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Marriage and Poverty: An Annotated Bibliography

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About this resource

This annotated bibliography is designed to provide researchers, policymakers, advocates, and the general public with an overview of the debate and research surrounding the promotion of marriage as a solution to reducing poverty. In addition to newspaper articles familiarizing the reader with the current debate, topics covered in this bibliography include: economic insecurity and single motherhood, child welfare and single motherhood, factors that influence marital decisions, race and family formation, the conservative and feminist perspectives, and current policy proposals. Articles are listed alphabetically by author within each category. This bibliography was written with the generous support of the Ms. Foundation, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, and the David and Lucile Packard Foundation.

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Newspaper Articles Outlining the Current Policy Debate

Associated Press. 2002. "Marriage Plan Raises Questions." *New York Times on the Web*, 15 April, <<http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/national/AP-Welfare-Marriage.html>> (April 15, 2002).

- The Bush Administration and some Republicans in Congress want to allocate up to \$300 million per year to welfare programs promoting marriage.
- Supporters of the proposal do not envision "forcing anyone down the aisle" or "pushing bad or violent marriages," rather they are interested in encouraging "healthy marriages."
- Welfare recipients interviewed indicated that marriage had not been a good option for them for a variety of reasons—including domestic violence, frequent incarceration of the father, and the discovery of the fact that the father was already married.
- Some states have already instated marriage programs:
 - West Virginia offers an extra \$100 in benefits to married couples, a program the Bush Administration indicated might not qualify for funding, since it is not specifically targeted at increasing "good marriages."
 - Oklahoma created marriage workshops to try and reduce the state's divorce rate.
 - Utah distributes a free video on "tips for a strong marriage" to couples applying for marriage licenses.
- Wade Horn, director of the Administration for Children and Families, suggested one example of a program that would be funded is marriage counseling offered to unmarried couples at the time of their child's birth.
- While supporters of the Bush proposal cite "uncontroverted research" that children from married families have less risk of living in poverty to legitimate the focus on marriage, many opponents believe that promoting marriage is not the business of government.
- Marian Wright Edelman, president of the Children's Defense Fund, expressed concern that such programs run the risk of being coercive. She is quoted as saying that "the best thing for marriage is a good job with a decent wage."
- Two polls cited indicate that the American public believes that government should "stay out" of marriage promotion (79%, Pew Research Center for People and the Press) and that welfare money should be spent on helping recipients get "good jobs" (86%, [editor's note: the article alludes to a poll released on April 15, 2002 by the National Campaign for Jobs and Income Support]).

Milbank, Dana. 2001. "A Marriage of Family and Policy; Bush Gives Government A Leading Social Role." *The Washington Post*, 15 April, 1 (A).

Highlights:

- The Bush administration proposes using grants to promote “responsible fatherhood,” marriage counseling to prevent divorce, and tax credits promoting two-parent homes and adoption.
- Bush has pledged \$200 million in grants over the course of the next five years to community and religious groups promoting fatherhood, marriage education, and conflict resolution. In addition, his budget outlines \$3 million for programs towards skill building for fathers.
- Bush is encouraging states to use their surplus welfare funds to provide premarital services and counseling.
- According to Bush officials, the family initiatives Bush is promoting are a conservative response to the Great Society programs, such as welfare, which they believe encouraged out-of-wedlock births and increased social problems.
- The Director of the President’s Domestic Policy Council, John Bridgeland, maintains that family breakdown magnifies social problems, including poverty, drug abuse, and crime.

Pear, Robert. 2001. “Human Services Nominee’s Focus on Married Fatherhood Draws Both Praise and Fire.” *The New York Times*, 7 June, 24(A)

Highlights:

- Wade Horn, President of the National Fatherhood Institute and President Bush’s nominee for Assistant Secretary of Family Support in the Health and Human Services Administration, has received sharp criticism from women’s groups due to his belief that the government should give preference to married households when distributing benefits and aggressively promote marriage, especially for low-income families.
- If Horn is confirmed, he would have authority over policies such as welfare, childcare, child support, foster care, adoption, Head Start, and refugee services.
- Horn advocates premarital education counseling for low-income couples, a public awareness campaign lauding the benefits of marriage, and pro-marriage posters in welfare offices and maternity wards.
- Many democrats share Horn’s view that the absence of fathers leads to many social problems.
- Feminists worry that denying support to needy single-headed families unfairly punishes children in female-headed households.

Philips, Melanie. 2001 “The Bond that Binds Us.” *Sunday Times* [London] 24 June 2001. Online. LEXIS-NEXIS Academic Universe. (September 25, 2001).

Highlights:

- American social policy is starting to take a new direction, away from governmental inaction in the private sphere, toward promoting and supporting traditional family types. While previous efforts were focused on providing money and services for those with children regardless of marital status, policy is now aimed at encouraging family cohesion.
- In Oklahoma, a state once plagued by high rates of divorce and teen pregnancy, public employees now advise clients that marriage represents a protective shield from social ills, such as poverty, disease, and violence. Abstinence is promoted in schools, while divorce is now more difficult under more restrictive laws.
- With the support of religious organizations, couples are required to wait four months before getting married and must participate in counseling sessions prior to their

marriage. Counseling is also available after marriage in order to advise couples on how to make their union more enduring.

- The Bush administration actively supports programs that advocate traditional marriage and has already devoted money to fatherhood groups that encourage absentee and teenage fathers to marry.
- Supporters of this new policy direction are those who believe that welfare has inappropriately supported single-parenthood by giving money to those who have children out of wedlock. Advocates of marriage suggest that welfare does not encourage citizens to take responsibility for their private actions.
- While British policy has not fully embraced this American trend, the Home Secretary, David Blunkett, recently extolled the virtues of marriage, and the need to promote these virtues to children. This indicates that Britain could be following the U.S.'s lead towards changing the direction and attitudes surrounding social policy.
- According to the author, "...the lesson for Britain is surely that ending the culture of excuses and moral indifference is essential in tackling family breakdown and welfare dependency."

Economic Insecurity and Single-Motherhood

The Alan Guttmacher Institute. 1999. "Married Mothers Fare the Best Economically, Even If They Were Unwed at the Time They Gave Birth." *Family Planning Perspectives* 31 (September): 258-259.

Data for this study was obtained from the National Survey of Families and Households, during the survey periods from 1987-1988 and 1992-1994, and based on a sample of 1,244 women who gave birth in the five years preceding their survey.

Key findings:

- Women who have children and never marry have significantly lower incomes, are 10 times more likely to be on welfare, and 70 percent less likely to be working full-time than mothers who marry at some point in their lives.
- Compared to women who were married when they gave birth, women who were not married when they gave birth were less educated, more likely to give birth as teenagers, and more likely to be pregnant sooner than they intended to be.
- The economic status of women who marry after they give birth closely resembles that of women who were married at the time they gave birth. The most economically disadvantaged women are those who never marry.
- While marriage is not associated with a woman's likelihood of working full-time, it does seem to be an important element in raising the economic security of mothers.

Halpern, Ariel. 1999. *Poverty among Children Born Outside of Marriage- Preliminary Findings from the National Survey of America's Families*. (UI Report No. 99-16). Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

This paper uses the National Survey of America's Families (NSAF) to determine if children who are born outside of marriage and live with single mothers are at a greater risk of living in poverty than those who were born to married mothers who have since become single.

Key findings:

- Of the children currently living with single mothers, 60 percent of children born out-of-wedlock are poor, versus 37 percent of children born within marriage.
- Black and nonblack (not Hispanic) children born outside marriage have similar poverty rates (63 percent and 57 percent respectively, standard error less than .01). Similarly, black and non-black (not Hispanic) children born inside marriage have comparable rates of poverty (39 percent for black children and 36 percent for non-black children).
- Hispanics born both inside and outside of marriage have a high rate of poverty (68 percent for those born outside marriage and 50 percent for those born within marriage).
- Within single mother families, children born outside of marriage are more than twice as likely to be black than children born within marriage are.
- Children born outside of marriage are more likely to have mothers that were younger than 20 when they had them (28 percent of nonmarital children versus 8 percent of marital children) and mothers who did not graduate from high school.
- Children born outside of marriage are less likely to receive financial contributions from their fathers (30 percent of children born outside of marriage receive child support versus 47 percent of children born within marriage). When they do receive such assistance, they receive about half of what children born inside marriage receive (\$2,087 versus \$4,598 a year respectively).
- Of children living with single mothers, those who were born outside of marriage are 1.7 times more likely to be poor than children who were born within marriages.
- Children of mothers who do not work are 24 times more likely to be poor than those whose mothers work full-time year round. This relationship between work and poverty suggests that increasing employment among mothers of nonmarital children would have a greater effect on reducing poverty than a policy focused exclusively on decreasing nonmarital births.

Remez, L. 1998. "Single Adult Mothers are Considerably Less Well-Off Than Their Married Peers." *Family Planning Perspectives* 30 (September): 250.

This analysis uses the Panel Study of Income Dynamics to study the economic well-being of single and married women who gave birth between 1985 and 1990.

Key findings:

- This analysis finds that the economic status of single mothers who gave birth at 20 years of age or older is closer to that of teenage mothers than adult married mothers in terms of their income, welfare receipt, and employment in the year before and after a birth.
- In the year following birth, five percent of the babies born to married adult women were poor while 36 percent of the babies born to unmarried adults were poor. The differences between unmarried mothers and teenage mothers were not significant.
- Unmarried mothers were more likely to receive welfare than teenage mothers and married mothers. In the year following their birth, 59 percent of children born to unmarried women, 41 percent of children born to teenage mothers, and 9 percent of children born to married women received welfare.
- Single mothers who were cohabiting were economically more secure than single mothers who were not cohabiting. However, they were still less well off than married mothers.

Child Welfare and Single-Motherhood

Garis, Dalton. 1998. "Poverty, Single-Parent Households, and Youth At-Risk Behavior: An Empirical Study." *Journal of Economic Issues* 32 (December): 1079-1106.

This study uses the National Educational Longitudinal Survey (NELS) to explore the relationship between poverty and family structure characteristics of an eighth grade cohort who grew up in single-parent households and their twelfth grade involvement in certain "at-risk" behaviors (i.e., drug/alcohol use and sexual activity).

Key findings:

- Households comprised of one parent have a greater likelihood of being poor.
- "Whether being a two-parent family leads to greater economic prosperity, or greater economic prosperity makes it easier for parents to remain together, there is a positive association between increased money income and two-parent families" (1091).
- On average, low-income parents were unemployed 25 percent of the four-year survey period.
- Children of higher income families were more likely to abuse drugs and/or alcohol.
- Income is not a significant variable in predicting the likelihood of youth sexual activity.
- The amount of time both parents spend with their children matters more than family structure, when it comes to reducing at-risk behaviors.

McLanahan, Sara S. 1997. "Parent Absence or Poverty: Which Matters More?" in *Consequences of Growing Up Poor*, eds. G. Duncan and J. Brooks-Gunn, 38-45. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

This chapter explores the relationship between family structure and children's well-being. A child's well-being is broken down into six domains: test scores, educational attainment, behavioral problems, psychological problems, jobs and income, and physical health. It also compares the impact of family structure relative to income on child development. Family structure and income effects are based on correlational evidence from previous studies (each domain includes evidence from at least three studies).

Key findings:

- Explaining as much as 50 percent of the variation, income is the most important factor describing the difference in the educational achievement of children raised in single-parent families. Less parental supervision and less social capital (due to more frequent relocation of their families) account for the remaining differences.
- Family structure seems to be more important to children's well-being in some domains but not others. Living with a single-parent has the most consistent negative effects in the behavioral problems domain. Studies show more incidence of fighting and hyperactivity in non-intact families. However, these effects are short-lived and, most likely, result from disruptions in family structure.

- Studies also find a consistent pattern of psychological problems among children of divorced families, but such negative effects decline with age and do not last into adulthood. This suggests that resulting psychological problems are limited to the period shortly before and after divorce.
- Family disruption has more consistent effects on educational attainment than on test scores. This suggests that problems that arise in the educational attainment domain seem to be related to behavioral problems rather than lowered cognitive ability.
- Studies are mixed when it comes to jobs and income and physical health.
- Children raised by divorced mothers do better than children raised by never-married mothers. Children raised by widowed parents do about as well as children who live with both parents. (Note: the authors do not specify a particular domain.)
- Other than increasing family income, remarriage does not have much effect on children's well-being. Children in stepfamilies have better educational attainment but do somewhat worse than children in single-parent families in regards to behavioral and psychological problems.
- Poverty status is more important than family structure when it comes to determining cognitive ability and school achievement. In contrast, family structure has a greater effect on behavioral problems, psychological problems, and physical health.
- Children growing up with divorced or never-married mothers experience lower educational attainment and more behavioral and psychological problems.
- It remains unclear if poverty is a cause or consequence of family disruption. Family disruptions can push families into poverty. At the same time, economic instability can cause families to break up.

Silverstein, Louise B. and Carl F. Auerbach. 1999. "Deconstructing the Essential Father." *American Psychologist* 54 (June): 397-407.

This article is a direct response to the neo-conservative movement that supports the idea of the essential role that fathers play in their children's lives based on their biological characteristics. In opposition to this stance, the authors indicate that fathers do not have an essential role based on their biology and demonstrate that either parent, male or female, can provide the nurturing that a child needs to flourish. Interviews with over 200 men from 10 different subcultures provided the authors with the information necessary for questioning the theory of the essential father.

Key findings:

- While it is acknowledged that children fare better in two-parent homes, parental figures need neither be a heterosexual couple nor biologically related to the child. Mothering and fathering should be seen as social roles that are interchangeable. The stability and depth of the emotional connection between parent and child determines their well-being, not the sex of the parent.
- Policy should be used to advocate responsible parenting in all family types. If encouraging fathers to take a more active role in their children's lives is a priority, it should not be at the expense of mothers or homosexual parents.
- The neo-conservative position that the absence of fathers is the cause of social problems, such as juvenile crime, teen pregnancy, and drug use, has not been proven. Many experts believe that children from divorced families are negatively affected emotionally and psychologically because of the general disruption to their lives and stress that is often the result of divorce. Having a part-time or absent father is not necessarily the cause of the problems that children of divorce often face.

- Neo-conservatives believe that providing a traditional family unit is the best, and perhaps only, means of creating a favorable situation for promoting responsible fathering. This article suggests, however, that the social context of the paternal role must be reviewed and altered, giving more prominence to fathering and encouraging the development of parenting skills in young boys. If fathers come to be seen by society as playing an important nurturing role, more fathers will actively participate in the care and upbringing of their children, regardless of family structure and marital status.
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Factors that Influence Marital Decisions

Blau, Francine D., Lawrence M. Kahn, and Jane Waldforgel. 2000. "Understanding Young Women's Marriage Decisions: The Role of Labor and Marriage Market Conditions." *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 35 (July): 624-647.

The authors analyzed Census Reports from 1970, 1980, and 1990 to examine the relationship between labor markets, "marriage markets," and welfare benefits on marriage rates for young women between 16 and 24 years old. They also conducted a supplementary analysis for women aged 25-34.

Key findings:

- Labor market opportunities have deteriorated the most for low-skilled men. High unemployment rates and low earnings for black men have reduced their marriage rates.
- Marriage rates drop with better labor markets for women and a high female-to-male population ratio; they rise with better labor markets for men.
- White women are more likely to be married, though black women are more likely to have children across each educational category.
- There has been a sharp decline in marriage rates across all race and education categories. However, the incidence of having children has not changed within these groups.
- Increased male unemployment and decreased men's real wages are most likely to have caused lower marriage rates.

Edin, Kathryn. 2000. "Few Good Men: Why Low-Income Single mothers Don't Get Married." *American Prospect* 11 (January): 26-31.

Interviewing over 130 black, white, and Puerto Rican low-income mothers in metropolitan Philadelphia, the author attempts to uncover why women in poor circumstances choose to have children outside of wedlock. The article investigates the factors that contribute to the unwillingness of these women to marry or remarry, and how this impacts the well-being of their families.

Key Findings:

- The circumstances surrounding marriage are dynamic, and the institution of marriage currently appears to be weakening. People are marrying later in life, with the median age at marriage the highest it has been since reliable statistics on the

subject have been available. Six out of ten new marriages end in divorce, and the tendency to remarry has declined. Such trends are ubiquitous amongst class, racial, and ethnic groups.

- The reasons behind this weakening of the institution of marriage are debatable, but it is generally agreed upon that the children of divorce often face greater hardships and difficulties than their counterparts from a two-parent family.
- While theories of non-marriage have been advanced by several academics, including Gary Becker and William Julius Wilson, the interviews show that these theories do little to explain why low-income mothers choose not to marry.
- The motives behind single-parenthood for these women appear to be affordability, respectability, trust, and control. Many of the women interviewed indicated that their decision not to pursue marriage was the result of both economic and emotional considerations.
- Affordability – Budgeting meager resources takes up a large portion of a low-income mother's time and energy. If a man cannot provide an adequate income, or his presence reduces the level of welfare that the family receives, many of those interviewed indicated that his presence would no longer be permitted in the household. In an attempt to maximize their income, women would rather be single mothers than support an economically inactive man. Often, these men proved to be too much of a strain on an already-tight budget.
- Respectability – Women would rather be single than married to a man who could not provide for his family or could only provide for them through committing criminal acts. The mothers hoped to improve their social standing through marriage and found that many of the men, with whom they were acquainted, lacked the means to help achieve upward social mobility. Many also perceived that others would judge them based on their husband's activities and were afraid of marrying someone who might jeopardize their personal position in the community.
- Trust – Relating to the previous issue, many of the women interviewed had experienced abuse or poor treatment from the men in their lives. Once-idyllic views of marriage had been altered due to bad experiences with significant others. Many did not believe that they would ever find a man who would provide for their families, be loving and respectful to them and their children, and remain faithful. The concern was often that a cheating or abusive husband would make the women appear foolish to her relatives, friends, and neighbors.
- Control – Many feared giving up the control that being single provided them. Being able to make decisions about the finances and the raising of children were important to many of the interviewees, who had often found their power over themselves and their children usurped by the men in their lives. Rather than taking the risk that a man would jeopardize their financial situation through poor planning, or have the household chores and responsibilities relegated to them, many women eschewed marriage altogether. Many wished to guarantee and maximize their control over their families—especially those who provided financially for their families, or had played a subservient role in previous relationships.
- The general consensus amongst those interviewed was that marriage would likely bring greater hardships and problems than single motherhood. Unless a suitable husband could be found, many would choose to remain single.

McLaughlin, Diane and Daniel Lichter. 1997. "Poverty and the Marital Behavior of Young Women." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 59 (August): 582-594.

The authors use data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth to examine the factors that encourage and impede marriage among poor, young women (age 18 to 28).

Key findings:

- In any given year, poor women were less likely to marry than women who were not poor.
 - Factors that increase the likelihood of marriage include: increased availability of men who earn above poverty level incomes, high school and college completion, cohabitation (more than doubled the likelihood of getting married), and employment.
 - Poor black women and poor white women had the same likelihood of getting married.
 - Welfare receipt did not influence the probability of getting married; poor women who do not receive welfare have the same probability of marriage as those who do.
 - The authors argue that policies that promote self-sufficiency will also promote marriage. Examples include, education and job training combined with job creation policies that focus on living-wage jobs.
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Race and Family Formation

Bulcroft, Richard A. and Kris A. Bulcroft. 1993. "Race Differences in Attitudinal and Motivational Factors in the Decision to Marry." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 55 (May): 338-355.

The authors of this study examine the relationship between race and gender attitudinal differences towards marriage in an effort to explain the low marriage rate of African Americans. The data is based on individual-level data from the 1987-88 National Survey of Families and Households. The analysis is restricted to never married, non-cohabiting men and women over the age of 18. Respondents were asked about their expectations about getting married, plans on getting married, perceived benefits of marriage, and the importance of economic factors in marital timing.

Key findings:

- Regardless of their age, black women are more likely to perceive themselves as getting married.
- Young black women (between ages of 19 and 24) perceive more economic benefits from marriage than young white women, but this difference disappears with age and reverses by the time women are in their mid-thirties.
- Black women perceive greater social/emotional benefits from marriage than white women at every age.
- Black men have lower expectations of marriage and perceive fewer economic and social/emotional benefits from marriage than white men.
- Black men and women place more emphasis on the importance of economic factors in their decisions about when to get married.
- Black women are less likely than white women to be willing to marry someone with fewer resources than they have.
- Black men and women are less willing to marry someone who already has children or has been married before than white men and women.
- Growing up in a divorced family does not undermine the motivation to marry. Women whose parents divorced or separated before they were 19 are more likely to perceive greater positive social/emotional benefits from marriage.

- The results of this study contradict the notion that the decline in marriage among blacks is caused by a decline in motivations to marry or a rejection of marriage.
- "Based on these data, marriage rates for black females are most likely declining because of a lack of available black males who can meet women's high expectations for male family headship (i.e., greater resources), a recognition by both black males and black females that their economic criteria for when to get married are not being met, and a greater unwillingness of blacks to marry someone who was previously married or had a child" (p. 352).

Burbridge, Lynn. 1995. "Policy Implications of a Decline in Marriage Among African Americans." In *The Decline in Marriage Among African-Americans*, eds. M.B. Tucker and C. Mitchel-Kernan, 323-344. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

While some believe that the decline in the number of marriages in the African American community is to blame for the numerous social problems found in the inner city, this article suggests that while social problems and the deterioration of marriages are correlated, one does not necessarily cause the other. To strengthen the institution of marriage in African American communities, greater efforts should be made to increase racial and economic equality. Policies that focus on treating general social ills, such as unemployment and crime, will likely also have a positive impact on marriage rates. A more holistic social policy approach, as opposed to pointed policy aimed at increasing the number of African American marriages, will provide more benefits in a variety of areas.

Key findings:

- The existence of dysfunctional families and failed marriages indicate larger social problems. The breakdown in community spirit and decrease in community services often place more pressure on families to provide such services and support internally. For low-income families, this pressure puts added stress on both the caregivers and financial providers.
- In the case of low-income African Americans, welfare policies sometimes prevent people from entering into marriage. In order to maximize welfare benefits, some couples choose to remain single so that the family can have access to health care and public assistance, since such benefits are eliminated or reduced when a couple gets married.
- African Americans are already economically disadvantaged relative to their white counterparts. This is coupled with the relatively poor schools that are available in areas dominated by African Americans, as well as a higher unemployment rate for blacks as opposed to whites. Many, even with jobs, are unable to adequately provide for their families, and are thus more reliant on shrinking government transfers. If employment opportunities were increased, while economic inequalities reduced, there is a good possibility that more African Americans would marry.

Darity, William A. and Samuel L. Myers. 1995. "Family Structure and the Marginalization of Black Men: Policy Implications." In *The Decline in Marriage Among African-Americans*, eds. M.B. Tucker and C. Mitchel-Kernan, 263-308. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

The increase in the number of African American female-headed households has risen dramatically over the years, with many explanations given for the phenomenon. While some believe that welfare induces women to remain single, the authors contend that their

calculated sex ratios demonstrate that fewer African American women marry because there has been a reduction in the supply of suitable mates.

Key findings:

- As real welfare benefits have fallen, the number of female-headed families has risen. Thus, the view that women avoid marriage in order to maximize their income is intuitively and empirically incorrect.
- The sex ratio indicates that African American women are limited in their choices, when searching for prospective life partners. These women may choose not to marry rather than endure a difficult or abusive relationship or the potential strain of divorce.
- Fewer African American men are available to marry due to mortality rates, criminal behavior, institutionalization, and entrance into the armed forces.
- Mortality Rates – The mortality rates for women are falling faster than they are for men. This indicates that women outnumber and outlive their male counterparts. This imbalance is caused by the high tendency of male African Americans to experience sudden or violent death throughout the course of their lives, relative to African American females.
- Criminal Behavior – African American men sometimes engage in illegal activities to support themselves, since the employment opportunities available to them are often limited, do not pay well, and offer few if any benefits. Participating in the crime market, while adding to the family income, is often not seen as appropriate or morally correct by African American women, who reject this type of financial support. Criminal activity can also lead to time spent in prison, limiting their availability to both the labor and marriage markets.
- Institutionalization – Every year, more and more African American men are institutionalized, as a result of substance abuse and psychological problems. These men are also viewed as unsuitable for marriage and less likely to be able to provide financially for their families.
- Entrance into the Armed Forces – Black men often enlist in the military, which is considered to be outside of the formal labor market. While the military does provide steady income for its employees, the majority of African American men are concentrated in the lowest-paying jobs. This also makes these men appear less suitable for marriage.
- Since larger social issues appear to be the cause of this reduction in the supply of African American men, the authors suggest focusing policy on these issues, such as improving health care and accessibility to youngsters, providing more money for low-income, African American families, and ensuring that good quality schools are available to all. By improving social conditions, there are likely to be more African American men available to marry who can provide for their families.

Lichter, Daniel T., Diane K. McLaughlin, George Kephart, and David J. Landry. 1992. "Race and the Retreat From Marriage: A Shortage of Marriageable Men?" *American Sociological Review*, 57 (December): 781-799.

The authors use data from the 1979 through 1986 waves of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth to evaluate the relationship between local marriage market conditions and racial differences in the timing of first marriages. They examine local marriage markets (i.e., sex ratios from the 1980 Census), the quantity and quality of available men, and economic independence among women to assess marriage constraints in marriage opportunities.

Key findings:

- The author's argue that individuals looking for marriage partners look for those who complement or enhance their own resources (such as earnings).
- The likelihood of marriage depends on the marriage seeker's "qualifications," those of his/her competitors and the availability of potential spouses with desirable characteristics.
- Welfare receipt is unrelated to marriage rates, suggesting that welfare is not a disincentive to marriage.
- Women's education, earnings and employment are all positively associated with marriage rates; this may be because economic independence is an attractive trait to potential marriage partners.
- In any given year, black women were 43 percent less likely to marry than white women.
- There are less "economically attractive" black men than white men. At the age of 25, there are .304 unmarried black men with adequate earnings for each unmarried black woman. In contrast, for 25 year-old, unmarried white women there are .72 unmarried white men with adequate earnings.
- If the black male to female same sex ratio were the same as the white male to female sex ratio, the probability of marriage for black women would increase by 23 percent. Similarly, if black women had the same size pool of "economically attractive" men as white women, their probability for marriage would increase by 24 percent.
- Even when local marriage markets are similar, the likelihood that black women marry is still about 50 to 60 percent of the rate for comparable white women.
- The availability of potential mates is a significant factor in delayed marriage and nonmarriage among black women.
- Insofar as there is only one unmarried black man with earnings above the poverty threshold for every three unmarried black women in their 20's, and marital decisions are at least partially based on the economic attractiveness of potential partners, creating jobs for men and women that pay livable wages may be a better strategy for promoting marriage.

Stier, Haya and Marta Tienda. 1997. "Spouses or Babies? Race, Poverty and Pathways in Family Formation in Urban America." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 20 (January): 91-122.

The authors use the Urban Poverty and Family Life Survey of Chicago and an urban sample of the National Survey of Families and Households to examine race and ethnic variation in birth and marriage. This study weighs the economic consequences of family formation through birth or marriage.

Key findings:

- About one-third of all low-income white and Hispanic, urban mothers and 80 percent of urban, poor black mothers had children before they were married.
- Poverty is the decisive factor influencing the likelihood of nonmarital births for non-black mothers.
- White and Mexican mothers are less likely to enter family life by having children than black and Puerto Rican mothers.

- About one-third of white mothers who lived in low-income neighborhoods or who were in the low-income stratum had children outside of marriage compared to 13 percent nationally.
 - Blacks are less likely to marry at any age.
 - Insofar as poor black mothers in U.S. cities nationally have similar rates of nonmarital births, both race and poverty independently contribute to the likelihood of nonmarital births.
 - Young black women between the ages of 14 to 21 are 3 to 3.5 times more likely than their white counterparts to have a child outside of marriage.
 - Growing up in a poor family significantly increases the likelihood of nonmarital births (odds ratio of .009 for poor women who grew up poor versus .006 for women who did not grow up poor).
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What Conservatives Are Saying

Fagan, Patrick. 2001. "Time for Instruction in the Three W's," *Washington Times*, 18 June. <<http://www.heritage.org/views/2001/ed061801.html>> (June 21, 2001).

Arguments:

- As a society we need to stress what Fagan calls the "three W's:" work, wedlock, and worship. Together, these three activities are "the pillars of a strong social infrastructure."
- Work is the obvious first step to escaping poverty. However, welfare recipients did not understand this simple truth before welfare reform because they were paid to do nothing.
- Couples who stay married are wealthier insofar as family income drops 28 to 42 percent after divorce (Fagan sites a study by University of Michigan professor, Mary Corcoran).
- Single-parenthood promotes crime. Fagan highlights two studies supporting this point: the first study found that boys over 20 years old without a father in the home are 2 to 3 times more likely to go to jail; the second study found incarceration rates among children of divorced parents in Wisconsin are 12 times higher than children of married couples.

Fagan, Patrick. 2001. "The Federal and State Governments, Welfare and Marriage Issues." Testimony given before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Ways and Means, Subcommittee on Human Resources.

Arguments:

- Children thrive best when their parents are devoted to them and to each other.
- Children deserve the "married love" of their parents.
- The breakdown of marriage increases demand for welfare services and leads to many social problems.
- Out-of-wedlock birth slows the cognitive development of children, reduces educational attainment, increases behavioral problems, lowers impulse control,

causes children to become anti-social, and lowers the job attainment of children born outside of marriage once they become adults.

- Divorce increases the likelihood of many social problems including crime, abuse, addiction, harmful mental and physical health effects, suicide, and weak parent-child relationships. Divorce also leads to decreased learning capacity, lower graduation rates, and increased premarital and teenage sexual activity.
- Federal entitlements and child support enforcement programs are costly and merely address the symptoms of the breakdown of the family. We need to design social policy to reduce illegitimacy and divorce, the two primary causes of this breakdown.
- The federal government needs to strengthen marriage and discourage and reduce divorce by creating an Office of Marriage Initiatives in the departments of Health and Human Services, Education, Housing and Urban Development and Justice. The Office would be funded by transferring funds from TANF, the Child Support Enforcement Program and Family Planning Programs.
- Responsibilities of the Office of Marriage Initiatives would include: advising states on how to use surplus TANF funds to increase marriage and decrease out-of-wedlock births and divorce and developing a curriculum on marriage and sexual abstinence in high schools.

Fagan, Patrick and Robert Rector. 2000. "The Effects of Divorce on America." *The Heritage Foundation Backgrounders* 1373 (June). Washington, DC: The Heritage Foundation.

Arguments:

- Divorce creates harmful effects on children and society. Divorce causes devastating physical, financial, and emotional harm to children. It also decreases religious worship. Crime, child abuse, and addiction are all affected negatively by divorce rates.
- "If nothing is done, America will continue the downward spiral into social decay" (4).
- Almost half of parents going through a divorce become poor after the divorce.
- Focusing funds on reducing divorce will save money in the long run inasmuch as it will reduce the need to "subsidize and sustain single-parent families" (30).
- To promote marriage the federal government should: establish pro-marriage demonstration projects; mandate that surplus welfare funds be used to strengthen marriage; establish a national goal to reduce divorce by one-third over the next decade; create a public health campaign informing Americans of the long-term benefits of marriage and the risks associated with divorce; and give a tax credit to couples who stay married after their youngest child reaches 18.
- States should: establish a goal to reduce divorce rates by establishing pro-marriage education and mentoring programs, requiring couples with children under 18 years of age complete divorce education (i.e., end "no-fault" divorce); promote community-wide marriage programs; require parents with children under 18 to prove their children would suffer grave harm by having their marriage continue; and make covenant marriages that lengthen the divorce process by two years available to engaged couples.
- Divorce not only decreases household income, it translates into diminished academic achievement among children which, in turn, leads to lower earnings as an adult.
- According to calculations based on the 1995 Survey of Consumer Finance, median family income is \$15,000 for never married single-parents, \$18,500 for divorced/separated families, and \$48,000 for couples in their first marriage.

- According to calculations based on the 1995 Survey of Consumer Finance, 59.6 percent of never married single-parents, 32.4 percent of divorced/separated single-parents, and 7.7 percent of families in their first marriage live in poverty.
 - Divorce increases the likelihood of premarital sex and teenage sexual activity.
 - Because divorced mothers are more likely to work full-time, their teenaged children are more likely to have premarital sex and multiple sexual partners, when they become adults.
 - "The marital instability of one generation is passed on to the next" (27). Some studies have found the risk of divorce among children of divorced families to be twice as high as children of intact families.
 - "Because divorce and out-of-wedlock births are the major routes into poverty, it should stand to reason that encouraging, preparing, and maintaining marriage is sound public policy" (34).
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Concerns Feminists Have about Promoting Marriage

Ireland, Patricia. 2001. "Don't Shortchange Moms." *USA Today*, 15 June, 13(A).

Arguments:

- The welfare reform reauthorization debate needs to be approached with an honest commitment to eradicating poverty.
- President Bush's proposal to channel \$350 million into marriage-promoting programs would divert desperately needed funds from single mothers and their children.
- Many women are poor because they fled abusive marriages.
- "Pressuring a poor mother to marry—without regard to a man's character or violent behavior—could do more harm than good."
- "To help impoverished children, we need to support poor families in whatever combination or configuration they exist and no matter who is head of household."

Mink, Gwendolyn. 2001. "Violating Women: Rights Abuses in the Welfare Police State," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 577 (September): 79-94.

This paper provides an overview of TANF sanctions and requirements that are aimed to modify the behavior of recipients.

Arguments:

- Policies that promote marriage foster dependency, insofar as they promote dependency on men.
- Investing in the employment opportunities of mothers would do more to make them self-sufficient.
- The aggressive promotion of marriage overrides a mother's own judgment about what is best for her and her children.
- Marriage and fatherhood initiatives assume that it is appropriate for the government to interfere in the intimate lives of poor mothers.

- "Marriage promotion and fatherhood initiatives seek to compel mothers to follow the government's moral prescriptions and to accept economic dependence on men" (p. 90).
- The gender gap in women's earnings makes it clear that single mothers are poor because women's work is not valued. This is especially true of women's unpaid care giving work.

Taylor, Sarah S. "Heated Debate on Welfare May Focus on Marriage." *Women's Enews* (5 March)
 <<http://www.womensenews.org/article.cfm/dyn/aid/467/context/archive>>
 (July 10, 2001).

Highlights:

- Women's advocates maintain that the focus on marriage promotion in the current welfare reform reauthorization debate punishes poor women rather than provides them with the supports necessary to rear their children and be economically stable.
- Gwendolyn Mink, professor of Political Science at the University of California at Santa Cruz argues, "It's making women dependent on men instead of doing other things that help women support their families."
- Feminists worry that laws promoting marriage may push women who don't want to be married into dysfunctional or abusive marriages and divert funds away from promoting child care and job training for single mothers.
- Many women's advocates maintain that promoting the financial security of mothers is the best way to ensure that children are not poor.
- Mimi Abramovitz, a professor at the Hunter College School of Social Work argues that marriage promotion is "a coercive act by the government." She also maintains that it discriminates against poor lesbian and gay parents.

Taylor, Sarah S. 2001. "Fatherhood Movement Has Range of Ideology, Agenda." *Women's Enews* (15 June)
 <<http://www.womensenews.org/article.cfm/dyn/aid/584/context/archive>>
 (July 10, 2001).

Highlights:

- Many women's groups are alarmed by the idea of using TANF funds to promote marriage.
- Tim Casey, senior staff attorney for the Now Legal Defense and Education Fund, argues that marriage will not solve the real needs of low-income families.
- Eleanor Smeal, president of the Feminist Majority, maintains, "The easiest answer to poverty for women is to pay women more."
- Organizations that question whether the federal government should be promoting marriage do not want to be branded as being against fatherhood.

Payne, Jacqueline and Martha Davis. 2001. "Testimony of NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund on Child Support and Fatherhood Initiatives." Prepared for the U.S. House of Representatives Ways and Means Committee, Subcommittee on Human Resources.

Arguments:

- Proposals that emphasize marriage do not adequately address the real causes of poverty and “transgress the privacy rights of low-income individuals.”
- Pending marriage-based fatherhood legislation “economically coerces low-income individuals to trade their fundamental right to privacy regarding marital decisions in exchange for receiving job and life skills training.”
- Marriage-promotion programs do not address the high incidence of domestic violence among low-income women. Studies consistently show that between 15 to 25 percent of welfare clients are victims of domestic violence. Marriage-promotion programs are potentially dangerous if women and their children are forced to maintain relationships with domestic violence abusers.
- Focusing on fatherhood and marriage will not guarantee the economic security of women and children because death, domestic violence, divorce, and job instability will still persist.
- Many factors including the wage gap, lack of useful education and training, lack of quality accessible child care, and domestic violence are examples of obstacles that may prevent women from being economically secure. Marriage and fatherhood programs do not address these issues and may even exacerbate, rather than solve, problems.
- Marriage-promotion programs ignore diverse family structures, including loving gay and lesbian families.

Wildermuth, John. 2001. “The Marriage Movement; Bush Espouses Benefits of Matrimony; Unmarried Moms Fear Being Singled Out.” *San Francisco Chronicle*. 21 June, 4(A).

Highlights:

- Critics of federally promoted marriage programs worry that President Bush and other supporters of the marriage movement are trying to make single mothers the scapegoats of the country’s problems and that they are advocating marriage as a cure all for a long list of social problems.
- Kim Gandy, executive vice president (and more recently, president-elect) of the National Organization for Women maintains, “I don’t believe the government has any role in the bedroom and in the most private and personal parts of a person’s life, which is what marriage certainly is.”

Current Policy Proposals

Alternatives to Marriage Project. 2001. “Alternatives to Marriage Project Statement Regarding Hearing on Welfare and Marriage Issues.” <<http://www.unmarried.org/welfare-marriage-tanf.html>> (September 20, 2001).

This statement, written by the Alternatives to Marriage Project, was presented at a Hearing of the House Committee on Ways and Means, Subcommittee on Human Resources. It encourages the government to recognize and support all family types, and to focus policy efforts on alleviating the sources of stress, particularly financial problems, that impact upon the well-being of families in general.

Key findings:

- TANF policies favor those families headed by two heterosexual parents. This draws attention, resources, and legitimacy away from alternative family forms—though the diversity in family type continues to grow in the United States and the rest of the industrialized world.
- Alternative family types, such as those headed by homosexuals or single women, are viewed by many traditional policy makers to be unhappy, unhealthy, and a burden to the welfare system. A sweeping characterization of these families as unhealthy, immoral, or a threat to the social fiber of the country overlooks those families who enjoy happiness and prosperity.
- Focus should be placed on supporting all family types, rather than solely traditional families. By improving the economic and social conditions in which people live, children will be able to enjoy a more stable family life. Marital status should not be used as a scapegoat to explain the instability and hardships that many families face. Nor should marriage be encouraged if the survival of women and children is threatened due to violence.
- Resources should be re-directed to provide the best quality of services to children, as opposed to promoting marriage. The goal of policies in this area should be to maximize the number of all loving and healthy relationships.

Haskins, Ron, Isabel Sawhill, and Kent Weaver. 2001. "Welfare Reform Reauthorization: An Overview of Problems and Issues." *Welfare Reform and Beyond* Brief 2 (January). Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.

This paper describes current issues surrounding the welfare reform reauthorization debate and describes where future policy is headed.

Highlights:

- High rates of nonmarital births, the decline of marriage, and deteriorating economic prospects for low-income fathers, are all contributing factors to why so many children grow up in poor single-parent families.
- In an effort to address the falling rate of marriage, states and the federal government are slowly moving towards policies that promote marriage.
- According to Census Bureau data, the labor force participation of 20 to 24 year old black males declined from 85 to 80 percent between 1992 and 1999. Meanwhile, the labor force participation of black females from 20 to 24 years old increased from 65 to 85 percent, surpassing their male counterparts by 5 percent.
- As the reauthorization process gets underway, Congress will likely focus attention on programs designed to promote marriage, better parenting, and employment for poor fathers.

McLanahan, Sara and Irwin Garfinkel. 1995. *Single-Mother Families and Social Policy: Lessons for the United States from Canada, France, and Sweden. In Poverty, Inequality, and The Future of Social Policy: Western States in the New World Order*, eds. K. McFate, R. Lawson, W.J. Wilson, 367-83. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

In this chapter, the authors look at cross-national Swedish, Canadian, and French systems, as a means to gain insight into poverty reduction among single-mother families without

increased prevalence or dependence on the state. The authors examine the rate of poverty among single mothers in these countries and the role of government in reducing poverty.

Key Findings:

- Disadvantages of growing up in a single mother family are linked to the economic insecurity these families face. Policy should be directed at increasing the economic security of single-parent families, without necessarily making single-parenthood more attractive.
- Policy directions include strengthening the labor market opportunities for single mothers, making nonresidential fathers provide more child support, and supplementing their incomes through government transfers.
- Countries that are more successful at reducing poverty among single mothers have subsidized childcare, offer universal rather than means-tested benefits and policies that enable mothers to support their families on their earnings and care for their children.
- Compared to single mothers in Canada, France, and Sweden, single mothers in the United States are the worst off. On average, they earn 47 percent of the average two-parent family income and 53 percent live in poverty. In contrast, single mothers living in Sweden earn 87 percent of the average two-parent family income and 6 percent live in poverty.
- The income transfer system in the United States reduces pre-transfer poverty by 5 percent. The Swedish income transfer system, in contrast, reduces pre-transfer poverty by 81 percent.
- Countries such as France and Sweden that offer generous benefit policies also have high labor force participation rates, suggesting that such policies do not promote dependence on government instead of on work. These countries have a heavy investment in both universal benefits and policies that promote work.
- Universally subsidized childcare increases the earnings of mothers by eliminating a major employment expense. Paid parental leave also reinforces work by making labor force attachment a standard for eligibility and limiting the benefit period to a set period of time. Both of these policies allow women to combine work and child rearing, thus promoting women's employment in the long run.

Suggested Readings

For further reading on marriage and poverty, please refer to the following sources:

Coontz, Stephanie. 1997. *The Way We Really Are: Coming to Terms with America's Changing Families*. New York: Basic Books.

Coontz, Stephanie. 2000. *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*. New York: Basic Books.

Hernandez, Donald. 1993. *America's Children: Resources from Family, Government and the Economy*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Waller, Maureen. 2001. *Unmarried Parents, Fragile Families: New Evidence from Oakland*. San Francisco: Public Policy Institute of California Report.

Waller, Maureen. 2001. "High Hopes: Unwed Parents' Expectations about Marriage," *Children and Youth Services Review* 23 (6-7): 457-84.

Waller, Maureen. 1999. Meanings and Motives in New Family Stories: The Separation of Reproduction and Marriage among Low-Income, Black and White Parents. In *The Cultural Territories of Race: Black and White Boundaries*. ed. Michele Lamont, 182-218. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

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