

**The State of Our Unions:
Why Marriage Still Matters for Children**

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**Don't Be Misled by the Marital
Misadventures of the Rich & Famous**



Grand Old Philanderers
Gingrich, Fagin, and Stanford. It doesn't help the Republican Party cause. By ALEXANDER COOKLEY.

The Marriage Gap

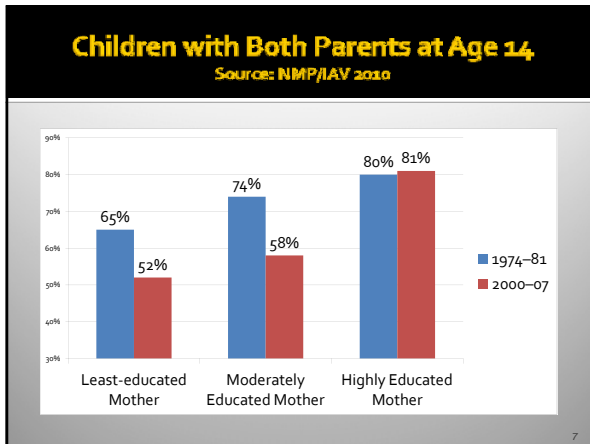
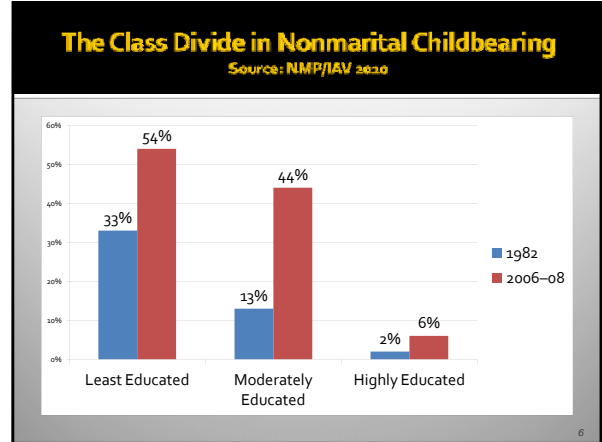
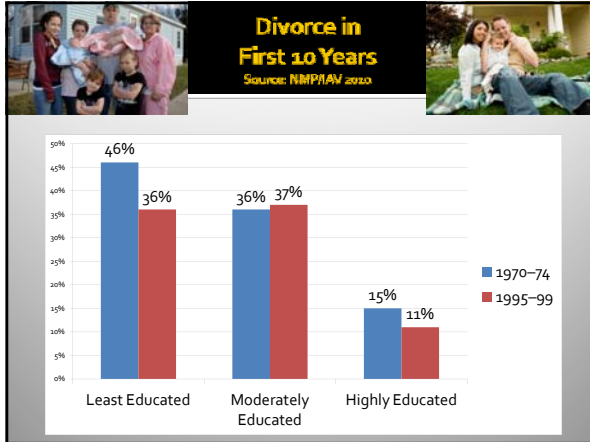
- In reality, marriage is in trouble among the less-educated and the less-affluent.
- Growing class divide in marriage:
 - College-educated are enjoying relatively high-quality, stable marriages;
 - But Middle Americans are less and less likely to form and sustain high-quality marriages;
 - Children in Middle America less likely to enjoy the benefits of growing up in an intact, married family.

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Defining My Terms

- Highly educated = college degree
 - 30% of U.S. adults
- Moderately educated = high school degree
 - 58% of U.S. adults → **Middle Americans**
- Least educated = high school dropout
 - 12% of U.S. adults

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When Marriage Disappears...

- When Marriage Disappears** finds:
 - The retreat from marriage is most pronounced in recent years in Middle America.
 - Middle American marriage patterns increasingly resemble those found among the poor.
 - But marriage is growing stronger among college-educated & the affluent.

Why Class?

- Fifty years ago, minimal class divides in married life.
- What accounts for the growing marriage gap?
 - Liberals tend to stress economic arguments.
 - William Julius Wilson
 - Conservatives tend to stress cultural and legal/policy arguments.
 - Kay Hymowitz

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Who is Right?

- Both are.
- *When Marriage Disappears* focuses on 3 causes:
 - A changing culture;
 - The rise of the post-industrial economy; and,
 - *Bowling Alone*: The retreat from civil society.

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A Change of Heart

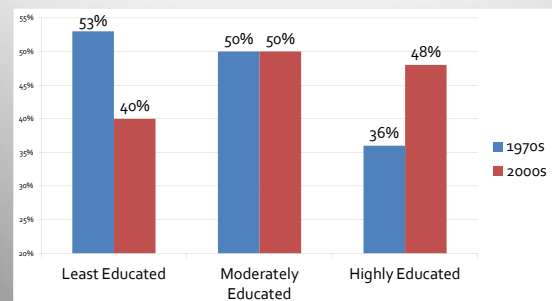


- Almost all Americans honor ideal of marriage in theory but increasingly tolerant of departures from the ideal in practice.
 - Middle America has become more accepting of premarital sex, nonmarital childbearing, cohabitation, etc.
- Middle Americans are now less likely to have a "marriage mindset"

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Attitudes Toward Divorce

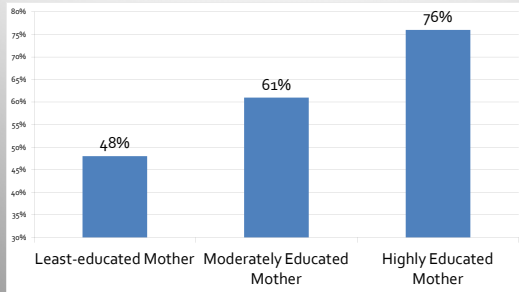
Source: NMP/IAV 2010



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Teens Embarrassed by Pregnancy

Source: NMP/IAV 2010



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The Retreat from Institutions

- Middle Americans are increasingly disengaged from the institutions of work and civil society—including religion.
- These institutions have traditionally supplied money, moral direction, & social support to marriage in America.



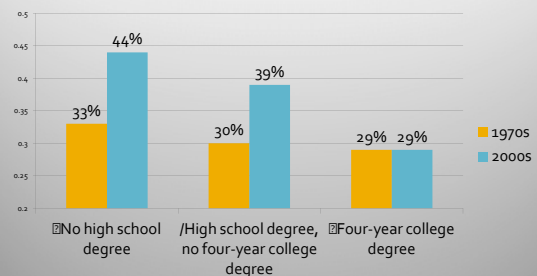
The Post-Industrial Economy

- Middle Americans—especially Middle American men—have seen their economic fortunes fall over the last 40 years:
 - Falling real wages for high-school educated men;
 - Increasing spells of unemployment.
- Not true for highly educated Americans.

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Spells of Male Unemployment in Last 10 Years

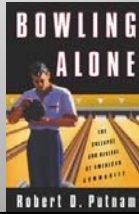
Source: NMP/IAV 2010



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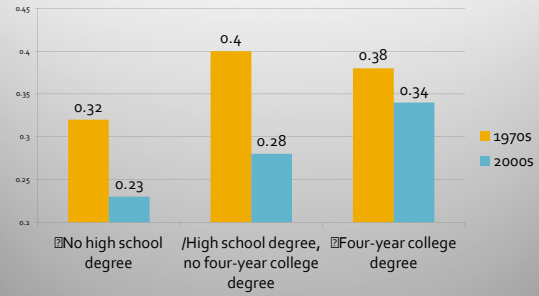
Bowling Alone in Middle America

- The last half-century has witnessed a marked decline in the civic & religious vitality of American society.
 - This decline is concentrated in Middle America.



Praying Alone: Weekly Attendees

Source: NMP/IVY 2001



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What is Forming Relationship Culture in America?

■ Then

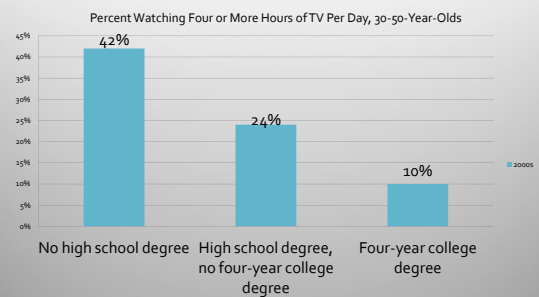


■ Now



Four or More Hours of TV

Source: GSS



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Adding It Up

- Middle Americans are less connected to the institutions of work, civil society, and religion that sustain strong marriages.
- More likely to be taking their cues about marriage & relationships from Hollywood and Madison Avenue than the highly educated.

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Why Should We Care?

- The marriage gap means that large numbers of **children** in Middle America, and in poor communities, will spend some time living outside of an intact marriage.
- Why should we care?



Two Married Parents are Better than One: Outcomes

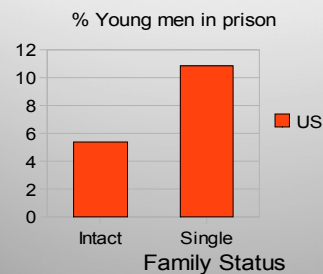


Children reared in single-parent homes are two to three times more likely to experience serious negative outcomes:

- About 10% of children in biological married-parent homes experience such outcomes;
- About 25-30% of children in biological single-parent homes experience such outcomes.

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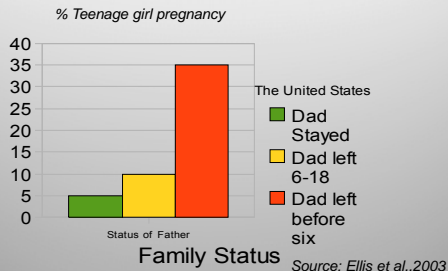
Young Men in Prison



Source: Harper and McLanahan 2004

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Teenage Girls Pregnant



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Effects on Adults

- Healthier
 - Married men live 10 years longer than unmarried peers
 - Marriage as powerful for men's health as not smoking a pack a day!
- Wealthier
 - Men work harder, smarter, and earn about 20% more after marrying
 - Median net worth of U.S. adults:
 - \$66,000 for married (\$120,000 for couple)
 - \$35,000 for divorced & never-married
- Safer
 - Married women significantly less likely to be raped, robbed, or murdered (according to DOJ):
 - Violent victimization rate: 17 per 1,000 married women
 - Violent victimization rate: 60 per 1,000 unmarried women

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Effects on Communities

- Child Poverty
 - Brookings study:
 - Much of the growth in child poverty in the United States since 1970 can be attributed to the retreat from marriage.
- Crime
 - Harvard Sociologist Robert Sampson: "Family structure is one of the strongest, if not the strongest, predictors of... urban violence across cities in the United States."

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Effects on Government

- The government incurs a host of welfare, educational, criminal, and medical costs when the family breaks down.
- New Georgia State University study estimates that the U.S. federal government spends at least an extra \$112 billion every year because of the retreat from marriage.
- So, the state becomes
 - The "provider" for women and children in single-parent families
 - The "protector" of the society against boys reared in fatherless homes

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Four Conclusions

- Marriage matters for the welfare of
 - Children
 - Adults
 - Communities
 - Government



What about Cohabitation?

- Cohabitation is becoming more common
 - Especially among poor and working class
 - More than 40% of children will spend some time in a cohabiting union in the U.S.
 - 21% of children now born into cohabiting households
- Are children doing ok in cohabiting households?

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Cohabitation & The Welfare of Children

- Children in cohabiting households do worse than children in intact, married families:
 - Educational failure (Raley et al. 2005)
 - 60% less likely to graduate from HS
 - Drug use (Cavanaugh 2008)
 - 116% more likely to smoke marijuana as teens
 - Sexual and physical abuse of children (Fourth National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect 2010)

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Fourth National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (2010)

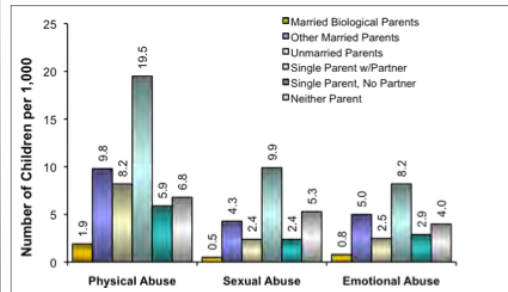
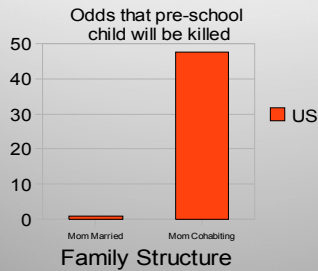


Figure 5-2. Incidence of Harm Standard Abuse by Family Structure and Living Arrangement.

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Preschool Children's Odds of Dying at Hands of Adult in U.S.



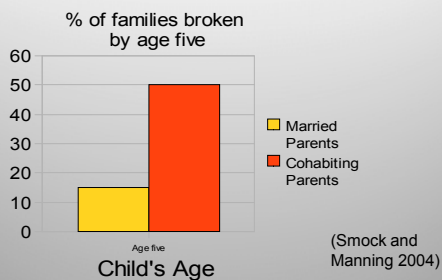
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Why are Cohabiting Unions Risky for Kids?

- Cohabiting unions tend to have less commitment, trust, sexual fidelity, and more violence than married unions.
- They are also much less stable, even when biological kids are involved.
 - Instability is linked to numerous problems for children—from delinquency to sexual abuse—and helps to explain why cohabiting unions are arguably more risky for children than a stable, single parent home.

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Stability for Children: Married vs. Cohabiting



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The New Scholarly Consensus About Marriage

- “The fact is that children born and raised in intact, married homes typically enjoy higher-quality relationships with their parents, are more likely to steer clear of trouble with the law, to graduate from high school and college, to be gainfully employed as adults, and to enjoy stable marriages of their own in adulthood. [T]he institution of marriage has been an important pillar of the American Dream, and the erosion of marriage in Middle America is one reason the dream is increasingly out of reach for men, women, and children from moderately-educated homes.”
-- Brookings Policy Brief (Wilcox & Cherlin 2011)

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Conclusion



- Given the clear economic, social, & emotional benefits of marriage for adults, children, & the nation, we need to renew the
 - Economic
 - Better jobs & vocational training for less-educated men
 - Legal/Policy
 - End the marriage penalty
 - Civic &
 - Religious & civic organizations need to target the less educated
 - Cultural
 - Hollywood & Madison Avenue
 - Foundations of marriage for our day.

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More Information

- <http://www.virginia.edu/marriageproject/>

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