasing a National Research Council report (Hayes 1987), some view the problem as early nonmarital sexual activity—if teens were not having intercourse they would not become pregnant; others argue that public programs should help sexually active teens avoid pregnancy by using contraceptives; others view the problem as early childbearing—suggesting that pregnant teens should be supported in choosing abortion; others view the problem as premature parenthood, suggesting the option of adoption. In short, the analysis and description of these issues, as well as prescriptions for altering social policies, are highly value-laden and controversial (Miller 1992). In spite of these challenges, the main focus here is to highlight current policy efforts and consider their efficacy to better inform policy-makers charged with distributing limited resources. Prevention and intervention efforts could be made at each decision crossroad (i.e., engaging in sex, using contraception, abortion, adoption, teen parenting). Figure 3-4 shows those key decision points.

3.1 Prevention policy

In a nation that emphasizes the importance of individual privacy rights and self-determination, the legislation of sexual behavior is approached reluctantly, even with youth. To complicate the issue further, the individual right to parent as one chooses has long been protected by legislation and there is a social expectation that government will not interfere with parenting unless children are at serious risk (Bogenschneider 2002). The Personal

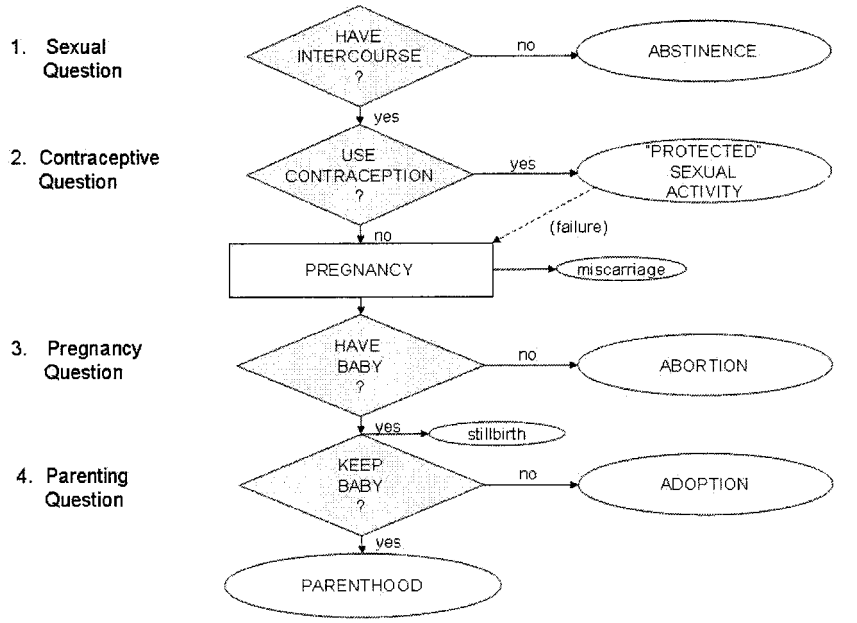

Figure 3-4. Major Issues and Turning Points in Teen Pregnancy and Childbearing.

Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (hereafter referred to as the 1996 welfare reform act) placed the responsibility of parenting squarely in the hands of parents (Bogenschneider 2002), allowing only very limited involvement of the government (especially to provide tangible support).

Further, public policy has limited influence on the overt behaviors of citizens and especially youth. It would seem, then, that resources should be placed where research has shown that public policy could make the greatest difference. Rigorous and objective policy analysis in this area is unfortunately very limited.

3.1.1 Sexual education

There have been three main approaches to presenting sexual and contraceptive information to adolescents: 1) abstinence-only, 2) abstinence-first, and 3) abstinence-plus.

3.1.1.1 Abstinence-only

Abstinence-only curricula teach teens that delaying sexual intercourse

until marriage is the only sure way to avoid unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. Alternative methods of avoiding these outcomes are not discussed and the costs of premature sex to self, family, friends, and society are highlighted. In 1981, the Adolescent Family Life Act (AFLA) was passed with a primary goal of decreasing the incidence of adolescent pregnancy. As part of that effort, $11 million dollars was allocated in 1981 for abstinence-only education (Kaiser Family Foundation 2002a). The 1996 welfare reform legislation continued emphasizing abstinence-only curricula (Brindis 2002), allocating $250 million over five years for block grants to states for abstinence programs. Despite the current political endorsement of abstinence-only curricula, research on its effectiveness has been inadequate. Kirby (2001) reported that only three rigorous evaluations have been conducted, and none found any impact on adolescent sexual behavior. Kirby further stated that not enough definitive research has been conducted to make a scientific judgment about the effectiveness of abstinence-only curricula.

3.1.1.2 Abstinence-first

Abstinence-first curricula emphasize the importance of teaching that sexual abstinence should be the first—but not necessarily the only—message about sex conveyed to teenagers. Although there has been little research on the efficacy of this approach, it amplifies the dialectic between parents, youth, and teen pregnancy prevention advocacy groups across the nation (National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy 2001). In a review of parental response to this issue, most parents favored an "abstinence as the best option" message that included the positive impacts of waiting. However, many teens and parents agreed that because half of high school-aged teens have had intercourse, a protective message for sexually active teens should emphasize the importance of contraceptive use for STD and pregnancy avoidance.

3.1.1.3 Abstinence-plus

In 2000, thirteen states required both abstinence and contraception education in their schools (Brindis 2002). This approach emphasizes both the importance of delaying sexual intercourse and the use of contraception to avoid pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. Rigorous evaluations (i.e., random assignment, large sample sizes, long-term follow-up) of school-based and community sex/HIV education programs based on these dual messages have shown statistically significant and programmatically important reductions in the frequency of sex, as well as increases in condom and contraceptive use, delays in sexual initiation, and decreases in

unprotected sex (Coyle et al. 1999; Jemmott et al. 1998). The findings are mixed, however, because some programs did increase condom or contraceptive use, but others did not. Also, the relationship between program participation and lower rates of teen pregnancy is not as strong (Kirby 2001). Finally, sex and HIV education programs do not significantly increase adolescent sexual activity, a concern that has made adolescent sex education programs controversial.

3.1.1.4 Family education programs

Kirby and Miller (2002) reviewed several approaches to increasing parent-child sexual communication (e.g., multi-session family programs, parent-only school orientation programs, school homework assignments, and college sexuality education). They concluded that the relationship between parent-child sexual communication and adolescent sexual behavior is more complex than a simple direct link, and that programming must address issues such as communication barriers, parent-child relationship quality, and parental values about adolescent sexuality. Additionally, they recommended that parent-child sexual communication might best be delivered as part of a comprehensive parent-child program.

3.1.1.5 Community education programs

Most community-wide approaches to teen pregnancy prevention are multifaceted (Kirby and Miller 2003). Evaluating such programs is difficult because the unit of analysis is often the community and not the individual. At the community level, media public service announcements (Doninger et al. 2001) increased condom availability (Kirby and Brown 1996; Polen and Freeborn 1995), and small-group workshops (Polen and Freeborn 1995) have shown success in reducing teen pregnancy. Multi-agency, community-wide collaboration showed promise in one community (Koo et al. 1994), although replication in another community did not produce significant results (Paine-Andrews et al. 1999). Community-wide education about abstinence or contraceptive use has not been reported to increase adolescent sexual activity (Kirby 2001). More intensive programs are more effective; however when programs end, the use of condoms and pregnancy rates return to pre-program levels (Kirby 2001).

3.1.2 Contraception availability

In 1970 the federal government enacted Title X of the Public Health Service Act, which required that a nationwide family planning services program be created and that clients of the program would be provided services regardless of age or marital status (Brindis et al. 2000). Federally-

funded family planning services are estimated to prevent 1.3 million unplanned pregnancies per year (Alan Guttmacher Institute 2002) or 20 million unwanted pregnancies over the last 20 years, nine million of which would have ended in abortion (Alan Guttmacher Institute 2000). For every dollar spent on family planning services, three dollars are saved in Medicare costs for pregnancy and newborn care (Alan Guttmacher Institute 2000). This figure does not take into account money spent on welfare and food stamp benefits, foster care, incarceration, and lost tax revenue.

Title X family planning programs are required to deliver needed services, such as contraceptives, gynecological treatment, HIV/STD tests, with a treatment focus on poor women (Alan Guttmacher Institute 2000). This is important in preventing adolescent pregnancy, because teenage females are more likely than older women to depend on publicly supplied contraceptives (Frost and Bolzan 1997). A nationwide study of government policies and teen sexual behaviors found that states with more family planning clinics per capita of teenage women also reported higher contraceptive use (Averett et al. 2002). Reductions in adolescent sexual activity or overall pregnancy rates have not been related to the provision of one-on-one health center consultations about sexual behavior, abstinence, and types of contraception, but increased condom and contraception use has been reported (Kirby 2001).

In 1981 Title X was amended to encourage family-of-origin participation in the contraception and abortion decisions of minors (Brindis 2002). Because of concerns regarding confidentiality in adolescent utilization of family planning services, states have struggled with requiring parental involvement. In a survey of Planned Parenthood clients, a little over half of adolescent females indicated that they would not seek reproductive services if parental notification were required (Reddy et al. 2002). Additionally, of those who indicated they would stop using family planning services, only one percent reported they would stop having sexual intercourse; almost 30 percent stated they would have unprotected sex. According to a telephone survey of youth regarding use of health care services, the most commonly sought confidential care is related to reproductive health (Klein et al. 1998).

3.1.3 Indirect prevention efforts

3.1.3.1 Family support and early intervention

Various family characteristics, including family structure (Lammers et al. 2000; Miller et al. 1997), parental education (Resnick et al. 1997; Steinmetz 1999), parental employment status (Miller and Moore 1990), poverty status (Harris and Marmer 1996), and quality of the parent-child relationship

(Boyer et al. 1999; Dittus and Jaccard 2000; Miller 2002) have been correlated with adolescent sexual behavior and pregnancy. Some general early intervention programs that did not specifically target reducing teen pregnancy have nevertheless demonstrated promising long-term results: in one case, after an intense, full-time preschool intervention, participants had significantly lower levels of early childbearing than those who did not participate (Campbell et al. 2002). Although expensive, more longitudinal studies designed to investigate the impact of such early intervention programs on adolescent childbearing are needed.

3.1.3.2 Youth development programs

A relatively recent approach to reducing teen pregnancy is through youth development programs that focus on a variety of activities such as service learning, academic achievement, and vocational training (Kirby 2001). These programs have shown promise, although more research is needed to determine why they are successful. Service learning and academic programs have shown success for the duration of participation (Allen et al. 1997; see Kirby 2001 for an extensive review). Kirby (2001) reported that vocational training efforts have not been adequately documented; additional study is needed to understand their impact on teen pregnancy. He hypothesized that providing opportunities for community service, increasing adolescents' attachment to school, increasing academic success, providing employment opportunities, increasing contact with caring adults, and providing supervised activities reduce the likelihood of teen pregnancy.

3.1.4 Comprehensive approaches

Based on his comprehensive review, Kirby (2001) concluded that middle and high school prevention programs should include:

a) Instructional techniques that encourage youth involvement in and attachment to school.
b) Sex education programs that address both pregnancy and STD/HIV.
c) Service-learning programs that incorporate community service and ongoing small group discussions.
d) School-based or school-linked clinics that focus on reproductive health and give clear messages about abstinence and use of contraception.
e) School condom availability programs. Theory-based programs that address the numerous antecedents and risk-factors that affect teen pregnancy and provide information about sexual behavior, consequences, and information about abstinence and access to contraception are likely to be the most effective in reducing teen pregnancy.

Kalmuss and colleagues (2003) also recently assessed the findings of many different types of programs dealing with adolescent pregnancy and made the following recommendations:

a) Intervention should begin earlier, targeting younger adolescents.
b) Programs need to be designed for minority teenagers. Because of early vaginal sex among black youth, and low contraceptive use among Hispanic teenagers, new models need to be developed that are geared specifically towards these groups and their needs.
c) Pregnancy interventions need to be systematically linked to other programs that deal with socioeconomic disadvantages, because research has linked economic disadvantage to an elevated risk of teenage pregnancy. Vocational, educational and counseling program partnerships could be formed focusing on the goal of decreasing teen pregnancy.
d) Because many youth lack the skills needed to practice safer sex, programs need to deal with the communication, negotiation, and refusal skills required for effective contraceptive use. Programs that deal only with the techniques of proper condom use might be ineffective because teens cannot emotionally or mentally envision themselves in these situations.
e) Programs need to more effectively address the influence of peers, social norms, and other pressures to have sex. Small intervention groups can become part of adolescents' social and friendship networks, reinforcing normative and behavioral changes long after the program has concluded.
f) Program planners should not assume that all sex is volitional. Current models fail to take into account that some proportion of early sexual activity is involuntary.
g) Program planners should not assume that sexual activity is limited to vaginal intercourse. Adolescents engaging in alternate forms of sexual activity need to be warned of the risks for sexually transmitted diseases associated with these practices, as well as how to protect themselves.
h) It should not be assumed that teenagers are motivated to prevent pregnancy. Many teenagers, especially those most at risk for pregnancy, are ambivalent when it comes to teen pregnancy, so they take few if any steps to avoid it. Programs need to focus more on these ambivalent feelings, which affect teens' motivations to delay sex or use contraception.

3.2 Intervention policy

3.2.1 Abortion policy and teen pregnancy

Since the passage of *Roe v. Wade* in 1973, the Supreme Court has made two major decisions regarding adolescent females' right to seek abortions (Kaiser Family Foundation 2002b). In July of 1976 the Court ruled that parents could not block their adolescent daughters' rights to an abortion. However, in 1983 the Court ruled that states could require parental notification for females under 18, as long as a judicial alternative existed for extreme cases.

The availability and cost of abortions varies greatly across the nation. In 2000, abortion providers were established in 13 percent of all U.S. counties, where 66 percent of women ages 15-44 resided (Alan Guttmacher Institute 2002). In 2001, an abortion at 10 weeks gestation cost an average of $372 (Henshaw and Finer 2003). The Kaiser Family Foundation (2002b) reported 32 states currently provide Medicaid funding for abortions that are life threatening, where conception occurred through rape, or in other extreme cases. A nationwide study comparing state level policies found that availability or cost of abortion was unrelated to adolescent sexual activity and contraceptive use (Averett et al. 2002).

In 2000, 19 percent of all abortions were to adolescent females (Alan Guttmacher Institute 2002), and approximately 30 percent of teen pregnancies ended in abortion (Henshaw 2003). Joyce and Kaestner (2001) found that teens living in a state with a 24-hour waiting period were more likely to seek out-of-state abortions than teens residing in neighboring states with a one-hour waiting period. Adolescent childbearing probably would be increased by abortion policy that included 1) mandatory waiting periods, 2) increased cost or less availability, and 3) mandatory parental notification. Although all of these would logically make obtaining abortion services more difficult, little evaluation of such policies has been conducted.

Of these policy issues, the most controversial is probably a minor's ability to obtain an abortion without parental consent or notification. According to the Alan Guttmacher Institute (2002), 43 states required consent of one or both parents before minors can receive abortions, although only 32 states are known to actively enforce the law. Brindis (2002) reported that in the early 1990s three quarters of teens under the age of 16 seeking abortion told at least one parent, regardless of state law. However, a little less than half of older minors (17-year-olds) discussed their abortions with a parent.

3.2.2 Adoption policy and teen pregnancy

It is estimated that less than 5 percent of adolescent pregnancies are

resolved through adoption (Miller and Coyl 2000). Choosing to place a child for adoption is more common among white adolescent females and those with higher educational expectations (Miller and Coyl 2000). Additionally, pregnant teens who have seen adoption modeled by friends or family are more likely to place their children for adoption (Namerow et al. 1993). Little research has been conducted on adoption policies and adolescents' decisions to place their children for adoption. Adolescents who wish to make an adoption plan are afforded the same treatment as adults making this decision (Hollinger 2000), even though their minor status does not allow them to enter into contracts or, in most cases, obtain an abortion without parental consent (Durcan and Appell 2001). Although this policy eases the placement of children born to adolescent parents, it does raise concerns about adolescent readiness to choose adoption. There is no added protection in current restoration policies for adolescent mothers who change their mind about the adoptive placement of their children (Durcan and Appell 2001).

3.2.3 Teen pregnancy and parenting: Improving their futures

3.2.3.1 Welfare reform

The 1996 welfare reform act contained several components specific to adolescent parents, and more recent amendments continue to address circumstances under which adolescent parents are able to collect monetary benefits (Grisham and Levin-Epstein 2003). Current provisions require adolescent parents to (1) attend secondary education or employment training at least 20 hours per week (with a limit of two years), (2) live in an approved setting (usually with family of origin or in an approved group home), and (3) to comply with education and residential regulations within 60 days of receiving benefits. Additionally, the time-limit clock that restricts cash benefits to five years does not start for adolescent parents until age 19.

The 1996 welfare reform act also advised states to make specific efforts to encourage marriage among unwed teen mothers, and to increase child support collection from absent fathers (Single-Rushton and Garfinkel 2002). Data about the results of these new welfare changes are mixed. If teens planned to marry or were in a committed relationship before the pregnancy occurred, the policy has been effective in offering incentives to help such couples take steps toward marriage (Carlson et al. 2002). On the other hand, if the pregnancy was the result of a friendship or casual relationship, the policy does little to encourage teens to marry (Carlson et al. 2002). Unwed mothers must establish paternity before child support can be ordered by the

court (Single-Rushton and Garfinkel 2002). However, after a baby is born most unwed teen mothers do very little to establish paternity, so the program has done little good for those who it was designed to help the most (McLanahan 1999). Recent research utilizing the 1997 and 2000 National Survey of Youth suggests that the 1996 policies directed toward teenage mothers did reduce the overall likelihood of welfare dependency (Acs and Koball 2003). Conversely, teenage mothers have been slightly more likely to live with their parents since 1996.

3.2.3.2 Reducing subsequent pregnancies

Although most would agree that second births (especially rapid ones) among adolescent mothers is a problem, this matter has received less attention than first adolescent pregnancies. It has been estimated that about one-fifth of annual births to adolescent mothers are second and higher order births (Martin et al. 2002). Klerman (2004), summarizing recent research, showed that teen mothers with lower educational expectations, live-in boyfriends or husbands, and those who had an intended first pregnancy are at higher risk for subsequent pregnancies. Klerman (2004) also outlined the negative consequences of second births (above and beyond initial adolescent childbearing) as including significantly larger decreases in economic self-sufficiency and educational attainment. Consequently, adolescent mothers who have subsequent children while still in their teens have increased demands for resources, with a decreased likelihood of increasing their earning power. There have been several approaches to reducing the likelihood of subsequent pregnancies, including home visits, family interventions, school interventions, and community-wide efforts (Klerman 2004). However, Klerman concluded that program evaluations to date need more methodological rigor before conclusions can be made about their effectiveness.

4. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Teen pregnancy rates in the United States, although declining, are still some of the highest in the developed world. Many individual, family, and community characteristics help explain higher levels of teen pregnancy in the U.S. Teen parenthood is problematic for both teens and their children, posing risks to their future growth and development. Society also pays heavy economic and social costs as a result of teen pregnancy and parenthood.

Public policy efforts have focused primarily on prevention before a pregnancy has occurred, as well as intervention afterward. These efforts

have met with some resistance on social, religious, and economic fronts. Prevention efforts in educating teens are somewhat successful in both decreasing sexual behavior and increasing contraceptive use. Intervention efforts have focused on both abortion and adoption. After teens decide to parent their children, intervention efforts have been implemented to assist teen parents through education designed to prevent second pregnancies and enhance job skills, as well as by encouraging marriage and providing economic assistance.

There are hundreds of programs designed to prevent and reduce teen pregnancy, a sampling of which have been discussed here. The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy (2004) recently published a comprehensive overview of teen pregnancy prevention initiatives, including abstracts of individual programs. This effort has been mobilized and sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) as a three-way partnership between the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, Advocates for Youth, and Child Trends. These organizations have been charged by the CDC to help identify and further develop programs that are evidence-based—what the CDC has termed "Putting What Works to Work." The publication is the result of their combined efforts toward an evidence-based public policy to reduce teen pregnancy. This CDC project should identify programs that will lead to sound public policy and make these programs better known and more accessible.

Aside from the combined effort described above, the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy has become the best known organization with a mission specifically focused on teen pregnancy prevention. The National Campaign's goal, stated in 1996, was to reduce teen pregnancy by one third by 2005. This goal is about to be realized, and to expire, suggesting another goal or set of goals that will provide future direction for the National Campaign. Their strategy for reducing teen pregnancy is broad and inclusive, as depicted in Figure 3-5. As shown there, the context of teen pregnancy prevention efforts (on the far left side of Figure 3-5) must: a) take into account diverse values about teen pregnancy; b) accept that it is an ideologically divisive issue; c) realize that it is not a narrow reproductive health issue, but rather that many sectors need to be involved; d) overcome the fact that there is some complacency and lack of understanding of the extent and seriousness of the problem; and e) deal with the situation that approaches to prevention must take place in a highly sexualized popular culture.

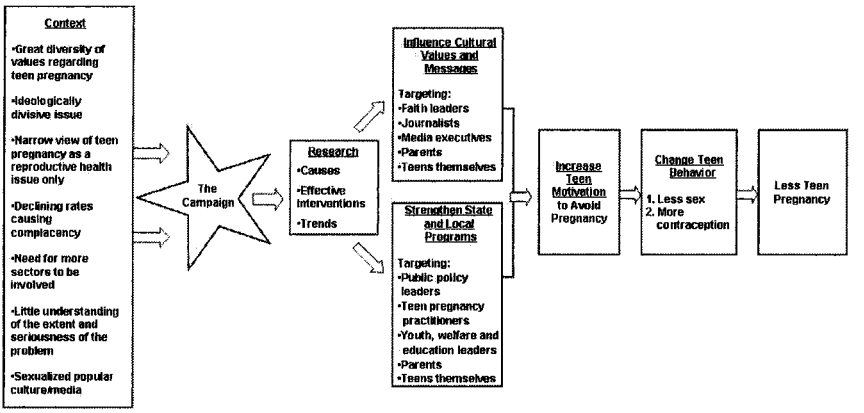

Figure 3-5. National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy Strategy.

The National Campaign strategy (http://teenpregnancy.org) is strongly grounded in scientific research to provide an empirical basis for understanding the issues. National Campaign research analyzes data on rates and trends, as well as assessing the evidence about the correlates and causes of teen pregnancy. This empirical approach also has provided assessments of the effectiveness of prevention and intervention programs. The resulting information has been used by the National Campaign in two ways, as shown in the middle of Figure 3-5. As shown at the top, research is used to provide the substance for cultural messages presented to religious, media, and family venues. As depicted in the bottom middle portion of the diagram, research also provides content for messages aimed at policy leaders and state and local program practitioners, as well as family and teen program participants.

Finally, all of these preliminary efforts and activities eventually have their effect on preventing teen pregnancy through teenagers themselves, who must have the motivation to avoid teen pregnancy through their own behaviors. Specifically, teen pregnancy can only be reduced through teens not having sexual intercourse, through their using contraception more effectively (using more effective methods more consistently), or through both of these behaviors.

Although the consequences of teen pregnancy and childbearing have been clearly outlined by research, the most effective public policy actions to address this problem remain somewhat uncertain. Public officials and program developers can partner with researchers to assess potential concerns in their communities that lead to teen pregnancies. More effective, empirically-driven programming and legislation can result from efforts in

education, family planning, and early interventions. The transition of responsibility for educating youth about sexuality has shifted from the private to the public sphere. Many communities now have the expectation that schools will provide adolescents with clear and truthful information about sexual behavior. Along with this expectation has come the impending question of who is responsible for teaching youth about decision-making related to sexual values. The new movement towards Abstinence First curricula certainly looks promising, especially when it is embedded in a community- or family-based approach. Family planning services should remain confidential and available for youth who seek them. About 85 percent of teen pregnancies occur among girls who were not using any method of contraception. Finally, although initially costly, early intervention strategies appear promising. As with all programming and legislative efforts, there continues to be a need for longitudinal impact assessments.

Practitioners and researchers also can collaborate in building comprehensive plans for community action and efficacy research. Peer-reviewed journals and other forums of research dissemination should make public policy evaluation a critical part of their agendas. Finally, organizations that fund teen pregnancy prevention and intervention programs and research should encourage the future pursuit of public policy assessment.

ENDNOTES

1. There are many potential reasons why teen birth rates in the United States are so much higher than in other developed countries. Although having a higher median income than most countries, the U.S. also has a greater percentage of residents living in poverty. This economic disadvantage is associated with risky sexual behavior, increasing the likelihood of teenage pregnancy and parenthood. Economic and racial explanations cannot account for the entire problem, however, because even among non-Hispanic white teenagers, the birthrate (36 per 1000) is still higher than most other developed countries (Alan Guttmacher Institute 2001).

   The association of public health care with the stigma of poverty might keep some U.S. teens from going to clinics for contraception or medical assistance. One-fifth of women in the United States have no health care coverage during their reproductive years. In comparison, most other developed countries provide health care for all. Public health care is considered a right, and therefore carries no stigma (Alan Guttmacher Institute 2001).

   In an Alan Guttmacher Institute comparison of the U.S. with other countries, contraceptive services elsewhere are woven into all aspects of health care, giving teens a stronger message about their importance. In the U.S., contraception is not a part of the health care system, not even among those privately insured. Confidentiality for teens is a

topic still hotly debated. As a result, teenagers in the United States are the least likely to use contraceptives, especially the most effective hormonal contraceptives. This lack of contraceptive use not only results in increased pregnancy, but also in an increase in sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). The U.S. has the highest levels of STD infections of all countries in the Alan Guttmacher Institute (2001) study.

Although teens in all countries have about the same frequency of sexual activity, teens in the U.S. have shorter relationships and more sexual partners. This leads to an increase in the spread of STDs as well as decreasing the likelihood of a frank discussion of contraceptive use.

The media in other countries uses messages about love and trust combined with humor to promote positive sexual messages. This counterbalances the sexually explicit images that bombard teens in advertising and entertainment. In the U.S. the prevention ads tend to be punitive in nature, only portraying the negative aspects of pregnancy and STDs, without promoting contraceptive use (Alan Guttmacher Institute 2001).

2. Although teenage childbearing generally has been viewed as a serious social and economic problem, some researchers believe the average effect of a teenage birth is negligible, and that natural variance among individuals negates "one size fits all" conclusions (Hoffman 1998). For example, Geronimus and Korenman (1992) compared sisters who had first births at different ages, and concluded that teenage births were not the cause of the mothers' educational and economic problems, but that preexisting family economic deficits were most likely a contributing factor for the births. Additionally, Hotz, McElroy, and Sanders (1997), comparing teenage mothers to females of similar ages who miscarried, found the former were actually better off financially by their mid- to late 20s than were the latter. Difference in education and welfare dependency were negligible. Negative effects on the children of teen mothers have also been questioned. Moore, Morrison, and Greene (1997) found children of teenage mothers to be no more at risk for depression, behavior problems, health problems, psychological well-being, or cognitive development than their later-born counterparts.

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Chapter 4

FRAGILE FAMILIES AND FAMILY LAW

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Abstract: Family law reforms concerning paternity, child support, illegitimacy, and domestic violence have helped fragile families over the past 50 years. Yet fragile families remain invisible to much of family law because historically lawmakers have focused on the problems of the middle and upper classes. Also, the law still enshrines some confining stereotypes, thus encouraging the poor to enter into unstable, dysfunctional relationships. Strengthening the culture of marriage in society and providing marriage skills training may help fragile families. This is the approach taken in a number of welfare reforms, including the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 and President Bush's marriage initiatives. Because the law performs channeling and expressive functions in addition to regulatory functions, these marriage initiatives may be judged a success insofar as they have changed the public discourse and raised concerns about marriage as a social good for the underprivileged. Finally, prevention may be more effective than cure when it comes to helping fragile families via the law.

Key words: fragile families, paternity, child support, illegitimacy, domestic violence, marriage initiatives, expressive functions of law

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper reviews four ways in which family law in the United States impacts fragile families. Part II examines family law reforms that have had or intended to have beneficial effects on fragile families. It reviews how family laws work in four specific areas of regulation: paternity, child support, illegitimacy, and domestic violence. Part III discusses how family law in the United States has failed fragile families. Fragile families are invisible to much of family law; historically our family law contained a dualism because lawmakers focused on the problems of the middle and

upper classes, while the family circumstances of the poor have not been well protected. In particular, the legal system has tacitly encouraged the poor to enter into unstable, dysfunctional lifestyles. Part IV suggests that strengthening the culture of marriage in society, and providing marriage skills training is one effective way to help fragile families. It reviews the marriage movement, discusses specifically the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, and describes key elements of President Bush's marriage initiatives. In Part V the regulatory functions of the law are distinguished from the social influence functions. Part V also reviews the success of the marriage initiatives in changing the public climate concerning marriage as a social good for all, including the underprivileged. Finally, Part VI concludes the paper with some general observations about the connections between family law and fragile families, suggesting that both instrumental regulatory approaches (a pound of cure) as well as broader legal approaches intended to create social influence (an ounce of prevention) are needed to help fragile families.

The balance of this introduction describes in general terms the current structure of the family law system in the United States of America. It also defines what "fragile families" means for purposes of this paper.

1.1 The family law system in America

This paper focuses on how fragile families are affected by the laws that regulate family relations in the United States (hereafter, "American family laws"). Most of these laws are state laws because the regulation of domestic relations is not one of the powers delegated to the national government in the U.S. Constitution. Regulation of domestic relations remains one of the residual areas of sovereignty delegated by the Constitution (particularly in the Tenth Amendment) to the states. Thus, the principle of federalism has influenced American family laws, including those that affect fragile families, by mandating the decentralization of the majority of family laws in the United States. In short, there is not one body of American family law. There are at least 50 bodies of state family laws that differ from each other in detail, substance, and procedure. Thus, there is inconsistency, variation and even direct conflict among the family laws of the 50 states.

The federal government does have authority that affects and sometimes preempts the family laws of the states. Fragile families are dealt with as a matter of poverty law, welfare law, and public benefits law. Those areas are dominated by Congressional statutes and federal agency regulations and rules. Most notably, federal welfare, tax, and bankruptcy laws frequently influence and interact with state family laws. Some provisions of the U.S. Constitution, or judicial doctrines based on the Constitution, also influence

and may even supercede state family laws. For instance, Fourteenth Amendment equal protection has overturned or required modification of most gender-based family laws. Thus, the constitutional delegation of specific powers to the national government, and the supremacy of the U.S. Constitution and the national laws enacted pursuant to the Constitution's specified powers, provide some constitutional boundaries for the state regulation of family law. They also provide some degree of uniformity in those areas of family law that are affected by areas of national regulation.

1.2 Defining "fragile families"

The term "fragile families" refers to families that are particularly vulnerable to poverty and related forms of social distress. The typical fragile family is incomplete or non-intact, and characterized by one-parent childrearing. Typically, fragile families lack fathers, which results in less paternal income, paternal influence, and paternal example. Often they are families where a father has never been present, because the child was born out of wedlock (The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study 2003).

Professor Sara S. McLanahan has been a leading voice in calling attention to the plight of fragile families. (Case et al. 2000; Garfinkel and McLanahan 1986; Harper and McLanahan 1999; McLanahan 1985, 1997, 1999; McLanahan and Bumpass 1988; McLanahan and Sandefur 1994). Formerly a single mother herself, she has stated: "When I first [began researching this issue] I wanted to demonstrate that single mothers could do just as good a job of raising children as married moms. Unfortunately, the evidence led me to somewhat different conclusions" (Myers 2000: 85). Her terse summary of the consequences of divorce for children is well-known: "Almost anything you can imagine not wanting to happen to your children is a consequence of divorce" (Magnet 1992: 43). She has noted that: "Mother-only families are . . . subjected to numerous . . . forms of economic and social instability, such as income loss, residential moves, and changes in employment and household composition. These disruptions—many of which are related to marital breakup—are a source of continued psychological stress and may lead to clinical depression in children as well as mothers (Garfinkel and McLanahan 1986: 11). She argues that "poverty and economic insecurity are a consequence of three factors: (1) the low earnings of single mothers; (2) the lack of child support from noncustodial fathers; and (3) the meager benefits provided by public assistance programs" (Garfinkel and McLanahan 1986: 11). Yet she also notes that the plight of children in fragile families cannot be explained in full by the absence of material support. The extent and quality of investment in children is lower

in fragile families, compared to intact families; as a result, "broader disorganization" is evident in the increased rates of crime, drug abuse and underemployment (McLanahan 1985: 873). McLanahan's work has shown that female-headed, low-income households are associated with economic deprivation and family stress (McLanahan 1985: 873). She has also highlighted the risks and struggles of stepparent families (Harper and McLanahan 1999).

2. HOW AMERICAN FAMILY LAWS TRY TO HELP FRAGILE FAMILIES

American family laws attempt to help fragile families in four major ways. First, they try to establish parentage. Second, they try to enforce child support obligations. Third, they seek to eliminate legal discrimination against children born out of wedlock. Fourth, they attempt to prevent violence against women.

2.1 Establish parentage

Parentage is not an issue for most children born in America because of two well established presumptions: (1) that the woman who gives birth to a child is the mother of that child; and (2) if she is married her husband is presumed to be the father of the child. Thus, in most cases, there is no dispute regarding maternity because the identity of the woman who gives birth is usually easy to establish. Although artificial reproductive technology is increasing the number of births in which traditional assumptions do not apply, in the overwhelming majority of cases the presumption of birth-maternity is still a reliable basis for establishing maternity.[1]

It is more difficult to establish paternity. Because one third of all children in the U.S. are now born out of wedlock (Fields and Casper 2001), the presumption that the husband of the woman who bears the child is the child's father only establishes paternity for about two-thirds of the children born. This is an area where the general presumptions of family law are of less benefit to fragile families.

At common law, the presumption of husband parentage used to be virtually irrefutable. For example, in *In re Findlay* the New York Court of Appeals rejected the application of the presumption that the offspring of a married woman is deemed to be the legitimate child of her husband in a case in which a woman left her husband in England, came with her lover to

America, and had three sons by him, all of whom he acknowledged. The lower courts held that these boys were presumed to be the legal children of the husband notwithstanding the unimpeached evidence to the contrary. The Court of Appeals reversed. Chief Justice Cardozo declared: "[T]he presumption is one of the strongest and most persuasive known to the law, and yet subject to the sway of reason. . . . The presumption does not consecrate as the truth the extravagantly improbable. . ." (*In re Findlay* 1930: 472-473). Today, the strength of this presumption varies from state to state. In some states the presumption of husband paternity is still very strong. For example, in *Michael H. v. Gerald D.*, the Supreme Court of the United States upheld a California statute that totally barred an adulterous neighbor from challenging the presumption that the husband of a married woman was "conclusively presumed" to be the legal parent of a child born to his wife, even though the scientific evidence clearly indicated that the neighbor, who had lived with the woman and the child for a time, was the biological father.[2] Many states, however, allow the presumption to be refuted by reliable scientific evidence of the husband's lack of paternity (usually DNA evidence).

A brief statistical overview shows the relative importance of establishing legal parentage. In 2000, 4,058,814 children were born in the United States of America, of whom 2,751,876 (68%) were born in wedlock (Martin et al. 2002: 2). Parentage of all children who were born to married parents was established by legal presumption—cases in which the presumption is contested are extremely rare. In 2001, there were approximately 270,000 paternity cases filed in 22 states, and approximately 80,000 paternity adjudications—thus approximately 30% of the paternity claims are successful (Ostrom 1994: 26, 2002: 35).[3] Extrapolating for all 50 states, there were approximately 650,000 paternity cases filed that year, of which about 200,000 were successfully adjudicated. In 1996, the most recent year for which data are available, there were 108,463 domestic adoptions, including 54,492 unrelated domestic adoptions. Of those unrelated domestic adoptions 23,537 were of newborn infants, representing 6.6 adoptions per 1,000 live births, or less than one percent of live births (Placek 1999: 27). Based on these data, it appears that maternity was established by the fact of birth for virtually all of the children born. Paternity was established for nearly 70% of them by legal presumption of birth and of being the husband of the woman who gave birth; paternity was established for approximately 5% of them by paternity adjudication; and parentage was established for approximately 1% of infants by adoption.

Establishing parentage is extremely important for several reasons. First, it provides a potential source of financial support and responsibility for the child. One writer noted:

> The dramatic proportion of U.S. children living in poverty and the escalating costs of governmental child support have led to a legislative crusade to find absent fathers. In 1991, 21.1% of all children in the United States were living in poverty. The statistics for children living in female-headed households were even more discouraging. In 1992, greater than half of the children living in single mother households lived in poverty. The economic picture for female-headed households of African-Americans was much worse, with 83.6% living in poverty in 1992. Child poverty is directly correlated to the rise in female-headed households over the last two decades. Between 1970 and 1990, the number of children living in mother-only households rose from 11% to 23%. The apparent dire situation facing many unwed mothers and their children has lead to a legislative outcry for higher rates of paternity establishment (Williams 1997: 261-262).

Another commentator noted that in the mid-1990s "89% of the families on welfare [were] headed by single women. In 1994, only 12.5% of welfare households headed by single parents received child support from their children's non-custodial parents," (Rotondo 1997: 292).

A second reason for establishing parentage is because it provides the opportunity for the development of a potentially crucial parent-child relationship. This relationship is critical, almost indispensable, for the healthy emotional development of children. The parent-child relationship also is important for the moral maturation of adults. Although the law increasingly allows non-parents who either act like parents or who have functioned *in loco parentis* to assert the same legal rights and claims as true legal (legally recognized biological and adoptive) parents, the likelihood that the parent-child bond will actually be developed increases when parentage is clearly established.

Paternity becomes a legal concern most often when public funds are tapped to support the child born out of wedlock. It is estimated that more than 70% of all legal paternity determinations in the United States come in proceedings to establish and collect child support obligations from fathers of children born out of wedlock (Nichols-Casebolt 1994; Williams 1997: 264). Mothers seeking federal welfare assistance are required to assist with state authorities in the determination of paternity except in unusual circumstances (Williams 1997).[4]

Federal law establishes requirements for establishment of paternity in both consensual and contested cases. States receiving federal welfare funds must follow these requirements, by facilitating the establishment of paternity in a simple and fair manner (Williams 1997: 265; see also Cesar 1995). Voluntary acknowledgement programs include both hospital-based programs

and programs run outside of hospitals. Hospital-based programs give the putative father an opportunity to voluntarily acknowledge paternity in the hospital at the time of the child's birth. The states also must establish procedures for voluntary acknowledgement of paternity outside the hospital. They must also create a presumption of paternity (irrefutable or conclusory) that is admissible as evidence of paternity, and that is sufficient grounds for a support order without further paternity proceedings (Williams 1997: 265-266). Furthermore, the Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement guidelines also set standards for contested paternity actions (see Williams 1997: 266-267).

2.2 Collect child support

Family law has been revised and strengthened to try to establish and recover child support, a vital issue for children born out of wedlock or experiencing parental divorce. Studies show that parents who no longer live with their children and have little contact with them are less likely to voluntarily support them adequately, if at all.

Federal involvement in child support essentially started in 1935, when Congress enacted Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). This program provided support to children in families not receiving support from an absent parent (Morgan 1999: 203; Saylor 2002: 92). In 1974, Congress required all AFDC recipients to assign their child support rights to the state and cooperate in the establishment and enforcement of support orders. State agencies were required to establish a parent locator service using IRS and Social Security information. Ten years later, Congress created what amounted to a national system with the Child Support Enforcement Amendments of 1984. This required each state to create guidelines on child support, as well as state commissions and specific enforcement procedures such as wage withholding (Estin 1998: 546-547; see also Saylor 2002: 92). Congress strengthened support laws in 1998 by setting federal standards for paternity, wage withholding, and by creating the U.S. Commission on Interstate Child Support (Saylor 2002: 92).

Although it is clear that much more child support is being collected today than before various federal overhauls, the overall success of the Child Support Guidelines is debatable. The number of public child support enforcement cases (to locate parents, establish paternity, and establish and enforce child support) increased from 5,432,000 in 1980 to 12,796,000 in 1990, to 19,419,000 in 1998. Collections were made in 2,064,000 AFDC and non-AFDC cases in 1990 and in 3,859,000 cases in 1998. However, the percentage of AFDC cases in which there was collection rose less than three percentage points, from 11% in 1980 to 14% in 1998, less than half the rate

of collection in private cases (29% in 1980 and 28% in 1998). Total amounts collected rose ten-fold, from $1,478,000,000 in 1980 to $14,348,000,000 in 1998, with collections merely quadrupling in AFDC cases, but rising 13-fold in non-AFDC cases (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001a, table 632). Thus, even the increased enforcement project designed to benefit both fragile families and the governments that support them seems to have resulted in much greater benefit to families not receiving AFDC. Child support is the primary method of support for nearly twice as many children than is public welfare. In 1997, 4,305,000 families were receiving child support, while 2,682,000 families were receiving public assistance (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2001b, table 602).

2.3 Eliminate discrimination against children born out of wedlock

Illegitimacy has largely been abolished as an operative legal classification. As far as child-protective and administrative policy are concerned, it is neither necessary nor desirable to categorize on the basis of legitimacy. Usually classification on the basis of paternity will achieve the same goals and purposes. However, statutes that penalize parents for not legitimating their children generally are not subject to the same degree of rigorous judicial scrutiny. All states allow children born out of wedlock, under conditions prescribed by the state of birth, to be legitimated by the father. Legitimating a child often creates the full parent-child relationship. All states have now enacted statutes providing that children born into marriages that for whatever reason are legally invalid are nevertheless legitimate. All states provide that the child is legitimated if the child's parents later marry and the father acknowledges the child. Some states provide a judicial process for legitimation (Nolan 1999; Wardle and Nolan 2002: 264-273).

The history of the abolition of illegitimacy goes back to 1968 when the Supreme Court decided *Levy v. Louisiana*, and *Glona v. American Guarantee and Liability Ins. Co.* Both cases involved a Louisiana wrongful death statute that provided that wrongful death actions could be brought by children for the death of their parents, and by parents for the death of their children. However, the statute did not include illegitimate children within the definition of "children." In *Levy*, five illegitimate children sought compensation for the wrongful death of their mother, and in *Glona*, the mother of an illegitimate child sought compensation for the wrongful death of her child. In both cases Louisiana courts upheld the statute and denied recovery. The Supreme Court reversed in both cases, and invalidated the laws. Justice Douglas wrote the opinion for the majority in *Levy*. He began

by emphasizing the personhood of illegitimate children: "We start from the premise that illegitimate children are not 'nonpersons.' They are humans, live, and have their being. They are clearly 'persons' within the meaning of the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment" (*Levy* 1968: 70). Applying a rational relation test he concluded that "it is invidious to discriminate against [illegitimate children] when no action, conduct, or demeanor of theirs is possibly relevant to the harm that was done the mother" (*Levy* 1968: 71). Denying wrongful death recovery to mothers of illegitimate children was equally irrational because it would be "far fetched to assume that women have illegitimate children so that they can be compensated in damages for their death" (*Levy* 1968: 71). Justice Harlan, joined by Justice Black and Justice Stewart, dissented. They argued that all wrongful death statutes are unavoidably arbitrary: an adulterous wife can recover for the death of her husband; a nonsupportive child can recover for the death of his parents; a loving couple who has raised an unadopted child cannot recover for the death of that child. For purposes of wrongful death, the dissenters viewed a biological relationship to be no more rational than the legal relationship of legitimacy (*Levy* 1968: 80).

Three years later the Supreme Court reached an apparently inconsistent conclusion in *Labine v. Vincent.* That case involved a Louisiana law that provided that legitimate children could inherit from their parents. Naturalized or acknowledged children could only inherit under a will. However, illegitimate children could not inherit by will or intestate succession. In *Labine*, a child who had been born out of wedlock, but acknowledged before a notary by her parents, petitioned to be appointed administrator of her father's estate. Her father had died intestate and had declared his daughter his only heir. Justice Black wrote the majority opinion upholding the law. He emphasized federalism: "The power to make rules to establish, protect, and strengthen family life as well as to regulate the disposition of property left in Louisiana by a man dying there is committed by the Constitution of United States and the people of Louisiana to the legislature of that state" (*Labine* 1971: 538). Although discrimination against illegitimates seemed unfair, the statute also discriminated against concubines as opposed to wives and collateral relations as opposed to ascending and descending relations. The task of drawing arbitrary lines, the Court concluded, was best left to the states. Justice Brennan, joined by Justices Douglas, White, and Marshall, dissented. They would not "uphold the untenable and discredited moral prejudice of bygone centuries which vindictively punished not only the illegitimate's parents, but also the helpless and innocent children" (*Labine* 1971: 541).

A year later, in *Weber v. Aetna Casualty Insurance Co.*, the Court distinguished *Labine. Weber* involved a Louisiana Worker's Compensation

scheme that gave preference in recovery of worker's compensation benefits to legitimate and statutorily acknowledged illegitimate children. Unacknowledged children were entitled to recover only to the extent that the claims of the preferred claimants did not exhaust the fund. Louisiana law did not permit a married man to acknowledge his children born to another woman. The decedent in *Weber* was married, but was not living with his wife (who was committed to a mental hospital). Living in his home were his four legitimate children and one unacknowledged illegitimate child of the woman with whom he was living—this woman bore the decedent another illegitimate child posthumously. When the man died in an industrial accident, the unacknowledged children received nothing because the four legitimate children exhausted the worker's compensation benefits. On appeal, the Supreme Court held the Louisiana statute unconstitutional. Justice Powell, writing for the majority, distinguished *Labine*. The Court held that in *Labine* the deceased father could have simply insured that his illegitimate children would receive some of his estate by making a will or marrying their mother. In this case, the deceased could neither marry the mother of the illegitimate children nor legally acknowledge them under the Louisiana statute. Powell further declared:

> The status of illegitimacy has expressed through the ages society's condemnation of irresponsible liaisons beyond the bonds of marriage. But visiting this condemnation on the head of the infant is illogical and unjust. Moreover, imposing disability on the illegitimate child is contrary to the basic concept of our system. The legal burdens should bear some relationship to individual responsibility or wrongdoing. Obviously, no child is responsible for his birth and penalizing the illegitimate child is an ineffectual—as well as an unjust—way of deterring the parent (*Weber* 1972: 175).

Justice Rehnquist dissented. He argued that, in deference to federalism, the Supreme Court should not scrutinize too rigorously state legislation dealing with such matters as recovery of the death of injured workers, intestate succession, and so forth (*Weber* 1972: 184).

Gomez v. Perez involved a Texas law that extended the right of paternal support to legitimate children but denied that right to illegitimate children. In a *per curiam* opinion, the Supreme Court held that the Texas law violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment: "[A] State may not invidiously discriminate against illegitimate children by denying them substantial benefits accorded to children generally" (*Gomez* 1973: 538).

In 1978, in *Lalli v. Lalli* the Supreme Court upheld a New York intestacy law that denied recovery to an acknowledged illegitimate child. The law allowed recovery to illegitimate children only if they had obtained a judicial

determination of paternity during the lifetime of the man from whom they claimed inheritance. The state's interests in credible evidence of paternity and in prompt and certain settlement of estates justified the additional requirements applied only to children born out of wedlock.

In *Parham v. Hughes* the Court upheld a Georgia statute that denied the father of an illegitimate child a wrongful death claim. Justice Stewart authored a plurality opinion for himself, Chief Justice Burger, and Justices Rehnquist and Stevens. The Georgia statute did not discriminate against illegitimate children, but penalized fathers who refused to legitimate their offspring. The difference in statutory treatment between unwed mothers and unwed fathers was justified by the difference in their circumstances: unwed mothers are easily identifiable, but there is always a question of proof in establishing the paternity of an illegitimate child. *Glona* was distinguished because the Louisiana statute in that case excluded every mother of an illegitimate child, while the Georgia statute excludes only fathers who have not legitimated their children born out of wedlock. The fathers could legitimate unilaterally. Justice Powell concurred in the judgment, emphasizing that the gender distinction was justifiable because of the difference in proof of paternity and maternity. Justice White dissented, as did Brennan, Marshall, and Blackmun. They believed the statute went further than necessary to achieve the purpose of avoiding problems of proof; in the case at bar, paternity was undisputed. The presumption that the father of a child born out of wedlock will not suffer any loss by the child's death was too sweeping.

The latest two cases were heard in 1998 and 2001. The Supreme Court upheld, on a strong deference-to-Congress grounds, an immigration law that made illegitimate children born to U.S. mothers abroad citizens upon birth, but required illegitimate children born to U.S. fathers to apply for citizenship before majority (*Miller v. Albright* 1998; *Nguyen and Boulais v. Immigration and Naturalization Service* 2001). Thus, for most practical purposes, discrimination against children born out of wedlock has been abolished.

2.4 Prevent and punish domestic violence

Almost all legal systems are intended to do at least two things: (1) enforce financial obligations; and (2) prevent and punish physical violence. Because of increasing awareness of the scope and severity of domestic violence, laws focused on its prevention and punishment have greatly increased in the past twenty years. All states have criminalized domestic violence (Moskowitz 1998: 106-107), all states provide simple proceedings for victims to obtain civil protection (protective orders) (O'Connor 1999: 966), all states take domestic violence into account in various civil

proceedings (such as child custody determinations) (Weiner 2000: footnote 595), and most states have attempted to disarm domestic violence abusers (Nathan 2002: 833).

The term "domestic violence" is commonly used in the United States to refer to "violence occurring in relationships between current or former partners" (Holland 2002; Rivera 1997-98: footnote 3). Domestic violence involves a continuum of behaviors ranging from degrading remarks to economic exploitation, from beating to sexual abuse, from threats to homicide (Hart 1998; Wheeler 2002: 561). There is no standard definition of domestic violence in American law (Portwood et al. 2001: 148). Each state has its own domestic violence law, sometimes consisting of several different statutes with different definitions. Additionally there are several federal domestic violence statutes with their own definitions.[5] Thus, domestic violence has many definitions, with none being universally accepted (Holland 2002: 171). For example, in Utah the Cohabitant Abuse Procedures Act defines domestic violence as "any criminal offense involving violence or physical harm or threat of violence or physical harm, or any attempt, conspiracy, or solicitation to commit a criminal offense involving violence or physical harm, when committed by one cohabitant against another" (Utah Code Annotated § 77-36-1 (2002)). This law lists 16 separate offenses which if committed by one cohabitant against another constitute domestic violence (Utah Code Annotated § 77-36-1(2) (2002)).

Although all agree that domestic violence is a serious problem in the United States, estimates of the incidence and frequency of domestic violence vary widely. Estimates change depending on how domestic violence is defined and who is making the estimate. Estimates of the number of American couples who experience some form of domestic violence each year vary from 1.5 million to 8.7 million.[6] One of the better sources, the National Institutes of Justice, recently reported that 1.5% of women and .9 % of men were physically assaulted (including rapes) in the last 12 months by an intimate partner. The same source also reports that approximately 25% of women and 8% of men report being assaulted by a current or former spouse, cohabiting partner or date during their lifetimes (Tjaden and Thoennes 2002: iii). Between 1992 and 1996, nearly one million incidents involving non-lethal physical violence were reported every year (Greenfield 1998; Portwood et al. 2001: 147). Since 1976, 30% of female murder victims were killed by their intimate partners (Rennison and Welchans 2000: 1; Tatum 2001-2002: 127). Moreover, women and children in fragile families are at greater risk of being victims of domestic violence or child abuse than children in intact families.

3. HOW AMERICAN FAMILY LAWS HAVE HARMED FRAGILE FAMILIES

3.1 Dualism in family law

Most family laws are written by and developed primarily to address the needs and concerns of the socioeconomic class who makes the laws. Thus, the legal problems of the wealthy are quite well addressed in American family laws. The concerns and interests of middle class Americans are generally represented in the legislative statutes, codes, administrative regulations and judicial decisions that constitute the body of contemporary family law. The concerns and legal quandaries of the homeless, the impoverished, the disabled, the unpopular, the marginalized, and society's outcasts are not adequately addressed in the laws or legal system because they are not well represented in law-making bodies.

This dichotomy is neither new nor unique to America. Nearly forty years ago, Jacobus Ten Broek noted the same dualism in Elizabethan-era English family and "poor" laws. This dichotomy remained even after the "modern" Progressive era of welfare legislation. As Michael Grossberg argues:

> [The] public law of child welfare [that] became imposed on the poor . . . brushed only lightly upon intact, mainstream families. These latter were governed by a private family law which less frequently was the object of legislation, but developed instead through private agreements and the decisions of courts in individual divorce cases. In doing so, domestic relations law reinvigorated what Jacobus Ten Broek has called the dual system of family law: liberationist policies for middle and upper classes, and repressive policies for the lower classes and for racial and ethnic groups (Grossberg 1995: 288; see also Jacob 1988: 129-130; Ten Broek 1971).

Thus, there is (and historically has been) a dualism in family law that treats the families and family problems of the poor quite differently than it treats the families of the more well-to-do. Part of the problem is structural and inherent in democracy. Democratic legal systems generally work well to protect the rights and address the needs of the majority of the people and of those who hold most of the wealth and property. Democracy is not structured to respond well to those on the fringes, whose needs or problems differ from those of the popular majority. It is difficult for democracy to respond to the needs of those who control very little of the wealth, property and goods that are the primary interests of legal systems and the sources of

the greatest influence in all legal systems. Thus, in a democratic society the law must overcome built-in structural biases if it wants to aid the minorities on the margins. Overcoming structural biases against minorities is what the Bill of Rights was all about. But the Bill of Rights does not offer explicit protection for fragile families—it does not even mention them.

3.2 The liberty-equality dichotomy in family law

Aside from structural biases, neglect of the problems fragile families face reflects dichotomies between liberty and equality, individualism and communitarianism, libertarianism and statism (Wardle 1997: 208-229). This dichotomy is reflected in many dimensions of our family laws. The liberty-individualist-libertarian side favors little government intervention in—or direct regulation of—families. The equality-communitarian-statist side favors aggressive government intervention, regulation, support, and shaping of families. In terms of process, the equality side favors use of government support programs to help fragile families, while the liberty side favors strengthening independent families. The statist approach favors government agencies as the primary delivery vehicle, while the libertarian approach favors decentralized and private non-governmental organizations that help individuals and couples become stronger, more independent families. The equality side tends to use and rely upon public law (public benefit law, welfare-administrative, constitutional, and criminal law), while the liberty side tends to prefer private law (family law, contracts, private ordering).

This dichotomy in American laws is at least as old as the U.S. Constitution.[7] Even before the Constitution was drafted, liberty and equality were seen as conflicting ideals (Locke 1960; Steinberg 1978: 133-141). When Alexis de Tocqueville visited America in 1831 he found the country to be "an extraordinary phenomenon" because its citizens enjoyed greater equality than those in "any other country of the world, or in any age of . . . history. . . ." (Tocqueville 1961: 45). However, he also noted that individual "sovereignty" (i.e., liberty) was the "fundamental principle" and "the grand maxim upon which civil and political society rests in the United States" (Tocqueville 1961: 501); "[E]very man is allowed freely to take that road which he thinks will lead him to heaven; just as the law permits every citizen to have the right of choosing his own government" (de Tocqueville 1961: 502).

American legal scholars today generally assume that equality cannot be achieved without restricting liberty, and that liberty cannot flourish without producing inequality. For example, James Fishkin asserts that the conflict between liberty and equality creates a "trilemma" for modern American liberalism (Fishkin 1983). That is, America and other liberal democracies

are founded on three conflicting liberal principles: (1) *equal opportunity* (that all persons should have equal opportunity to compete for the limited goods of this world, and arbitrary native characteristics such as race and gender should not determine those opportunities—in other words, everyone gets to line up at the same starting line of the race, none given a head start or handicap), (2) *merit* (that limited goods should be distributed on the basis of merit—the gold medal goes to the fastest runner, the first to cross the finish line, not to the richest or most well-connected), and (3) *family autonomy* (that the state will not coercively intervene in private families regarding internal family concerns such as child rearing—the teams can train and prepare for the race however they choose). The "trilemma" is that even if goods like public resources are distributed solely on the basis of merit, and even if the opportunity to compete on merit is open to all persons, without any advantage or disadvantage given on account of race or sex, all persons will not have an equal chance for success because of family autonomy—because children raised in some families come to the starting point in the race for life's goods much better prepared to succeed than children raised in other families. We cannot achieve any two of these goals without violating the third.[8] Fishkin suggests that, "[i]f taken seriously, the liberal strategy of attempting to ration fairly opportunities for the achievement of unequal positions would require systematic intrusions into the family. Only then could the maintenance of background inequalities be rendered compatible with equal opportunities [and merit]" (Fishkin 1983: 3-4). Doing so would violate the liberty values that are enshrined in the Bill of Rights, the Constitution, and Declaration of Independence.

In the contest between liberty and equality, the American family law system traditionally has leaned toward liberty. There has been little regulation of the family because of the belief that individuals, families, and the nation flourish best and benefit most from liberty in family matters (Hafen 1983: 479-483). The dominant trend of developments in family law in the past 30 years, such as the constitutional doctrine of privacy, adoption of no-fault divorce, and legitimation of previously prohibited sexual relations, has tended to replace old public "equality" norms (all married people may divorce only when set standards are violated, all people will abstain from sexual relations outside of marriage, cohabitation is only permitted for married couples, and so forth) with subjective, individually determined liberty standards.

The law's concern for fragile families is affected by this dichotomy. The historic preference for liberty has resulted in reluctance to intervene on behalf of fragile families—society has preferred to "let them alone", to turn a blind eye to their isolation, abandonment, and suffering. On the other hand, the countervailing preference for equality has resulted in pressures for

stultifying conformity to sometimes dysfunctional or inflexibly oppressive standards, and the fostering of a "welfare" culture of dependency.

3.3 The failure of family law to protect the poor and fatherless

Family law's greatest failing towards fragile families is the fact that so many families and children fall between the cracks. The system fails to satisfy the needs of many. The inability to establish the paternity of many children, the inability to collect child support for many children, and the difficulties the system has in protecting against domestic and child abuse are evidence of the system's failings.

It is said that "[c]onsistency and uniformity are not words that aptly describe the paternity statutes of the 50 states. Past attempts at a uniform code have not been successful and have left us with 50 variations of paternity determination" (Williams 1997: footnote 20). For example, the prestigious National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws has drafted four different so-called "uniform" acts concerning paternity. These acts include the Uniform Act on Blood Tests to Determine Paternity, which only four states have adopted, the Uniform Act on Paternity, which only six states have adopted, the Uniform Parentage Act, which eighteen states have adopted, and the Uniform Putative and Unknown Fathers Act, which no state has adopted (Wardle and Nolan 2002: 247-249).

Despite improvements and bright spots, the absolute numbers of children and parents left outside the system is its biggest failure. The family law system works best in addressing the problems of the middle and upper classes, whose lives and problems the lawmakers had in mind when they passed their family laws. It is not designed to cope well with the problems of the underclass—the "illegitimate" members of our society. Fragile families could crash the family law system. So, in tragically large numbers, they are left out and left behind.

3.4 Denying the benefits of mainstream marriage and families

Another failing of the family law system is the cultivation of a welfare community dependent upon long-term public assistance. This has occurred because family law has helped create and support an image of nonmarital families. It has fostered and reinforced expectations of self-defeat and an image of being doomed to either nonmarital relations or marital failure. It has encouraged long-term dependency by enabling families deemed

incapable of responsible marital life. By creating a welfare system that gives incentives not to marry, America's system of family laws has operated to deny the benefits of marital family life to generations of fragile families. The system has cultivated its own clients, fostering and nurturing low income couples, and especially single mothers, to live as fragile families rather than to move forward to responsible marital life.

4. HOW STRENGTHENING THE CULTURE OF MARRIAGE IN SOCIETY AND MARITAL SKILLS OF STRUGGLING COUPLES HELPS FRAGILE FAMILIES

4.1 The movement to strengthen marriage

Government efforts to strengthen marriage are growing. For example, three states have enacted "covenant marriage" laws that require a stronger public commitment to marriage, pre-marital counseling, and counseling to revive the marriage before divorce, and provide stricter grounds for divorce (essentially fault or one- or two-year separation) (Hawkins 1998:1-8).

By 2001, at least 18 states reportedly had enacted laws or established programs designed to strengthen marriage (Wetzstein 2001). These include marital skills training programs, providing financial incentives to welfare recipients who marry, public marriage education programs, marriage license fee reduction for parties who have had premarital counseling, and setting state goals to encourage marriage and reduce divorce (Fagan 2001; Wetzstein 2001). Florida was one of the first states to institute such programs. In 1998 the Florida legislature passed a "Marriage Preservation and Preparation Act" requiring all high school students in the state to be given instruction in "marriage and relationship skills education." The Act also offered a reduction in the price of marriage licenses and waiver of the three-day waiting period to couples who undergo at least four hours of training in a "premarital preparation course." Finally, the Act required couples who file for divorce to attend a "Parent Education and Family Stabilization Course" addressing (1) the legal and emotional impact of divorce on adults and children; (2) financial responsibility; (3) laws on child abuse or neglect; and (4) conflict resolution skills.[9]

4.2 The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) contained what one commentator called "the most radical welfare reforms in the history of welfare and child support enforcement" (Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, S 101, Pub. L. No. 104-193, 110 Stat. 2105, 2110 (1996); Rotondo 1997: 305). PRWORA repealed the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program of "welfare entitlement" and replaced it with Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) block grants to the states. These block grants are intended to give states more flexibility in designing work-oriented, transitional welfare assistance programs for low-income families (Nguyen 2002: 489). PRWORA provided a fixed amount to be divided among the states each year for six years and then required reauthorization (currently pending). States with high population growth or historically low welfare allocations received supplemental amounts. Performance bonuses were authorized for states meeting employment-related goals. "Illegitimacy reduction" bonuses were authorized for states that reduced the number of non-marital births without increasing the number of abortions (Coven 2002: 2; Nguyen 2002: 490).

There are four legislative objectives for TANF. They are to: (1) provide assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives; (2) end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage; (3) reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and establish annual numerical goals for their reduction; and (4) encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families (Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, Pub. L. No 104-193, § 104, codified at 42 U.S.C. § 601 (1996)).

Note that all four goals involve strengthening families. Three of the four involve strengthening and encouraging marriage. Non-citizens have limited eligibility for TANF assistance (Nguyen 2002: 490). Families may receive TANF assistance for up to five years, but states may continue providing benefits to 20% of the eligible families beyond 60 months. The 1996 Act also requires at least 50% of the families receiving assistance to be engaged in a work-related activity for at least thirty hours per week; those who do not meet that requirement lose their benefits for a sanction period (Nguyen 2002: 490).

Since the 1996 enactment of PRWORA, the number of working single parents has risen to 60% (Nguyen 2002: 491). Child poverty has declined significantly, from 23% in 1993 to 16% in 2000, the lowest level since 1978,

with poverty among African-American children now at an all-time low and poverty among Hispanic children also dropping (Nguyen 2002: 491). Teen pregnancy and birth rates have declined to their lowest level since the 1960s. The number of children born out of wedlock also fell, and the proportion of low-income children living in two-parent families rose (Nguyen 2002: 491-492). Because some of these trends began before TANF was passed, causation is not certain. Also, TANF termination has not been problem-free:

> Some research indicates that . . . families who leave TANF involuntarily generally have the greatest barriers to employment, including substance abuse problems, low literacy rates, mental or physical disabilities, domestic violence, or problems with transportation, childcare, and housing (Nguyen 2002: 491).

4.3 The Bush administration's marriage initiatives

Although certain programs like PRWORA started under the Clinton presidency, supporting and strengthening marriage is one of the hallmarks of President Bush's welfare reform marriage initiatives. For example, in an October 3, 2003 Presidential Proclamation establishing Marriage Protection Week, President Bush declared that protection of marriage "is essential to the continued strength of our society." He also stated that his administration is committed to "working to support the institution of marriage by helping couples build successful marriages and be good parents" (Bush 2003).

In 2003, President Bush announced his proposals for welfare reforms in connection with reauthorization of PRWORA. They included (1) $22 billion per year for cash welfare, work preparation, and childcare; (2) expanding money for child support enforcement and continuing money for childcare and health insurance for the children of single moms and other low-income working families; (3) Earned income tax credits up to $4,000 for single moms leaving welfare to start working; and (4) up to $300 million per year for state programs that reduce nonmarital births and increase the percentage of children in married-couple families (The White House 2002; Office of the Press Secretary 2002). Nguyen (2002: 493-494) provides a useful overview of the Bush plan:

> The [Bush] plan would increase the minimum percentage of families that must be engaged in work activities from 50% to 70% in 2007 and would require families to participate in 40 hours of work-related activities a week in order to count towards the state participation rates, up from current requirements of 30 to 35 hours a week, depending on family size. . . . [It] would also end separate two-parent family participation rates that

> it claims created a disincentive for two-parent families because they are subjected to more rigorous work requirements than single-parent families. Other changes would allow teen parents to meet the work requirements through maintaining satisfactory school attendance and increasing penalties for states who fail to meet the state work participation rates. . . . [President Bush's proposal includes] a series of initiatives aimed at promoting marriages and otherwise strengthening families. The proposal would amend the overall purpose of TANF to reflect the goals of improving child outcomes and encouraging healthy, two-parent families and responsible fatherhood. The President's agenda also includes the establishment of an annual fund to conduct research on family formation and healthy marriages, a matching grant program aimed at developing innovative approaches to promoting healthy marriages and reducing out-of-wedlock births. In their state plans, states would also be required to include marriage promotion efforts and encouraged to treat two-parent families equitably. Related to the President's agenda to promote marriage are his proposals to encourage abstinence and prevent teen pregnancy (Nguyen 2002: 493-494).

To strengthen child support collection, the Bush proposal "encourages states to give to families who have left welfare all the child support collected on their behalf and would provide federal assistance to states in doing so." Furthermore, the Bush proposal

> would also charge families not on welfare a "user fee" of $25 annually for successful child support collection and would require states to regularly review and adjust child support orders. Other proposals . . . would deny a passport to anyone owing over $2,500 in past-due child support and allow states to collect past-due child support by withholding Social Security payments from some individuals (Nguyen 2002: 494).

The Administration for Children and Families in the Department of Health and Human Services reports that the pending Administration-sponsored House welfare reauthorization bill (HR 4) includes more than $200 million for healthy marriage education and research programs, including matching grants for high school education on the value of marriage and relationship skills, marriage education skill development programs (including conflict resolution), pre-marital education for engaged couples, marriage enhancement programs, divorce reduction, and marriage mentoring (The Administration of Children and Families 2003). The government policy to strengthen marriages cites abundant research showing that married couples acquire more wealth (which in turn reduces the chances that children will be raised in poverty), that children raised in intact two-

parent married households enjoy better physical health than children raised in other households, and that marriage reduces the risk of domestic violence in the home (The Administration of Children and Families 2003). The goal is "to help couples, who choose marriage for themselves, develop the skills and knowledge to form and sustain healthy marriages" (The Administration for Children and Families 2002).

4.3.1 Criticisms

Some feminists object to the Bush marriage initiatives because they think it encourages women to become dependent on men. "'It's a patriarchal sexist mentality to say that the cure for a poor mother's poverty is a father's income' says Gwendolyn Mink, a professor of political science at the University of California at Santa Cruz and author of a 1998 book on welfare reform, 'Welfare's End' . . . 'It's making women dependent on men instead of doing other things that help women support their families' . . . 'The ideological underpinning of this is that to allow women to raise children on their own is a real threat to the patriarchy,' says Abramovitz" (Taylor 2001). On a similar note, some charge that the marriage initiative promotes a stereotype of weak, male-dependent women who are defective because they are not married (Taylor 2001).

Others object that the fathers of single mothers' children often are poor providers, and that pushing marriage may push some women into abusive, impoverished relationships (Cato Institute 2002; Taylor 2001). Some critics think it is the government trying to legislate and enforce religious morality (Taylor 2001), or getting too involved in the private affairs of its citizens (Marriage as Public Policy 2003). Some critics suggest that some provisions are unlikely to motivate many low income individuals to marry because they do not address the critical needs of that population. For instance, Theodora Ooms and the Cato Institute have suggested different methods of strengthening marriage in low-income communities and believes that "most of the legal reforms and programs initiatives currently being proposed to revitalize and strengthen marriage are not likely . . . to have any significant impact on marriage stability and quality, or nonmarital childbearing among the poor" (Cato Institute 2002; Ooms 2002).

Finally, it has been suggested that the legal system is unlikely to have a significant impact on the marriage patterns of fragile families because (1) marriage is cultural rather than legal; and (2) the Constitution constrains how far the government can go in promoting marriage. Carl Schneider (2002) has questioned the extent to which legal reforms can revitalize marriage because it is primarily a cultural and not a legal institution. Laurence Nolan (2002) has argued that the law must not neglect the "is" of fatherless

children in promoting the "ought" of marriage for fragile families. Nolan has also suggested that the Constitution limits the extent of legal efforts to strengthen marriage.

4.3.2 Defenses

Supporters of the marriage initiatives in welfare reform law argue that it is beyond dispute that there is a connection between nonmarital childrearing and a host of economic, educational, and social disadvantages for children and for society.[10] They assert that the marriage initiative in PRWORA is not coercive, and it is not a dating or marriage service. Rather, it simply provides an opportunity to those who are interested (The Administration of Children and Families 2003). They point to an extensive survey of 2,323 Oklahoma residents (including 300 Medicaid recipients) in 2002 that revealed that 85% of the population believed the government's effort to promote marriage and reduce divorce was "very good" or "good," and 72% of the welfare recipients surveyed said they would consider going to relationship education classes (six percent higher than the general population) (Wetzstein 2002).[11] Supporters of the marriage initiative reject the claim that marriage is none of the government's business. "As Governor Keating of Oklahoma has said, '[W]hen you look at the consequences of divorce, the better question is: 'What business do we have not getting involved?' Good government has a critical interest in stable marriages" (Fagan 2001).

Patrick Fagan (2001), a staunch defender of the government's marriage initiative in welfare reform, writes:

> Although America has invested $8.4 trillion in social programs since the War on Poverty began in the 1960s, welfare dependency, juvenile crime, child abuse, school underachievement, drug abuse, suicide among children, and many other problems have increased. At the same time, federal and state governments still spend about $150 billion each year subsidizing single-parent families. This stands in stark contrast to the approximately $150 million they spend each year in an effort to reduce out-of-wedlock births and divorce—the two principal causes of single-parent families in America. In other words, for every $1,000 that government spends providing services to broken families, it spends $1 trying to stop family breakdown. All society receives in return for this lopsided "investment" is more of what it subsidizes—broken families, troubled children, and social problems. . . . Rather than throwing more funds at government programs that deal with the effects of family

> breakdown, federal and state officials should take steps to prevent family disintegration in the first place.

Fagan (2001) supports the marriage initiative because:

> Social science literature is replete with robust findings on the harmful effects of broken families, particularly for children. Juvenile crime, abuse and violence, and lowered income are often associated in the research with single-parent families . . . . Children born out of wedlock have an increased risk of death in infancy, higher incidence of retarded cognitive and verbal development, and higher rates of drug addiction and out-of-wedlock pregnancy as teens. As adults, they have higher rates of divorce, work at lower-wage jobs, and abuse their children more often. . . . Policymakers who hope to stop this societal fall must look instead at ways to reduce divorce and out-of-wedlock birth by strengthening marriage.

4.3.3 Some inklings of effectiveness

Several provisions of PRWORA have been shown to have a positive impact on collection of child support. PRWORA required states to adopt the Uniform Interstate Family Support Act (UIFSA), which, among other things, eliminates the need for complex and difficult interstate child support collection actions by allowing a single jurisdiction to maintain and enforce child support. A report by the National Center for State Courts that examined interstate child support filings found a "clear effect" of the PRWORA on reducing the need for interstate child support filings. States that did not adopt UIFSA had no drop in filings but "after implementing UIFSA, the fours states [studied] . . . experienced an immediate and substantial drop in interstate filings" ranging from 21% in Minnesota to 87% in Oregon (Jones et al. 1998: 3). PRWORA also required states "to create expedited procedures that allow state child support agenc[ies] to act in routine cases without obtaining an order from a judicial or administrative tribunal" (Jones et al. 1998: 4). The National Center for State Courts Report notes that such court-circumventing child support collection reforms have proven more efficient than litigation and these provisions are expected to decrease judicial enforcement caseloads (Jones et al. 1998: 4). PRWORA also encourages the use of voluntary paternity establishment procedures. The National Center for State Courts Report found that such approaches have proven more efficient than administrative or judicial paternity establishment—they are expected to decrease the more expensive and time-consuming judicial paternity caseload (Jones et al. 1998: 4).[12]

There also is some early indication that the marriage initiatives may be having some positive effect on reducing single-parent childrearing. As reported by Maggie Gallagher:

> The analysis of the National Survey of America's Families (a survey of 40,000 nationally representative families) . . . done by Urban Institute scholars Gregory Acs and Sandi Nelson [found]: Between 1997 and 2002, the proportion of children under six living in intact married families actually increased. So did the proportion of all children in low-income households (the bottom quarter) by close to 4 percent. . . . The less good news is that part of the shift away from single mothers was into cohabiting rather than married families. A study by Sara McLanahan and colleagues. . . suggests "children born to cohabiting mothers are reportedly more aggressive, more withdrawn, more anxious/depressive, and have more overall behavior problems at age three than children born to married parents" (Gallagher 2003).

There is additional evidence that strengthening marriage reduces the problems affecting fragile families. For instance, one way to prevent or reduce the incidence of domestic violence is to strengthen marriage skills. Couples who have learned conflict resolution skills are less likely to experience domestic violence and divorce than couples who have not developed those skills. Conflict resolution and other marital skills can be learned. Thus, marriage preparation programs, marriage education, and marital skill training programs appear to reduce domestic violence in vulnerable couples.

Scott Stanley, one of the leading researchers on marriage skill development, attests: "There is some evidence of a primary preventative effect of PREP [Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program—a marital skill development program] in lowering the likelihood of relationship aggression" (Stanley 2001: 277). Likewise, another leading study in the field of marriage counseling and education reports that persons who participated in a preventative intervention program for couples planning marriage reported significantly lower instances of physical violence than couples who did not participate in any prevention program (Markman et al. 1993: 74-75). Because couples who have experienced violence prior to marriage are at greatest risk of experiencing domestic violence during marriage (Holtsworth-Munroe and Markman 1995: 77), teaching marriage preparation skills to such couples may reduce the likelihood of domestic violence (Holtsworth-Munro and Markman 1995: 77). "[R]eviewers of the literature agree that marital therapy is effective, at least in the short term, in reducing marital conflict. In addition, . . . analysis of the efficacy of marital therapy for promoting marital stability indicates some long-term positive

effects for reducing marital conflict and preventing divorce" (Bray and Jouriles 1995: 470). Marital and family therapy is reported to be "more efficacious than standard and/or individual treatments" in overcoming problems that may trigger domestic violence, depressed outpatient women in distressed marriages, marital distress in general, alcoholism, and drug abuse (Pinsof and Wynne 1995: 585).

For example, the four and five-year follow-up of couples trained in one marriage skill development program (Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program, or PREP) revealed that couples who had received the training reported about one-fourth the level of physical violence than comparable (control) couples who had not received the training.[13] Another study of PREP showed that, after three years, couples who had gone through the marital skills training "showed a decrease in problem intensity over time, whereas control couples showed an increase" (Markman et al. 1988: 215). Likewise, the control (untrained) couples "evidenced declines in levels of relationship quality, whereas [marital skills-trained] couples maintained or improved their already high level of functioning" (Markman et al. 1988: 214). A study of couples with an alcoholic partner who received a behavioral marital therapy (BMT) program reported:

> The prevalence of husband-to-wife violence was significantly decreased in both the first year and the second year after the [therapy], as compared to the year before [therapy]. The percentage of couples who experienced any violent act decreased from 61.3% in the year before BMT to 22.7% in the first year after BMT . . . and to 18.7% in the second year after BMT . . . . The percentage experiencing severe violence decreased from 24.0% in the year before BMT to 6.6% in the first year after BMT . . . and to 8.0% in the second year after BMT. . . . (O'Farrell et al. 2000: 318).

Likewise, "[c]omparisons of verbal aggression in the first and second year after BMT for the alcoholic husbands showed that both the frequency of verbal aggression and the prevalence of clinically elevated verbal aggression declined significantly. . . ." (O'Farrell et al. 2000: 300). Other studies suggest that "prevention programs may be useful, because early intervention may help prevent the continuation and escalation of physical aggression" (Holtsworth-Munroe and Markman 1995: 79). More than 100 studies "show that a wide variety of marriage-strengthening programs can reduce strife, improve communication, increase parenting skills, increase stability, and enhance marital happiness" (Fagan et al. 2002). Thus, marriage preparation, marital enhancement, marital skill development, and marital therapy programs may effectively reduce the risk and incidence of some domestic violence.

To the extent that other problems (such as self-support, child-rearing, educational enhancement) involve similar skills that can be learned and applied effectively within the mutual support system that we call marriage, these data provide some hope for fragile families who can and are able to marry. However, the effects of such programs are hotly contested and the studies are capable of different interpretations.

5. CONCLUSION

From ancient times, care for widows and the fatherless has been a primary standard of individual virtue and social morality.[14] The existence in significant numbers of fragile families is an indication of some failure in American laws and social policies, including American family laws.

Many thoughtful critics have argued that America has gone too far in pursuit of liberty (radical individualism) at the expense of equality (community) (Glendon 1987, 1991; Symposium: Individualism and Communitarianism in Contemporary Legal System 1993). The American legal system is a hybrid system that struggles to balance both equality and liberty interests.

There is a need for the traditional public-poverty-law approach of hard regulatory law to provide support for fragile families. There also is a need for the traditional private (quasi-public) child support order and enforcement programs to provide for the economic needs of fragile families. Finally, there clearly is a need to improve the related legal claims, mechanisms and procedures.

However, there is more to the solution than just tried-and-failed traditional legal procedures. There also is a need for softer expressive and channeling approaches to strengthen the marriage culture for all families, including fragile families. The old axiom that "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" may provide wise guidance in considering how to address the problems of fragile families. We need both an ounce of soft law prevention and a pound of hard law cure. By (1) helping vulnerable individuals and couples to better prepare for marriage; (2) providing accessible programs to help them develop marital skills; (3) providing accessible support for those in troubled marriages from those who can teach skills of marital healing, communication, conflict avoidance and conflict resolution; and (4) encouraging couples to find ways to resolve their difficulties without violence, abuse, or abandonment, the continual creation of fragile families may be reduced. By teaching the importance and benefits of marriage, and by putting high social value upon undertaking, accepting and fulfilling marital responsibilities, fewer fragile families may be created.

By revitalizing a marriage culture in America, fewer vulnerable young individuals, couples and their children may be trapped in the quagmire of fragile families. There should be a balanced, hybrid approach in public policy for responding to the crisis of fragile families in America, including using the expressive and channeling power of the law to revitalize marriage.

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ENDNOTES

1. For example, a child may be born to a gestational surrogate into whom an embryo resulting from in vitro fertilization of the egg of a woman desiring to have a child but whose medical condition does not make that possible (*Johnson v. Calvert* 1993). Or a child may be born to a donor surrogate who donates her egg for in vitro fertilization with the sperm of a man not her husband and re-implantation in her womb, with the intention to deliver the child to another woman—usually the sperm donor's wife—upon birth (*In re Baby M.* 1988).
2. California Evidence Code § 621 allowed the mother of the child and her married husband to challenge the presumption of paternity, but not the adulterous, third-party biological father. Although the mother, a married woman, lived temporarily with several men during her marriage to Gerald, and even though the blood test evidence strongly supported a neighbor's claim of paternity, the California courts held that the California law barred the adulterous father's parentage claim. The U.S. Supreme Court agreed that the California law did not violate the Constitution.
3. In 1986 it was reported that paternity adjudication occurs for only 28% of all children born out of wedlock (meaning that for approximately 72% of illegitimate children there is no formal paternity determination) (Nichols-Casebolt and Garfinkel 1991: 83-97). While some of these children have a presumed father because their mothers have married their fathers after birth, or the father has received the child as his own or committed some other act to create a presumption of paternity, it seems likely that most illegitimate children have no known father by formal determination or by presumption.
4. "The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 authorizes the states to deny 25%- 100% of applicable public assistance to those families who have not cooperated with paternity determination. Pub. L. No. 104-193, § 408(a)(2), 110 Stat. 2105, 2135 (1996)" (Williams 1997: footnote 23).
5. The most widely-known federal statute is the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), which incorporated the states' definitions of violence for its civil action provision (42 U.S.C. § 13981(d)(2)(A) (1994)). VAWA's main criminal provision, 18 U.S.C. § 2261, prohibits "interstate domestic violence" defined as "travel[ing] across a State line . . . with the intent to injure, harass, or intimidate that person's spouse or intimate partner, and who, in the course of or as a result of such travel, intentionally commits a crime of violence."

Section 2262 prohibits interstate travel with the intent to violate a protective order. For purpose of the federal Gun Control Act of 1968, 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(9) (2001), Congress defined domestic violence as violence "committed by a current or former spouse . . . of the victim, by a person who is cohabiting with or has cohabited with the victim as a spouse . . . or by a person similarly situated to a spouse . . . of the victim." This Act prohibits gun possession by domestic violence abusers, prohibits anyone subject to a domestic violence restraining order from possessing a gun in or affecting commerce (18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(1)-(9)), and also makes it unlawful for "any person . . . who has been convicted of a misdemeanor crime of domestic violence" to possess a gun in or affect commerce (19 U.S.C. § 922(g)(8)). A misdemeanor crime of domestic violence is defined as any misdemeanor that "has, as an element, the use or attempted use of physical force, or the threatened use of a deadly weapon" if the victim is the current or former spouse, domestic partner, parent, or guardian of the perpetrator" (18 U.S.C. § 921 (a)(33)(A)).

6. Murray A. Strauss and Richard J. Gelles have estimated that 8.7 million couples experience physical aggression each year, and that 3.4 million experience severe violence carrying a high risk of injury (Strauss and Gelles 1990: 95-112). In contrast, Patricia Tjaden and Nancy Thoennes have estimated that 1.5 million women and 834,732 men are physically assaulted (including rapes) each year by an intimate partner (Tjaden and Thoennes 2002: iii).
7. The greatest cause of conflict at the Philadelphia Convention of 1787 at which the Constitution of the United States was drafted—a conflict that nearly led to the dissolution of the Convention—was whether the states were to be given equal representation in the legislative branch, or whether the citizens were to be given equal representation in both houses of Congress (Bowen 1966: 69-128, 185-197).
8. We can preserve family autonomy and equal opportunity, but to compensate for the grave disparities in preparation resulting from family autonomy will have to sacrifice the principle of merit (award contracts on the basis of racial quotas); or we can preserve family autonomy and merit, but to compensate for the grave disparities in preparation resulting from family autonomy will have to sacrifice equal opportunity (give racial preferences in educational opportunity); or we can preserve equal opportunity and the principle of merit, but will have to sacrifice family autonomy (massive intervention to guarantee that all children are equally prepared to compete in life's contests).
9. Florida Statutes Annotated §§ 741.0305 (fee reduction); 741.04 (waiver of waiting period); 61.21 (parent education course). Katherine Spaht has noted that Florida Statute § 232.6 "requires that a course in life management skills (1/2 credit), which would include among the other components of marriage and relationship skill-based education, be taught to high school students as a graduation requirement" (Spaht 1998: 129-130).
10. Conservatives—and many liberals—can at least agree on what the problem is. The evidence that children are far better off being raised by their married, biological parents is overwhelming. Studies consistently show that children living in fragile families are more likely to have emotional and behavioral problems, fail in school, be physically abused, be involved in crime, and wind up on welfare as adults (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994). Children have clearly suffered as a result of a federal welfare system that for decades subsidized single parents and penalized marriage. With subsidies inevitably increasing the behavior Washington was paying for, and modern cultural norms dictating that no stigma attach to illegitimacy and single motherhood, the number of out-of-wedlock births soared (Horn 2002: 101; O'Beirne 2002).

11. Oklahoma Governor Keating had turned up to $10 million in surplus state welfare funds to marriage-strengthening programs after learning that the sluggish economy and marital instability were connected.
12. In 1996 there were 300,000 paternity cases filed in 21 states (Jones et al. 1988: 4), whereas in 2001 this was down to about 270,000 (Ostrom 2002: 35), indicating that the shift to administrative paternity establishment encouraged by PRWORA has reduced paternity judicial caseloads.
13. Markman and his colleagues reported that the average number of physical violence episodes reported by couples who had received the training was .39 compared to a mean of 1.53 reported by the control groups (Markman et al. 1993: 74-75).
14. This social orientation is apparent in the Old Testament:

When thou beatest thine olive tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow.

When thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean [it] afterward: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow (Deuteronomy 24:20-21 (KJV)).

Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy (Psalms 82:3 (KJV)).

And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in [his] wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger [from his right], and fear not me, saith the LORD of hosts (Malachi 3:5 (KJV)).

Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow (Isaiah 1:17 (KJV)).

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Chapter 5

FAMILY STRUCTURE AND CHILD WELL-BEING

The Role of Parental Social Connections

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Abstract: Our previous work found that single-parenthood was associated with reduced well-being for white, but not black, children (Dunifon and Kowaleski-Jones 2002). The current paper examines whether parental social connections account for differences in the effects of family structure on child well-being. Using data from the 1979 to 2000 waves of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, our results show a key role for living with a grandparent in accounting for race differences in the influence of single-parenthood on children. In contrast, visiting friends and relatives did not explain differences in the relationship between single-parenthood and child delinquency among African American and families receiving public assistance sub-groups.

Key words: family structure, grandparent influence, child development

1. INTRODUCTION

Considerable policy and research attention has examined the role of marriage in the lives of adults and children. In particular, policy activity associated with welfare reform and reauthorization has been influenced by research evidence (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994; Waite 1995), executive priorities, and popular opinion that a married family setting benefits children and the families in which they live. However, children who do not live with married parents may have access to other resources, such as grandparents, friends and relatives, that may buffer the potentially deleterious effects of living in a single parent family. To date, research examining the role of

social support in single parent families (Cramer and McDonald 1996; Hogan, Hao, and Parish 1990; Parish, Hao, and Hogan 1991) has yielded mixed findings.

Building on previous research, this chapter examines the role of parental social connections in accounting for sub-group differences in the influence of family structure on children. In doing so, we make several contributions to the literature in this area. First, to address issues of selection into family living arrangements, we estimate child-specific fixed-effects models. This controls for all child- and parent-specific time-invariant factors that may be associated both with the family structure in which a child lives and with that child's well-being. Second, this paper seeks to understand important, but understudied, sub-group differences in the influence of family living arrangements on children. Finally, we ask whether social connections account for group differences in the influence of family structure on child well-being.

Specifically, this paper focuses on two important sub-groups: African-Americans and families receiving public assistance. African-Americans are an important focus because of the higher prevalence of single parenthood in Black families, and because previous work found significant race differences in the influence of single-parenthood and cohabitation on children (Dunifon and Kowaleski-Jones 2002). Families receiving public assistance are examined because they are the target of public policies aimed at increasing marriage; therefore, it is important to understand the interplay between social connections, family structure and child outcomes for such families.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Single parenthood

The number of children spending time in single parent families has increased dramatically in the past 30 years. In 2002, 23% of all U.S. children under the age of 18 were living with a single mother; 16% of white children were living with a single mother in 2000, compared to 48% of African-American children. Single parenthood is of concern to policy makers in part because of the high prevalence of poverty among children in such families. In 2000, 38% of families with a female householder and no husband present were in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau 2003).

A great deal of prior research has explored the connections between family structure and child development. In general, single-parenthood is associated with greater behavior problems, higher rates of teenage

pregnancy, and lower academic achievement among youth (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994).

In order to accurately assess the effects of family structure on child development, it is crucial to disentangle family structure effects from the effects of economic status and other parental characteristics. For example, after controlling for poverty status, Smith, Brooks-Gunn, and Klebanov (1997) found no influence of single parenthood on young children's achievement and intelligence test scores in two large data sets. In a study employing over 30 years of data, Biblarz and Raftery (1999) found no influence of single-motherhood on children's adult socioeconomic status after controlling for maternal employment and occupation. Using a matched mother-child sample from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, Carlson and Corcoran (2001) found that controlling for measures of mothers' income and parenting practices reduced the associations between living in a single-parent family and children's test scores and behavioral outcomes to insignificance. These studies highlight the importance of controlling for characteristics like income and parenting practices when studying the relationship between single parenthood and child development. Additionally, because African-American and white children spend differing amounts of time, on average, in single-parent families (Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan 1995), it is important to consider race differences in the influence of single parenting on children.

2.2 Social connections

Our previous research (Dunifon and Kowaleski-Jones 2002) found that single-parenthood was associated with increased delinquency and lower test scores for white, but not Black, children. The current paper extends this research by examining whether parental social connections account for sub-group differences in the effects of single parenthood on children.

The idea that parental social relationships can benefit adults and their children is the basis of the social capital literature (Coleman 1988). This literature suggests that social networks represent a stock of potential assistance that parents can rely on in time of need. This assistance may come from connections to relatives, friends, or community members, for example. Such connections have the potential to protect children against negative correlates of single-parenthood such as low income or reduced parental time investments.

Some research suggests that parental social connections are particularly strong in African-American communities. Hill (1972) argues that one of the greatest strengths of African-American families is the existence of strong kinship ties. Stack (1979) documents elaborate social networks in an

African-American community, in which child care, food and money are exchanged. Such support networks may be a response to economic and social constraints faced by African-American single parents (McDaniel 1994).

This suggests that African-American families may have access to various parenting resources outside the context of a traditional marriage, which could be a reason why single-parenthood is associated with fewer negative outcomes for African-American children compared to white children. These resources may include the child's grandparents, as well as other relatives and family friends. In this paper, we measure parental social connections along two dimensions: the frequency of contact with friends and relatives, and whether a child lives with a grandparent.

According to several studies, black grandparents are more involved with their grandchildren and play a more active role in their lives than do white grandparents. Looking at childcare arrangements, Vandell et al. (2003) found that non-white parents were more likely to rely on grandparents for full-time child care than were white parents. Cherlin and Furstenberg (1986) found that African-American grandparents were more likely than white grandparents to exhibit "parent like behaviors," such as correcting a child's behavior. It is possible that such race differences in grandparent involvement may account for some of the race differences in the impact of family structure on children.

The current study operationalizes the involvement of grandparents with their grandchildren through a measure of whether the child lives with a grandparent. Goldscheider and Bures (2003) examine trends in the percentage of unmarried adults with children who live in "complex households," most of which involve adults living with their own parents. Using Census data, they show that, starting in 1970, Blacks became more likely than whites to live in such arrangements. In 1990, Afrian-American unmarried adults with children were most likely to live in a complex household.

Some previous research has examined the influence of grandparent co-residence on children and their mothers. In general, this research finds that grandmother co-residence benefits young mothers' education (Unger and Cooley 1992) and employment (Gordon et al. in press), but is associated with less positive parenting behaviors on the part of these mothers (Luster and Dubow 1990; Wakschlag, Chase-Lansdale, and Brooks-Gunn 1996). However, the negative association between co-residence and parenting behavior is largely due to the selection of mothers who are poor parents into co-residence with their own parents (Gordon et al. in press).

The research described above focuses on young mothers of very young children. A smaller body of research examines how grandparent co-

residence benefits older children, again focusing on offspring in single-mother families. McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) found that adolescents living with a single mother and a grandparent are more likely to drop out of high school than those living with a single mother alone. They hypothesize that this may be due to the selection of poorly-functioning mothers and teens into co-residence with grandparents. Other research suggests that living with a grandparent can benefit older children. DeLeire and Kalil (2002) examine teenager well-being in a variety of family structures and find that youth living with a single unmarried mother and a grandparent fare better than do those living with married parents, even after controlling for a wide range of economic, social and demographic measures. The authors suggest that the beneficial effects for children of living with a grandparent may be due to the grandparents' provision of financial and non-financial resources, and their ability to monitor youth behavior. Although the authors did not test for race differences in the influence of living with a grandparent on children, Black teens in their sample were more likely to be living with a grandparent than were white teens.

Another focus of this paper is whether social connections differ between families receiving public assistance and those who are not. In general, much less research exists on this topic. Duncan et al. (2001) found that welfare-receiving families report a higher frequency of socializing with neighbors than non-welfare families. Perhaps differences by welfare status in the influence of family structure on children can be explained by variations in social connectedness across welfare status.

To summarize, then, this paper asks two research questions. First, does the association between single-parenthood and child delinquency differ by race or by welfare status? Second, if such differences exist, can they be explained by race or welfare differences in family social connections?

3. DATA

We use data from the 2000 and earlier waves of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979 merged mother-child files (NLSY79), a nationally representative survey designed by the U.S. Department of Labor to study variations in labor market behavior and experiences. The parents of the children we study were between ages 14 and 22 when first interviewed in 1979 and constitute a representative sample of individuals born between 1957 and 1965. Their ages ranged from 35 to 43 in 2000, and they have been interviewed annually since 1979 (biennially since 1994). Beginning in 1988, and biennially thereafter, interviewers administered the Child Self-Administered Survey (CSAS) to children of women in the original sample

who were aged ten and older. Because each child can be assessed more than once, the data are stacked to create a child-year file in which each child contributes multiple observations.

Our sample consists of children ages ten to fourteen between 1988 and 2000 (our dependent variable of delinquency was assessed starting in 1988). Because of the design of the NLSY mother-child data, this is not a nationally representative sample of children in this age range. Instead, it is a representative sample of children aged 10-14, assessed between 1988 and 2000, who were born to mothers who were between the ages of 14 and 21 in 1979. Our data thus contain an over-sample of children born to younger mothers.

4. MEASURES

4.1 Delinquency

The outcome used in this paper is a measure of delinquency composed of eight items from the CSAS. These items ask the child how often in the past year he or she has: stayed out later than his/her parents allowed, hurt someone badly enough to need a doctor, lied to parents about something important, taken something without paying for it, damaged school property on purpose, ever gotten drunk, skipped a day of school without permission, and stayed out a night without permission. These items are coded never (0), once (1), twice (2), or more than twice (3). This scale ranges from 0 to 24 and alphas for each year range from .66 to .72.

4.2 Family structure

To measure family structure, we sum the total number of years from birth to a child's assessment point that he or she lived with the mother and no spouse or cohabiting partner (single parent) and the mother and her spouse (married parent). Years in which the child was living with his or her mother and her unmarried cohabiting partner are dropped from our analyses due to sample size problems. In multivariate analyses we estimate coefficients on the single parent variable; the reference category is the amount of time spent in a married-parent family. Analyses indicated no differences in the effect of living in a step-father family compared to living with two biological parents on the outcomes examined here. Therefore, our measure of time

spent in a married couple family includes both family structure types: two biological parents and step-father families.

4.3 Social connections

Parental social connections are measured with two indicator variables. The first, measured at each wave, ascertains whether the child's grandparent or great-grandparent lives in the household. The second is a measure of whether the child's mother reports that their family visits friends or relatives once a week or more.

4.4 Control measures

All multivariate analyses control for the following measures: average income over the child's lifetime up to the assessment (logged), ages of the child and mother, number of children in the household (including the assessed child), total number of weeks the mother has been employed up to the assessment point, and total years of welfare receipt up to the assessment point. As described below, our use of within-child fixed-effects models means that child and mother specific characteristics that do not change across time, such as child gender or mother's age at first birth, are controlled, but are not estimated. All analyses also include controls for the total number of family structure disruptions a child has experienced, and the duration since the most recent family structure disruption, at each assessment point.

5. METHOD

When estimating the associations between family structure and children's outcomes it is possible that children living in various family structures may differ in unobservable ways. Without being able to control fully for how children in single-parent families, for example, differ from those in married-couple families, Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) estimates of child outcomes on family structure may be biased. To address this, we use within-child fixed-effect regressions, relying on repeated observations of family structure and the outcome of interest, delinquency, for each child. These analyses exploit the fact that we have several observations for each child in the NLSY.

The potential for bias from OLS regression analyses is shown in Equation 1. Here, the outcome of child i at time t is regressed on the number

of years the child has spent in a single-parent family (yrs_single_{it}), as well as a series of control variables ($controls_{it}$). The reference category is years in a married-parent family. It is likely that researchers are unable to measure and account for all of the ways in which children living in single and married families may differ. Potential omitted measures could include aspects of maternal mental health, child temperament, or family socioeconomic status that do not change with time (represented by $Mother_i$ and $Child_i$). If such variables are omitted from Equation (1), but are correlated with both the time a child spends in a single-parent family and that child's delinquency (Y_{it}), then estimates of β_1 from Equation (1) will be biased. Specifically, the unmeasured components of $Mother_i$ and $Child_i$ would be included in the error term (ε_{it}) of Equation (1). The error term, in turn, would be correlated with both the dependent and independent variables, violating key assumptions of OLS (Deaton 1997).

$$Y_{it} = \alpha_{it} + \beta_1 yrs\_single_{it} + \gamma_1 controls_{it} + Mother_i + Child_i + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (1)$$

To address this, we use within-child fixed-effect regressions, relying on repeated observations of family structure and the outcomes of interest for each child. The fixed-effects model used in this paper is shown in Equation 2 (for a more complete description see Deaton 1997 or Greene 1997). Each variable in the equation is averaged over all assessed time points for a specific child (for example, $yrs\_single_{i.}$ is the average number of years a child has spent in a single-parent family across all periods in which that child is observed). This average value is then subtracted from the value at a specific time point for that child (yrs_single_{it}, the average number of years in a single-parent family at a specific time point). As a result, all time-invariant measured and unmeasured characteristics for a specific child, (including $Mother_i$ and $Child_i$ in Equation 1, as well as other time-invariant measures such as child gender), drop out of the model. This includes any persistent components of the error term that are correlated across time.

$$Y_{it} - Y_{i.} = \alpha_{it} - \alpha_{i.} + \beta_1(yrs\_single_{it} - yrs\_single_{i.}) + \gamma_1(controls_{it} - controls_{i.}) + \varepsilon_{it} - \varepsilon_{i.} \quad (2)$$

It should be noted that these analyses do not remove the biasing effects of unmeasured variables that change with time. For example, components of maternal mental health, child temperament, or family socioeconomic status that change with time and are unmeasured may still bias the estimates in Equation 2.

Table 5-1 presents means and standard deviations for the variables of interest in this paper. In order to measure changes within children over time, the data are stacked to create a child-year file in which each child contributes multiple observations.

Table 5-1. Descriptive Statistics: Means and Standard Deviations (unweighted).

	Mean	*SD*
Delinquency	3.15	3.55
Lives with grandparents	.08	.27
Visits friends and relatives weekly or more	.32	.47
Child is black	.36	.48
Child's family receives welfare	.18	.39
Whether living in single-parent family	.31	.45
Whether living in married-couple family	.69	.47
Total years in single-parent family	3.52	4.23
Total years in a married-couple family	7.24	5.61
Log income	10.30	.99
Child age	12.29	1.58
Number of children in household	2.60	1.16
Total weeks of maternal employment	307.39	243.12
Total years of AFDC receipt	2.65	3.77
Maternal age	33.46	3.48
Yrs. since most recent family structure change	1.92	4.06
Total number of family structure changes	1.36	1.53

6. RESULTS

6.1 Descriptive analysis

As a first step, descriptive analyses were performed in order to examine variation in social connections between Black and white families, and between welfare-receiving and non-welfare-receiving families, within family structure categories. As noted above, our analyses focus on two theoretically important sub-groups: African-Americans and families receiving public assistance. Within these populations, social connections were examined separately for single-parent and married families. The results are presented in Table 5-2. Results in these tables were obtained by regressing the social connection variables on indicators first for race and then for welfare status separately by family structure. Because each child

may appear in the data more than once, robust standard errors were calculated.

Table 5-2. Whether Child Lives with Grandparents.

	White Mean	Black Mean	Significance of difference white vs. black
Single-parent Families	.10	.15	p = .05
Married couple Families	.04	.09	p = .06

N = 3,530 children aged 10-14 with non-missing measures of delinquency.

Table 5-2 shows that black children in single-mother families are more likely to live with a grandparent than are white children in such families (among children living with a single mother, 15% of black children live with their grandparent, compared to 10% of white children). Additionally, Black children in married couple families are more likely to live with a grandparent than white children, although overall, the likelihood of living with a grandparent is lower in married-couple families. This is consistent with other research showing that living with a grandparent is more prevalent in single-mother families (Ruggles 1994), and that black children are more likely to live with a grandparent than white children (Goldscheider and Bures 2003).

Table 5-3 examines the likelihood that a family visits friends and relatives weekly or more, and finds no differences in this measure by race or family structure.

Table 5-3. Whether Child is in Top Quartile of Visiting Friends and Relatives.

	White Mean	Black Mean	Significance of difference white vs. black
Single-parent Families	.33	.33	n.s.
Married couple Families	.32	.30	n.s.

N = 3,743 children aged 10-14 with non-missing measures of delinquency.

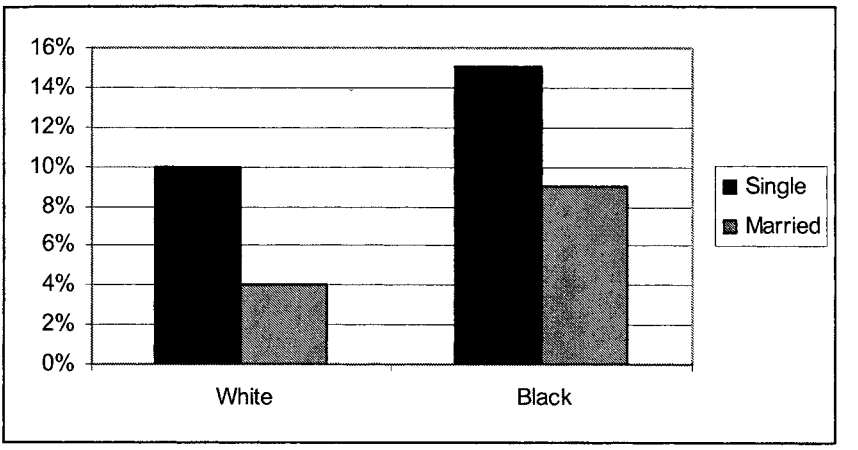

Figure 5-1. Percentage of Children Who Live With a Grandparent by Race.

Table 5-4. Whether Child Lives with Grandparents.

	Non-welfare Mean	Welfare Mean	Significance of difference non-welfare vs. welfare
Single-parent Families	.12	.12	n.s.
Married couple Families	.04	.16	p = .01

N = 3,524 children aged 10-14 with non-missing measures of delinquency.

In Table 5-4, results show that welfare-receiving children in married couple families are more likely to be living with grandparents than are those who do not receive welfare. Specifically, 16% of welfare-receiving children in married-parent families live with a grandparent, compared to 4% of those who do not receive welfare. Results from Table 5-4 are also shown in Figure 5-1. In contrast, the measure of how often the family visits friends and relatives does not vary significantly across welfare status (Table 5-5).

Tables 5-6 and 5-7 examine average levels of delinquency for children in single-parent vs. married-couple families separately by the two measures of social connections. These analyses ask whether, among all children living with their grandparents, for example, a significant difference in delinquency exists between those in a single-parent family and those in a married-couple family. Table 5-6 looks at average delinquency in single- vs. married-parent families for children living with their grandparents and those who are not. Results show that, for children living with their grandparents, there is not a significant difference in the average level of delinquency between single-

parent and married-parent families. In contrast, for children not living with their grandparents, those in a single-parent family have significantly higher levels of delinquency than those in a married-parent family. Results from Table 5-6 are reproduced in Figure 5-2.

Table 5-5. Whether Child is in Top Quartile of Visiting Friends and Relatives.

	Non-welfare Mean	Welfare Mean	Significance of difference non-welfare vs. welfare
Single-parent Families	.32	.33	n.s.
Married couple Families	.32	.36	n.s.

N = 3,467 children aged 10-14 with non-missing measures of delinquency.

Table 5-6. Average Child Delinquency.

	Single-parent families	Married-couple families	Significance of difference single vs. married
Lives with grandparent	3.44	2.78	n.s.
Does not live with grandparent	3.91	2.97	p<.01

N = 3,788 children aged 10-14.

Table 5-7 examines family structure differences in delinquency by whether the family visits friends and relatives weekly or more. Children in single-mother families have higher levels of delinquency, regardless of whether the family visits friends and relatives weekly or not.

Table 5-7. Average Child Delinquency.

	Single-parent families	Married-couple families	Significance of difference single vs. married
Visits friends/relatives weekly	3.84	2.67	p<.01
Does not visit friends/relatives weekly	3.87	3.06	p<.01

N = 3,723 children aged 10-14.

These analyses lay the groundwork for our multivariate fixed-effects models. Based on the descriptive analyses, we expect that living with

grandparents may account for any race and welfare differences in the influence of single-parenthood on children. Because the descriptive results indicate no differences in the influence of family structure on delinquency by how often the family visits friends and relatives, we expect that this measure will not account for race or welfare differences in the influence of single-parenthood on children.

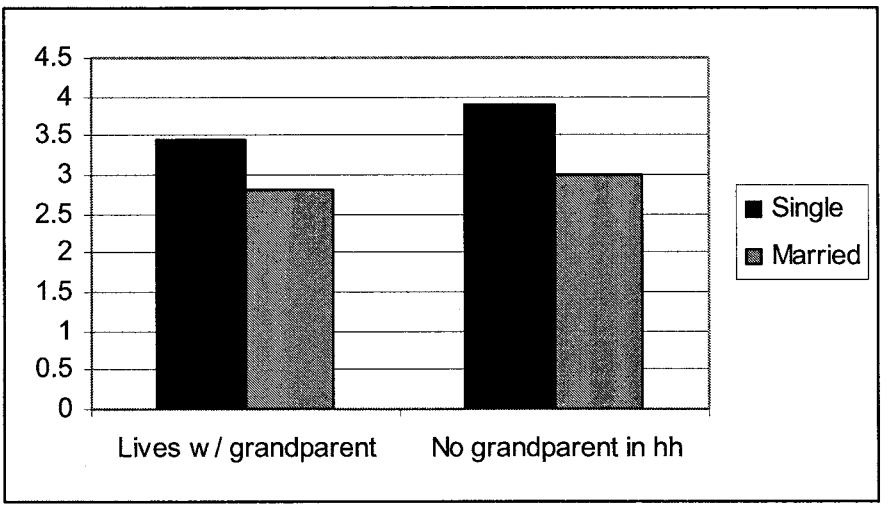

Figure 5-2. Average Child Delinquency.

6.2 Multivariate analysis

To test the hypothesis that living with grandparents may account for race and welfare differences in the effects of single-parenthood on children, we perform fixed-effect regression analyses with child delinquency as the dependent variable. In the first analyses, the measure of time spent in a single-parent family is used to predict delinquency (with time spent in a married-couple family as the omitted category). To test whether significant race/welfare differences exist in the influence of family structure on delinquency, this model includes interactions between family structure and child race/welfare status.

The next analyses repeat this model, estimating it once for children who are living with their grandparents and then a second time for those who are not. This will show whether controlling for the likelihood that a child lives

with a grandparent accounts for any race or welfare differences in the influence of family structure on delinquency. The same procedure is then followed to examine children separately by the frequency of visiting friends and relatives. All analyses control for the following measures: average income over the child's lifetime up to the assessment (logged), ages of the child and mother, number of children in the household (including the assessed child), total number of weeks the mother has been employed up to the assessment point, total years of welfare receipt up to the assessment point, total number of family structure changes, and duration since the most recent change. Results from these analyses are shown in Tables 5-8 and 5-9. In Tables 5-8 and 5-9, standard errors are shown in parentheses.

Table 5-8. Fixed-Effect Regression Results Predicting Delinquency: Race Differences.

	Pooled Sample	Lives with Grandparent	Does not live with Grandparent	Visits friends or relatives weekly	Does not visit friends or relatives weekly
Married*Black	-.04	.92	-.07	-.39	.20
	(.28)	(1.67)	(.31)	(.76)	(.41)
Single-parent	.73***	-.12	.69***	.96**	.72**
	(.21)	(.80)	(.21)	(.47)	(.31)
Single*Black	-.83***	.45	-.80***	-1.54***	-.79**
	(.26)	(2.14)	(.26)	(.56)	(.38)
N	2884	111	2773	919	1965

*p < .10; **p < .05; ***p <.001

The first column of Table 5-8 shows race differences in the influence of family structure on delinquency. Here, an additional year spent in a single-parent family is associated with an .83-point increase in delinquency for white children. The influence of single-parenthood on delinquency is significantly reduced for black children, and post-hoc analyses indicate that the total effect of single-parenthood on delinquency is not significant for black children.

The next column of Table 5-8 presents the results of analyses for children living with their grandparents. Here, there is no significant race difference in the influence of single-parenthood on delinquency. Additionally, the coefficient on the interaction between race and single-parenthood has reversed compared to that shown in Column 1. For both white and black children living with a grandparent, there is no significant association between an additional year in a single-parent family and delinquency, and there is no race difference in the association between single-parenthood and delinquency. In contrast, the race difference in the

influence of single-parenthood on children remains when looking at children who do not live with a grandparent (Column 3 of Table 5-8). For such children, an additional year in a single-parent family is associated with a .69-point increase in delinquency for white children, while post-hoc analyses reveal that for black children there is no significant relationship between living in a single-parent family and delinquency.

The fourth and fifth columns of Table 5-8 present results of analyses examining race differences in the influence of single-parenthood on children separately by the frequency with which a family visits friends and relatives. In Column 4, looking only at children who visit friends and relatives weekly or more, the significant race difference in the influence of single-parenthood on delinquency remains. Here, an additional year in a single-parent family is associated with a .96-point increase in delinquency for white children, but is not associated with a change in delinquency for black children. The same pattern emerges in Column 5, which looks at children who do not visit friends and relatives weekly; again, single-parenthood is associated with an increase in delinquency for white, but not black, children.

Table 5-9. Fixed-Effect Regression Results Predicting Delinquency: Welfare Differences.

	Pooled Sample	Lives with Grandparent	Does not live with Grandparent	Visits friends or relatives weekly	Does not visit friends or relatives weekly
Married*welfare	.12*	-.04	.11	.11	.16
	(.07)	(1.32)	(.07)	(.12)	(.12)
Single-parent	.37**	-.16	.33*	.26	.31
	(.17)	(.72)	(.17)	(.37)	(.24)
Single*welfare	-.09	-.55	-.09	-.22	-.08
	(.07)	(1.94)	(.07)	(.16)	(.11)
N	2882	111	2771	918	1964

*p < .10; **p < .05; ***p <.001

Table 5-9 presents results for analyses examining differences by welfare status. In the first column, there is no significant difference by welfare status in the association between single-parenthood and delinquency. Although the difference between groups is not statistically significant at the .05 level, results do show that an additional year in a single-parent family is associated with a significant increase in delinquency only for children not receiving welfare (post-hoc tests reveal that an additional year in a single-parent family is not a significant predictor of delinquency for children in welfare-receiving families).

Column 2 presents results for the sample of children who live with their grandparents. As in Column 1, the association between single-parenthood

and delinquency does not differ significantly by welfare status. Unlike the previous set of analyses, results here show that an additional year in a single-parent family is not associated with an increase in delinquency for children in non-welfare families (nor is there a significant association for welfare-receiving families). Column 3 of Table 5-9 presents results for children who are not living with their grandparents. Again, the association between single-parenthood and delinquency does not vary by welfare status. However, there is a moderately significant ($p < .10$) and positive association between an additional year in a single-parent family and the delinquency of non-welfare-receiving children who do not live with their grandparents.

Columns 4 and 5 of Table 5-9 present differences by frequency of visiting friends and relatives. In Column 4, focusing on children who visit their friends and relatives weekly or more, there is no significant difference by welfare status in the association between time in a single-parent family and delinquency. An additional year in a single-parent family is not associated with delinquency for welfare-receiving or non-welfare receiving children. In Column 5, results are presented for children who do not visit friends or relatives weekly. Again, no significant difference by welfare status exists, and time in a single-parent family is not associated with delinquency for either group.

7. DISCUSSION

Previous work found that time spent in a single-parent family was associated with increased delinquency for white, but not black, children (Dunifon and Kowaleski-Jones 2002). Our current paper seeks to determine whether ethnic differences in parental social connections can account for the relationship between family structure, race, and offspring delinquency. In addition, we expand our previous work to consider differences by welfare status in the influence of single-parenthood on children. In doing so, this paper makes several contributions to the literature on family structure and child well-being: first, to address issues of selection into family living arrangements, we estimate child-specific fixed-effects models, controlling for all child- and parent-specific time-invariant factors that may be associated both with the family structure in which a child lives and with that child's well-being. This is a novel approach to analyses relating family structure to child well-being. Additionally, this paper examines important but understudied sub-group differences in the influence of family living arrangements on children, focusing on the role of social connections in explaining such differences.

Two measures of parental social connections were examined: whether a child lives with a grandparent and the frequency with which a family visits friends and relatives. Our findings suggest a key role for living with a grandparent. In contrast, the frequency of visiting friends and relatives did not explain differences in the relationship between single-parenthood and child delinquency within sub-groups.

As in our previous work, results show that single-parenthood is associated with increased delinquency for white, but not black children. The results also support the hypothesis that racial differences in the likelihood of living with a grandparent may account for this difference. Descriptive results show that black children in single-mother families are more likely to live with a grandparent than are white children residing with a single mother. Additionally, when child residence with a grandparent is held constant, the race difference in the influence of single-parenthood on children becomes insignificant. That is, white children living with single mothers fare worse than black children only when they do not live with their grandparents. This suggests a positive role of extended kin in providing support for single mothers. Having a grandparent in the home may be associated with increased childcare, emotional support, monitoring of the child, and a host of other factors.

Looking at differences by welfare status, we found some evidence that single-parenthood is associated with increased delinquency only for families not receiving welfare. Because our analyses hold constant factors associated with a family's eligibility for welfare, such as income and family size, this may indicate that, among families equally entitled to public assistance, children in families that do not receive it suffer. However, our results indicate that social connections do not account for the differences in the influence of single-parenthood by welfare status.

This study has some limitations. In particular, when looking only at children living with grandparents, sample size is reduced dramatically. It is possible that the lack of significant associations between family structure and child delinquency in these models is due to the small sample size, rather than the fact that the analyses focus on children living with grandparents. We are encouraged that this is not the case by the fact that the coefficient on the interaction between race and family structure is reversed in the models looking only at children living with a grandparent.

Previous studies have explored the role of kin networks in improving the lives of single women who are rearing children (DeLeire and Kalil 2002). In particular, previous work has found an important role for kin in single parent African-American households, although the effectiveness of this support has been found to diminish as the mother moves out of early adulthood (Parish et al. 1991). Much of this research has focused on

teenage mothers and has relied on methodological approaches that potentially suffer from selection bias.

Our work, in contrast, employs methods that address the issue of selection bias and therefore provides a more stringent test of the associations among family structure, social connections, and child well-being. Moreover, our work extends the focus to women of all ages who are rearing their children alone using nationally representative data. Results indicate a positive role for extended family, which points to the value of moving beyond marital status to consider a wide range of supports that are present in the lives of children growing up in single-parent families.

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Chapter 6

SHIFTING FORTUNES IN A CHANGING ECONOMY

Trends in the Economic Well-Being of Divorced Women

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Abstract: Income losses resulting from marital disruption have traditionally contributed to high rates of poverty for single women. This paper explores trends in the economic consequences of divorce using data from the 1980-2001 Current Population Survey March Demographic Supplement. Divorce still adversely affects women's incomes, but divorcées have achieved noticeable economic gains over the last twenty years. Newly developed econometric techniques reveal progress at all points of the income distribution; middle- and upper-class economic gains cannot be attributed to polarization within divorced women's incomes. Multivariate analyses show that progress can largely be attributed to divorcées' progress in the workforce and changing demographic attributes, rather than economic dependence on men, relatives, or income transfers. Finally, we explore the implications of these results for understanding stratification in contemporary America.

Key words: economic consequences of divorce, family structure, poverty, income polarization

1. INTRODUCTION

Childhood poverty is one of the most pressing social problems facing the United States, both today and for the foreseeable future. Thirty-seven percent of the poor are under age eighteen, while 16% of all minors now live in poverty (Dalaker 2001). Economic deprivation while growing up has been linked to poor physical health (Korenman and Miller 1997), reduced

intellectual ability and academic achievement (Duncan et al. 1998; Pagani et al. 1997; Smith et al. 1997), premarital fertility (Duncan et al. 1998; Wu 1996) and various other psychosocial difficulties (Hanson et al. 1997; McLoyd 1998).

One of the most important determinants of poverty in contemporary America is family structure (Levy 1995). Poverty rates for single mothers have traditionally been five times those of two-parent families (Garfinkel and McLanahan 1986). Furthermore, changes in the structure of the American family since 1960 have greatly contributed to higher rates of childhood poverty. In the 1980s, approximately 23% of the increase in childhood poverty resulted from the proliferation of mother-headed families (Eggebeen and Lichter 1991). This trend has led some researchers to label single-mother families as the new underclass for the end of the 20th century (Garfinkel and McLanahan 1986; Weitzman 1985).

Divorce is an important source of poverty among single-mother families. Although divorce rates have stabilized since 1979 (Goldstein 1999; Raley and Bumpass 2003; United States Bureau of the Census 2001a), about 50% of all new marriages will probably dissolve (Bramlett and Mosher 2001; Kreider and Fields 2001) and marital dissolution often takes a grievous toll on women's incomes (Holden and Smock 1991). This is particularly the case for divorced women with children, who suffer greater declines in standard of living (cf. Bianchi et al. 1999; Smock 1993, 1994). For these reasons divorce is crucial to understanding poverty in contemporary America. Family structure is now firmly entrenched with race, education, and socioeconomic origins as stalwarts of stratification research.

In this paper we examine how divorced women's incomes have changed over the past twenty years. Newly developed statistical methods coupled with data from the 1980-2001 Current Population Survey (CPS) allow unprecedented insight into the economic consequences of divorce. Although still poorer than their married counterparts, divorced women had much higher incomes in 2001 than in 1980. This can largely be attributed to growing levels of vocational capital in conjunction with declining family size. Economic dependence on income transfers or other adults plays little part in accounting for divorcées' increasing incomes. We also shed light on the changing distribution of incomes for divorced women. Marital disruption has contributed extensively to income inequality. Poverty rates would be lower if not for high divorce rates. However, we show that income polarization has not occurred within the population of divorced women to the same extent as it has for Americans as a whole. Instead, divorcées throughout the income distribution have benefited from changing economic conditions.

2. BACKGROUND

Political commentary on divorce is as old as divorce itself (Phillips 1991), and contemporary America is no exception. Recently the governors of Arkansas and Oklahoma openly stated their desires to cut divorce rates in their states by one-third to one-half (New York Times 2001). Covenant marriage laws in Louisiana, Arizona, and Arkansas offer the option of eschewing easy divorce for what amounts to fault-based statutes (Nock et al. 1999; Thompson and Wyatt 1999). Language urging the reconsideration of no-fault divorce appeared in the 2000 Republican Platform (New York Times 2000); in total, over thirty states entertained anti-divorce legislation in the 1990s (Gardiner et al. 2002).

The reasoning behind this war against divorce goes beyond the desire for a return to a 'golden age' of marriage. Many blame easy divorce laws for the proliferation of poverty (Gallagher 1996; Galston 1996). According to the opponents of divorce, preserving two-parent families would cut public expenditures by reducing subsidies to indigent single mothers.

Sometimes the proponents of tougher divorce laws have drawn on outdated or discredited research. Weitzman (1985), whose findings partially motivated the Louisiana Covenant Marriage Act (see Spaht 1998), analyzed 228 respondents selected from Los Angeles County court dockets in 1977. She reported that divorce lowered women's standard of living, measured as the ratio of income to needs, by 73%. Subsequently her results were found to be erroneous (Peterson 1996). Concurrent studies withstanding scholarly scrutiny show smaller but still noteworthy post-divorce declines in women's standard of living, generally in the neighborhood of 20-45% (Mott and Moore 1978; Nestel et al. 1983; Sorensen 1992).

Recent studies report more mixed results. Some show that women still suffer tremendous income losses following divorce. Bianchi et al. (1999) analyzed women with children using data from the Survey of Income and Program Participation that extended through 1990, and found post-divorce declines in median per capita income of 29%. Smock (1993, 1994), using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth that extended through 1988, showed that women who had married and divorced by age 31 suffered declines in median per-capita income ranging from 21% (for whites) to 35% (for African-Americans). But none of these studies tell the whole story. According to Current Population Survey data, only 29% of divorced women in 2001 had children. Also, nearly 90% of divorcées are now over the age of 31.

More inclusive studies using recent data suggest that divorced women's financial prospects have finally begun to improve. Nationally representative data from the 1987-1994 National Survey of Families and Households show

that the economic consequences of marital disruption, as measured by per capita income, have declined about 40% since the early 1980s (McKeever and Wolfinger 2001). This finding is supported by Current Population Survey data, which indicate that poverty rates for single-mother families achieved a record low (25%) in 2000 (Dalaker 2001). Although this figure includes families produced by death and out-of-wedlock birth, it suggests economic improvement for divorced women. Furthermore, research accounting for differential taxation and complex patterns of physical custody suggests that the economic consequences of divorce might have declined as early as the late 1980s (Braver 1999).

The weakening effect of divorce on women's incomes is reflective of the more general trend in gender inequality in the United States. Implicit in the divorce literature is the argument that women's post-divorce drop in standard of living is attributable to the transition from living in a household that participates in the labor market to being an individual who does so. In the past this meant that most women, who either subordinated their own careers to those of their husbands or, more likely, left the labor market at marriage, were suddenly forced back into employment without the advantages their husbands had accrued by working continuously (Weitzman 1985). Furthermore, from a labor market perspective it is not surprising that younger women and women with children suffer precipitous declines in income following divorce. Younger workers and mothers traditionally have had low earnings.

Although divorcées' economic disadvantages remain rooted in the institutions of the labor market, the position of women in these institutions has changed a great deal. One important development concerns the human capital women now bring to the work place. Between 1980 and 2000 the proportion of women with college degrees rose from 13% to 24%, while those with high school diplomas increased from 66% to 84% (United States Bureau of the Census 2001a). All else being equal, education increases divorcées' earning power. Also, the gender gap in wages narrowed over the last 15 or so years (O'Neill and Polachek 1993; United States Bureau of the Census 1999). These developments were aptly summarized by Suzanne Bianchi (1997) several years ago at a Consortium of Social Science Associations Congressional Breakfast seminar: "Men and women are not equal, but when it comes to market work, to earnings, to the jobs they hold, the changes are all in the direction of greater equality."

Divorcées have benefited from changes in marriage as well. Women's median marriage age has risen to 25 (Fields and Casper 2001), so more women have significant work experience before they marry. Furthermore, married women's labor force participation increased from 50% to 61% between 1980 and 2000 (United States Bureau of the Census 2001a). Even

married women with children are increasingly likely to work, and divorcées previously employed during marriage do not face the myriad problems associated with reentering the labor force. Although these developments help all women, they probably have greatest significance to the recently divorced. After marriages end most women are under pressure to convert their vocational skills into income.

Changes in fertility may also play a part in improving the economic situation of divorced women. Family size has declined over time, so recently divorced women now have smaller families to support (United States Bureau of the Census 2001a). Furthermore, child support laws have been revised in favor of custodial mothers and average payment size is now often larger than it used to be (Cancian and Meyer 1996; Grall 2000).

It is also possible that divorced women may only be faring better in recent years because of changes in household structure. Although remarriage has become less common over time, rates of post-marital cohabitation have risen sharply (Martinson 1994). This implies that some divorcées are finding ways of relying on others—outside of the traditional solution of remarriage—should they be unable to provide for themselves. On the other hand, fewer divorcées now move back in with their parents than in the past (McKeever and Wolfinger 2001). It is important to account for economic dependence in any attempt to understand the reasons for change in divorced women's economic well-being, particularly in light of the potential policy implications. Historically, public aid to single mothers has been predicated in part on their inability to provide for themselves. Does their current earning power obviate the need for governmental support? Conversely, evidence of increased economic dependence would undercut the significance of higher post-marital incomes.

The dramatic social changes described here have the potential for greatly reshaping the economic contexts in which divorcées find themselves. We therefore examine how and why the incomes of divorced women have changed since 1980. These research questions speak to current debates on poverty and gender inequality in the market place by documenting the changing welfare of one disproportionately at-risk population. In doing so we address three of the main social trends in the United States over the past 25 years: the changing family structure, the growing role of women in the labor force, and income polarization. Understanding the connection between these issues is an important step in accounting for social inequality in contemporary America.

3. RESEARCH PLAN

Most research on the economic consequences of divorce has used panel data to conduct before-and-after comparisons of divorcées' incomes (e.g., Bianchi et al. 1999; McKeever and Wolfinger 2001; Smock 1993, 1994). Although advantageous in many respects, before-and-after studies cannot answer certain questions about divorce. Panel data generally span limited periods of time, making it difficult to study trends in divorcées' incomes. Also, only a small percentage of respondents tend to get divorced in any given interval between panels and as a result sample sizes have generally been quite small, often on the order of about 200 women. Even larger surveys like the Panel Study of Income Dynamics or the Survey of Income and Program Participation cannot provide samples adequate for the distributional analyses we employ.

In the current paper we take a novel approach by analyzing data from the 1980-2001 Current Population Survey (CPS) March Demographic Files, an annually repeated cross-sectional survey. This entails a direct contrast between divorced and married women, rather than comparing pre- and post-divorce incomes for the same women. A large sample of divorced women enables us to understand how changing economic, contextual, and personal characteristics have affected their incomes. Moreover, the CPS allows us to study trends across the income distribution.

Research on divorcées' economic well-being has traditionally relied on means or medians to summarize income distributions, but simple summary statistics cannot tell us whether some divorced women are doing better at the expense of others (Bernhardt et al. 1995; Morris et al. 1994). Have all divorced women fared better over time, or has a rising middle class of divorcées obscured economic stagnation by others? In conjunction with the large CPS sample size, recently developed methods for analyzing distributions (Handcock and Morris 1999; Fortin and Lemieux 1998) permit new insight into how divorced women have fared across the entire income distribution. In particular, we will address three questions:

1. What factors are responsible for divorcées' economic progress?
2. How much has economic dependence on relatives and income transfers helped divorced women?
3. Are all divorcées faring better than in previous years, or only those at certain points of the income distribution?

4. METHODS

4.1 Data

We use data from the 1980-2001 Current Population Survey March Demographic Files (United States Bureau of the Census 2001b). The CPS is an annually-repeated national probability sample of households in the United States; the March survey contains demographic variables appropriate for research on divorced women's incomes. The total sample size for the 22 years analyzed is 1,124,160. The study begins at 1980 for two reasons. First, it marks the beginning of the Reagan presidency, often thought to herald a new economic regime (Kymlicka and Matthews 1988; Lekachman 1982). Second, Garfinkel and McLanahan's (1986) landmark study of poverty in single-mother families analyzed CPS data extending through 1980.

We analyze only divorced and married women. Other women, as well as men, are omitted from the sample. Although never-married mothers are a rapidly growing demographic group (Rawlings and Saluter 1994) and tend to be even poorer than divorced mothers (United States Bureau of the Census 1997), the reasons for their poverty are somewhat different than for divorced women and therefore merit their own investigation. The same is true for widowed women. Finally, we omit separated women due to the design of the CPS. Most respondent characteristics, including marital status and family size, are measured at the time of the interview, while income measures are lagged a year. As many separated women probably dissolved their marriages in the year prior to the interview, their per capita incomes often reflect their husbands' earnings but their current family size. Supplemental analyses show that separated women report median per capita incomes almost three times those of divorced women.

As measured by the CPS, income provides two analytic challenges. First, heaping occurs because survey respondents tend to round off their reported incomes (e.g., $24,573 becomes $25,000). Second, the CPS topcodes incomes for high-earning respondents. Neither of these data issues affect our results because we analyze the position of respondents within the income distribution for divorced women, rather than actual dollar amounts. Most divorcées fall into the same general income category whether or not they round their incomes. Similarly, high incomes would fall into the upper income categories irrespective of topcoding.

Income is measured in 2001 dollars, adjusted using the consumer price index (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2002). All analyses are weighted. In regression analyses we report Huber-Weight standard errors, to adjust for

biases potentially induced by the weights and the cluster-sample design of the CPS (Winship and Radbill 1994).

4.2 Sample selection issues

Most studies of divorced women's incomes have used panel data to conduct before-and-after comparisons. Although our cross-sectional analysis of CPS data offers many advantages, it raises the concern that sample selection could affect our results. If financially well-off women make the transition from separation to divorce especially quickly, worse-off women would be underrepresented in our sample. Poorer divorcées will also be underrepresented if financial need motivates them to remarry quickly. The same holds true for women who form cohabiting relationships subsequent to divorce. Finally, the population of divorced women could itself reflect self-selection: perhaps only women who anticipate post-marital prosperity choose to leave their husbands. Any of these biases could produce misleading estimates of divorced women's economic well-being.

Previous research allays concerns about sample selection issues. Using Panel Study of Income Dynamics data, Ono (1995) shows that wives with high incomes are less likely to divorce within a calendar year of separation, presumably because it takes more time to divide large estates. There is no income effect in the subsequent year. Only a couple of years after separation does income begin to increase the likelihood of divorce. By this point about 75% of separated couples have officially ended their marriages. Sample selection in the transition from separation to divorce should therefore not bias our results towards artificially inflated incomes for divorced women.

Another selection issue concerns whether impoverished women are especially likely to remarry in order to ameliorate their financial situation. But this is not likely to be a source of selection bias: Divorcées' employment status, highly correlated with income, does not affect the chances of remarriage, at least for whites (Martinson 1994). This result probably reflects two countervailing effects. On the one hand, poorer women have a greater need to remarry, since remarriage represents one of the best ways for divorced women to improve their incomes (Morrison and Ritualo 2000); on the other hand, poorer women are less attractive to prospective spouses. Perhaps these effects offset one another, yielding no relationship between income and remarriage.

A third selection issue concerns the propensity of divorced women to live with partners out of wedlock. Remarriage rates have declined in the last thirty years (Martinson 1994); over the same period cohabitation became much more common, especially among divorcées (Bumpass and Sweet 1989; Casper and Cohen 2000; Martinson 1994; see also Bumpass and Lu

2000). Divorced women may now be more inclined than ever to improve their financial situations by living with partners out of wedlock. This is an important issue, because it speaks to the question of women's economic dependence on men. The CPS allows us to measure cohabitation, so we will be able to differentiate between single and cohabiting divorcées.

The fourth and final possibility for sample selection bias concerns whether women self-select out of marriage into divorce. This seems unlikely for two reasons. First, if the population of divorced women disproportionately reflected those who saw themselves well prepared for single life, we would expect women who initiated separation to fare better after their marriages ended. But this is not the case: women who report leaving their husbands fare no better financially than those whose former husbands initiated divorce (McKeever and Wolfinger 2001). Furthermore, Smock et al. (1999: 794) demonstrate through a multi-stage model that ". . . if married women were to divorce, their average level of economic well-being would be about the same as that of divorced women." These findings cast doubt on the notion that women self-select into divorce based on their self-perceived financial prospects.

Although not technically a sample selection issue, the CPS data do not allow us to know for how long divorced women have been divorced. This is not a liability because the economic consequences of divorce generally persist for at least several years after the disruption (Duncan and Hoffman 1985; Stirling 1989; Weiss 1984). The reason seems clear: if divorcées lack the resources needed to improve their incomes it will likely take at least several years to acquire them. Conversely, if women have work skills they will probably put them to use soon after their marriages end. Over time divorced women may potentially be able to improve their earnings, so our results should be viewed as "average" figures for all divorced women.

4.3 Univariate analyses

We compare per capita incomes of divorced and married women to study trends in the economic consequences of divorce. Per capita income is computed by dividing family income by the number of people in the family. Family income in itself is not as useful for studying the economic consequences of divorce. Losing a husband usually entails the loss of a family's primary wage earner, so family income always declines precipitously after marital disruption. But lower family income by itself does not necessarily connote a lower standard of living, because family size has also declined. Per capita income accounts for changing family sizes. Furthermore, declines in family size over time may lead to improved

standards of living even if divorced women's incomes remain constant, because families now contain fewer children to support.

An alternative to per capita income is a measure of the ratio of income to needs, often defined as the ratio of income to the poverty line. Like per capita income, income-to-poverty line ratios respond to economies of scale, but these measures are most important when considering the impact of divorce on men's income. For women, both measures show relatively similar economic losses occurring as a product of divorce (Bianchi et al. 1999). Since income-to-poverty line ratios and per capita income tell substantively similar stories, we only report results based on the latter.

To study univariate trends in divorced women's income we employ both traditional univariate statistics and new graphical methods of data analysis that depict distributional trends. These allow us to examine change for divorcées at different points in the income distribution, as well as to ascertain the extent to which income polarization has occurred. Following Handcock and Morris (1999: 21), we examine the changing distribution of divorced women relative to 1980 income levels. If Y_0 represents the income distribution at 1980, $F_0(y)$ the cumulative distribution function, Y the income distribution of a later year, and F(y) the cumulative distribution function for that year, then the relative distribution can be represented as $R=F_0(Y)$. R thus measures the relative rank of any position in the comparison distribution, Y, relative to Y_0.

All analyses exclude cohabiting divorcées, ranging from 10% of divorced women in 1980 to 15% in 2001. As has always been true for remarriage, nonmarital cohabitation has become an effective route to economic recovery for divorced women (McKeever and Wolfinger 2001; Morrison and Ritualo 2000). Moreover, unmarried-couple households have increased almost five-fold since the late 1970s and divorcées are especially likely to enter cohabiting unions (Casper and Cohen 2000). The CPS only added direct means of measuring cohabitation in 1995, so we use the adjusted POSSLQ method described by Casper and Cohen (2000) to identify cohabiting respondents. This has two drawbacks. First, adjusted POSSLQ does not allow us to differentiate opposite-sex roommates from cohabiting partners. Perhaps as a consequence adjusted POSSLQ overestimates the actual number of cohabiting couples, although the rate of overestimation has remained relatively constant over time. A second and more serious problem concerns the compatibility of adjusted POSSLQ with income measures that account for economies of scale. Per capita income and income-to-poverty line ratios are based on the number of people within a family, but adjusted POSSLQ couples always span two families within a single household. This makes it impossible for us to compare the incomes of single and cohabiting divorcées.

4.4 Multivariate analyses

We model divorced women's family income in both 1980 (N = 4,202) and 2001 (N = 4,547) as a function of human capital, work status, living arrangements, and other factors. Earnings from child support, alimony and public aid are subtracted from family income, so our results reflect the effects of independent variables on earnings; the impact of transfer income is considered in additional analyses. Although the optimal solution would be to conduct a regression analysis of per capita income or income-to-poverty line ratios rather than family income, doing so is ill-advised because such analyses imply interactions between family size and all independent variables (Smock 1993: 368). We then decompose the differences between 1980 and 2001 incomes to differentiate the effect of changes in average resources from changes in returns to these resources. The univariate analyses confirm relative monotonicity in income trends, so analyzing the endpoints of the 1980-2001 time series captures the changing effects of the covariates on divorced women's incomes. Moreover, decomposition analyses require discrete data points—there is no way to decompose our entire time series.

Most regression analyses of economic well-being use log-income as a dependent variable, with the objective of predicting mean log-incomes. Although adequate for studying the effects of covariates in any given period, predicting mean log-incomes is problematic for studying change over time. As we demonstrate in the univariate analyses, the shape of the income distribution has changed as well as its mean. Comparing means fails to capture the consequences of shifting distributions. A solution, as shown by Fortin and Lemieux (1998), is to study the effect of covariates on respondents' locations within the income distribution using a rank regression approach. For both 1980 and 2001 we divide family income into 50 intervals, each containing approximately 2% of the income distribution. This provides adequate categories to approximate the income distribution without spreading the sample too thin. The distribution of 50 income categories provides the dependent variable, with estimation conducted via ordered logistic regression. The resulting parameter estimates can be interpreted as the log odds of a 2% increase in one's position in the income distribution. More important, the decomposition of 1980 and 2001 results reflects greater sensitivity to changes in the income distribution than would a decomposition of means based on ordinary least squares regression.

Education, included in multivariate analyses as a measure of human capital, is dummy coded as less than a high school degree, high school graduate, some college, four year college graduate, and graduate degree.

Occupational status and hours worked allow us to ascertain how women's labor market participation has contributed to their economic progress. Hours worked is dummy coded as not working, (0 hours)[1], working part-time (1-39 hours), and working full-time (40+ hours). Occupational status is measured with a standard Socioeconomic Index (SEI) of occupations (Hauser and Warren 1997); unemployed respondents are assigned a value of 0 for this variable.

Living arrangements may benefit divorced women's economic well-being. Smock (1993) showed that many divorcées improve their financial situations by living with parents or other relatives, so we measure both with dummy variables. Due to limitations of the CPS it is impossible to identify the presence of a parent in households where the parent moves in with the divorcée, rather than vice versa. In these uncommon instances respondents residing with a parent or parents are coded as living with other relatives.

About 90% of the children of divorce live with their mothers at least some of the time (Cancian and Meyer 1998). Although children adversely affect their mother's earnings (Budig and England 2001; Waldfogel 1997), family size has declined in recent years (United States Bureau of the Census 2001a). Also, the relationship between fertility and divorce is complex (Lillard and Waite 1991). For these reasons we explore the impact of children on divorced women's incomes. We use two measures: number of co-resident children (coded as a set of dummy variables) and an additional dummy variable measuring the presence of any children under age six. Pre-school age children make it more difficult for single mothers to work.

We use three other independent variables. The first is size of SMSA, which is dummy coded as living in a metropolitan area with a population greater than one million. Although cities have more jobs (United States Bureau of the Census 2001a), they also have higher divorce rates (Bramlett and Mosher 2002; Sweezy and Tiefenthaler 1996). Gradations for SMSAs smaller than one million are available in 2001 but not 1980. Second, given well-known racial differences in income we employ dummy variables measuring whether respondents are white, black, or other racial background (including non-black Hispanics). Again, more detailed measures became available only recently. Third, we control for age and its square to account for well-known life course differences in income.

5. RESULTS

5.1 Univariate analyses

Figure 6-1 shows trends in women's per capita income between 1980 and 2001. For each year median income is plotted separately for divorced and married women. Throughout the time series divorced women have far lower per capita incomes than married women. Only by 1998 does divorced women's median income surpass that of married women in 1980. Nevertheless, over the years of the study all women's median per capita incomes rose steadily. The only lasting departure from a steady upward climb comes in the early 1990s, when a recession produced temporary declines for both groups.

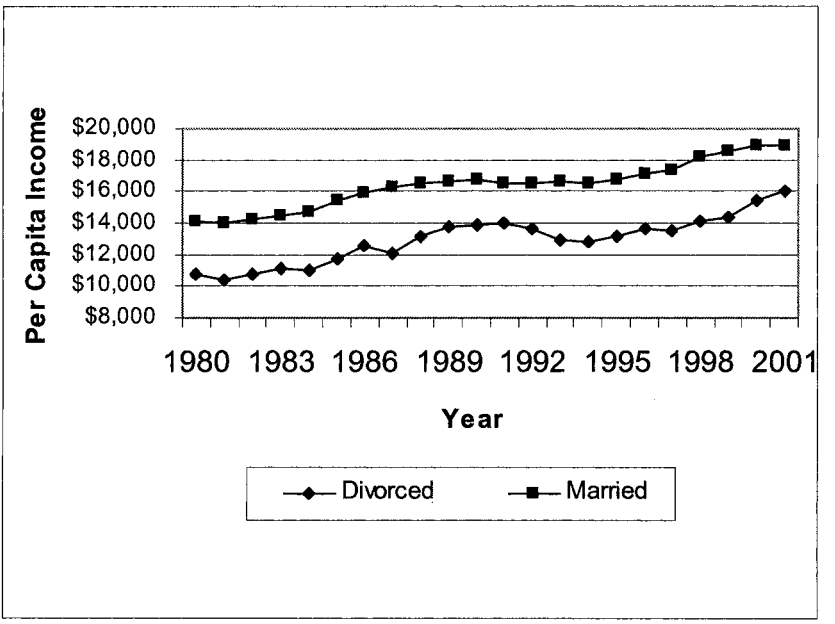

Figure 6-1. Women's Per Capita Income by Marital Status, 1980-2001.

How much has the economic well-being of divorced women improved? Table 6-1 summarizes changes in income over time by marital status. The top panel of Table 6-1 shows that divorced women's median per capita income grew 48% from 1980 to 2001. This was a somewhat faster rate of growth than that of married women, which increased 34%. Although both

groups of women have benefited from changing economic conditions, divorcées have shown greater improvement over the last twenty years.

Table 6-1. Changes in Per Capita Income.

	1980	2001	% change
		Median	
Married women	$14,153	$18,976	34%
Divorced women	$10,780	$16,000	48%
		Lower Quartile	
Married women	$8,968	$11,250	25%
Divorced women	$5,736	$8,304	45%
		Upper Quartile	
Married women	$21,871	$31,353	43%
Divorced women	$18,499	$29,000	57%

Analyzing only median per capita income potentially masks changes in the overall income distribution. Real income has declined since 1980 for all demographic groups except the college educated (Farley 1996). Moreover, women's economic progress relative to men's can be partially attributed to a decline in men's real incomes at the lower end of the income distribution (Bernhardt et al. 1995). This should drive down gains in married women's per capita income relative to divorced women's for lower-income couples, because men will no longer be contributing as much to per capita income in married families. Improvement in women's real income can be also be attributed to polarization within women's earning (Bernhardt et al. 1995). For these reasons it is informative to assess divorced women's economic progress at various points in the income distribution.

The second panel of Table 6-1 shows changes in real income for the lower income quartiles, while the third panel considers the upper quartile. The comparison is interesting for several reasons. First, divorced women in the lower quartile have improved their incomes only slightly less (45%) than the median divorced woman (48%). Improvement in divorcées' economic well-being cannot be solely attributed to dramatic gains by the higher deciles. Gains in the lowest quartile are especially pronounced in comparison to the slow progress of married women in the same quartile (25%). Although income polarization has hurt married couples in the lower quartile, divorced women have not apparently been so greatly affected.

As might be expected, divorcées in the upper quartile have fared especially well. Their incomes show the most dramatic improvement of all groups depicted in Table 6-1 (57%), outstripping both married women in the same quartile (43%) and divorced women in the lower quartile (45%). Divorced women in the upper quartile have several factors working in their favor. Not only are they the beneficiaries of changes that have aided divorced women in general, they may have also profited from the polarization of wages among American workers.

We can further understand the nature of wage polarization by comparing changes in the relative income distributions of married and divorced women over the study period. To do so we plot the changing proportion of women who fall into 1980 income deciles. As with other univariate analyses, separate plots are presented for married and divorced respondents. Looking first at married women, Figure 6-2 reveals a gradual shift of per capita income towards the upper deciles in married women's families from 1980 to 2001. There are dramatic gains in the upper deciles of the distribution, losses in the middle, and slight losses in the bottom deciles.

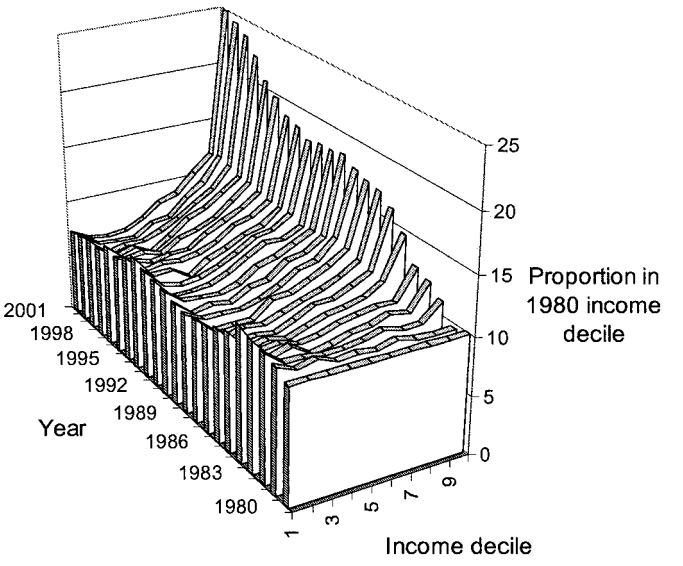

Figure 6-2. Relative Distribution of Per Capita Income, Married Women.

Divorced women show a somewhat different pattern, as displayed in Figure 6-3. Similar to married women, there have been large gains in the

higher deciles. Thus more divorcées now have per capita incomes that only the top 10% of divorced women in 1980 could attain. However, there is an even greater drop than for married respondents in the number of women in the lower earning deciles. While 8% of married women in 2001 had incomes that would have placed them in the lowest income decile in 1980, this is true for only 6% of divorced women. Overall, divorcées are being drawn out of the lower deciles to a greater extent than are married women. This suggests less of a "shrinking middle" for divorced women than for their married counterparts. It also implies that divorcées have not suffered from the income polarization that Bernhardt et al. (1995) finds for women in general. Excluding dramatic gains in the highest decile, the shape of divorced women's income distribution has not changed as radically as that of married women.

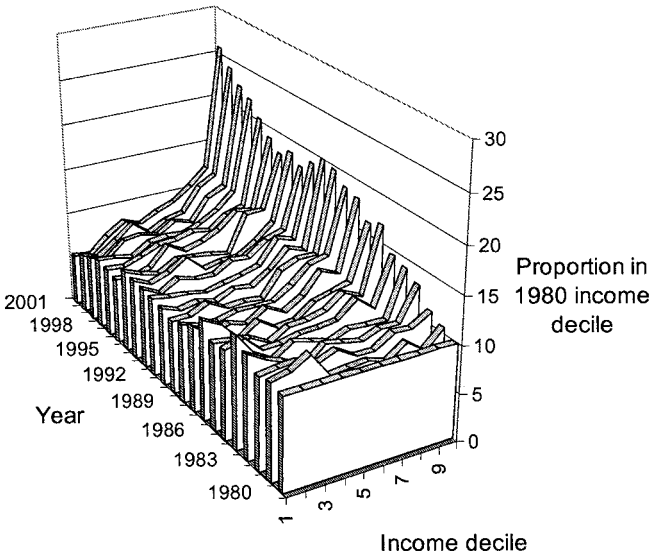

Figure 6-3. Relative Distribution of Per Capita Income, Divorced Women.

5.2 Multivariate analyses

Our multivariate analysis compares divorced women in 1980 and 2001, the end points of our time series. Means or percentages for independent variable are shown in Table 6-2; all changes are significantly different

except for coresidence with parents.[2] Between 1980 and 2001 divorced women's labor force qualifications increased considerably. Twenty-nine percent of 1980 respondents did not have high school diplomas. By 2001, only 15% failed to finish high school. The number of women with four-year college degrees grew 7% during these years, while the number with some college increased 14%. Average occupational status also increased, from 34 to 37. Employment fell 1%, from 77 to 76%; however, the percent of divorced women in full-time work increased 1%, from 58 to 59%. Furthermore, the average age for divorcées rose from 43 in 1980 to 50 in 2001. All else being equal, older women have more work experience.

In recent years divorcées have had far fewer children, due to both declining fertility and modest gains in paternal custody. Only about half of 1980 respondents had no resident children; by 2001, over two-thirds were childless. The number of women with multiple children also declined substantially. Perhaps more important, the number of divorced women with children under six shrank from 14% to 6%. Young children in particular make it difficult for single mothers to work. Taken together, these factors suggest that divorcées in 2001 had far greater earning potential than they did in 1980.

Table 6-3 shows the results of the ordered logistic regressions of position in the income distribution. Looking first at the model for 1980, most of the independent variables are significantly related to income and in the expected direction. Living with a parent or other relative, being white, living in a large metropolitan area, age, and all vocational characteristics are positively related to income. Divorcées with two or more children make less money than do those with one or no children. Finally, women with young children make less money than those who are childless or only have children over age six.

There are several important changes across the years of the study.[3] Between 1980 and 2001, occupational status (SEI) became more important in determining income, as did higher education. The distance between the college and high school educated has risen, as is true for all workers in the U.S. during this period. On the other hand, the effect of being in the labor force has declined considerably, with the coefficient for part-time work losing significance in 2001. Just being employed is apparently no longer as important for obtaining a higher income. By 2001 divorcées had to have strong workforce qualifications and a good job in order to make more money.

Other changes concern family structure. The negative financial implications of children have declined, so that by 2001 only women with three or more children incur an income penalty. The income penalty associated with children under the age of six has also declined, though it

Table 6-2. Percentages or Means for Independent Variables.

		1980	2001
Vocational Characteristics			
Education	Less than H.S.	29%	15%
	H.S. graduate	41	32
	Some college	18	32
	College graduate (4 year degree)	7	14
	Advanced degree	5	7
Hours Worked	None	23%	24%
	Part-time	19	17
	Full-time	58	59
SEI[a]		34	37
Additional Income Sources			
Alimony/child support received		32%	19%
Amount alimony/child support[b]		5,224 (2,430)	6,944
Public aid received		15%	3%
Amount of public aid[b]		5,934 (2,760)	3,835
Family Characteristics			
Number of children	Zero	52%	71%
	One	23	16
	Two	17	10
	Three or more	9	4
Children younger than six		14%	6%
Living with parent(s)[c]		7%	6%
Living with other relative(s)		10%	12%
Other			
Residing in large city		43%	49%
Race	White	78%	73%
	Black	15	15
	Other	6	11
Age		43	50

Notes: Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding error. Figures are weighted. Ns are 4,142 for 1980 and 4,541 for 2001. All change from 1980 to 2001 significantly ($p < .05$) different except where noted.

[a]Means reported for those who are currently working.

[b]Means reported for those who received given type of aid; amounts expressed in 2001 dollars, with 1980 dollar amounts in parentheses.

[c]No statistically significant change between 1980 and 2001.

Table 6-3. Ordered Logistic Regressions of Income Ranking.

		1980	2001
Vocational Characteristics			
Education	Less than H.S.		
	H.S. graduate	.60***	.32***
	Some college	.66***	.53***
	College graduate (4 year degree)	.53***	.98***
	Advanced degree	.97***	1.44***
Hours Worked	None		
	Part-time	1.42***	.11
	Full-time	2.52***	1.09***
SEI		.03***	.05***
Family Characteristics			
Number of children	Zero		
	One	.01	-.14
	Two	-.25*	-.18
	Three or more	-.53***	-.27^{+}
Children younger than six		-.80***	-.64***
Living with parent(s)		.81***	.74***
Living with other relative(s)		1.85***	1.81***
Other			
Residing in large city		.33***	.39***
Race	White		
	Black	-.26**	-.28**
	Other	-.31**	-.21*
Age		.06***	.03^{+}
Age^2 / 1000		-.23^{+}	-.04
Log-Likelihood		-14619	-16385

$^{+}p < .10$; $*p < .05$; $**p < .01$; $***p < .001$

Notes: Analyses are weighted. Ns are 4,202 for 1980 and 4,541 for 2001.

remains negative and statistically significant. Also, the positive effect of coresidence with parents or other relatives remained relatively stable over time.

There has been little change regarding living in a large city or race. In both years those in large cities have higher incomes, and non-whites lower incomes. While the relative size of the effect for black and other non-white women has switched, the differences between coefficients is not large. On

the other hand, the effect of age on divorcées' incomes has diminished considerably. This shows that by 2001 the incomes of older women were very similar to those younger women were able to earn.

5.3 Predicted income densities

We employ a regression standardization in conjunction with the ordered logit models estimated for 1980 and 2001 to further explore how the income distribution has changed for divorced women. The result, shown as a density plot of predicted incomes for 1980 and 2001, appears in Figure 6-4. A Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for equality of distributions (Kanji 1999), based on mean-standardized versions of the two density distributions, shows them to be significantly different ($D = .32$, $p < .05$).

Fewer cases fall into the far left-hand side of the plot for the 2001 data than the 1980 data, suggesting that over time more divorced women have escaped the bottom of the income distribution. The modal point of the 2001 distribution is lower than the 1980 mode. This in accord with the univariate results presented in Table 6-1, which show that financial growth has been slowest for divorcées in the middle of the income distribution. Far more cases fall just to the left of the mode of the 2001 distribution. These probably reflect the population of divorcées who in 1980 occupied the very

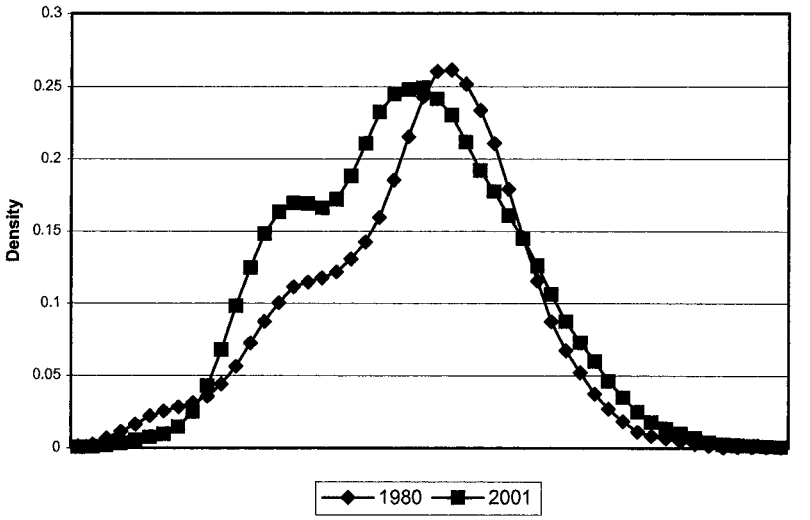

Figure 6-4. Predicted Income Densities for 1980 and 2001 ($p < .05$).

bottom of the income distribution. In addition, some of the women who used to fall into the middle of the distribution now have incomes placing them in the upper income deciles.

Based on these changes, the most pronounced trends evinced by Figure 6-4 have been economic progress out of the bottom income deciles, and into the upper deciles. These trends mirror Table 6-1 and Figure 6-3, which both show strong growth over time by divorced women in the lower and upper income quartiles. Perhaps these results are most interesting because they run counter to the polarizing trend observed in the general population. The density plots for 1980 and 2001 show no signs of income polarization; indeed, divorced women's economic progress appears to have occurred in both the lower and upper deciles at the expense of the middle of the distribution.

In order to ascertain whether changing respondent attributes—as opposed to changing returns to any given level of attributes—have affected income we construct a counterfactual density plot of predicted values on the dependent variables. Figure 6-5 graphs the density of the predicted 1980 income distribution against the simulated predicted density distribution of income in 1980 if the distribution of personal characteristics in the population were the same as in 2001; in other words, the predicted density based on the 1980 model but the 2001 data for all independent variables.[4] A Kolmogorov-Smirnov test shows that the two mean-centered distributions are significantly different ($D = .28$, $p = <.05$). Figure 6-5 shows that were personal characteristics at 2001 levels in 1980, there would have been fewer women at the bottom of the income distribution and more at the top. Changing levels of respondent characteristics have therefore facilitated the reduction in poverty among divorced women since 1980, and improved the prospects of women previously in the middle of the income distribution. Additionally, Figure 6-5 shows no meaningful growth at the very top of the distribution commensurate with the losses at the bottom; in other words, no new elite based on rising levels of human capital and other respondent characteristics seems to have developed. Divorcées across the income distribution have benefited from changing vocational attributes and other respondent characteristics.

Figure 6-5 also shows signs of increasing bimodality among divorcées' incomes. The density line for the distribution based on 2001 levels of respondent attributes twice crosses the trace for 1980 incomes in a short stretch of the bottom half of the distribution. This bimodality implies a growing divide between those more and less qualified for lucrative employment by 2001. However, this observation should be qualified. The increasing bimodality does not reflect a growing division between richest

and poorest families, but instead a growing division in the economic structure of the middle class. Were women in 1980 to have the same characteristics as in 2001, those earning middle level incomes would have been divided into a smaller but worse-off group and a larger, better-off

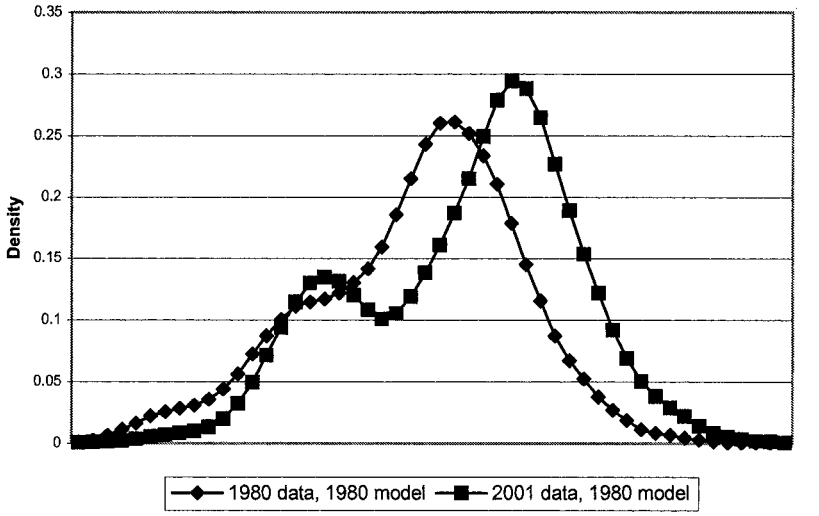

Figure 6-5. Predicted and Counterfactual Income Densities: Contrasting Changing Respondent Characteristics ($p < .05$).

group. Those in the latter would have profited especially strongly from higher returns to any given level of human capital, returns which are no longer present in 2001 (see Figure 6-4). For this reason we do not see this sharp bifurcation of the middle income earners realized in the actual 2001 distribution.

A second counterfactual test is to compare the predicted 1980 income distribution against the simulated predicted density distribution of income if the returns to respondent characteristics were at 2001 levels in 1980; in other words, the 2001 model but the 1980 data. The two density distributions, unlike those depicted in Figure 6-5, are not significantly different according to the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test ($D = .24$, p = n.s.) and are therefore not shown. Thus the income distribution for divorced women would not have changed substantially over time if respondent characteristics had remained stable; greater returns to any given level of human capital and other

respondent attributes cannot by themselves account for divorcées' economic progress.

5.4 Economic dependence

We now turn to the contributions of nonemployment income and other forms of outside support to divorced women's economic well-being. Table 6-2 shows that relatively few respondents have benefited from nonemployment income. In 1980 about one third of the sample reported receiving child support or alimony (hereafter jointly referred to as child support), but receipt had declined to 19% by 2001. Receipt of public aid also declined, from 15% to 3%. On the whole, divorcées now fare better while simultaneously receiving fewer income transfers. But what about the divorced women still receiving money? To what extent do they depend on these income transfers? It would undercut our findings on the economic improvement of divorced women if their progress had been driven in part by greater dependence, albeit by fewer recipients, on child support or public aid.

To address this question we measure dependence by computing the percentage of total family income separately attributable to public aid and child support. Median levels of dependence for each income source are shown for 1980 and 2001 in Table 6-4. Neither child support nor public aid can account for divorcées' economic progress. For the median recipient, child support provided just under one third of total income in 1980. By 2001, child support comprised only 14% of total income, even though average payment size rose (see Table 6-2). The transformation has been even more dramatic for public aid dependence. In 1980, it was the sole source of income for the majority of its recipients. In contrast, it provided just 28% of all income for the median recipient. Even economic dependence based on the combined receipt of both child support and public aid has abated. Three percent of respondents received both types of income transfers in 1980; the corresponding figure for 2001 was less than 1%. Although the majority of recipients of both child support and public aid had

Table 6-4. Median Contributions of Nonemployment Earnings to Total Family Income.

Median percentage of contribution to family income	1980	2001
Alimony/child support	31%	14%
Public aid	100%	28%
Both	100%	38%

Notes: Figures restricted to respondents receiving each type of aid. Results are weighted.

no other sources of income in 1980, combined receipt only comprised 38% of the total income for the few divorcées receiving both in 2001. These trends demonstrate that divorced women now fare better financially even as income transfers became less important.

Economic dependence may also take the form of coresidence with parents or other relatives. Traditionally many women moved back in with their parents subsequent to marital disruption (Smock 1993), although more recent research suggests that this trend has abated in recent years (McKeever and Wolfinger 2001). The results shown in Table 6-2 confirm that coresidence with parents has declined. Seven percent of divorcées lived with a parent in 1980; by 2001, only 6% did. On the other hand, coresidence with other relatives increased over these years, from 10% to 12%. These modest changes cannot be interpreted as a meaningful increase in economic dependence for divorced women. Moreover, the regression results presented in Table 6-3 show that the relative economic benefit of living with a parent or other relative remained relatively stable between 1980 and 2001.

6. DISCUSSION

This paper has revealed noteworthy trends in divorced women's economic well-being between 1980 and 2001. Although marital disruption still takes a strong toll on women's incomes, divorcées are faring better over the last 22 years. We are not the first to note improvement in divorced women's incomes, but no previous research has chronicled systematic change over a period exceeding twenty years. In this regard, the Current Population Survey offers a rich and underutilized resource for tracking economic well-being. We now return to the three questions we posed earlier in the paper.

6.1 What factors are responsible for divorcées' economic progress?

We offer two answers to this question. First, changes in the labor market have helped many divorced women prosper. Although divorcées are now employed at the same rates as they were in 1980, their higher levels of labor force qualifications have been decisive in their growing incomes. Second, concurrent changes in the American family structure have benefited divorcées' labor force participation. The typical divorcing woman is older and, based on data for all women between 1980 and 2001, more likely to have worked during marriage (United States Bureau of the Census 2001a),

so she is more likely to have significant work experience than was the case twenty years ago. More than two-thirds of divorcées are now childless, whereas twenty years ago half had children to support. Perhaps more important, the number of divorced women with pre-school age children has fallen from 14% to 6%. All of these changes make it easier for divorcées to support themselves after their marriages end.

6.2 How much has economic dependence on relatives, cohabiting partners, and income transfers helped divorced women?

Divorced women's financial gains cannot be attributed to economic dependence. Although divorcées receive more alimony and child support than they used to, it comprises a far smaller portion of their incomes than it did in 1980. The declining economic significance of public aid funds has been even more dramatic. Public aid supplied the majority of its divorced recipients with all their income in 1980. By 2001, far fewer divorcées received public aid and even among its recipients it only comprised about one fourth of their total incomes. Economic dependence on parents and other relatives also cannot account for divorced women's higher incomes. Divorcées themselves deserve much of the credit for their economic progress over the last twenty years.

One major change in the demographic status of divorced women that we can only examine in passing is the increase in post-marital cohabitation. Ten percent of CPS divorcées were cohabiting in 1980. By 2001, cohabitation had risen to 15%. This 5% increase is small enough that increased selection over time from divorce into cohabitation could not have had a large effect on divorced women's economic well-being. Furthermore, increases in post-marital cohabitation have done little more than make up for declines in remarriage. Recall that rates of remarriage have abated over time (Martinson 1994). Between 1970 and 1984 increases in cohabitation more than offset the falling remarriage rate (Bumpass et al. 1991). Although this result has not been updated, the trend probably persisted. Thus the women who now cohabit subsequent to divorce probably reflect the same population that would previously have remarried. In other words, divorcées are now forming post-marital relationships at the same rate they did twenty years ago, but nowadays more are living with their partners out of wedlock instead of marrying. If there is no appreciable trend in overall post-divorce union formation, there is probably also no change over time in divorcées' economic dependence on men.

6.3 Are all divorcées faring better than in previous years, or only those at certain points of the income distribution?

This paper has contributed to research on the economics of divorce by examining both summary statistics and income distributions. We show that divorced women have achieved economic gains across the income distribution, not suffering the income polarization that characterizes the population as a whole. Although the changing structure of the family, most notably divorce and the rise in out-of-wedlock births, has certainly contributed to the growth of the American underclass, the conventional wisdom about income polarization should not be uniformly applied to everyone: The income distribution has changed differently for the demographically prominent group of divorced women, who numbered more than eleven million in 2000 (United States Bureau of the Census 2002).

7. CONCLUSION

Our analysis of CPS data offers optimism for future generations of divorced women. Certainly there is room for improvement, but many signs point to continued economic progress. At the start of the 21st century divorcées, like all women, are better positioned for success in the job market than ever before. Their labor force qualifications have increased dramatically. Although men and women are still not equal in the workplace, the gap has narrowed to the considerable benefit of those left vulnerable by marital disruption.

We view it as a propitious development that divorcées at the bottom of the income distribution have raised their incomes almost as much as the median divorced woman. Changes in human capital and other respondent characteristics responsible for divorcées' higher incomes have helped women across the income distribution. Furthermore, divorced women in the higher income deciles have not derived any substantial benefit from higher returns to any given level of human capital. These findings allay concern that economic progress has been driven by the gains of a small group of middle- or upper class divorcées.

Our results show that the relationship between family structure and poverty, one of the staple findings of the sociology of inequality, is complex. In particular, it is important to consider the labor market position of household heads who are traditionally at risk of being poor. Female householders have been able to better themselves economically, even with

reduced government assistance, by dint of the changing nature of their labor market participation. This includes higher levels of education and better jobs, as well as increased experience resulting from demographic shifts like delayed marriage and reduced fertility. In order to understand poverty in America for any segment of the population it is necessary to take account of changing gender inequality in institutions like the educational system and the labor market.

Our research illuminates some of the reasons behind abating rates of inequality in contemporary America. The striking improvement in divorced women's incomes is one reason why poverty rates for mother-headed families recently reached a 40-year low of 25% (Dalaker 2001). Although divorced women as a whole now fare better—a trend that will hopefully not be reversed in the current economic downturn—single-mother families still have poverty rates several times higher than two-parent families. To a certain extent this is inevitable: families headed by mothers will always lack the male incomes that have traditionally supported husbands, wives, and children. Moreover, out-of-wedlock births have also played an important role in accounting for high poverty rates. Although our findings lead us to be optimistic for divorced women, the poverty rate for female-headed households remains one of the most important social problems in the United States.

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ENDNOTES

1. This includes both unemployed and not in the labor force. The overwhelming majority of those who do not work report being out of the labor force, so we are unable to distinguish these respondents from those who are unemployed but looking for jobs.
2. Significance tests are weighted and adjust for the effects of weights and cluster sampling on standard errors.
3. Differences in coefficients across models cannot be tested for statistical significance in the analyses we employ. Since the dependent variables for 1980 and 2001 represent distinct income distributions, the data cannot be pooled across survey years.

4. Unfortunately there is no way to perform a partial standardization (e.g., to use 1980 values on some independent variables and 2001 values on others) to determine which predictors have been particularly important to divorced women's economic progress. Although a subset of means in a standard decomposition can easily be switched, partial distributions in this type of analysis cannot be.

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Chapter 7

FAMILY STRUCTURE AND ADOLESCENT LABOR MARKET PARTICIPATION

Examining the Motives for and Effects of At-Risk Students' Work for Pay during High School

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Abstract: We argue that focusing on only one type of fragile family structure—generally single-parent families, without distinguishing how these families were formed—obscures important processes and mechanisms among different types of families. We focus on a specific adolescent risk behavior, high-intensity work, and theorize that adolescents in certain types of fragile families will work more hours because of financial need, while teens in other types of fragile families will extend their work hours to avoid family conflict and stress. Using data from the 1990 and 1992 waves of the National Education Longitudinal Study, we examine the effects of living in a never-married, divorced, widowed, stepparenting, or cohabiting family on work hours. We then look at whether work hours and the motives behind their scheduling can help to explain why teachers assess students from fragile families more negatively than those from intact families. Results provide support for the more general argument that scholars hoping to understand fragile families must distinguish among different family structures and processes.

Key words: family structure, adolescent work, academic achievement

1. INTRODUCTION

As the number of children living in poverty and in non-traditional families grows, so too does concern over whether living in such situations has effects on child development (Bumpass and Lu 2000; Fields and Casper 2001). Much evidence suggests that growing up in poverty has adverse consequences for a variety of child outcomes, including health, academic

and occupational achievement, and socialization (Duncan et al. 1998; Pagani et al. 1997; Smith et al. 1997), as does growing up with high levels of family stress (Menaghan et al. 1997; Yamoor and Mortimer 1990) or in non-traditional—or fragile—families (McLanahan and Bumpass 1988; McLanahan and Sandefur 1994).

Even as scholars lavish attention on these issues, relatively few delve into the specifics of how different types of fragile families may function and how social dynamics may affect the children who grow up in such families. Although focusing on the differences between, for example, single-parent families and two-parent families, as is commonly done, has uncovered important information about fragile families, focusing only on such analyses obscures potentially important differences between several different types of fragile families (never-married, divorced, stepparenting, widowed, and cohabiting families). There are solid theoretical reasons to believe that the processes and mechanisms causing these families to be fragile might differ; for example, we might expect some types of single-parent families, such as never-married and divorced families, to be at greater risk for poverty because of the presence of only one potential breadwinner, while other types of single-parent families, such as widowed families, might have financial safety nets in place that protect children from experiencing severe and extended poverty. Similarly, although stepparent and cohabiting families may be less prone to poverty because of the presence of two potential breadwinners, they may have a tendency toward higher rates of conflict than families where children's biological parents are married to each other. When discussing fragile families, focusing only on single parents prevents us from fully understanding the challenges facing different types of single-parent families and ignores entirely the problems certain kinds of two-parent families face. In this paper, we focus on a particular risk factor for adolescents—high-intensity work—as an example of how investigating the structures and processes in multiple types of fragile families may give scholars and policy-makers a better understanding of the challenges these families face.

1. ADOLESCENT EMPLOYMENT

1.1 Academic achievement

Most studies on the effects of adolescent employment have utilized a "zero-sum" perspective (D'Amico 1984; Warren 2002). This perspective defines time as a finite resource and assumes that time spent in paid work is

time that cannot be used in educational, social, or family activities. A natural outgrowth of the zero-sum perspective is a focus on educational outcomes; as students spend time working outside the home for pay, they may have less time to devote to homework or studying. As a result, adolescent labor force participation may be associated with lower academic achievement.

Early studies of adolescent employment supported the zero-sum argument: students who worked for pay during the school year reported lower grades (Greenberger et al. 1980; Steinberg et al. 1981); D'Amico (1984) and Lewin-Epstein (1981) found that early employment reduced time spent on homework. Further, adolescents who work spent less time reading books not assigned for school (Greenberger and Steinberg 1986).

Subsequent research demonstrated that the effects of student employment could be better understood by studying work intensity, or the number of hours students worked, rather than merely whether they worked. Students who work in low-intensity, part-time jobs tend to have better academic outcomes than those who do not work at all, possibly because they learn how to better manage their time in order to accomplish all of their goals (D'Amico 1984). Challenging the zero-sum perspective, Schoenhals, Tienda, and Schneider (1998) found that students who worked watched less television than those who did not. In addition, a study of 251 low-income, at-risk African American youth found that stable, low-intensity work may be linked to high school completion and, for boys, college attendance, suggesting the possibility that positive work environments could be particularly helpful for at-risk students (Leventhal et al. 2001).

However, students who participate in more intense work situations (generally described as working 20 or more hours per week during the school year) have lower grades and lower educational aspirations (Barton 1989; Finch et al. 1991; Finch and Mortimer 1985; Jakob-Chien and Dukes 1998; Lillydahl 1990; Markel and Frone 1997; Marsh 1991; Mihalic and Elliottt 1997; Mortimer et al. 1996; Steinberg and Dornbusch 1991), are more often absent from school (Marsh 1991; Steinberg et al. 1993), and more often seem fatigued in class than do their peers who do not work or who work in lower intensity situations (Bills et al. 1995). High-intensity work is also associated with lower enrollment in post-secondary schooling for boys (Mortimer and Johnson 1997). Although findings regarding the effects of adolescent employment on academic outcomes while in high school are somewhat mixed, most scholars now contend that high-intensity work poses the most danger, while low-intensity work may actually be beneficial for schooling.

1.2 Non-academic outcomes

The effects of adolescent employment are not limited to academic outcomes. Many parents believe that adolescent participation in the workforce imbues positive socialization that will encourage teenagers to embrace a work ethic, to appreciate the value of punctuality, and to seek paid employment more readily after high school. Research has generally borne out these parental assumptions: teenagers who work during high school are less likely to be unemployed in the first four years after high school (Marsh 1991; Mortimer and Finch 1996; Steel 1991) and further into adulthood (Mihalic and Elliott 1997), and they enjoy higher wages (Marsh 1991; Stone and Mortimer 1998). Adolescent workers also have greater workplace skills (Greenberger et al. 1980) and stronger work orientation (Steinberg et al. 1981) than those who have not worked. Adolescents who work in family-owned businesses, where their parents can presumably take an active role in workplace socialization, perceived greater parental support for their labor force and academic goals and reported less drug and alcohol use than teens working in the private sector (Hansen and Jarvis 2000).

Adolescent work experience may influence psychological outcomes as well. Working outside the home for pay adds additional sources of stress to adolescents' lives that may have deleterious effects on their overall well-being. Markel and Frone (1997) found that students engaged in high-intensity work experienced more work-school conflict, which was related to a lack of school readiness and greater stress. Poor work-school connections are associated with depression for girls; female respondents also reported more stress linked with feelings of responsibility for things outside of their control, including work issues. Similarly, boys report that work stress influences their depression (Shanahan et al. 1991). Adolescents who report problems at work were more likely to be depressed and to have negative views of themselves than were those who did not work or who did not report work problems (Simons and Miller 1987). Students who work also report more cynicism about the workplace and more acceptance of unethical business practices (Steinberg et al. 1981).

Participation in the paid labor market may also influence adolescents' relationships. Teenagers who work spend less time with their families and report less closeness with their families than do non-workers (Greenberger et al. 1980; Mihalic and Elliott 1997; Pickering and Vazsonyi 2002; Roisman 2002; Shanahan et al. 1996). Again, work intensity was an important factor in these relationships; the effects of working on family relationships are stronger for teens working more than 20 hours per week than for those in low-intensity work (Pickering and Vazsonyi 2002; Roisman 2002). Adolescents working in high-intensity situations may also have strained relationships at school, where they are less integrated into school activities

(McNeal 1995) and may be assessed less positively by their teachers (Yamoor and Mortimer 1990).

Finally, working more than 20 hours per week may encourage adolescents to engage in delinquent or inappropriate behavior. Some scholars have argued that adolescents are exposed to non-familial adults in the workplace, some of whom may model delinquent or illegal behavior (such as drug use), while others may merely model behavior that is deemed appropriate for adults but inappropriate for minors (such as alcohol use or sexual activity). Other researchers maintain that teens who work more are able to engage in delinquent behaviors because they are not subject to the same level of parental monitoring as are adolescents who, because they work less, are around their parents more. Proponents of both perspectives, however, agree that high-intensity work is related to negative risk behaviors. Adolescents who work more than 20 hours per week engage in more sexual risk-taking behavior (Ku et al. 1993; Valois and Dunham 1998) and delinquent behavior such as smoking and petty crime (Jakob-Chien and Dukes 1998; Miller and Matthews 2001). High-intensity workers are also more likely to use alcohol and drugs when still in school (Hansen and Jarvis 2000; Jakib-Chien and Dukes 1998; Jenkins 1996; Kouvonen and Lintonen 2002; McMorris and Uggen 2000; Mihalic and Elliott 1997) and to report higher rates of marijuana and alcohol use in their late 20s (Mihalic and Elliottt 1997).

Adolescent participation in the paid labor force, then, is something of a mixed bag. Low-intensity work may help youth learn positive work ethic and time-management skills, leading to improved academic outcomes and increased attachment to the labor force. High-intensity work may leave teens at risk for work-school conflict, strained family relationships, and increased participation in delinquent and inappropriate behavior.

2. FRAGILE FAMILIES

Given what we know about teenage employment, it seems reasonable to ask what effect growing up in a fragile family might have on adolescent work force participation. First, children who grow up in various fragile family structures and children engaged in high-intensity work both fare poorly with respect to education, delinquency, and family relationships. Yet few researchers have investigated whether differences in working environments and motives could explain why these families struggle. For example, living in a mother-headed household has been linked to lower academic achievement (Duncan et al. 1998; Pagani et al. 1997; McLanahan and Sandefur 1994; Smith et al. 1997). Although teens who work many

hours per week also have lower academic outcomes, little research has examined whether a corresponding link exists.

Similarly, although poverty is a major correlate of living in a fragile family, children who grow up in single-parent families are less likely to graduate from high school and more likely to engage in delinquent behaviors than their counterparts in two-biological-parent families, even when they are not poor (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994). Adolescents in stepparent families, with two potential adult earners in the family, are less likely to be in severe financial distress than are those in single-parent families (excluding widowed families). Yet adolescents in both single- and stepfamilies exhibit more problematic behaviors and outcomes than their counterparts in two-biological-parent families (with children in stepparent families similar to those in single-parent families, and those in widowed families occupying a position between the other two). For example, teens in stepparent families are less likely to graduate from high school than teens who live with their biological parents, but are more likely to engage in risky sexual or substance abuse behaviors (Aquilino 1991; Downey 1995; Flewelling and Bauman 1990; Hoffmann 1994; Jenkins and Zunguze 1998; Sandefur et al. 1992; Tygart 1990); teens in widowed families, while somewhat more successful than those in stepparent families, are also less likely to graduate from high school than teens who live with their biological parents (Ambert and Saucier 1984; Saucier and Ambert 1983). Again, these outcomes are similar to those found for adolescents who are in high-intensity work situations, but little effort has been made to examine any possible links between living in a fragile family and working long hours.

Perhaps most important, the differences in adolescents' lives that make some of their families fragile may be similar to the factors that help determine how much they work. For example, teens in poor, mother-headed families might work more hours in order to help their families make ends meet or to be able to afford status-producing consumer goods that parents in wealthier families could purchase for their children; they therefore may incur some of the academic penalties associated with high-intensity work as a result. However, few studies examining academic outcomes have investigated the extent to which work and family demands may be helping to drive the negative effects of living in fragile families. Similarly, if family conflict or stressors encourage youth to spend less time at home and more time at work, the time and social pressures associated with high-intensity work may contribute to academic trouble or delinquent behavior. In other words, although we know that teens from fragile families struggle because of poverty and family stressors, we have yet to thoroughly investigate how these factors play out in different kinds of fragile families and how their effects may be mediated by other influences in children's lives, such as labor market participation.

Most of the work that looks at whether family structure affects adolescent work habits examines European countries where secondary schooling ends earlier than it does in the United States and full-time work is the most common experience for those in late adolescence (de Goede et al. 2000; Patten and Noller 1991). The few that do examine the effect of family structure on adolescent work in the U.S., such as Schoenhals et al.'s (1998) careful study, tend to focus on comparisons between single-parent and two-parent families, with no distinction made as to how the single-parent families were formed.

This inattention to family structure likely has several causes. First, early studies predicting whether teens worked for pay found few notable differences between family structures. Even Schoenhals et al. (1998) finds the most interesting outcomes are related to family structure for single mothers who do non-traditional work; single-mother parenting in and of itself does not affect teen employment. These (non-)findings may have led researchers to believe that they would find no differences in the hours worked among teens from different family structures. In addition, much of the work in this field has relied on relatively small samples. Small samples provide insufficient cases to distinguish between family types; in fact, the few studies that do analyze family structure focus only on single-parent versus two-parent families, without distinguishing between divorced and never-married parents or among step, cohabiting, or married biological parents. Unfortunately, these data problems have led scholars to ignore theoretical explanations for why adolescents in fragile families might engage in a risky behavior: high-intensity work. Researchers also have been unable to investigate whether different mechanisms and processes within different kinds of fragile families drive potential differences in working patterns (i.e., if financial issues encourage children in divorced families to work more hours, or whether family conflict drives children in stepfamilies to work more).

In this study, we use a large, nationally representative data set to test hypotheses regarding the relationship between living in a fragile family structure and engaging in high-intensity work. We also examine whether these factors are related to the ways teachers, who control many educational experiences and outcomes for adolescents, assess youth from fragile families.

3. HYPOTHESES

Hypothesis 1: Adolescents in fragile family structures will work more hours than those in biological two-parent families.

Hypothesis 2: Socioeconomic factors, including spending patterns, will explain why teens from divorced and never-married families work more hours than those in biological two-parent families.

Hypothesis 3: Family interaction and atmosphere will explain why teens from stepparent, widowed, and cohabiting families work more hours than those in biological two-parent families.

Hypotheses 4a and 4b: High-intensity work, linked to SES and family interaction and atmosphere variables, will explain the more negative assessments teachers give to adolescents in fragile families, including appraisals of a) homework completion and b) alertness.

4. DATA AND METHODS

4.1 Data

We use data from the first and second follow-up waves of the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS), conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES). The NELS is a nationally representative study that gathered data from students, parents, teachers, and school administrators. The first wave of the study was conducted in 1988, drawing random samples of approximately 25 eighth-grade students from each of 1000 randomly selected schools. Students were surveyed again in 10^{th} grade (1990), 12^{th} grade (1992), two years after their class would have graduated from high school (1994), and six years after their class would have graduated from high school (2000). We employ data from the 10^{th} and 12^{th} grade surveys. Since the focus of this study was whether living in fragile families influences work participation, we excluded respondents who had missing data for family structure and work participation variables. This yielded a sample of 10,585, of whom 64 percent lived in two-parent biological families, 14 percent lived in stepparent families, 15 percent lived in divorced families, four percent lived in widowed families, three percent lived in never-married families, and one percent lived in cohabiting families.

4.2 Measures

Table 7-1 describes the variables used in our analyses.

Table 7-1. List of Concepts, Variables and Metrics.

Concept/Variable	Description	Metric
Dependent Variables		
Currently Working in 12th Grade (1992)	Student's report of whether or not s/he worked for pay outside the home in 12th grade	1=currently working 0=not working
Work Hours	Student's report of the number of hours worked each week at current job	0-40 hours
Always Completes Homework	Teacher's report of how often student completes homework assignments on time	1=always complete 0=other
Always Alert in Class	Teacher's report of how often student is attentive in class	1=always attentive 0=other
Key Concepts and Independent Variables		
Family Structure	Parent's report of current marital status	Dummy variables differentiating stepparent, never married, married, divorced or separated, widowed, and cohabiting families; married is the omitted category
Spending Habits	Student's report of whether s/he used most of his or her money on rent or education	1=most money spent on rent or education 0=otherwise
Family Interaction in 10th Grade (1990)	A scale of five items measuring student's report of how often s/he discusses things with parents, including school courses, school activities, things studied in class, grades, and going to college; α=.79	0-5; higher scores indicate more interaction
Family Interaction in 12th Grade (1992)	A scale of nine items measuring student's report of how often s/he discusses things with parents, including the five items above as well as plans and preparations for the ACT/SAT, job possibilities after high school, current events, and troubling events; α=.86	0-9; higher scores indicate more interaction

Concept/Variable	Description	Metric
Negative Family Atmosphere in 10th Grade (1990)	Student's report of how important it is to get away from parents	1=not important 3=very important
Negative Family Atmosphere in 12th Grade (1992)	Student's report of how important it is to get away from parents	1=not important 3=very important
Background Variables		
Socioeconomic Status	NELS composite created using parent's report of education, occupation, total household income in 1988	-3.091-2.753
Sex	Student sex	1=male 0=female
Number of Siblings	Student's report in 10th grade (1990) of total number of siblings	0=none 8=eight or more
Race/Ethnicity	NELS composite based on student report of race	Dummy variables differentiating Asian and Pacific Islanders, Hispanic, Black, American Indian and Alaskan, and white respondents; white is the reference group
Suburban neighborhood	NELS assessment of school setting	Set of dummy variables: urban, suburban, rural; suburban is the omitted category
Region	NELS assessment of school region	Dummy variables differentiating northeast, midwest, south and west; northeast is the reference group

Currently employed is a dummy variable that captures whether the respondent was working outside the home for pay in 1992 (12th grade). *Number of hours worked* is a continuous variable that measured how many hours per week the respondent worked in her primary job during the 1991-1992 school year; higher scores indicate greater work intensity. Teacher assessments of how often respondents handed in their homework on schedule or were alert in class are measured by two dummy variables: *always turns in homework* and *always alert in class*. Family structure is measured by a set of dummy variables that tapped the respondents' parents' marital status: *married, never married, divorced, widowed, remarried* (which we refer to throughout the paper as *stepparent*), and *living in a marriage-like relationship* (which we refer to throughout the paper as *cohabiting*); married is the reference category. Although many studies,

including this one, often refer to families where the biological parents of the respondents are married to each other as two-biological parent families, we should note that we have no way of determining whether the small (just over 100) number of youth living in cohabiting families are living with one or both biological parents.

The NELS does not contain a perfect measure of whether respondents spend their money on necessities to help their families make ends meet. The most similar variable is likely one that asks whether the respondent spends most of his or her money on rent. As might be expected, less than one percent of respondents chose this response. To tap *money spent on necessities*, we use a variable that asks whether respondents spend most of their money on rent or education. Although this variable may not perfectly capture whether the respondent is working in order to help support the family of origin or pay for education (educational fees could be for activities rather than tuition, for example), this variable does distinguish money spent on rent and education from money spent on cars or "going out".

Family interaction is a scale tapping how often the respondent talks to his or her parents about various subjects. In order to address issues of causality, we include measures of family interaction in both 10th grade and 12th grade; if the change in family interaction over time is associated with work intensity, it provides additional evidence that adolescents choose to work more intense hours in order to avoid their homes and families. The 10th grade family interaction variable includes five items concerning discussion about matters such as class schedules and educational aspirations and has an alpha of .79; the 12th grade family interaction variable consists of nine items similar to those used in the 10th grade measure and has an alpha of .86. For both variables, higher scores indicate more interaction. *Negative family atmosphere* is a single item that asks how important it is to the respondent to get away from his or her parents. Again, family atmosphere is measured in both 10th and 12th grades. Higher scores indicate more desire to get away from parents and a less desirable family atmosphere.

Socioeconomic status is a composite measure created by the NCES that reflects parents' income, education, and occupational status. *Sex* is a dummy variable; race is tapped by a set of dummy variables: *white, Black, Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic,* and *American Indian*; white is the reference category. We also control for region (*Northeast, Midwest, South,* and *West*; Northeast is the reference category) and urbanicity (*urban, suburban*, and *rural*; suburban is the reference category). Finally, because we include measures of family interaction, we also control for *sibship size* to ascertain whether adolescents in larger families interact less with parents because parental time is diluted across multiple children (Downey 1995).

4.3 Methods

We employ binary logistic regression to examine whether living in a fragile family influences whether an adolescent worked in 12th grade, whether teachers believed the adolescent always turned in homework, and whether teachers felt the adolescent was always alert in class. Because only half of the respondents were linked to data for these teacher assessment variables, the Ns for those two models are 5,035. Because of the criteria used for inclusion in the sample, the only other missing data were found on continuous variables; we used mean substitution to address the missing data for these variables and included dummy variables indicating that substitution to account for potential bias (Cohen and Cohen 1975).[1] We entered the key variables in steps to examine their distinct effects. Model 1 examines the effects of living in different types of fragile families. For the models predicting work intensity, Model 2 adds spending habits; Model 3 includes family interaction and atmosphere variables; Model 4 controls for demographic background variables, including SES, and Model 5 includes important interaction effects. For the models predicting teacher assessments of their students, Model 2 adds work intensity; Model 3 includes spending habits; Model 4 adds family interaction and atmosphere variables; Model 5 controls for demographic background variables, and Model 6 includes significant interaction effects between fragile family structures and other independent variables.

5. FINDINGS

Table 7-2 displays the mean levels of the variables included in the model by family structure. Adolescents in married and stepparent families are more likely to work than those in never-married, divorced, widowed, and cohabiting families.[2] There are significant differences among family structures in work intensity: teens in fragile family structures work more hours than do teens in married families (although, at the mean level, no group on average meets the 20+ hours per week generally described as high-intensity). Adolescents in never married and stepparent families work on average about two and one-half hours more per week than do those in married families. The small number of youth in cohabiting families (just

over 100) work on average nearly five and one-half more hours per week than their peers in married families. Students in fragile family structures are also assessed more negatively by their teachers.

Table 7-2. Means and ANOVA for Variables by Family Structure.

	Never married	Married	Divorced	Widowed	Co-habiting	Step-parent	ANOVA Family type
N	278	6,868	1,536	339	108	1,456	
Currently employed	.31	.48	.41	.37	.39	.46	***
Work hours	15.55	13.14	14.50	13.99	18.53	15.59	***
Always completes homework	.08	.19	.11	.10	.10	.11	***
Always alert in class	.09	.17	.09	.10	.10	.10	***
Spending habits	.18	.15	.16	.13	.14	.14	*
Family interaction (1990)	2.11	2.19	2.12	2.06	2.01	2.12	***
Family interaction (1992)	1.92	2.05	1.99	1.96	1.86	1.97	***
Negative family atmo-sphere (1990)	1.78	1.69	1.75	1.66	1.71	1.83	***
Negative family atmo-sphere (1992)	1.73	1.63	1.67	1.62	1.74	1.73	***
SES	-.70	.11	-.23	-.36	-.51	-.12	***
Male	.44	.48	.45	.48	.42	.50	
# siblings	2.81	2.29	2.80	2.49	3.44	3.60	***
Asian/ Pacific	.05	.09	.03	.07	.03	.04	***

	Never married	Married	Divorced	Widowed	Co-habiting	Step-parent	ANOVA Family type
Islander							
Hispanic	.14	.11	.14	.15	.14	.11	***
Black	.52	.06	.16	.22	.18	.10	***
White	.28	.73	.66	.54	.63	.75	***
Native	.02	.01	.02	.02	.02	.01	**
American							
Urban	.39	.27	.30	.31	.28	.24	***
Suburban	.28	.41	.35	.34	.27	.36	***
Rural	.30	.30	.31	.28	.37	.35	***
Northeast	.20	.20	.19	.13	.23	.14	***
Midwest	.22	.28	.25	.24	.13	.26	***
South	.40	.31	.34	.39	.41	.36	***
West	.14	.19	.18	.17	.15	.19	***

Notes: Tests of significance are two-tailed. *$p<.05$ **$p<.01$ ***$p<.001$

Adolescents in married families are slightly more likely to interact with their parents in both 10th and 12th grade than are adolescents in fragile families; these respondents also are slightly less likely to want to get away from their parents. Married families report significantly higher SES than do fragile families. Teens in never-married families are much more likely to be Black, while most teens in married, divorced, or stepfamilies are white. Interestingly, adolescents in married families have the fewest siblings, while those in reconstituted families report the most. Those in married and stepfamilies are more likely to live in suburbs than adolescents in other family types. More teens in never-married families live in the South, perhaps reflecting the racial distribution of these families.

Table 7-3. Logistic Regression of Family Structure on Current Employment.

Variable	
Family Structure	
Stepparent	.140
Never Married	-.302
Divorced	-.138
Widowed	-.181
Cohabiting	-.045
Constant	.116
-2 LL	9,627.992

Note: N=10,585

Table 7-4. Regression Coefficients of Family Structure (Model 1), Uses of Money (Model 2), Family Interaction and Atmosphere (Model 3), Background Variables (Model 4), and Interactions (Model 5) on Number of Hours Worked.

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Family Structure					
Stepparent	1.420***	1.431***	1.262***	.994***	-.010
Never Married	1.114*	1.145*	.919	.235	.118
Divorced	.631*	.652*	.520*	.167	.304
Widowed	.233	.258	.048	-.418	-.008
Cohabiting	2.372**	2.377**	2.002*	1.412	1.336
Uses of Money					
Spending habits		1.296***	1.518***	1.761***	1.736**
Family Interaction and Atmosphere					
Family Interaction in 10th Grade (1990)			-1.061***	-.537**	-.546*
Family Interaction in 12th Grade (1992)			-2.363***	-1.877***	-1.836***
Negative Family Atmosphere in 10th Grade (1990)			.371**	.388**	.390**
Negative Family Atmosphere in 12th Grade (1992)			-.336*	-.297*	-.388**
Background Variables					
SES				-1.711***	-1.860***
Male				.562***	-1.355***
Asian				-1.497***	-1.465***
Hispanic				.144	.289
Black				-.972**	-.941**
Native American				-.887	-.849
Urban				-.853***	-.845***
Rural				-1.003***	-1.003***
Midwest				.975***	.963***
South				.647**	.657**
West				.253	.217
Number of Siblings				-.013	-.013
Interactions					
Stepparent*Negative Family Atmosphere in 12th Grade (1992)					.791**
Divorced*SES					.785*
Widowed*SES					1.384*
Stepparent*Hispanic					-1.706*
Constant	13.711	13.618	20.619	18.419	18.494
R^2	.003	.004	.022	.046	.048

Notes: N=10,585. Tests of significance are two-tailed. *p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Table 7-3 shows the results of the logistic regression analysis predicting whether the adolescent worked for pay outside the home in 12th grade. As expected, none of the fragile family structures produces adolescents significantly more likely to work, a finding similar to those that may have discouraged previous researchers from further investigating work patterns.

The results in Table 7-4, however, suggest that ignoring more detailed work patterns may be a mistake. Model 1 in Table 7-4 shows that adolescents who live in stepparent, never-married, divorced, and cohabiting families all work significantly more hours than do adolescents in married families. Although it is difficult to tell if working 1-1.5 hours more per week will have a detrimental effect in and of itself, this finding suggests that analyses testing only whether youth work outside the home are not sufficient. Living in a fragile family structure is in fact associated with working more hours while still in high school. Model 2 demonstrates that spending most of one's money on rent or education is also associated with increased work intensity, although this variable does not alone explain away the effects of living in certain types of fragile families (notably divorced and never married families, as predicted in Hypothesis 2). Model 3 includes measures of family interaction in the 10th and 12th grades, as well as family atmosphere variables. Improved family interaction is associated with lower work intensity, while worsening family atmosphere is associated with slightly higher work intensity. In this model, the effect of living in a never married family is no longer significant, suggesting that changes in family interaction and atmosphere have a greater effect on whether adolescents in that fragile family type work long hours than do financial aspects (contrary to the hypothesis regarding that family structure).

Model 4 introduces background characteristics, including SES. Adolescents from families with greater SES work significantly fewer hours; although other demographic characteristics are significant in this model, it is the effect of SES that explains away the effects of living in a divorced or cohabiting family structure (separate analyses not shown). The effects of other demographic variables (boys work more than girls; urban and rural teens work less than suburban teens, etc.) are consistent with previous research on adolescent work. In Model 4, only the effect of growing up in a stepparent family persists.

Model 5 introduces interactions between fragile family types and other explanatory variables. Youth who live in stepparent families and who feel more strongly about getting away from their parents work more hours than do those in stepparent families with positive atmospheres (Figure 1a). It is this interaction effect that finally explains away the effect of stepparent family structure. The effect of increased SES lowers work hours more for adolescents in married families than in divorced families (Figure 1b), with a similar pattern occurring when comparing widowed families to married

families (Figure 1c). Finally, Hispanic teens in stepparent families work fewer hours than do white teens in stepparent families (Figure 1d).

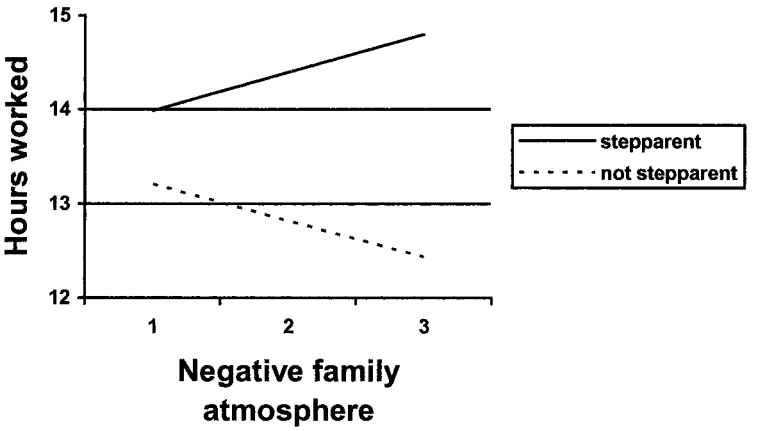

Figure 7-1a. Effects of Stepparent Family*Family Atmosphere on Work Hours.

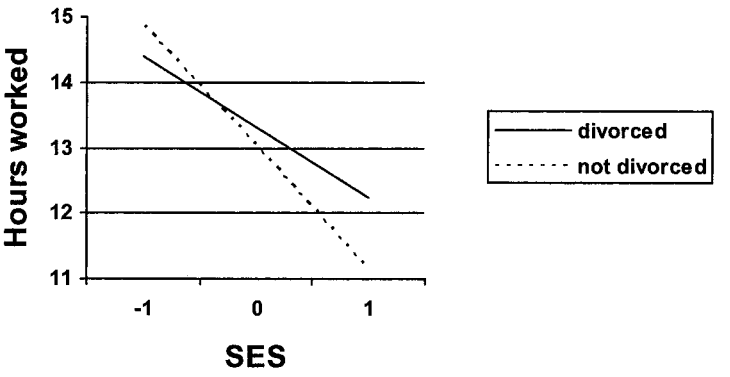

Figure 7-1b. Effects of Divorced Family*SES on Work Hours.

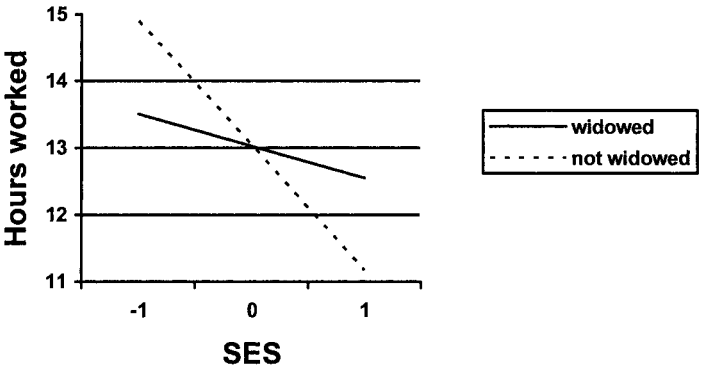

Figure 7-1c. Effects of Widowed Family*SES on Work Hours.

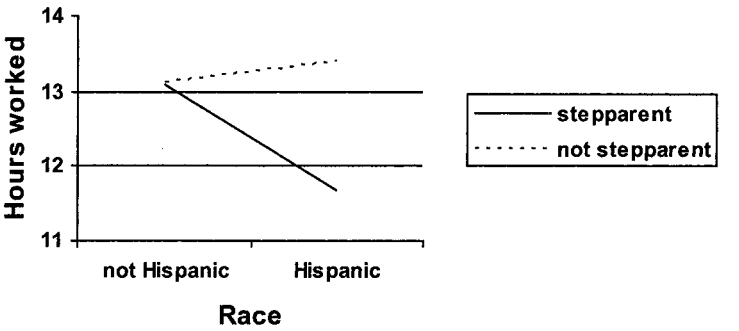

Figure 7-1d. Effects of Stepparent Family*Hispanic on Work Hours.

This model provides support for Hypothesis 1 (teens in fragile family structures will work more hours than those in married families), some evidence for Hypothesis 2 (the effects of living in a divorced family disappear with SES and spending habits), and some support for Hypothesis 3

(teens in stepfamilies with deteriorating family atmospheres work more hours than teens in stepfamilies with improving family atmospheres).

Turning to academic issues, Table 7-5 presents the analyses predicting whether teachers believe the respondent turns in homework on time.

Table 7-5. Logistic Regression of Family Structure (Model 1), Number of Hours Worked (Model 2), Uses of Money (Model 3), Family Interaction and Atmosphere (Model 4), Background Variables (Model 5), and Interactions (Model 6) on Homework Always Complete.

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Family Structure						
Stepparent	-.530***	-.488***	-.474***	-.425***	-.346**	-.345**
Never Married	-.903*	-.878*	-.878*	-.822*	-.615	-1.350*
Divorced	-.466***	-.454*	-.444***	-.414***	-.325**	-.318**
Widowed	-.874***	-.866***	-.841**	-.793**	-.644*	-.636*
Cohabiting	-.237	-.163	-.202	-.142	.021	.023
Work Intensity						
Hours Worked		-.023***	-.024***	-.020***	-.016***	-.016***
Uses of Money						
Spending habits			.529***	.486***	.421***	.424***
Family Interaction and Atmosphere						
Family Interaction in 10th Grade (1990)				.143	.054	.055
Family Interaction in 12th Grade (1992)				.322***	.210*	.209*
Negative Family Atmosphere in 10th Grade (1990)				-.198***	-.205***	-.206***
Negative Family Atmosphere in 12th Grade (1992)				-.144**	-.149**	-.149**
Background Variables						
SES					.327***	.382***
Male					-.355***	-.333***
Asian					.431***	.434***
Hispanic					-.093	-.090
Black					.006	-.065
Native American					-.424	-.412
Urban					-.046	-.045
Rural					.186*	.187*
Midwest					.254**	.255**
South					.191	.192*
West					.077	.079
Number of Siblings					-.024	-.023
Interactions						
Never married*Black						1.561*
Constant	-1.295	-1.006	-1.058	-1.532	-1.241	-1.242
-2 LL	5883.363	5828.706	5802.203	5720.686	5626.286	5621.888

Notes: N=5,035. Tests of significance are two-tailed. *p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Teachers have significantly more negative opinions of students' task completion for adolescents from all but cohabiting fragile families than they do for students from married families. When work intensity is controlled, the effects of living in a never married or divorced family become somewhat less significant but do not go away entirely. Students who spend most of their money on necessities actually have more positive assessments from teachers (Model 3), as do those in families with more interaction, while students in families with deteriorating atmospheres are less likely to turn in their homework (Model 4). Still, none of these factors fully explain the effects of living in fragile family structures. The inclusion of background characteristics (Model 5) explains the negative effect of living in a never married family, with being Black the key variable (separate analyses not shown). The interaction effect in Model 6 seems to bear this out, with Black students in never married families more likely to turn in homework than white students in the same family structure (Figure 2).

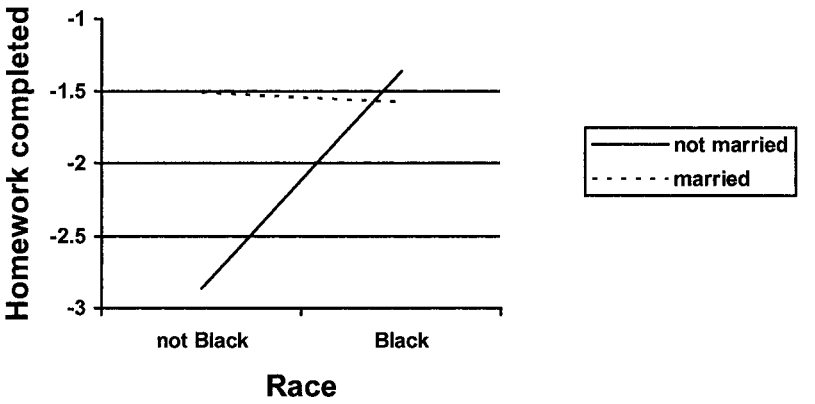

Figure 7-2. Interaction Effect from Table 5, Model 6: Never-Married*Black on Teacher Assessment of Homework Completion.

Table 7-6 reports similar findings for teachers' assessment of students' alertness in class. Again, teachers have significantly more negative opinions of students from all but cohabiting fragile families than they do of students from married families. Controlling for work intensity explains the negative effect of students from widowed families. Students who spend most of their money on necessities are actually reported as being more alert (Model 3). Model 4 shows that students who interact more with their

Table 7-6. Logistic Regression of Family Structure (Model 1), Number of Hours Worked (Model 2), Uses of Money (Model 3), Family Interaction and Atmosphere (Model 4), Background Variables (Model 5), and Interactions (Model 6) on Always Attentive in Class.

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Family Structure						
Stepparent	-4.88***	-.434***	-.416***	-.384**	-.284*	-.283*
Never Married	-.708*	-.742*	-.739*	-.678	-.466	-1.59*
Divorced	-.472***	-.459***	-.449***	-.436***	-.329**	-.321**
Widowed	-.481*	-.465	-.434	-.407	-.258	-.246
Cohabiting	.051	.149	.110	.181	.271	.274
Work Intensity						
Hours Worked		-.029***	-.030***	-.028***	-.022***	-.022***
Uses of Money						
Spending habits			.594***	.561***	.501***	.504***
Family Interaction and Atmosphere						
Family Interaction in 12th Grade (1992)				.385***	.232**	.232**
Negative Family Atmosphere in 12th Grade (1992)				-.252**	-.250***	-.249***
Background Variables						
SES					.309***	.309***
Male					-.350***	-.347***
Asian					.570***	.573***
Hispanic					-.111	-.106
Black					-.038	-.136
Native American					-.589	-.570
Urban					.154	.155
Rural					.137	.138
Midwest					-.113	-.111**
South					-.020	-.019
West					-.346**	-.344**
Number of Siblings					-.025	-.023
Interactions						
Never married*Black						2.100*
Constant	-1.465	-1.106	-1.165	-1.591	-1.241	-1.244
-2 LL	5638.525	5557.322	5525.505	5465.245	5360.155	5352.833

Notes: N=5,035. Tests of significance are two-tailed. *p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

parents are more alert in class, while those who have a more negative family atmosphere are reported to be less alert (note that these models do not reflect change in family interaction or atmosphere; the change models were not significant in predicting alertness in class). These family interaction and

atmosphere variables explain away the effect of living in a never-married family. Model 5 includes background characteristics, which decrease the effects of living in a stepparent or divorced family. However, the effects of living in these types of fragile families persist even after controlling for SES and race. Model 6 introduces an interaction term between living in a never married family and being Black (see Figure 7-3); as was the case for the models predicting teacher assessment of timely homework completion, this interaction indicates that teachers rate Black students from never-married families as more alert than white students in the same kind of family.

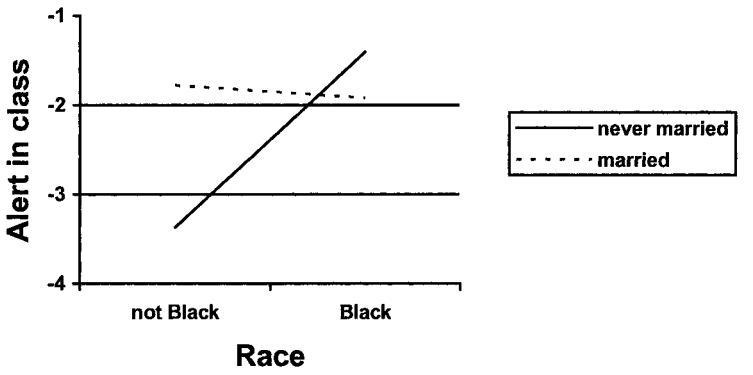

Figure 7-3. Interaction Effect from Table 6, Model 6: Never-Married*Black on Teacher Assessment of Alertness.

6. ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS

Factors that affect academic participation and achievement among youth who grow up in fragile families may not be limited to paid employment. For example, receipt of government aid in the form of food stamps, housing vouchers, Social Security benefits, or AFDC monies may lessen the pressure for adolescents to provide financial support for the family. In these cases, the absence of a parent may be mitigated by social safety nets, and it is possible that students whose families receive such aid might work less and therefore be able to devote more attention to school. On the other hand,

youth in single-parent families may be required to provide more unpaid child care for their own siblings, both to cover for parents who are working long hours or multiple jobs in response to financial pressures and because of the lack of a second adult in the home who could provide supervision for younger children. Although unpaid child care may not be reported as paid employment, the time spent in such tasks may have similar effects in distracting students from school activities as working a paid job would.

To test these ideas, we included variables tapping the student's report of receipt of government aid and student's report of hours spent babysitting his or her own siblings. In none of the models did these two variables have any effect. In addition, we tested our models on subsamples of youth who reported substantial familial receipt of government aid and youth who reported spending long hours babysitting their siblings. Our models behaved in very similar manners for these subsamples and for the general sample, suggesting that welfare receipt and time spent providing child care had little effect on school outcomes. We speculate that this finding reflects data that are unable to fully capture the concepts in question: although a variable is available asking respondents about time spent babysitting siblings, it is not possible to distinguish whether respondents receive pay for this activity, nor can we be sure that respondents who do receive pay do not report this activity as paid employment. Similarly, the only data available on family welfare receipt come from the adolescents, who may or may not be aware of the extent of family dependence on these safety nets. Future research using data more conducive to testing the effects of welfare receipt and family caretaking may provide more information.

7. DISCUSSION

Although many of the factors that make non-traditional families fragile are similar to those that encourage adolescents to engage in the high-risk activity of high-intensity work, little research has examined possible relationships between work behaviors and growing up in a fragile family. In this study, we use a nationally representative data set to examine whether youth in fragile families are at risk for working high-intensity hours and whether the mechanisms operating in the different kinds of fragile families to encourage high-intensity work vary by family type. Results provide mixed support for the specific hypotheses: Teens in fragile family structures work more hours than their peers in married families, and socioeconomic status was influential in explaining the effect of living in a divorced family on work hours. Similarly, youth who had lost a parent through death were less susceptible to the effects of SES on high-intensity work than were teens in married families, perhaps reflecting the financial safety nets many

widowed families are able to call upon. However, it was the effect of family interaction and atmosphere variables, rather than SES, that explained the effects of living in a never-married family. Although we might assume that youth in cohabiting families might have access to more financial resources than youth in single-parent families, it was the effect of socioeconomic status that explains why these youth work more hours. However, family atmosphere did help to explain why adolescents from stepparent families work more intense hours, as those who express more desire to get away from their parents work more than do otherwise similar teens who are less worried about getting away.

Similarly, students who engaged in high-intensity work received lower assessments from their teachers, but this effect did not entirely explain away the negative assessments teachers give students from fragile families. Even after controlling for work hours, spending habits, and family interaction and atmosphere, as well as demographic characteristics, youth in stepparent, divorced, and widowed families more often fail to turn in homework on time and are less alert in class than youth in married families. This may be due to additional important factors not in the models; while focusing on issues of work intensity and family structure, we have not yet examined the role of other possible influences, such as other extracurricular activities, academic aspirations and orientations, and self-concept, that may affect how teachers view students. Future work should examine how fragile family structures and work intensity may act in conjunction with these variables to explain how teachers assess students from fragile families. These models also point out the importance of considering other demographic variables, such as race, in conjunction with fragile family status. Interaction effects between never-married family status and being Black showed that white teens in never-married families were assessed more negatively by teachers than were Black teens in the same family structure, perhaps indicating more normative acceptance for Black families of this structure. Given that 52 percent of never-married families in this sample are Black, it is possible that these families are more accepted in communities as a normative family type, or that more families of this type live in the same area and can provide social support for each other (never-married families are concentrated in the South). Never-married white families, however, may have fewer social resources or may be considered less normative and may draw more attention and disapproval from people outside the family, such as teachers. Unless we consider each type of fragile family separately, we risk missing out on these processes.

In addition, adolescents' spending habits provided mixed evidence for the influence of work on youth from fragile families. We hypothesized that youth in fragile families, particularly those in families at greater risk for poverty (most of the single-parent family types), would work more hours if

they needed money to spend on necessities, possibly leading to lower academic outcomes and greater exposure to risky behavior. In fact, spending most of their money on rent and education was associated with teens' working more hours, but youth who spent their money in this fashion also received more favorable assessments from teachers, a counterintuitive finding. It is possible that, as D'Amico (1984) and Carr et al. (1996) suggest, students who work gain greater time management skills, and that students who take early responsibility for their own support may be more responsible in general or may have more serious intentions about college; future work could examine such issues as the role of educational aspirations for these students. However, it is also possible that the variable as measured does not fully capture spending money on necessities; respondents may think of money for education as savings for college, a common reason youth in middle-class families work while still in high school (Steelman and Powell 1991). More detailed measures of adolescents' spending habits and obligations may be better able to determine whether youth in certain types of fragile families are driven to high-intensity work by financial need.

Although the hypotheses were not entirely supported, the results do support the more general idea that scholars and policy makers cannot fully understand the risks and problems children face living in fragile families by merely comparing single-parent families to two-parent families and labeling the former as fragile. In other words, not all fragile families operate in the same way—to paraphrase Tolstoy, perhaps each type of family is fragile in its own way. There are theoretical reasons to believe that youth living in different types of fragile families may be experiencing different family processes and mechanisms related to their family structure. For example, families that are more susceptible to poverty—single-mother families, notably those with minority heads of household—may endure financial pressures that encourage their children to engage in higher-intensity work; on the other hand, members of racial groups that are more commonly in fragile families may find social capital with others in the same. Families that may not be as susceptible to poverty—such as non-traditional two-parent families, cohabitors and stepparent families—may still have stressors that encourage youth to work longer hours in order to avoid family conflict. Collapsing these family types into single-parent versus two-parent families would obfuscate the actual processes affecting adolescents, frustrating our attempts both to understand and to help them. The idea that we must pay closer attention to different types of fragile families is one that could be applied to many studies about family structure and youth outcomes. For example, the distinct patterns among different types of families found in this study support recent work looking at whether single mother and single father families operate in similar ways. Although previous studies suggested that there may be significant gender-based differences between single mothers

and single fathers, most of those assumptions have been based on studies that compare single mother families to two-parent families and conclude that father absence damages children in unique ways. When studies actually compare single mothers to single fathers, they find very few gender-based differences in parenting behaviors and child outcomes (Downey et al. 1998).

Future research should take advantage of large-scale, longitudinal data sets such as the NELS or the National Survey of Adolescent Health (Ad-Health) that can both provide information at more than one time point, allowing for better inference about causal connections between family structure and youth outcomes, and provide a large enough sample to allow scholars to look at family structure more finely. Such studies could look at short-term effects of high-intensity work for youth from fragile families, such as the effect of longer work hours on grades and test scores, dropping out of school, attending college, and delinquency and psychosocial effects, as well as long-term effects on outcomes such as family formation, occupational attainment, and college completion. Additional research could look at the effects high-intensity work has on the most fragile of families—those in greatest poverty, where putting food on the table may be a consideration for adolescent workers, or those who have engaged in early childbearing and have formed fragile families of their own. Although such data were not available in the NELS, more detailed information on spending habits, financial need, and family stressors could allow for more detailed tests of the mechanisms within different types of fragile families that drive adolescents to work longer hours, possibly putting them at risk for negative academic and behavioral outcomes. Finally, although this study suggests that such mechanisms may operate differently in different fragile family structures, it was not able to fully explain the work habits and teacher assessments of youth in such families. Additional research including the effects of high-intensity work and detailed family structure on youth outcomes could also include other variables of interest that could affect work choices and teacher opinion, such as participation in other extracurricular activities, school social capital, or self concept to see if the effects of growing up in a fragile family could be fully explained.

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ENDNOTES

1. These dummies were not significant in any of the models so we do not include them in the tables.
2. Although many studies of adolescent work have found no difference in likelihood of working among different family types, Schoenhals et al. [1998] use the 10th grade wave of the NELS and find small differences when comparing single-parent and two-parent families; these findings, derived from a very similar sample, are similar.

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Chapter 8

MAYBE SOMEDAY

Marriage and Cohabitation among Low-Income Fathers

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Abstract: Drawing upon a life course framework and grounded theoretical analysis, I explore the family circumstances of low-income, single fathers and their expectations regarding marriage. In-depth interviews were conducted with 37 low-income men living in a metropolitan area of the western U.S. Most of these men were actively engaged in parenting, either while living with their partner or sharing parenting between two households. Many of the cohabiting relationships these men formed included periods of separation due to conflict. Among these men, those who fathered children as adolescents were less likely to marry or assume parental responsibilities than those who fathered children at older ages. Overall, these fathers expected to marry sometime in the future but because of uncertainties in their current relationships chose to cohabit instead. The primary challenges to marriage or long-term commitment that men reported were economic strains due to a lack of educational and occupational opportunities, and parenting stresses due to a lack of parenting and family interaction skills. In addition, men raised concerns regarding their ability to discipline their children without being abusive.

Key words: marriage, cohabitation, parenting, low-income men

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last several decades, the proportion of births in the U.S. occurring outside of marriage has increased dramatically. At the same time, cohabitation increased as formal marriage declined (Bumpass and Lu 2000). Goldscheider and Kaufman (1996) argue that the declining importance of marriage and parenting has been greater in the lives of men than in the lives

of women. In particular, marriage rates are lower and cohabitation rates higher among low-income couples relative to couples of higher socioeconomic status (Manning and Smock 1995; Seltzer 2000). This lack of formal commitment by low-income men to their partners and the children they father has serious consequences not only for women and children, but also for the men themselves. Nonmarital births, in particular, have been linked to health risks and poverty among women and children, as well as poverty among single fathers (Brown and Eisenberg 1995; Da Vanzo and Rahman 1993; Nock 1998).

Among men who become fathers, their sexual unions as well as their background experiences and attitudes influence their early involvement in parenting. To date much of the family research has focused largely on the participation of men in marriage, with little attention being given to low-income, never-married men and their attitudes and commitment to family life (Blankenhorn 1995; Furstenberg 1988; Gerson 1993; Goldscheider and Waite 1991; Marsiglio 1995). In addition, low-income, single men are generally under-represented in national surveys (Bachu 1996; Lerman 1993). Thus, little is known about the challenges to marriage experienced by economically disadvantaged fathers (Hamer and Marchioro 2002).

Based on in-depth interviews, I explore how low-income unmarried fathers living in a western metropolitan area perceive their role as fathers and attitudes toward marriage. In particular, I examine the barriers to marriage and long-term commitment experienced by these low-income fathers. The use of in-depth interviews provides valuable insights as to how these men define and perceive their familial responsibilities, as well as the forces that facilitate or inhibit their involvement in parenting and marriage. An understanding of single fathers is important given the increases in nonmartial childbearing over the past few decades and the rise in female-headed households (Moore 1995; Ventura et al. 1995). Research on this under-represented group also informs policies related to marriage, welfare, child custody, and child support (Greene et al. 1996).

2. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

The organization of men's lives has changed significantly over the past several decades. Men are now spending less time in marriage and with children than before (Goldscheider and Kaufman 1996); fatherhood has increasingly become a voluntary role (Gerson 1993). In some instances, men may not know if they have fathered a child; when men are aware, their responses to paternity vary. Some choose not to be involved in the child's life. Such men are increasingly less attached to their sex partners and are forming relationships in which social norms defining roles and

responsibilities are less clear. In contrast, other men embrace with vigor the role of father and spend more time with children than did previous generations (Gerson 1993). Why some men choose to invest time and money in family life while others reject parental and spousal obligations is a question central to current debates about men and their role in the family.

Employing a life course framework, I explore the family formation process and early parental involvement of young, disadvantaged men. The life course perspective emphasizes the sequencing, timing, and ordering of roles. Based on this framework, life events are dependent upon prior life transitions, and in turn influence subsequent events in one's life; thus, the past influences the present, and the present influences the future (Rindfuss et al. 1988). Sets of interlocking roles and transitions place an individual on a life course trajectory that is modified by further events and transitions (Elder 1985; Rindfuss et al. 1988).

According to this perspective, men who become fathers but lack the financial resources to provide for a family experience role strain. The disparity between expectations and resources results in a loss of control over one's life situation that requires some form of accommodation or adaptation in order for control to be restored. Control may be regained by increasing resources or by denying familial obligations. Responses to life changes and the loss of personal control involve choosing from alternatives structured by social expectations and individual resources (Elder 1985). Thus, a man's response to fatherhood is influenced by his own personal resources, as well as by his social context.

Within the life course framework, age expectations mark appropriate times for major life transitions such as leaving home, getting married, and having children. Life events that occur out of sequence, as well as other departures from the normative life course, can have adverse consequences (Elder 1985; Hogan 1981). Of particular concern in the U.S. is the rise in nonmarital childbearing (Moore 1995; Ventura et al. 1995). This concern is underscored by Zill and Nord (1994), who identify three risk factors increasing the likelihood of poverty among children. These factors include (1) low parental education; (2) young parental age; and (3) single-parent families (Zill and Nord 1994). Thus, children born to single, teen parents are particularly at risk of living in poverty.

The formations of sexual unions are primary factors in family formation. Although current research demonstrates the benefits of marriage relative to remaining single, since the 1970s both divorce and cohabitation have increased as time spent in formal marriage has declined (Waite and Gallagher 2000). Bumpass and colleagues (1991) argue that young people continue to form sexual unions at about the same ages as they did in the past, but many more are choosing cohabitation over marriage. Although cohabitation is less stable than marriage, 40% of cohabiting households

contain children (Bumpass and Lu 2000). Even more tenuous are dating relationships, which account for the majority of nonmarital births (Bumpass et al. 1991; Ventura et al. 1995).

The likelihood of cohabitation relative to marriage is highest among low-income, less educated individuals with unstable employment histories (Clarkberg 1999; Manning and Smock 1995; Seltzer 2000; Thornton et al. 1995). Cohabitors with more economic resources are more likely to expect to marry their partners and more likely to do so than more economically disadvantaged cohabiting couples. Higher earnings and cumulative education increase the likelihood of individuals forming unions and in particular, marriages.

Non-custodial fathers exhibit a weaker attachment to their children than do fathers who reside with their children (Furstenberg 1988; Landry and Camelo 1994). Moreover, the type of sexual union men form with their partners is a strong predictor of men's involvement in parenting. Studies of young unwed fathers of AFDC children indicate that child support declines as the relationship with the mother of the child becomes more distant (Rangarajan and Gleason 1998). However, not only do men's relationships with the mothers of their nonresidential children influence their involvement in parenting, but also do their current partnerships. Single men or those currently in cohabiting relationships are less likely to maintain contact with nonresidential children than are currently married men (Cooksey and Craig 1998).

Current knowledge of why low-income men choose to be actively involved in family life is vague at best. The experiences and attitudes that shape economically disadvantaged men's perceptions of marriage and fatherhood, as well as the barriers and obstacles they encounter in accepting and fulfilling familial obligations require further understanding. Many have advocated the need for government programs to support and encourage marriage because of the benefits such programs may provide, not only to individuals but to society as a whole (Waite and Gallagher 2000). However, is marriage the best option for low-income, single fathers? Seltzer (2000) argues that low-income couples value marriage, but choose cohabitation because they lack resources. If this is the case, what resources are needed in order for disadvantaged men to marry? I explore these issues through in-depth interviews with low-income fathers.

3. METHODS

Data for this study come from personal interviews with fathers living in a western metropolitan area. Initially, interview participants were identified by an agency servicing local low-income children. The agency's director

advertised the study by posting notices in the agency soliciting participation from single fathers. Single fathers indicating interest provided their names and phone numbers to the agency director for contact by the study investigators. Potential subjects were contacted by phone and interviews were held in an agency office, generally after hours. Thus, interviews were conducted in a private and neutral environment.

From the initial sample obtained via contacts at the agency, snowballing techniques were used to expand the sample. The men interviewed provide a unique sample of economically disadvantaged or "fragile fathers" (cf. Greene et al. 1996) of children born outside of marriage. In particular, most of the fathers interviewed exhibited at least two of the three high risk factors noted by Zill and Nord (1994): less than a high school education, young age at fatherhood, and single-parenthood. The children born to these fathers are therefore at greater risk of living in poverty relative to children born to married parents.

Once the agency director made initial contact with potential candidates and obtained permission from them to release their names, potential subjects were tracked via phone calls in order to schedule interviews. At the beginning of each interview, written consent to participate in the study was obtained; also the purpose of the study and steps to maintain confidentiality were explained. Interviews were conducted by male interviewers of similar age to the subjects. Interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed by the interviewer for analysis. Subjects were given an honorarium for their participation.

The interview guide used a flexible format with leading questions. Questions were asked regarding the mother of their first child, as well as current partners and later children. Other questions in the interview focused on how respondents interpreted and defined their expectations, obligations, and experiences as fathers. Questions also included issues related to marriage and parenting and explored factors inhibiting or facilitating involvement in family life. The contributions men made to their children and partners, both in terms of child care and financial support, were considered as well.

In this study, I used a grounded theoretical approach to data collection and analysis (Strauss and Corbin 1990). I did not seek to confirm a particular theory prior to data analysis, but instead began with general topics related to family life. After transcription, the interviews were sorted based on topics and themes through a process of coding and creating memos. Diagramming techniques, such as "typologizing," and concept or flow charting, were used to map out relationships between important concepts found in the interview data (Lofland and Lofland 1995; Marshall and Rossman 1995; Strauss and Corbin 1990). From this process, categories were derived and a conceptual framework emerged. In particular, patterns

regarding men's relationships with the mothers of their children and their attitudes toward marriage were identified.

This study, therefore, explores how low-income, unmarried men understand the relationships they have with their children and the mothers of their children. The interviews underscore the stresses and challenges these men face in parenting and the parameters that shape their involvement in family life. In particular, this study identifies attitudes toward marriage among single, low-income men, as well as resources needed to encourage successful family relationships.

4. ATTITUDES TOWARD MARRIAGE

4.1 The fathers

The average age of the 37 fathers interviewed was 29; ages ranged from 20 to 41. All of the fathers experienced fatherhood outside of marriage and only two were legally married at the time of interview. The interview sample was relatively diverse in terms of race and ethnicity. Half of the sample were white, 22% African American, 11% Hispanic, 8% Native American and another 8% identified themselves as being from other or multiple race and ethnic groups. Most of the fathers were employed at the time of interview; 11% reported unemployment. All of those employed were in low-paying occupations or were self-employed. The education levels of the men varied: 22% had less than a high school education, 16% reported receiving their GED, 24% had a high school diploma only, 24% had attended some college and 14% had completed a bachelor's degree. Thus, almost two-thirds of the fathers reported completing only high school or less.

The family arrangements of the fathers interviewed were of four general types: (1) single father households (no partner present); (2) two-parent households (couples generally cohabiting together); (3) shared parenting in separate households; (4) and single mother households (father generally had contact with children on a visiting basis). A few of the fathers were raising children alone either because the mother had died, or more commonly, because the mother left the household and was not involved in parenting. These men struggled with the challenge of both providing financially for their children and taking care of them full-time.

More common in the sample were two-parent households and shared parenting households. Two of the fathers were currently married to their partners, whereas the others were cohabiting. In most of the cohabiting households, both partners contributed financially to the household and

assisted in child care responsibilities. In several other cases, the couple jointly shared financial and child care responsibilities but did not live together. These separate households were located near each other so that children could spend part of the week in each household on a regular basis. These two household types (cohabitation and shared parenting in separate households) appeared to be distinct phases in a general pattern of living together, separating for a period of time, and then moving back in together.

The final type of family arrangement involved the children living full-time with the mother, and the father visiting on an occasional basis. In some cases, particularly if the mother was on government assistance, the father had been contacted by an agency and required to pay child support. Unless required to pay support, most of these fathers contributed only occasionally to their children's financial needs (such as presents on holidays). In two cases, fathers did not know about the birth of the children until served papers by the state. These fathers had no contact with their children or their former partners, but were paying child support.

Several of the fathers had experienced multiple family arrangements throughout their teen and adult years. Many who had become fathers while in their teens had little or no contact with their first-born children, who were generally living in single-mother families. These same fathers, however, were often cohabiting at the time of interview with other partners and were involved in parenting subsequent children.

Respondents were asked in general about their desire to get married someday, and specifically about whether they had wanted to marry the mother of their first child, as well as their current partner. Thus, responses in the interviews provide a snap-shot of men's expectations to marry their partner under varying circumstances in their lives.

4.2 Too young to marry

In general, men had no desire to marry their partners if they experienced paternity at a very young age. They felt that they and/or their partners were too young to accept the responsibilities of family life. In these teen relationships, individuals were dating when a pregnancy occurred. Often, the relationship ended prior to childbirth. In most of these circumstances, the young mother later formed a household with another man, or lived with extended family as a single mother. The tenuous nature of these early relationships is evident in the comments of a respondent who discovered a year after high school that his eighteen-year-old girlfriend was pregnant. He explains why they did not stay together:

> She started seeing this other guy. I didn't agree with that so I broke up with her. So then of course I became the asshole that broke up with her

> after I got her pregnant. And then she married him during her eighth month. So not even a month later she marries this guy. They're still married now, so it ain't all bad.

In one example, the teen parents decided to give up parental rights and place the baby for adoption because they were too young to marry and provide a home. The young man explains:

> I didn't know what we were going to do. We were both kids. She didn't know what to do. When she told me she was pregnant she came to my house, told me. . . we talked about it for a little and then she left. And then I didn't see her for a long time. I tried contacting her and everything and then I received these papers from Texas and it was about [the baby] and adoption papers and stuff like that. . . . I feel like I'm a better person because I did give him a life instead of trying to be a child and taking care of a child. And I kind of pat myself on the back for that one. . . it was the most mature and responsible thing we could have done.

Many of these fathers indicated that they were enjoying their freedom and were not ready to settle down at a young age and take on family responsibilities. Many said they were too young to have the necessary skills to provide for a family. Marriage was not seen as an option at this age by these men. One man who became a father at fifteen explained that he did not marry because, as he said, "I was too young. I was working at a bar and grill. I wasn't making any money." In another example, a young man related his concern about getting married at sixteen when he found out his girlfriend was pregnant. He said, "I was like, how am I going to support a child and me? Am I supposed to get married? What now?" Another respondent expressed concern about getting married too young; he and his girlfriend were about nineteen when they had a baby:

> I just think that we both just knew without even saying anything that we weren't ready, that we were just too young. If we got married this early and weren't ready it'd just push a divorce and that's the last thing I want. . . .

Many young fathers resented the availability of programs to support teen mothers so they could finish schooling, whereas fathers were expected to provide child support with very limited financial or educational resources. Some men were frustrated that they were not able to participate in the decision to either give up a child for adoption or parent a child they fathered. In a few cases, the men were unaware that they had fathered a child until notified by the courts. One father explained:

> She didn't let me know she was pregnant. I basically carried on with my life and then five years later I get notices from the courts saying that they'd had court without me because they couldn't find me. I've been paying child support for years and years and years. I feel like I was cheated with her. She never told me she was pregnant so I never had the opportunity to be responsible. She took my responsibility away by not telling me. We should have discussed what was best for the child, maybe adoption. She went ahead and had the kid without me and as a result I'm paying for it for eighteen years.

Resentment was strongest among those men required to provide child support for children they could not parent. Young fathers that gave up their parental rights through adoption, or to married partners or relatives, described the decision as difficult, but for the best. They considered themselves good fathers because they gave the child a more stable home life than they could have provided as a teen father.

Several fathers expressed regret that they had not taken responsibility early on for their sexual behavior and delayed parenting until they were ready. As one man explained, "When you're younger you just don't think about that sort of thing. And now, later on in life, I think honestly, why couldn't I keep it in my pants? If I'd have had half a brain back then I wouldn't be in the spot I'm in now." Once sexually active, none of the fathers reported using contraception consistently. Several explained that they thought they could not get someone pregnant, or that their partner told them they could not get pregnant. Whether this explanation for unprotected sex was a rationalization or whether they actually thought they could not get pregnant is uncertain; but several of the respondents or their partners seemed to think that if they had not experienced a pregnancy after a period of unprotected sexual activity, they were unable to have children.

For these men, early age at sexual intercourse and unprotected sex resulted in the assumption of adult roles before they were mature enough or ready financially to take on family responsibilities. Marriage under these circumstances was perceived not as a solution to early parenthood, but as an additional burden. In most cases, negating the fatherhood role—rather than accepting the additional role of husband—was the option these men took.

4.3 Lack of trust

The majority of fathers interviewed were willing to support their children financially and accept the role of parent in their lives, but preferred to cohabit with their partners rather than marry them. There were two primary reasons given for choosing cohabitation over marriage. Some men indicated a lack of trust in their partnerships and their ability to commit to a long-term

relationship. Others acknowledged the inability as a couple to work out differences and get along with each other. These men lacked confidence that their relationships could be long-term.

Many of these young men had been involved in carefree lifestyles before becoming fathers. Some met their partners while clubbing or at parties. In some cases, after becoming fathers they felt a commitment to their children, but did not trust their partners or themselves to remain sexually exclusive. One young man explained why he could not see himself getting married:

> Mostly I don't feel a lot of trust for women so my feeling on that is I'm not going to stand in front of another person and promise to love them the rest of my life and to be faithful and that sort of thing when I don't have trust. I think trust is a big part of love. It'd be a lie if I went before the honorable judge or priest or whatever and said, 'I do' because I just don't.

In several instances, this respondent acknowledged not only his lack of trust in his partner, but also in himself to remain committed to a long-term relationship. One father talked about cohabiting with the mother of his children:

> Yeah we still lived together but there was changes in our lifestyles. She was going to college at the time and we already had our little thing going on where we started getting distant from each other. Myself, I think I caused a lot of problems being so suspicious and all this. When it came down to it, we were already seeing other people but we wanted to stay together for the kid's sake.

Some respondents indicated a lack of faith in the institution of marriage; they believed that formal marriage no longer represented a commitment to one's partner over time. One father explained:

> I think marriage has lost its true meaning in a relationship. I think that people have damaged the meaning of marriage so much that they're doomed to be divorced from the day they say 'I do' . . . I think society has worn out a true meaning in relationships. To me the true meaning of marriage is to be determined to love that person through all of the commitments that it takes through bad and good and to always work on it. That marriage should be forever. It's something you chose to work with[;] whether it goes wrong or not it's your responsibility to make it work for your family.

4.4 Fear of divorce

Several respondents were afraid to marry, not because they did not believe in marriage, but because they were afraid of divorce. The majority of the respondents interviewed grew up in divorced families and did not want their children to experience a similar childhood. Respondents viewed divorce as more complicated than separation following cohabitation. They did not want to deal with the legal ramifications of divorce and felt it was better just to live together in case things did not work out. As one father explained his choice to live with his partner rather than marry:

> You know, I've been with her twelve and a half years and I don't think marriage would change anything other than if we was to separate there'd be more problems with us. You know, we'd have to go to the court, do this, do that. And right now we could just separate and not have to go to court to get visitation rights because we don't do that. She lets me see him whenever I want to and that's fine. But like I say, if we was married, there'd be a lot more problems that could occur through that.

In general, many of the fathers reported a cohabitation history that included living with their partners, separating when problems arose, then getting back together again. Separation seemed to be a way of working out differences in these relationships. One father explained his relationship with the mother of his child:

> Well, we both lived together, and I moved out when things went sour. I moved out, and for a couple of months we tried again, and I moved out again because things didn't work out. Three different times where I moved in and had to move out because she would bleach my clothes or do things. . . lock me out of the house for a couple of days. Things like that.

Some relationships eventually ended after several trials if the couple just could not work out living together long-term. As one young man explained, "I ended up being with her for two and a half years and just. . . went our separate ways."

4.5 Maybe someday

Several of the respondents were in relationships at the time of interview that they thought could result someday in marriage. Some were waiting until they finished schooling or considered themselves in a better position to marry. One young man explained he wanted to get married in "another year or so at least." Yeah, because she wants to be at a certain point; like done

with a certain amount of school. I would too. I'd like to be done with my associate's at least before I get married." Some men indicated that they had talked with their partner about getting married, but had just not gone through with it yet. "We talked about it a little bit, but we didn't do much to make it happen," was the way one respondent explained it. Another said they talked about marriage, but "every time we really got serious about it something [came] up and it just never really happened."

Others were hesitant to make a formal commitment until they were sure that the relationship would last – that they had found the "right one." One father, planning to marry his partner next year, explained:

> I love her still to death. There's [been] time where I've thought it wasn't working out. But when I'd leave, she's all I'd think about and every time we'd get in a fight. . . I don't know, there's just something about her. Even when I first seen her, when we first made eyes, I was attracted to her. And then we went from there. But ever since my child was born, it's made me have much more love for her. I don't think I could ever leave her.

Another father, feeling that he had met the right partner, indicated his desire to get married after living together for more than five years and having two children together:

> She's everything I need. I need to marry her. I want to grow old with her and pass on with her. I want to be with her for the rest of my life. I want to legally consummate our relationship. We're married spiritually and have been for years. Plus I want to get married because I believe it's the right thing to do and shows a serious desire for commitment. Your kids will all have the same last name and you become a family. . . . Society dictates that that is what you do. I need to be financially and legally tied to her and her to me. I'm getting married because I'm supposed to and because it's the ultimate way to consummate your bond.

One of the married fathers, when asked if he was happy with his life, replied he was, because "I've got a good job; I've got a son and a wife and a family." The other married father indicated that he was living with his partner when his first child was born, that "it was common law, but [then I] did make it right." Thus, some men felt social pressure to legalize their unions, particularly for their children. Some felt they had met the person they wanted to spend the rest of their life with and were expecting to marry within a year. Others were waiting until they had the resources to marry, or to be sure the relationship would last. All of these relationships started with cohabitation. Although many of the men indicated a desire to marry

someday, the majority had still not formalized their unions when interviewed.

5. OBSTACLES TO MARRIAGE

In general, respondents opposed marriage in circumstances where they felt one or both partners were too young and immature to take on spousal responsibilities. However, when partners were older, most fathers were favorable toward marriage at some point in the future. However, at the time of the interview the majority preferred cohabitation to marriage because of the unstable nature of their relationships. In particular, men seemed to be uncertain about long-term commitment because they lacked financial resources as well as relationship skills. I examine each of these obstacles to marriage separately.

5.1 Financial resources

Beyond the teenage years, most of the fathers interviewed formed informal unions with the mothers of their children. While considering marriage an option for the future, the majority preferred to live together because of perceived uncertainty in the relationship. One major factor contributing to uncertainty and instability in these informal relationships was a lack of economic resources. Many fathers indicated that financial stress and having the means to support a family were the biggest challenges they faced in family life. As one unemployed father with a GED explained, "for me, I wake up and every day that I don't work I'm just like, oh man, we're broke, the bills are behind. I got to get up and do something. I got to get out and do something. But the finances is just boom. . . it's always there, it's never ending." Additionally, as was the case with this father, many of the respondents' financial difficulties were compounded by the need to pay child support for nonresidential children with former partners.

Several of the fathers had not had the opportunity to obtain schooling beyond high school or a GED, and were frustrated with the lack of job opportunities. One father with an 11^{th} grade education shared his frustration:

> I really, really want to go back to school. And for me especially it's hard for me because she claims him. It's hard for me to get financial aid or anything for school. And because I have him all the time. . . that's probably one of the toughest things right now. And I'm sure that if I just picked it up a little bit and started digging on that, I'd find a way. . . but that's just been difficult.

Financial concerns were one of the primary stresses cited by men as influencing their ability to both parent their children and get along with their partners. Another father with a high school diploma explained that the pressure to provide for his family was "the hardest part. . . finances is the hardest part for me; trying to take care of them so I can take them to the doctor and the dentist, so they always have money for anything they need—is the hardest part." In addition, several fathers noted the strain on relationships of having to live with relatives or not having a home of their own.

In other instances, child care policies discouraged couples living together because of the financial burden. Some men moved out of the home so that their partners could receive child care assistance. As one father explained:

> We were living together, but I moved out so she could still receive daycare assistance. She was getting daycare assistance for my son and they were asking for my information to get me for child support, so I decided to move out so she was able to get it. She stopped getting it for two months and [it] was really hard for me to pay for daycare, so I moved out so she was able to get daycare assistance again.

Thus, financial challenges appear to be a major factor influencing the lack of stability in these cohabiting unions. Without financial security, many fathers expressed concern about formalizing their relationships, and the strain of paying bills seemed to increase conflict with their partners.

5.2 Relationship skills

In addition to a lack of educational and occupational skills, fathers generally lacked relationship skills. Many couples appeared unable to resolve differences without conflict or separating. Some men commented on their inability to communicate with their partner and to develop a relationship of trust. One father explained why he and his partner separated:

> I think it was a trust and a communication issue more than it was anything else. She wasn't able to trust me, and a lot of the communication between the both of us was not where it should have been. In any relationship, friendship, whatever, if you don't have trust and communication I don't think any kind of friendship or relationship will work.

Some of the couples chose to separate rather than fight in front of their children. Many of the respondents grew up in homes with conflict and they did not want that kind of environment for their children. Unable to resolve differences with their partner without conflict, some chose instead to

separate. One young father explained why he and his partner separated and decided to split time with their son between the two households:

> I don't want him to see us fighting. I don't want it to get bad or anything like that. That's what I didn't like to see. Because I saw my parents fight all the time. I don't want him to see that at all. I just want him to have a good life and be a kid.

In addition to the challenges of communicating and interacting with their partners, fathers also expressed concern about disciplining their children. In several examples, differences in discipline styles were a source of contention between men and their partners. Generally, the fathers saw themselves as more strict in terms of discipline and the mothers as too lenient. One father explained, "Every time I try to discipline [our son], she gets mad at me for him. So I really just don't say nothing no more. And she'll be pissed off at me. He can do what he wants I guess." A father planning to soon marry his partner underscored a similar challenge when he said, "Our disagreements are surrounding our learning to be parents."

Meeting the daily needs of feeding, bathing, and dressing children did not appear to be problematic for these fathers. However, several fathers were unsure about how to discipline children or help with homework. One father explained the challenge of parenting in this way:

> There is no right way, it just depends upon the circumstances and you try to do the best you can because you don't know what is the right way. You just do what you feel and I want them to be special. I mean, they're already special but I want them to achieve to be somebody and I don't always know if I'm doing the right thing. I just keep trying.

Another father also expressed his uncertainty in parenting, "Do I wish I had more skills in rearing my son? Yes. Do I wish I had more patience and skills in being able to sit down and understand his homework and understand some of the things he's going through now? Yes, I do."

In general, fathers expressed love for their children and a desire to be good parents, but they felt unequipped to discipline and teach their children. Many mentioned that they lacked support networks to assist them in parenting. The majority of the respondents did not have close ties or relationships with their own parents and none of the fathers interviewed were actively involved in any religious organizations. Many felt they had only themselves to look to in dealing with family challenges. One father raised in foster care and state institutions explained:

> I wish I had someone like a grandpa to go to. I wish I had a father figure that I could get guidance from. I don't have that. I am smart enough and I do have a good heart and I am devoted. I feel like it's me against the

> world. [The hardest part is] doing it alone and not being equipped. Not having a support system or other sources to draw from. The decisions I've made in my life have put me in a place to not be the best father I can be.

The stresses of meeting financial obligations and interacting as a family were often difficult for men to deal with. Fathers spoke of the challenges of managing their anger and frustration without becoming abusive. Many of them were raised in abusive homes and did not want their children to experience similar childhoods, but were unsure how to discipline and interact without verbal or physical abuse. One father noted the frustration of trying to communicate with his son. He said, "I got a tendency to scream, but [I'm] not as verbally abusive as my parents were to me." Another father, on his own at fourteen after living in foster care, explained that disciplining his son without anger is a big challenge for him:

> I get to the point when I get all mad and I've learned that it's just best to walk away because I was abused when I was a kid. All of the men I knew would beat me. That's how I was raised. They whipped me and used a strong fist and all that kind of stuff. I wouldn't do that to my son. There are times when he's gotten in trouble. And, I think that there are times when a spanking is appropriate depending on the situation. The biggest thing is the fact that I tell him something and he doesn't do it and I do the grounding and time out and I just can't seem to get through to him about certain things. Maybe it's his age or a number of things. That's my biggest issue.

Finding positive ways to deal with anger and stress appeared to be a continual challenge for these fathers in maintaining positive family relationships. One of the unemployed fathers explained how his frustration and anger over finances sometimes spills over into his interactions with his son:

> I've got to go find a punching bag or something. I have to release that energy. Most of the time when I get angry and he's around, it isn't him at all. It's just anger and I just. . . I try to stay with him because he's my son and I love him and try and talk to him about it, but he's four going on five now. There's not much you can really explain to him. It's just exasperation. It's not really anger, it's exasperation. It's like, "Ah man, come on." It's like the same question for the sixtieth time.

In sum, the majority of the fathers interviewed were actively involved in raising their children and providing financially for them. Although some had children from earlier relationships that they had little or no contact with, most of the fathers were currently living with or near a partner with whom

they shared parenting responsibilities. In general, commitment to the children they fathered was stronger than commitment to partners. However, most of the fathers recognized the importance of both parents in the lives of their children and wanted to have a positive relationship with their child's mother.

Many of the fathers were in cohabiting relationships interspersed with periods of separation. Respondents in general were positive about marriage at some point in the future, but because of high levels of uncertainty in their lives preferred to cohabit instead. Overall, poor financial resources and poor relationship skills, including difficulty managing stress and anger, made it difficult for men to develop long-term relationships and to parent their children.

6. DISCUSSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

From interviews with economically disadvantaged fathers, two primary conclusions regarding marriage are apparent. First, for teens or very young fathers, marriage is generally not an option. Young men unprepared to accept the responsibility of fathering children are even less prepared to accept the responsibilities of married life. As suggested by the life course framework, the occurrence of life course events out of sequence can have negative consequences (Elder 1985; Hogan 1981). Efforts to promote marriage among these young men would likely fail. Instead, policies and program efforts are needed to inform teen parents of all options available to them in response to an unwanted pregnancy, especially when marriage is not a viable option. Both young men and young women involved in a pregnancy need to have input in determining outcomes for the child, including giving up parental rights.

Confronted with a pregnancy at a young age, some may choose adoption or giving up parental rights to the other partner. In other cases, if teen fathers are expected to provide financial support, they will need assistance to finish school and obtain employable skills so that they can better meet child support payments and participate in shared parenting. In situations where the father takes full responsibility for his children, child care assistance will be needed so he can balance the demands of work and family. Young fathers report many of the same frustrations and challenges experienced by young mothers, but feel less social support. Policy makers need to address the challenges of teen parenting for both young women and young men.

My second primary conclusion concerns the need for greater efforts in educating young people regarding reproduction. Youth need to recognize the likelihood of pregnancy when engaging in unprotected sex. In addition, sex education curricula in public schools should make stronger linkages

between engaging in sexual activity and the consequences of early parenting. Based on the data reported here, young men need more opportunities to think through the consequences and responsibilities of sexual activity. In addition to curricula on responsible sexual behavior, courses could include family life education and parenting. Policy makers and educators need to better prepare young people to avoid early parenthood, and to provide greater support if unwanted births occur.

Beyond adolescence, most young fathers interviewed were committed to their children and wanted to be involved in their lives. In addition, they recognized the contributions of both mothers and fathers to child well-being. Stability in family relationships, however, was challenged by a lack of economic resources and interaction skills. As implied by the life course perspective, a lack of financial resources produces role strain in men. Such strain can be overcome by either increasing resources or by denying familial obligations. For low-income men, the latter is often a more viable option.

Past studies suggest that low-income couples would marry if they had the resources (Seltzer 2000). Marriage may help promote stability and encourage long-term commitment among partners, but without economic stability and positive interaction skills marriages are not likely to last. The majority of men in this study ultimately wanted marriage and positive family relationships, but lacked the skills or resources to make it happen. Support systems in the community to help them were very weak.

In order for these fragile families to experience greater stability and long-term commitment, policy efforts need to address three critical deficiencies. First, men need greater support to further their education and job options so that they can better provide financially for their families. In particular, single fathers need greater access to child care assistance, loans for school, work training programs, whether they are living alone or with their partners. Couples that desire to live together and share financial and child care responsibilities should not be penalized and forced to maintain separate households. Again, policies need to consider the needs of not only low-income mothers, but also low-income fathers.

Second, young parents need opportunities to learn parenting and communication skills. In particular, they need to learn positive ways to discipline and interact with their children. In addition, communication, decision-making, and conflict-resolution skills are needed so that couples can work through differences without having to leave the household. The low-income fathers interviewed in this study were anxious to learn how to be better fathers and to provide positive environments for their children. They seemed less motivated to work through differences with their partners. Still, it appears that fathers would respond positively to parenting classes and family interaction education if they felt it would help their children. Community centers and elementary schools could offer family and parenting

classes, particularly in low-income neighborhoods. Child care for such classes could be provided to encourage attendance. Other state assistance programs such as daycare assistance could also be tied to participation in parenting and family classes.

Finally, counseling or anger management skills are needed so that young men do not perpetuate the patterns of abuse they experienced as children. Counseling or anger management instruction could be presented alongside parenting classes. Policy makers and community leaders need to look closely at ways to educate and support young men in their efforts to be actively involved in the lives of their children and committed to their partners. Policies are needed to encourage marriage but not punish cohabiting couples. Young adults, particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds, need better training in both employment skills and family interaction skills in order to form committed marital relationships. Without such preparation, they are likely to remain in less stable cohabiting unions.

These conclusions are based on 37 interviews with low-income fathers in one metropolitan area. Further research is needed to better understand the needs of economically disadvantaged families. To the extent possible, nationally representative research is needed to determine whether these findings can be generalized. However, if single, disadvantaged men continue to be under-represented in national surveys, this may not be feasible. Replication of this study in other regions could provide support for these findings, as well as increase confidence in their national applicability. Conclusions drawn from these in-depth interviews identify challenges faced by low-income fathers, but more research is required to determine the breadth of these concerns.

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Chapter 9

FATHERHOOD AS A TRANSFORMATIVE PROCESS

Unexpected Successes among High Risk Fathers

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Abstract: Understanding the processes through which fathers meet the challenge of parenthood is critical to the development of policies and practices designed to support fragile families. This chapter focuses on a sample of young, high-risk fathers who made a "better than expected" adjustment to parenthood. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods we found that, despite significant individual and social disadvantages, these fathers developed relational capacities associated with positive parenting. These capacities included a growth-oriented perspective on the co-parenting relationship, a commitment to shared responsibility for taking care of the co-parenting relationship, and a willingness to empathize with their co-parenting partner. Case studies illustrate the transformation of these young fathers and underscore the role of the co-parenting relationship in the development of these critical relational capacities. Discussion focuses on the importance of studying unexpected successes for the development of effective interventions.

Key words: adolescent parents, young fathers, risk and resilience, fatherhood

1. INTRODUCTION

In response to the rising numbers of mother-headed households, there is a great debate about whether to encourage young unwed parents to marry (Horn 2001; McLanahan et al. 2001; Mincy and Huang 2001). Policies designed to (a) pursue and/or punish fathers who do not meet their legal and financial responsibilities and (b) promote marriage are referred to as "the marriage agenda." This agenda is a reaction to the social costs of single motherhood, which has included high rates of poverty and a heavy reliance

on public programs for economic support (Carlson et al. 2001; Coley 2001; Furstenberg 1995).

From the perspective of the sociologist, young fathers are important to understand because they are an important piece of the puzzle of high rates of divorce and out-of-wedlock pregnancies; fathers play a critical role in the rise in mother-headed households, if only through their absence. But the processes involved in a father's disengagement are difficult to track and clarify (Hijjiwa et al. 2003).[1] There is some evidence that the declining rate of marriage is linked to decreases in the proportion of "marriageable" men, defined as men who are able to fulfill their traditional role as primary provider (Wilson and Neckerman 1987). Others have argued that the problem is linked to changing social values (including the demise of commitment and responsibility) and that we must promote the institution of marriage as the foundation upon which our culture is built (Blankenhorn 1996; Popenoe 1993).

From a psychological perspective, fathers are important because the quantity and quality of a father's engagement with his children has deep, enduring psychological consequences (Cabrera et al. 2000; Marsiglio and Cohan 2000). The psychological perspective focuses more squarely on the relationship that develops between father and mother, and between father and child. There is good evidence that two parents are better than one (in most circumstances) because childrearing is a physically, psychologically, and financially demanding job (Amato and Gilbreth 1999; Amato and Keith 1991; McLanahan and Sandefur 1994). Fathers who are positively engaged have a direct beneficial impact on child well-being in many of the same ways that mothers have a direct impact. They can also have indirect effects on child outcomes by providing financial and emotional support to the child's mother (Lamb 1997; Marsiglio and Cohan 2000). The quality of a father's involvement may matter more than his mere presence or absence, but it is important to note that fathers are not easily replaced by a secondary caregiver. The "absent" father can have a palpable psychological impact simply because he is absent. Many children long for or resent their absent fathers.

Until relatively recently, studies of parenthood did not include fathers, partly because parenthood was thought to be the domain of mothers, and partly because fathers were much more difficult to study (Costigan and Cox 2001; Marsiglio et al. 2000). The tendency to exclude fathers from parenthood research began to change as several prominent researchers, including Michael Lamb and Jay Belsky, advocated for research on the normative development of fathers and the role they play in child development.

Nonetheless, there is a great deal about fathers that we do not know. As indicated earlier, we do not have an adequate understanding of the processes through which fathers become absent. Perhaps more importantly, we do not understand how some young men are able to meet the challenges posed by fatherhood, despite personal limitations or social obstacles. In this chapter we will describe an approach to the study of fathers, intended to provide a fuller understanding of fathers and fatherhood, which we believe is critical to the development of clear, sensible policies regarding the promotion of marriage.

2. BACKGROUND

Fathers can be divided into four broad categories. First, there are men who seem well prepared for adulthood in all the usual ways and then make a reasonably successful adjustment to fatherhood. At the other extreme are the fathers who have troubled histories and few resources and make a poor adjustment to parenthood. These include fathers who willfully disengage from their parental responsibilities. It also includes the fathers who remain involved, but do more harm than good. It is important to study and understand these two groups of fathers, if only to confirm our theories of positive and negative predictors of paternal involvement.

There is a third group of fathers who appear to have the social and psychological potential to become good fathers, who we would label as "low risk," but who end up disengaging from childrearing or engaging in behavior that is clearly unhealthy for their children. Understanding how these fathers are different from those who make a positive adjustment to parenthood is critical for prevention researchers, who are concerned with how to keep low risk fathers on a positive trajectory.

Finally, there is a fourth group of fathers who are of interest to intervention-oriented psychologists. These are the young men who appear to be at high risk for failing to function adequately as fathers, but who surprisingly do much better than expected. This group of fathers seems to hold some hidden clues about how to work effectively with seemingly hopeless cases. If we can understand how these fathers are different from their peers, who look like bad bets and live up to that expectation, then we may learn something useful about how to help young men overcome their past difficulties and rise to the challenge of parenthood.[2]

Consider the case of Carl,[3] who participated in our study of young couples making the transition to parenthood, and was one of these unexpected successes. At the time of our first interview, Carl was diagnosed with conduct disorder and substance abuse, had a very poor relationship with

his own father, and had dropped out of high school. He did not seem like a good bet for a positive outcome, but he surprised us. Here is an excerpt from an interview we conducted with Carl two years after the birth of his first child:

Interviewer: So how do you think you're doing as a father?

Carl: I think I'm doing very good as a father.

Interviewer: Why do you say that?

Carl: Because I'm working two jobs and I'm spending time with my kids and I'm constantly around them. Ain't a time when I ain't around them. When I wake up, they see my face, when they go to sleep, they see my face. So, as long as they see my face then and there, I'm alright. It's like they are a very special part of me and it's just something I can't live without.

Interviewer: How do you think Crystal's feelings about you have changed over the past year? Put yourself in her shoes as far as feelings towards you.

Carl: She probably grew really deeply in love with me. Just seeing that. . . what type a person I was. . . she probably didn't know if I was going to stay or if I was going to leave. That's a big issue, and being teenage parents. . . you don't really know if the father going to be there or not. Cause this. . . it's like a statistic that most people underage who have kids or come from broken homes they don't really stay together. You see a lot of women out here, a lot of girls getting pregnant and stuff like that, and their baby's daddy leave them and then they just stuck on public assistance and they don't have no help. And, I think that she really just respect me more, just seeing that I stuck there being with my kids.

Interviewer: How have you changed?

Carl: I mean, just I'm more mature now. You know, I am more settled. Like before I had my kids, you know, man I was living life. I was living my life, on my terms. Now, I learn to live life on life's terms, you know. You've got to deal with the reality of the situation. I have two kids, I just can't go and do what I want to do, go spend my money on all. . . you know, I used to just buy flashy clothes, and that was all I was thinking about. I didn't have responsibilities. I was just enjoying myself, doing

> whatever there is things to do, going out, going to shows, partying, coming in three o'clock, four o'clock. I can't do that now, I got kids so I got to be there with them, and I've got to take some stress off her. So I got to be there all the time. I am more settled now, you know.

This chapter focuses on fathers like Carl, as our primary goal is to describe some capacities and circumstances which facilitate the sort of change illustrated by his story. A secondary goal of this chapter is to describe the process through which we arrived at our understanding of these fathers, which we believe is methodologically innovative. Our data collection strategy included a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, which allowed us to move from detecting general patterns in the adjustment to fatherhood to examining the particular circumstance of a few fathers who did not fit the pattern.

Positive adaptation in the face of significant risk is often referred to in developmental psychology as resilience, and is attributed to the presence of protective factors (Rutter 1990). Protective factors generally fall into three categories: individual characteristics (e.g., intelligence, temperament), external community supports (e.g., church, school), and warm supportive relationships (Garmezy 1985; Rutter 1990). While we know little about what protective factors contribute to the positive adjustment of high risk fathers, there is some evidence to suggest that a young man's partner plays an important role in his adult outcome (Belsky et al. 1984; Cutrona et al. 1998; Rutter et al. 1990). For example, several researchers report that young men who have troubled histories but who find psychologically healthy, supportive partners are able to increase their chances of making a successful adjustment to adulthood (Belsky et al. 1984; Rutter et al. 1990). Based on this research, we were interested in examining how the partners of the young men in our study may have facilitated positive fathering. Furthermore, we wanted to identify internal characteristics and capacities that enabled some men to utilize the resources available to them, especially their partners.

3. RESEARCH PLAN

Our effort to study young, high risk fathers presented us with several methodological problems. The first involved finding these fathers, recruiting them into a research study, and getting them to talk to us about their feelings, experiences, and relationships. These are not simple tasks (Costigan and Cox 2001). Our primary recruitment strategy consisted of gaining access to expectant fathers through their pregnant partners; we recruited fathers

through programs catering to pregnant teenagers, such as special schools and prenatal clinics. We conducted this study in Chicago, spoke with about 350 young women about participating in the study, and successfully recruited 179 of their partners. The rate of recruitment suggests partial success; the drawback of this strategy is that we were not able to gain access to those young men who had already disengaged from their partners.[4]

Beyond the challenge of identifying and recruiting these young expectant fathers into our study, we wanted to differentiate between types of fathers. This goal required that we assess the risk status of young men prior to childbirth and then assess their functioning as fathers at some later point in time. We developed a multi-method approach in order to gain perspective on fathers from several angles. We videotaped their interactions with their partners and then coded these interactions for warmth and hostility. We interviewed these young men for several hours, asking about their relations with their own parents, their relationship with their partner, their expectations of fatherhood, their psychological well being (using a structured diagnostic interview), and their academic and vocational functioning. We also interviewed their partners, asking many of the same questions, hoping to obtain some corroborating evidence (Coley and Morris 2002). Based on an array of risk and protective factors, we assigned each father with an initial risk score. An outline of our methodology for determining initial risk status is described in Table 9-1.

Two years later, we followed up with these fathers, videotaping and coding their interactions with their children, interviewing them about their parenting beliefs, attitudes, and practices, their experience of fatherhood, and their relationship with their partners. Again, the partners of these fathers were interviewed and used as corroborators. The information we gathered was used to create an index of paternal functioning, which included positive indices, such as the presence of nurturing behavior, and negative indices, such as high rates of physically punitive parenting behavior and low rates of patience, tolerance, and empathy. This information was used to create an index of paternal outcomes. An outline of the strategy for assessing paternal outcome is presented in Table 9-2.

4. QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Identifying trends between risk and outcome

In our first run through the data, our basic hypothesis was simple: fathers who were inarguably at high risk for poor adjustment to adulthood (were very young, had a history of psychopathology, reported poor relations with their own parents, were observed to have a conflict-ridden relationship with their partner, had dropped out of or were out of school but not working) would exhibit more parental dysfunction at follow up. For some fathers, paternal dysfunction could be defined simply as paternal absence or

Table 9-1. Measures of Risk and Protective Factors at Time 1.

Risk Factors	Measures Used
Interpersonal Behavior	Videotaped couples interaction during a disagreement task
High rates of observed hostility toward partner	Structural Analysis of Social Behavior Observational Coding Scheme (Florsheim and Benjamin 2001)
Low rates of observed warmth toward partner	
Psychopathology	Structured Diagnostic Interview based on DSM IV criteria
Current or past major psychopathology including mood disorders, anxiety disorders (excluding phobias), substance use disorders (excluding tobacco addiction), and behavioral disorders	Diagnostic Interview for Children and Adolescents (DICA; Reich 2000)
	Structured Clinical Interview for Diagnosis (SCID; Spitzer et al. 1995)
Psychosocial Risk	Demographic Questionnaire
Young age (< 17)	
Dropped out of high school	
Not in school and not working	

disengagement. However, for those fathers who remain engaged, parental dysfunction would need to be defined in terms of the quality of their parenting. Based on previous literature on the role of fathers in child development (Lamb 1997; Pleck 1997), we distinguished between dysfunctional and functional fathers using the various measures listed in Table 9-2. Our index of initial risk and parental outcome was continuous, meaning that we did not draw a firm line between what constituted high and low risk or between positive and negative parenting. Although almost all fathers were found to have some level of risk or to have some parenting problems, there was a great deal of variability in the balance between positive and negative factors.

Generally, our predictions were confirmed (Florsheim et al. 2003). At the two year follow up, about a quarter of the fathers had become disengaged

Table 9-2. Measures of Parental Functioning Administered at Time 2.

Risk Factors	Measures Used
Observed parenting behavior	Videotaped parent child teaching activity
Excessive rates of observed parental control or hostility toward child	Structural Analysis of Social Behavior Observational Coding Scheme (Florsheim and Benjamin 2001)
Low rates of observed warmth toward child	
Self Reported Parenting Behavior	Parent Behavior Checklist (Fox 1992)
High rates of self reported harsh disciplinary behavior, including spanking, deprivation, and yelling	Discipline Scale (Sample items: If my child hit me in anger, I would hit or spank my child; if my child cries after being put to bed, I spank him or her)
Low rates of self reported nurturing behavior, including reading stories, playing, praising, and physical affection	Nurturance Scale (Sample Item: I play make believe with my child; I praise my child for learning new things)
Negative attitudes about children and parenting (impatience, intolerance, low empathy, distrust)	Child Abuse Potential Inventory (Milner 1994); Sample Items: Children should always be quiet and polite; a five year old who wets his bed is bad

from parenting. The prenatal risk index was able to distinguish between those fathers who became disengaged and those who remained involved as co-parents with an accuracy rate of 60%.

We also found that for those fathers who remained engaged as parents, the prenatal risk index was associated with the quality of parental functioning at follow up (accounting for about 8% of the variance), such that those fathers who were determined to be at highest risk were more likely to have more parenting problems. For example, young men who were observed to be hostile when interacting with their partners (and who remained involved as co-parents) were more likely to engage in high rates of controlling behavior when interacting with their children. Conversely, fathers who exhibited high rates of warmth toward their partners engaged in higher rates of warm, nurturing behavior with their children.

These findings are generally consistent with the research literature on adult married couples, indicating that there is a moderately strong link between the quality of a couple's relationship and the quality of their parenting behavior (Cowan and Cowan 2000; Cox et al. 1999; Katz and Gottman 1996). However, it is important to note that in our study, many couples were not married, not living together, or no longer romantically involved at follow up. Whether the couple remained together romantically did not emerge as an important predictor of parental functioning. That is, there were a number of fathers who were able to maintain a positive connection with their partners, despite the fact that they were no longer romantically involved.

4.2 Identifying fathers who beat the odds

Subsequent to identifying trends in the trajectories of young fathers, we wanted to identify exceptions to these trends, with a particular focus on the unexpected successes (e.g., the fathers who did better than we expected based on our assessment of their initial risk status). This step is important because clinical researchers need to move beyond the identification of developmental trends and stable differences between high and low risk individuals. Knowing more about individuals who buck these trends is likely to reveal something useful about how to facilitate positive development in our highest risk populations.

Based on the information collected from the entire sample of young expectant fathers, we identified a group of young men who were, by most standards, at very high risk for paternal failure. This group of 60 fathers were drawn from the larger sample of 179 fathers, and was defined as having at least two of the risk factors listed in Table 9-1. Among these 60 young men, we identified 18 who, at follow up, were functioning relatively well as

fathers, based on the measures outlined in Table 9-2. More specifically, we used regression analysis to determine which fathers were functioning significantly "better than expected" relative to their level of dysfunction at Time 1 (standardized residual scores > .60).

In an effort to understand the difference between fathers who had poor outcomes and those who had "better than expected" outcomes, we listened to their initial and follow up interviews, looking for signs of resilience. We found that it was not possible to differentiate these groups if we paid too much attention to good intentions during their partner's pregnancy. Most of the fathers in both groups started with good intentions. At the outset, these young men did not see themselves as either more or less invested in fatherhood than their peers. There were no clear differences between the individual risks we identified in the "better than expected" group when compared to those fathers who failed to make a successful transition to parenthood. However, as we examined the changes that took place in these fathers over time, one important difference emerged. We found that the relationships of the "better than expected" fathers seemed to improve across the transition to parenthood, despite the fact that some of them (28%) were no longer romantically involved with their partners at follow up.

This is a rather remarkable finding, because most of the couples in our study experienced a decline in the quality of their relationships after the birth of their child, as do many adult couples when becoming parents (Cowan and Cowan 2000). To illustrate this apparent difference, we will describe the stories of two young couples who typify this pattern of adjustment.

4.3 Case studies

4.3.1 Darnel and Sherrie

Darnel was 18 and Sherrie was 16 when they were recruited into our study. Like all the high risk fathers, Darnel had a troubled past. He had been expelled from school for fighting and skipping classes and was not working when we first spoke with him. He seemed unfazed by the pending challenge of parenthood, saying that Sherrie's pregnancy has not really affected him but he was looking forward to "hanging out" with his kid.

Darnel reported a generally positive relationship with his mother, but his father had been only peripherally involved in his life and died a year before our first interview. Darnel had troubled memories of his father, who had beat him as a child. Darnel's father had abandoned the family, but on his deathbed, he wished for some reconciliation with his children. Darnel did

not talk easily about his father and indicated that his feelings about their relationship and his death were something he did not want to share with others, not even Sherrie. Despite these risks, Darnel reported a positive relationship with Sherrie, which was corroborated by our own observations and generally supported by Sherrie's account. He also seemed determined to become a good father, differentiating himself from his own father.

At follow up, two years after their son Theo was born, Darnel and Sherrie were no longer romantically involved. When asked why they broke up, Darnel told the interviewer that after his son's birth, he was caught for drug trafficking and went to jail for three months. The time he spent away from Sherrie and his child changed the way Sherrie felt about him. Darnel explains it like this:

> We grew apart. The time I spent in jail, we just grew apart. I still care for her, I still love her the same, but that time that was missed can't be replaced.

Nonetheless, Darnel was actively, positively involved in co-parenting, and received high scores across the measures of parental functioning listed in Table 9-2. He was working full time in a legitimate job, providing financial support, and frequently visiting his son. Sherrie summarized Darnel's fathering in the following way:

> I think he's a good father because he definitely spends time with his son. I can give him that; that's an A+. Another reason is when he's not around, he does call to see how Theo is doing. He calls to check on him like a good parent would do. Then when they're together you can tell that's father and son because they really get along well.

It is interesting to note that despite the fact that Darnel was functioning well as a father and seemed to be deeply invested in his son, there was some uncertainty about other aspects of his life looming in the background. When we asked him to rate his opportunities for success, Darnel said he had a 50-50 chance of making it, citing as potential obstacles the temptation of drug money and doubts about his ability to apply himself.

4.3.2 Robert and Latoya

Robert was 19 at the time of our initial interview and his girlfriend Latoya was 16 and four months pregnant. Robert had a history of depression, was involved in a gang, and had a previous child born to another woman. He also reported a distant, conflicted relationship with his own father, who "came around every once in a while." On the positive side, Robert was still in school and was in contact with his first child and in a

reportedly positive (and platonic) co-parenting relationship with the child's mother.

Robert described an argumentative relationship with Latoya, and said they sometimes became physically aggressive. Most of the arguments focused on Latoya wanting Robert to be around more and Robert's wish to maintain his independence. Related to this, Robert had wanted Latoya to have an abortion, but she and her family didn't believe that was right.

At the two-year follow up, Robert and Latoya were living together and had three children. Shortly after their son was born, Latoya became pregnant with twins. Somewhat surprisingly, Robert and Latoya were arguing less, were no longer physically aggressive with one another, and seemed noticeably warmer. When asked about changes in their relationship, Robert responded as follows:

> Robert: I wasn't expecting for the relationship to be this long. I thought when we first started out we was just going to be, you know, going together for a little while. But it ended up being a year, and then after a year it ended up being two years, and then the baby came, and then the other two came, and we just, we grew closer. I try my best to do anything for her. I clean for her if she's gone. I cook for her if she's hungry and don't feel like cooking. I wash for her if she don't feel like washing. I practically do anything for her, anything I feel will make her happy. And she knows I care about her a lot.
>
> Interviewer: How does she know that?
>
> Robert: I tell her. I always tell her.

Robert was not a perfect father. In his interview, he indicated that he used spanking as a form of discipline and felt this was necessary for children to understand the difference between right and wrong. During the videotaped play activity he was sometimes too controlling with his son. Yet, despite his beliefs about discipline and his tendency toward control, we observed that he was also quite warm with his son and that he was positively engaged in parenting. Latoya's comments supported this impression . When we asked Robert to describe an ideal father, this is what he said:

> An ideal father should be. . . if they don't have the money to take care of their child that shouldn't make them turn away. Because money is not everything for that child. That child is going to need you more than what the money is going to be used for. I mean without your love and support for that child—if you just walk away cause you say "oh, I don't have enough money for this I can't provide for her so I'll just leave"—that

child is going to hurt as it grows up wondering where you are, or where you been. Basically I think you should be around that child simply because it's yours. And you don't need money to take care of a child. Ok, you need money in a materialistic way, but mentally, physically, emotionally—you just be there for your child.

4.4 Recurring themes in the success stories

Sorting through the stories of these unexpected successes, we identified two broad, overarching themes that seemed to set them apart from their peers. First, we observed that for several of the young men in our study, fatherhood itself seemed to provide a catalyst for change. These better than expected fathers utilized their resources and developed their strengths in response to the challenge of parenthood. For some fathers this awakening did not occur until sometime after the child was born. For example, some fathers went to jail during the first year of their child's life and it was the experience of being in jail and away from their child that seemed to mobilize their wish to make a change. Here is an excerpt from our interview with Darnel:

Interviewer: Can you tell me how things are different for you from the last time you were interviewed?

Darnel: You know I am no longer. . . me and Sherrie are no longer together. Financially I am doing better now, and I got a better outlook on life this time.

Interviewer: How so, how is your outlook different?

Darnel: At first I wasn't really too much concerned and I was just letting things go. Then I see that I got to step up and make things happen. That's basically how I changed. Having a baby has made me more responsible. At first I really didn't have no responsibilities, I just did what I wanted to do when I wanted to do it. But now since I have my son, it's my responsibility to make sure his priorities come first, what he need. I have to work and be able to be there when Sherrie call me and he need something, I got to have the money for what he need, so. . . she basically made me more responsible and I think he just brightened up my life. There is something about being around him that makes me happy.

Interviewer: What do you think brought about that change?

Darnel: Well, I let things happen for too long and I got into the wrong situation, doing time in jail. Then I got out and knew I had to change and made the change. What really made me change was that when they took me to jail I couldn't spend no time with my son. That was what really made me change, the fact that I didn't want to go back. If I make more mistakes then my son is the one who would suffer.

In a very similar vein, here is an excerpt from Robert's interview.

Robert: I used to be on the streets for a while, and all that, but when he came I slowed it down. I wasn't as wild, as bad as I used to be.

Interviewer: Ok. What kinds of things were wild, what were you doing that was wild?

Robert: Gang banging and all that stuff. I didn't care too much about anything. I didn't really have too much responsibility. I had a daughter at the time, but it wasn't you know, I wasn't too serious about kids until Johnny came. Then I just stopped. I realized I got two kids now it's time to slow it down with all the wild acting and stuff.

Interviewer: Ok. So now you're different in what way? Like what are you doing now that is different?

Robert: I act more mature. I'm aggressive with everything that's positive.

Responsibility and maturity are clear themes throughout the interviews with the "better than expected" fathers, who seem to identify strongly with their role as father and put the needs of their children first and foremost. This investment in fatherhood implies a capacity to appreciate what a child stands to gain from a father. Such an investment was not observed in the high risk young men who made a poor adjustment to fatherhood. Many of them seemed tightly focused on their own concerns or defeated by hardship, undermining their commitment to their child.

Responsibility and maturity are elusive, ambiguous psychological constructs that are difficult to define and measure, and nearly impossible to induce in 18 year old men (Galambos et al. 2003). Although it is fascinating to know that these kinds of changes can occur, it is a little discouraging that we don't know how to foster the development of responsibility or maturity. Indeed, several programs for young fathers have been developed around the theme of male responsibility (Doherty et al. 1998; Walker and McGraw 2000), but none have had much success.

As indicated earlier, a second theme appeared in the stories of several "better than expected" fathers, who seemed to have positive relationship skills despite their high risk status. Some of these fathers were open, warm, and supportive with their partners during the initial interview and retained these qualities across the transition to parenthood. In some cases, the relationship was strained in the beginning, but improved with time. Many of the fathers who did not make a positive adjustment to parenthood spoke about themselves, their partners, and their children as distinct entities, living in separate worlds, pursuing their own agendas. The "better than expected" fathers and their partners expressed a more generous and generative perspective on their relationship. In some cases, the young men reported an eagerness to be with their child, to support their partner, and to participate in something greater than themselves. The partners of these "better than expected" fathers expressed appreciation for the commitment. This stood in sharp contrast to the partners of the poorly functioning fathers, who often complained quite bitterly about the fathers' selfishness.

Although financial support was an issue for many mothers, most were more keenly focused on their partners' efforts to provide consistent emotional support. When we asked Sherrie to describe how Darnel had changed since the previous interview, she said the following:

> He's changed, he's really stable with the job that he has. Before, he was kind of shifting in and out of this job, that job, this job, that job. He's pretty stable with this one. I guess he's matured, and he's really serious about what needs to be done right now. . . . He's thoughtful, he's there when I need him. And if he doesn't have it he will get it. He's just perfect, he's a perfect guy. He's considerate about my feelings. Like if I'm not feeling so good or feeling down, he will come and try to spend some time with Theo and come and try to talk to me. If he can't come here, we'll talk on the phone. Things like that. He's there for me when I need him for something. For Theo and for me. When he lends me a hand, he'll give it to me. He won't let me borrow it. He'll give it to me. He'll say, here you can have this. And when Theo needs something (clicks fingers), I got it.

Latoya was less articulate about the changes in her relationship with Robert than Sherrie was about Darnel, but the change is apparent when we compare her responses at the prenatal interview and the follow up interview. At the first interview when we asked her how she felt about Robert, she said:

> I love him—that is about it. He treats me better than other people that I have been with. And we spend more time. He gets along with the family good.

At the follow up there is a subtle shift in how Latoya describes Robert. This interview took place not long after Latoya had given birth to twins after a difficult and complicated pregnancy that required her to be on bed rest.

Interviewer: How do you feel about him?

Latoya: I feel he's a good father. I love him. He's a good person. He takes care of me, he took care of me when I was sick. He had the kids all the time. He did everything, I mean everything (chuckles). I didn't have to do anything. He quit his job to take care of me. He takes care of me now.

Interviewer: Ok. You said he's a good father too. Tell me about that.

Latoya: He takes care of the kids, I mean like he washes their clothes, put their clothes on. He takes them places, gives them what they need, things they want, spends time with them. That's about it.

4.5 Quantifying the qualitative differences

These stories raise an important question: What specific "relational" capacities are involved in the development of a more positive adjustment to parenthood? Because there has been so little research on young co-parents, we looked to the literature on middle-class, adult couples for help in defining healthy romantic and co-parenting relations. A careful review of the marital literature helped us to identify four capacities associated with healthy relationships: the capacity to focus on togetherness within the relationship, the ability to express fondness, the capacity to accept both positive and negative characteristics in others, and the capacity to experience and express empathy for one's partner (Buehlman et al. 1992; Cowan and Cowan 2000; Jacobson and Christensen 1996; Long 1993).

More specifically, togetherness was defined as the young father's ability to express solidarity with his partner and his commitment to overcoming the challenges of co-parenting (Buehlman et al. 1992). Fondness was defined as the capacity to express warmth, affection, and appreciation for the co-parenting partner (Gottman 1999). The concept of acceptance was most clearly articulated in the work of Jacobson and colleagues (Jacobson and Christensen 1996; Jacobson and Margolin 1979), who define acceptance as the ability to tolerate, if not embrace, those characteristics of the partner (and the relationship) that cannot be changed. Acceptance often includes expressions of understanding and compassion for the partner's personal foibles. Empathy was defined as the willingness to take the

Table 9-3. Risk, Outcome, and Relationships Capacity Scores.

Variable Name	Better than expected parenting outcome (n=18) Mean (S.D.)	Poor parenting outcome (n=42) Mean (S.D.)	t-test (df = 58)
Risk Composite (standardized)	-0.07 (0.75)	0.04 (0.69)	0.57
Outcome Composite (standardized)	1.09 (0.56)	-0.48 (0.64)	8.44**
Fathers Relational Capacity at T1 (total)	33.61 (7.78)	31.00 (9.16)	1.05
Togetherness[1]	7.97 (1.83)	7.02 (2.01)	1.67
Empathy[2]	2.89 (0.96)	2.84 (1.17)	0.21
Acceptance[1]	7.83 (2.22)	7.34 (1.99)	0.85
Fondness[1]	7.67 (2.14)	7.44 (1.98)	0.40
Relationship Growth[1]	7.28 (1.71)	6.34 (2.65)	1.37
Fathers Relational Capacity at T3 (total)	31.89 (10.17)	25.95 (8.29)	2.37*
Togetherness[1]	7.11 (2.44)	5.50 (1.92)	2.73*
Empathy[2]	3.44 (1.20)	2.31 (1.07)	3.63**
Acceptance[1]	7.17 (2.06)	6.24 (2.03)	1.59
Fondness[1]	7.16 (2.28)	6.62 (2.15)	0.38
Relationship Growth[1]	7.08 (2.63)	5.29 (2.13)	2.65**
Residual Change in Father's Relational Capacity (unstandardized)	3.93 (10.09)	-1.68 (8.27)	2.25

[1]scaled 1-10 [2]scaled 1-5 * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

perspective of the partner, especially during conflicts (Gottman 1999). A fifth relational capacity, which was not found in the marital literature but emergent throughout the interview data, was the capacity for relational

growth. We defined the capacity for relational growth as expressing some perspective on the need for growth within the co-parenting relationship and some willingness to make those changes.

We developed the Relational Capacities (RC) Coding System to assess these qualities in our participants, based on their responses to the Young Parenthood Interview. The Young Parenthood Interview is a semi-structured interview which was administered separately to both the mothers and fathers participating in this study, first when they were still expecting and then again at the two year follow up. After listening to recorded interviews and reading verbatim transcripts, coders (trained to be reliable) rated each relational capacity on a scale ranging from 1 (low) to 5 (high). Because some of the couples were no longer romantically involved at follow up, we adjusted the coding scheme to accommodate those couples who were only involved as co-parents. More specifically, we assessed each parent's relational capacities as a romantic partner and a co-parenting partner. In other words, a participant could be very accepting of his partner as a co-parent but not very accepting of her as a romantic partner (or vice versa).

Comparisons were made between the relational capacities of the 42 high risk fathers whose parenting outcomes were relatively poor "as expected," and the 18 fathers who did "better than expected." Results, reported in Table 9-3, indicated that at the initial (prenatal) interview, the better than expected fathers were not significantly different from their peers across the various relational capacities. However, at follow up, the "better than expected" fathers were coded as having higher relational capacity scores, most particularly the capacity for togetherness, empathy, and relational growth. To some extent, this statistically significant difference was associated with increased relational capacities. However, in some cases the fathers in the "better than expected" group were exceptional in that they were able to maintain higher relational capacity scores across the difficult transition to parenthood. Other fathers experienced declines in their relational capacities, which was likely due to the stressors associated with having a child and the difficulties of maintaining a positive co-parenting relationship.[5]

5. DISCUSSION

As indicated by the data presented in Table 9-3 and illustrated in the case studies, a relatively clear message emerged from our data: fathers who were able to establish a stable and emotionally secure relationship with their partners were better able to become positively engaged with their children, despite personal histories marked by disadvantage, failure, trauma, and misbehavior. For some fathers, a positive relationship was apparent in the

beginning and the challenge was to maintain the connection across this difficult developmental transition. Others struggled to create a positive relationship along the way. In these cases, it seemed that the psychological impact of a newborn baby allowed for the development of new strengths or the discovery of new resources.

This process may seem mysterious and we do not understand why this transformation happens for some and not for others. Nonetheless, the effort to define and measure relational constructs associated with a positive transition to parenthood promises to be useful in the development of relationship focused treatment programs for young couples (Shapiro et al. 2000). Focusing on the development of tangible relationship skills between co-parenting partners seems more promising than trying to teach young fathers to become more responsible or mature. Providing relationship-focused services to young expectant couples may seem like an obviously good idea, but currently there are few young parenthood programs that include a co-parenting relationship component.

An important lesson to be learned from the Carl, Darnel, Robert, and other unexpected successes is that transformations are possible and that relationship factors play a primary role in the transformation process. As most parents will attest, sustaining romance and raising children are difficult endeavors. It may be the case that marriage lends some stability to what seems like a naturally unstable process, but it is also the case that marriage does not guarantee love, respect, and acceptance. From a public policy perspective, the institution of marriage is a more convenient target than the quality of couples' relationships. However, without a focus on relationship quality it seems unlikely that the "marriage agenda" will produce the desired effects. Couples who stay together may still be at risk for serious co-parenting and parenting problems. Couples who break up, like Darnel and Sherrie, may still be able to function quite well as co-parents. These facts make it difficult to know whether and when we should encourage couples to get married, or even stay together as a couple. Perhaps it is a safer bet to promote relationships through the development and implementation of couple-focused interventions and let marriage happen when it happens.

ENDNOTES

1. More recently, several researchers have indicated that the rise in mother-headed households does not necessarily mean that fathers are truly absent, deadbeat dads (Cabrera et al. 2000; Coley 2001). Many unmarried fathers remain actively and positively involved in childrearing. Understanding the full spectrum of father-child relations is critical to an informed debate on the state of marriage and the wisdom of the marriage agenda.

2. The boundaries between these four groups are fuzzier than we have made them out to be. There are two important reasons for this fuzziness. First, many fathers function well in some respects and quite poorly in others, which makes them hard to categorize. Second, fathers may move back and forth between categories; they may look like poorly functioning fathers for a period of time and then look much better some time later.
3. All the names and other identifying details have been changed to protect the confidentiality of participants.
4. The recruitment rate for this study was approximately 50%. Many pregnant teens who were asked to participate in this study did not because they were not in contact with the father of their child. Some expectant fathers were unwilling to participate and some were too old for our study, which focused on fathers who were 24 and under. We believe the fathers who participated in this study are representative of fathers who are most likely to be receptive to intervention efforts designed to facilitate positive involvement.
5. We considered that perhaps the partners of these "better than expected" fathers were more interpersonally skilled and somehow facilitated the transformation we observed. However, we could not detect clear differences between the partners of the better than expected father and their high risk peers.

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