

A Report to the Nation
Maggie Gallagher, Principal Investigator

The Age of Unwed Mothers
Is Teen Pregnancy the Problem?



Institute for American Values

This report comes from the Marriage Project of the Institute for American Values. Maggie Gallagher, the principal investigator, is an affiliate scholar at the Institute and the director of its Marriage Project. The Institute is grateful to Amara Bachu, Douglas J. Besharov, Norval Glenn, Dana Mack, Steven L. Nock, and Maris Vinovskis for their scholarly and editorial suggestions, and to the William H. Donner Foundation for its generous financial support of this initiative. The contributions of other supporters are also greatly appreciated.

On the cover: Maternity (1950) by Milton Avery. Oil on canvas, 32 X 46 inches. Collection of Sally M. Avery. ©1999, Milton Avery Trust/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, NY.

© 1999, Institute for American Values. All rights reserved. No reproduction of the materials contained herein is permitted without the written permission of the Institute for American Values.

ISBN 0-9659841-5-X

Institute for American Values

1841 Broadway, Suite 211

New York, NY 10023

Tel: (212) 246-3942

Fax: (212) 541-6665

info@americanvalues.org

www.americanvalues.org

The Age of Unwed Mothers Is Teen Pregnancy the Problem?

Executive Summary

Why have three decades of intensive national effort to reduce teen pregnancy not been more successful? Largely because for three decades, we have framed the problem falsely. What we have called our “teen pregnancy” crisis is not really about teenagers. Nor is it really about pregnancy. It is about the decline of marriage.

What has changed most in recent decades is not who gets pregnant, but who gets married. Demographically, our “teen pregnancy” problem is inseparable from the disconnect between marriage and childbearing that increasingly characterizes the procreative behavior of adults in their 20s. Culturally, the “teen pregnancy” crisis stems largely from a widespread ambivalence about marriage, and especially about the importance of marriage when it comes to raising children, that afflicts adults in our society as well as teens.

The majority of unwed births in the United States are to adult women in their 20s. These are not “children having children,” nor are they “Murphy Browns.” Almost three-fifths of all births to unwed teenagers in the U.S. are to young women who are either 18 or 19 years old. Since the early 1970s, the proportion of all teenage mothers who conceived their children out of wedlock, but got married before the birth, has dropped from 47 percent to 16 percent. In choosing unwed motherhood over marriage, these young women are not so much rebelling against, as responding to, reigning cultural values which strongly discourage early marriage. Yet the evidence in this report suggests that marriage, even early marriage, is not a fate worse than unwed motherhood.

Without a strong commitment to marriage as a life goal and as an essential gift to children, today’s teenagers find it much harder to come up with good reasons to say “no” to sex, to use birth control conscientiously, to avoid men who are not good marriage candidates, or to consider adoption when marriage is not advisable. For this reason, more and better progress in reducing teen pregnancy will require returning the idea and ideal of marriage to the center of our national discussion. Regarding teen pregnancy, the key question we face concerns what, if anything, today’s adults intend to tell the next generation about the meaning and importance of marriage in their own and in their children’s lives.

This report contains five sections. The first introduces the topic and the goals of this inquiry. The second describes how we currently conceive the crisis. The third section proposes that marriage is the missing dimension in our understanding of contemporary adolescent childbearing. The fourth section examines public schools’ policies affecting pregnant teenagers. The report concludes with recommendations for change. ■

Introduction

TEEEN PREGNANCY has commanded intense national attention for more than a generation. As far back as 1976, the Alan Guttmacher Institute published a widely distributed booklet, “11 Million Teenagers,” proclaiming a teen pregnancy “epidemic.” Two years later, Congress passed a bill doubling family planning funds that the U.S. Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare described as “the centerpiece of President Carter’s strategy” to combat “the urgent problem” of teen pregnancy.¹

Yet until quite recently, despite many successive government and community efforts to reverse the trend, the unwed teen pregnancy rate continued to climb, from 23.9 births per 1000 single female teenagers in 1975 to 31.4 in 1985, and to an all-time high of 46.4 in 1994. Nothing that adults said or did seemed to matter. From 1975 to 1994, the unmarried teen birth rate almost doubled.²

But in the mid-1990s, something remarkable happened. For the first time in a generation, teen birth rates began to drop. From 1994 through 1997, the unmarried teen birth rate declined 9 percent, roughly returning to its 1990 level. Between 1991 and 1997, the total teen birth rate dropped 16 percent. These declines have been modest, but encouragingly broad, a result both of lower unwed teen birth rates in most ethnic groups and of declines in first births as well as repeat births to teens.³ The sharpest drop has occurred among groups facing the highest risks. Between 1991 and 1997, Black teenage birth rates, for example, dropped by about 25 percent.⁴

This recent turnaround is a welcome indication that social problems are not unconquerable. While the causes of social change are always complex, there is good reason to believe that this recent decline stems at least partly from adult efforts to improve contraceptive use among high risk teens and to encourage teens to postpone sexual activity.⁵ We now know that concerted efforts by parents, community leaders, schools, and other professionals can make a difference. That’s the good news.

The bad news is that America still faces crisis levels of unwed teen pregnancy. About ten percent of 15-19 year olds become pregnant each year. More than 40 percent of our teenagers will become pregnant before they reach their 20th birthday. America’s teen birth rate is almost 9 times higher than the Netherlands’, four times higher than Sweden’s, more than twice as high as Austria’s, and 65 percent higher than Great Britain’s.⁶ Currently in the United States, almost 400,000 babies annually are born to unmarried mothers under the age of 20.⁷

Who are these girls and young women? The image of teenage mothers as disproportionately poor, welfare dependent, and minority is somewhat misleading. Girls and young women from low income, minority, and single-parent families are at far higher risk. But in recent years, young, unwed motherhood has been moving out of the inner city and up the class ladder, affecting more working-class and blue-collar families, including intact families.

Even after taking ethnic differences into account, America’s teen birth rate remains quite high. The birth rate for White 15-19 year old females in the United States is 3.6 percent, more than 40 percent higher than Canada’s teen birth rate.⁸ And

while the unmarried African American teen birth rate today is actually a bit lower than it was in 1980, the White teen birth rate has more than doubled since 1980.⁹

Girls and young women who have babies in their teens typically do come from less advantaged backgrounds. But they are not necessarily the poorest of the poor, with nothing to hope for and nothing to lose. According to an analysis of one large, nationally representative sample, 87 percent of teen moms came from families that had not been on welfare in the previous two years. The average White teen mother went to a school in 8th grade in which almost three-quarters of the students were not poor (that is, were not eligible for the free lunch program); typical Black and Hispanic teen moms attended schools in which almost 60 percent of students were not poor.¹⁰ Moreover, while living with a single parent sharply increases the risk of teen motherhood,¹¹ more than half of White and Hispanic teen moms lived with both biological parents at least through the eighth grade.¹²

The recent turnaround is a welcome indication that social problems are not unconquerable.

Why are so many American teenagers and young women making choices that lead to young, unwed motherhood? Given the intensive attention both to promoting contraception and (more lately) to promoting abstinence, why have educators, parents, and community leaders made no more than a small and quite recent dent in the problem of teen pregnancy?

In this report, we explore two sets of questions. First, what do adults currently think about teen pregnancy and how are they confronting the problem? In particular, what are today's adults telling the next generation about why teen pregnancy is a bad idea? Second, how are schools currently dealing with the problem of pregnant teens?

To answer these questions, we examined the academic literature on teen pregnancy and interviewed experts in the field, paying special attention to studies that investigated the attitudes and experiences of White teen mothers who are not poor. We read suburban and small town newspapers to get a sense of what new projects — and problems — are currently evident in local schools regarding teen pregnancy. We conducted our own interviews with young, White, unwed mothers whose families are not poor, both to uncover how they are treated at school and to understand how their own ideas about romance, marriage, sex, birth control, and fathering may have led them towards unwed teen motherhood. We interviewed school personnel, primarily nurses and social workers, to ask how they encourage young people to answer the question: "What's wrong with teen pregnancy?" We talked to school administrators about whether and how federal laws and regulations were affecting the way they deal with the problem of teen pregnancy in their communities. Finally, we looked at a sample of recent high school health textbooks to see what they are telling young people about why and how to avoid teen pregnancy.

From these sources, we have developed a fairly coherent understanding of how educators and other influential adults currently approach the teen pregnancy problem in the United States.

At right:
Mother and Child
(1944) by Milton Avery.
Oil on canvas, 40 X 30
inches. Private
collection. ©1999,
Milton Avery
Trust/Artists Rights
Society (ARS), New
York, NY.



Conceiving a Crisis

WHY SHOULD we care about teen pregnancy? And how should we care for pregnant teens? Today's strong, bipartisan consensus against "children having children" was forged from a convergence of perspectives among a number of philosophically diverse groups: physicians, educators, social workers, feminists, taxpayers, psychologists, family planning advocates, and parents. Today's common concern over "teen pregnancy" thus masks diverse and sometimes competing conceptual approaches to teen pregnancy that have been adopted by different segments of society.

Why is it a problem if a teenager decides to have a child? Depending on which expert or program leader is being asked, the answer can be one or more of the following. She and her baby are more likely to suffer health problems. She is more likely to drop out of school. She is less likely to achieve the means to support herself and to advance her career. She and her baby are more likely to become dependent on the public purse. She is using a baby to work out psychological issues of self-esteem or depression. Or finally, she got pregnant unintentionally and thus needs help in avoiding unplanned pregnancy.

One way that this question is almost never explicitly answered in expert discourse is: *Because she is not married.* Yet it is precisely the explosive growth of unwed childbearing that has largely fueled the public sense of crisis. The teen birth rate is, and has been for many years, much lower today than it was in the 1950s and early 1960s, when many teens married and began their families young. It is the unwed teen birth rate that has grown rapidly enough to earn the label "epidemic." Yet too often, we omit this underlying cause of the crisis from our public description of it.

How we define a problem decisively shapes the range of possible solutions. What has caused the rise in unmarried teen pregnancy? In America today there are two main ways of answering that question. Teen pregnancy is seen either as a contraceptive crisis or as a premature sexuality crisis. The first paradigm is dominant in what might be called the teen pregnancy movement or "industry": school nurses, service providers, educators, physicians, mental health professionals, and the authors of health textbooks and teen pregnancy prevention materials. The second conceptual framework has been significantly more popular among the public than the professionals, but, thanks to a 1996 federal law that provides funding for abstinence-only education, it is also growing in influence within the teen pregnancy movement.

Is "Children Having Children" the Problem?

Perhaps one reason why so many young women are ignoring anti-teen pregnancy messages is that they do not feel that we are talking about them. While there is a powerful consensus against teen pregnancy, the message we are currently sending to the next generation centers on age, not marital status. We may be suggesting to large numbers of older teens, in particular, that our warnings need not apply to them.

For the bulk of today's teen pregnancy problem is less "children having children" than increasing numbers of young adult women having babies outside of marriage. The majority of unwed births in the United States today are to single women in their 20s — neither "children" nor "Murphy Browns." Unwed teen moms account for over 30 percent of U.S. babies born outside of marriage. But unwed teen moms younger than 18 account for only 13 percent of babies born out of wedlock.¹³

Thus, even arbitrarily confining our concern to mothers under 20, rising rates of teen births are being driven not primarily by minors, but by young women old enough to vote, sign contracts, and serve in the armed forces. Almost three-fifths of unwed teen births are to young adult women who are 18 and 19 years old.

Moreover, rates of unwed childbearing among these older teens are most similar not to younger school-age girls, but to adult women in their early 20s.¹⁴ Trends in the birth rate for single 18-19 year olds track quite closely with trends in the birth rate for single women in their early 20s. Between 1975 and 1994, for example, the birth rate for unwed 18-19 year olds more than doubled, from 32.5 to 70.1 births per 1000. For unwed women in their early 20s during this same period, the birth rate jumped from 31.2 to 72.2 per 1000. The only noteworthy difference is that the recent declines in unwed childbearing have been larger among 18 and 19 years olds than among women between the ages of 20 and 24. In fact, the unwed birth rate for White women in their early 20s continues to rise, up two percent since 1994, and up 136 percent since 1980.¹⁵ This data is far from definitive, but it does suggest that teen pregnancy campaigns may be successful, but only in the limited goal of persuading more young women to postpone out of wedlock childbearing until their early twenties.

HERE IS the paradox. As a society, we aim a fair amount of public money and many strong words at the problem of "teen pregnancy," that is, at the 376,000 births in one recent year to single teen mothers under the age of 20. Yet we pay comparatively little attention — indeed, it often seems that as a society we are stone-cold silent — regarding the 439,000 births that same year to single mothers in their early 20s.¹⁶ Are we against the former but indifferent to the latter? If so, what is our reasoning? Consider the prospects for a typical 20- or 22-year-old single mother and her baby. Are they really that much different, or better, than those facing an 18- or 19-year-old single mother?

Just waiting for a few more birthdays to roll around before having a child does not reduce the risk to mother or child by much, at least for older teen moms. Researchers comparing the fate of sisters, for example, concluded that national estimates of the effects of unwed teen childbearing may have been exaggerated.¹⁷ Why? One reason is that many of these young women who avoided "teen" childbearing then had children out of wedlock in their 20s. Other recent studies have found that single adult mothers resemble single teen mothers more than they resemble adult married mothers. According to one 1996 study, "adolescent mothers experience significantly more mental health problems and significantly less

well-being than married adult mothers but report similar levels of psychological adjustment when compared to single adult mothers.”¹⁸

Teen childbearing, as opposed to adult unmarried childbearing, does impose some additional penalties. But the great divide regarding economic status and emotional well-being is clearly between single and married mothers.¹⁹ How much will waiting a few years to become an unwed mother help a teenager economically? When it comes to family income, not much, according to a recent analysis:

“The economic situation of older, single childbearers is meager at best; their situation is much closer to that of teen mothers than that of married childbearers . . . ”²⁰

A wealth of evidence accumulated in the 1990s has produced a new consensus among most family scholars that marriage matters. Overall, children raised by single parents are five times as likely to be poor, twice as likely to drop out of school, and two to three times more likely as adults to commit crimes leading to an incarceration.²¹ These children are also more likely to be victims of crime, especially child abuse.²² Even after controlling not only for socioeconomic variables (parental education, occupation, family income, welfare receipt, and race), but also for family process variables (parental warmth, discipline, and time spent with children), “the net effects of non-intact family structure on child development outcomes are negative and strong,” according to Lingxin Hao of Johns Hopkins University.²³ Urie Bronfenbrenner, one of the nation’s leading family scholars, sums it up: “Controlling for associated factors such as low income, children growing up in such [father-absent] households are at greater risk for experiencing a variety of behavioral and educational problems, including extremes of hyperactivity or withdrawal, lack of attentiveness in the classroom, difficulty in deferring gratification, impaired academic achievement, school misbehavior, absenteeism, dropping out, involvement in socially alienated peer groups, and, especially, the so-called ‘teenage syndrome’ of behaviors that tend to hang together — smoking, drinking, early and frequent sexual experience, a cynical attitude toward work, adolescent pregnancy, and, in the more extreme cases, drugs, suicide, vandalism, violence, and criminal acts.”²⁴

That unmarried birth rates among older teens are so similar to those of women in their early 20s should alert us to an important possibility. Perhaps the teens who are becoming single mothers are responding not only to specific conditions affecting their age group, but also, and even especially, to broader cultural messages influencing all young women. In short, perhaps our “teen pregnancy” problem stems from a larger issue that we have yet to confront. That issue is the weakening of norms connecting marriage to childbearing throughout our society. Are we transmitting a marriage culture to the next generation? Do we want to? What can we say or do to encourage more girls and young women to see a good marriage, a committed partner and father, and not just an 18th or a 20th birthday, as the thing worth waiting for?

*Single adult mothers resemble
single teen mothers more
than they resemble
adult married mothers.*

Is Teen Motherhood Mostly a Contraceptive Crisis?

Within the expert discourse, the dominant way of constructing the teen pregnancy crisis over the last two generations has been to view it as a contraceptive crisis: the failure of sexually active teens to use effective contraception consistently. According to a 1995 review of teen pregnancy prevention programs, “the general approach is to target contraceptive use among adolescents, to promote the development of skills and resources conducive to effective contraceptive use, and to address barriers to the receipt of contraceptive services.”²⁵

There is considerable evidence that teenagers as a group are inept users of contraceptives. Teenagers are more likely than older women to use contraceptives sporadically. About 28 percent of younger teenagers (and 23 percent of 18 and 19 year olds) who are sexually active either do not use any method of contraception or use it only sporadically.²⁶

But even teens who do use contraceptives experience high failure rates (as do single women in their 20s). In the hands of single teenagers, even the Pill is no guarantee against pregnancy. One study finds that about 12 percent of poor and working-class single (and not cohabiting) teenagers who rely on oral contraceptives get pregnant within the first 12 months of use. So do almost 23 percent of those girls and young women who rely on condoms. (For middle-class teens, the contraceptive failure rate is about 7 percent for Pill users and 13 percent for condom users.) Poor and working-class teens who rely on the Pill or condoms are about four times more likely to experience a contraceptive failure in any given year than are middle-class married women in their 30s, the group with the lowest rates of contraceptive failure.²⁷

The risk of out-of-wedlock pregnancy, not small in any one year, rises rapidly when measured with reference to the total number of years that a sexually active girl or young woman remains unmarried. In 1994, about 21 percent of single, sexually active unmarried girls under age 18 got pregnant. So did about 18 percent of single, sexually active 18-19 year old women. About 14 percent of single sexually active minors, and almost 11 percent of sexually active 18-19 year old women had a baby.²⁸ “The risk of failure during typical use of reversible contraceptives in the United States is not low,” concludes a 1999 study in *Family Planning Perspectives*, referring to all women, not just teenagers. About nine percent of women become pregnant within one year of starting use, and “the typical woman who uses reversible methods of contraception continuously from her 15th to her 45th birthday will experience 1.8 contraceptive failures.”²⁹

These high rates of unintended pregnancy lead many Americans to view better contraceptive education, often including easier access to contraceptives, as the main solution to the teen pregnancy crisis. But in light of recent research, it has become obvious that our teen pregnancy crisis cannot be understood solely or even primarily as a consequence of contraceptive ignorance. As one respected researcher summed it up in a 1999 article in *Journal of School Health*: “Twenty years of research has informed the field that knowledge level is only weakly related to behavior . . . and that programs that focus on knowledge acquisition do increase student knowledge, but they do not significantly change sexual or contraceptive behavior.”³⁰

Nor is teens' access to contraceptives the main problem: "Most studies that have been conducted during the past 20 years have indicated that improving access to contraception did not significantly increase contraceptive use or decrease teen pregnancy." Even when schools in high-risk areas dispensed free contraceptives, hired trained staff, and provided other health services to insure confidentiality, "school-wide rates of contraceptive use typically did not increase and pregnancy or child-bearing rates did not decrease."³¹

High contraceptive failure rates are not simply due to ignorance. They must be at least partly a function of carelessness and, in a larger sense, a function of culture. The basic problem for teens is not so much lack of information as it is the missing or ambivalent guidance from adults and the larger culture, which, together, effectively reduce the motivation of girls and young women to avoid pregnancy. To be more effective, anti-teen-pregnancy programs must offer girls and young women much better and more authentic answers to the key question: Why should I wait to have a baby?

Those school programs that have had modest but encouraging success concentrate on providing students with clear, direct guidance, as opposed to values-clarification or decision-making skills. They combine strong messages in favor of postponing sexual activity along with contraceptive information, typically stressing communication, negotiation, and "refusal" skills for teens.³²

There appears to be one exception to this general rule. While contraceptive education in general has had limited success in combating teen pregnancy, a significant part of the drop in teen birth rates in the 1990s does seem to be the result of Norplant. Efforts by medical professionals to get high-risk teens, such as those who have already had a pregnancy or a baby, to use one of the two new contraceptive options that have vastly lower failure rates — Norplant or the slightly less effective Depro-Provera — have met in recent years with measurable success.

Repeat pregnancies have been a particular concern for many researchers, physicians, and service providers. Without interventions, note two researchers, "nearly half of first-time adolescent mothers become pregnant again within two years." Yet of all the attempts to prevent or delay these second pregnancies, notes one medical study, "postpartum levonorgestrel implant insertion [i.e., Norplant] is the only intervention that has been consistently associated with a significant reduction in the repeated adolescent pregnancy rate in this country."³³

The relative effectiveness of Norplant as a method of contraception among high-risk teens can also be seen in a recent study of 100 teen mothers. The predicted rate of pregnancy in one year of postpartum use was just two percent for Norplant users, as against 38 percent for Pill users, even though the two groups did not differ in their future pregnancy intentions.³⁴ According to the Alan Guttmacher Institute, the use of long-acting contraceptives may have played "a particularly large role in reducing second pregnancies among teen mothers."³⁵

Even achieving only delays in repeat unwed childbearing may be important for children's well-being. One new study following 116 first born children of African

*Is it possible to make a
good marriage, and not just
an 18th or 20th birthday,
the thing worth waiting for?*

American school-age mothers in New Haven found that, when these teen mothers delayed subsequent childbearing for 2.5 years, their female children were less likely either to drop out of school or to become teen mothers themselves. Boys whose mothers delayed further childbearing for five years were more successful in school at age 12, and less likely to be incarcerated by age 18.³⁶

Is Teen Motherhood Mostly a Premature Sexuality Crisis?

A less predominant but increasingly politically ascendant approach is to view the teen pregnancy crisis primarily as a teen sexuality crisis, a consequence of the growing number of teens who are ignoring moral norms that confine sexual intercourse to married people, or at least to adults. It is certainly true that the proportion of unmarried teenagers who have had sex has risen dramatically. The proportion of 16-year-old girls who had ever had intercourse increased from about 8-9 percent during the 1960s and early 1970s to about 21 percent during the mid-1980s. In the years 1958 through 1960, only about 27 percent of 18-year-old women had ever had intercourse, and many of them were married. By 1970-72, about 35 percent of 18-year-old women were no longer virgins. But by the mid-1980s, despite a rapid drop in teen marriage rates, the majority of 18-year-old women were sexually experienced.³⁷ Currently, about a quarter of U.S. young women, and about one-fifth of men, remain virgins through their teen years.³⁸

The likelihood that a teen will have experienced sexual intercourse is affected by a variety of family and neighborhood variables, including the proportion of single-parent families and the proportion of mothers who work. When it comes to delaying teen sex, reducing opportunity (or temptation) is important. Close supervision, which is more easily accomplished when teens live in two-parent homes, especially those in which mothers at home supervise after school behavior, increases the likelihood that teens, especially young teens, will postpone sexual activity.³⁹ Indeed, mothers' abstinence messages appear to be more effective than the same messages coming from schools.⁴⁰ One study of 751 Black urban young people and their mothers, mostly single mothers, found that those teens whose mothers had expressed opposition to premarital sex were twice as likely to be virgins as were the teens whose mothers were more permissive.⁴¹

For these reasons, viewing the teen pregnancy crisis as a sexuality crisis has been helpful. In the mid-1990s, a new emphasis on abstinence in schools, community groups, and churches — such as the Southern Baptists' "True Love Waits" campaign — appears to have helped reverse what once seemed to be an inexorable rise in the proportion of teens who have had sexual intercourse.⁴²

In sum, both the contraceptive and the premature sexuality paradigms have led to useful approaches. A recent study by the Guttmacher Institute concludes that the drop in teen pregnancy since 1991 is likely the result of both better contraceptives and a drop in teen sexual activity.⁴³ At the same time, the success of both of these approaches has been modest, in part because neither of them directly addresses the heart of the matter: the growing disconnection between marriage and childbearing in the minds and lives of young couples.



At left:
The Baby (1944) by
Milton Avery. Oil on
canvas, 44 X 32 inches.
The Butler Institute of
American Art,
Youngstown, OH.
©1999, Milton Avery
Trust/Artists Rights
Society (ARS), New
York, NY.

The Marriage Dimension

YOUNG ADULT women having children is not a new phenomenon. The number of women who had their first child during their teen years was almost the same in the early 1970s as in the early 1990s. But the proportion of teen moms who conceived their first child out of wedlock has increased significantly, rising from about 65 percent in 1970-74 to 89 percent in 1990-94. The single biggest change in recent decades has been the declining proportion of pregnant single teens who marry.⁴⁴

Over the past 30 years, two larger social trends have affected teen childbearing. First, higher ages at marriage, combined with earlier initiation into sex, have led to an increasing number of single teens exposed to the risk of premarital pregnancy for longer periods of time. The second trend is the decreased likelihood that a single teenager will either “legitimate” her pregnancy by marrying or giving the baby up for adoption.

The Legitimation Funk

Overall, after holding steady at 15 percent for most of the 1950s, the proportion of teen births occurring outside of marriage doubled between 1960 and 1970, from 15 to 31 percent, then doubled again between 1970 and 1990, from 31 to 68 percent.⁴⁵ Between 1970 and 1974, for example, almost 47 percent of single teens expecting their first baby married before the child was born — about the same proportion as three decades earlier (1940-1944). By the early 1990s, the proportion of nonmarital teen conceptions that led to marriage had plunged to 16 percent.⁴⁶

Currently, nearly 78 percent of teen births occur outside of marriage.⁴⁷ A disproportionate share of this increase has been the result of changes in the behavior of White teens. Since 1970, the proportion of births to White teens that are out of wedlock has more than tripled.⁴⁸

The decline has been almost as dramatic among older teens as among those under the age of 18. As recently as the early 1970s, about 75 percent of 18- and 19-year-old teen moms were married by the time of the birth. But by the early 1980s, that proportion had plunged to 54 percent. By the late 1980s, only 42 percent of 18- and 19-year-old mothers were also married.⁴⁹

Legitimation rates for women in their early 20s have also dropped, though not as dramatically.

By the early 1990s, pregnant women in their early 20s were about twice as likely to pick unwed motherhood over marriage as they had been in the early 1970s, while women age 18-19 were about three times as likely.⁵⁰ Somehow, girls and young women in this generation seem to be increasingly convinced that they are old enough to be mothers, but too young to marry.

The Adoption Deficit

When it comes to insuring that most children grow up in stable, two-parent homes, society's most important institution is marriage. But when a single young woman is pregnant, and marriage is not advisable, a second primary social institution, similarly intended to secure for children the protection of married-couple homes, is adoption. Culturally, the two institutions are closely connected and, in many ways, dependent upon one another. Sadly, then, but not surprisingly, as marriage rates in our society have dropped, so have rates of adoption.

Between 1971 and 1982, the proportion of unmarried White mothers who released their babies for adoption dropped by more than half, from 18 percent to 7 percent. For unmarried Black mothers, the proportion releasing for adoption during this period also dropped in half, from a very low two percent to an even lower one percent. "These declines occurred," notes a RAND study, "despite recent data suggesting that relinquishment results in better outcomes for the birth mother, including delayed marriage, increased likelihood of employment six and twelve months after the birth, and greater likelihood of living in a higher-income household."⁵¹ By the mid-1980s, the proportion of unmarried White mothers releasing for adoption had dropped to just 3 percent.⁵² What used to be important differences between the propensity of Black and White single mothers to give their babies to adoptive homes have all but disappeared.

About 78 percent of births to teen mothers occur outside of marriage, up from 15 percent in 1960.

Waiting for What? The Limitations of the "Teen Pregnancy" Approach

Despite our intensive campaigns against teen pregnancy, why are single teens more likely to have babies today than they were thirty years ago? Why do so many young adult women today find unwed motherhood either easier to arrange than early marriage or preferable to early marriage? And why has adoption fallen so far out of favor?

Obviously, the reasons for these changes are varied and complex. But surely some important clues can be found by examining what current teen pregnancy programs in particular, and today's adults in general, are actually telling girls and young women about the relationship of marriage and adoption to motherhood.

The first thing to notice is that today's adults seem to be saying remarkably little about these particular issues. Often, they say nothing at all. For example, most teen pregnancy initiatives concentrate almost exclusively on how teens should behave before they get pregnant, typically focusing on encouraging teens either to postpone sex or use contraceptives. But once a girl or young woman is actually expecting a child, adult guidance from the larger community, particularly regarding marriage and adoption, frequently disappears.

In their comprehensive 1995 evaluation of teen pregnancy prevention programs, Kristin Moore and her colleagues find no “formal efforts that espouse legitimization of a child via marriage when conception occurs outside of wedlock.”⁵³ While many programs encourage pregnant teens to stay in school, there are few, if any, formal interventions “that seek to encourage/discourage a specific pregnancy resolution option” such as “the occurrence of a birth within . . . marital union.” Moreover: “Only a minority of programs focus on pregnancy resolution decisions, including abortion, marriage, and adoption; we found only one empirical evaluation of a pregnancy resolution program.”⁵⁴

Our interviews with teen mothers, as well as interviews conducted by others, suggest that most teen moms quite clearly feel the disapproval of society. But for many girls and young women, the social stigma apparently has less to do with their marital status than with their age. Obviously, then, the stigma is felt more acutely by younger teens. “I don’t want to be a statistic — a teenage mother who is on welfare,” one college-bound 16-year-old mother told the *Buffalo News*, “I want to give my daughter as good a life as someone older would.”⁵⁵ Another teenager, defending her decision to become a mother, also frames the issue in terms of age: “I don’t see myself as a child. I am practically 18. I’m almost old enough to vote, and I’m old enough to drive.”⁵⁶

AT THE “Teen Center,” a program for pregnant and parenting teens located in the basement of a high school in an affluent university community, researchers studied 50 teen mothers and three teen fathers. Nearly 80 percent of the program participants were White; most came from lower-middle or working-class families. “The culture at the Teen Center,” reports one researcher, “was characterized largely by its competitive nature. The teens tried to prove that they were better parents than other parents, not only other teenagers but also those who delay having children until their 20s, 30s, and 40s . . . By ‘winning’ these competitions, the teens hoped to combat the negative image associated with early child-bearing.” Fifteen year old Tracy, for example, looks down on older parents: “Like, they do what my parents did, with having lots of rules and being really strict.”⁵⁷ In our interviews, we found that many older teen mothers spontaneously contrasted their situations with that of younger, school-age mothers, who are viewed by these 18-19 year olds as the real “teen pregnancy” problem.

Isn’t it clear that something rather important is missing from the world view of these young mothers? Yet in their insistence on framing the issue as one of age, these young people are clearly imitating the experts and other grown-ups, who have urged them to wait before having babies, while remaining unusually vague about what exactly they should be waiting for.

What’s wrong with a teenager having a baby? Examining the ways in which school officials and the relevant written material for teenagers seek to answer this question, two themes stand out. First, educators consistently make age the primary issue. Moreover, they describe what they view as age-related risks primarily in medical and educational terms — the very terms most likely to imply that these consid-

erations do not necessarily or even obviously apply to older teens, who either already have, or soon will have, a high school diploma, and who are already physically mature enough to carry a child.

Second, the case presented to teenagers for avoiding pregnancy focuses narrowly and exclusively on the teenager herself. All the reasons revolve around “what will happen to me.” Your education will suffer. Your career will be set back. You’ll be overburdened and stressed. You won’t have time for fun and recreation. It “can be very stressful to care for a helpless baby,” according to one high school health textbook. Such stress can interfere with enjoyable activities like dating, friends, movies, or relaxing at home.⁵⁸

A school nurse in Maine told us: “I try to tell the girls they’re compromising their own life. They are too valuable to interfere with their own growth and education at this point.”⁵⁹ A typical high school health textbook gives three reasons why teen motherhood is a bad idea. It raises the chances that your baby will be born with low birth weight or other medical problems. It increases your risk of future health and learning problems. And it may cause you to drop out of school. According to this textbook, moreover, it is primarily dropping out of school, rather than teen childbearing itself, that “increases the risk for continued poverty and child abuse and neglect.”⁶⁰

Obviously, since teen childbearing frequently does lead to girls dropping out of school, the emphasis on the importance of staying in school is understandable. But what is the basic message?

Apparently, as long as you stay in school and stay healthy, having a baby has few long-term harmful consequences, or at least few consequences that the authorities are able to specify. For older teens, especially, the message thus becomes fairly clear: If you are confident about a healthy delivery and a high school school diploma, you are probably not who the textbook authors and the other adults have in mind when they fret about the “teen pregnancy” problem.

Are Selfish Reasons Enough?

Here is our thesis. In restricting the conversation on teen pregnancy to narrow considerations of self-interest — what will happen to me? — today’s adults are missing something important about the way all people, even teenagers, think. When educators act as if teenagers lack the capacity for moral realism, and do not need their most important choices (such as whether and when to bring a child into the world) to make moral sense, they are underestimating teenagers, thereby effectively miseducating them. By ignoring the best interests of the child in pretending that the most important ethical questions facing these teenagers do not even exist, these educators are neglecting some of the basic determinants of human motivation and action. As a result, they are restricting themselves to narrow and ultimately unpersuasive arguments.

If avoiding pregnancy is consistently presented to teenagers as a matter of self-interest, how can adults complain, or even act surprised, when girls and young

Teenagers are attracted to motherhood by the same benefits that draw older, married women into motherhood.

women decide that having a baby is essentially a matter of personal preference? “If they want to be moms, that’s their choice,” says an Idaho teenager whose sister had a baby in high school.⁶¹ Just because being a teenage mom may be hard, doesn’t make it wrong. It all depends on how much you are willing to give up for your child.

A **BSENT ADULT** guidance, this view of the matter rings true for many young people. Can teenagers be good parents? *Of course we can.* “A lot depends on how willing the teenagers are to give up their free time,” says one 14-year-old Maryland boy who participated in a roundtable discussion on the subject. “Teenagers have just as good a chance to be good parents as adults . . . There are plenty of adults who are horrible parents, and there are horrible teenage parents, too.” Here is a 16-year-old girl from California: “If I were to have a child now, I know I’d definitely be a better parent than mine were to me.” And a 15-year-old girl from North Dakota: “Teenagers can be wonderful parents . . . I think with effort and affection anyone can become a good parent.”⁶²

There are numerous other problems, including scholarly problems, with limiting ourselves to what economists call an “opportunity cost” model for conceptualizing the risks of teen pregnancy. As Naomi B. Farber puts it, the economic model “does not offer insights into why non-poor Black and White teens might choose to become single mothers.”⁶³ Indeed, we are unaware of any research showing why, in a purely rational-choice model of behavior, motherhood ever makes sense, at least for women interested primarily in maximizing education, career, and leisure opportunities.⁶⁴

At any age, motherhood imposes both direct costs and opportunity costs on women. Especially in modern societies, a child costs a lot and, excepting the currency of love, pays back little or nothing. Yet most women who are mothers view these costs as a small price to pay for motherhood. So do most young unwed mothers.

If material self-interest is the only criterion, pregnant teenagers who choose to bear a child rather than have an abortion have already rejected the most “rational” choice available to them. Young women who decide to be mothers are clearly acting in pursuit of a different sort of goal. This may help to shed light on the conclusion of a recent scholarly review: “Although the Opportunity Cost hypothesis is generally proposed as an explanation for adolescent sexual and fertility behavior, the empirical evidence in support of this theory is limited and inconclusive.”⁶⁵

Why is this theory flawed? Because in large measure, unwed teenagers who bear children are drawn by the same benefits, most of them decidedly extra-economic, that draw older, married women into motherhood. The maternal bond, similar to the sexual bond, is partly defined by the deeply human drive to transcend the self, to become capable of both giving and receiving love. At any age, much of the attraction of motherhood lies in this realm of sexual, moral, and emo-

tional meaning. In one study, White teen mothers, despite the obvious hardships, actually reported greater enjoyment of life and a more positive sense of well-being than childless teens: “The adolescent mothers were developing a stronger purpose for living since the births of their infants.”⁶⁶

This constant adult emphasis on teenagers’ material self-interest, insofar as it leaves an ethical vacuum, may actually enhance the attractiveness of unwed motherhood for some teenagers. Teen mothers, confronted by adults who urge them to be selfish, can take the high road. They can admire themselves for being good mothers, willing to sacrifice for their babies. “Today, pregnant teenagers are even beginning to be viewed by some of their peers as role models,” reported the *New York Times* in 1993 after April Schuldts of Eau Claire, Wisconsin, five months pregnant, was elected her school’s homecoming queen. Said one of her classmates: “You look at a girl who’s pregnant or has a baby and think ‘she’s a better person than me, someone who is strong.’”⁶⁷ In one study of teen mothers who never considered releasing their babies for adoption, about 18 percent of the teenagers said that a mother who gives up her baby for adoption was being “selfish.” About 31 percent said that these mothers were “abandoning the baby.”⁶⁸

*“If they want to be moms,
that’s their choice.”*

One powerful question is, “What is in my best interests?” But another question, rarely asked by adults, but surely at least as powerful, is, “What would a good mother do?” One study asked pregnant teens what might make them consider adoption. Relatively few of the teenagers cited financial or other practical considerations. Among White pregnant teens, for example, only 23 percent said that they would consider adoption if “it would help you achieve your career goals and financial security.” Only 19 percent were interested in adoption if “it would help you stay off welfare.” These teenagers were stirred much more dramatically by the idea that adoption might be in the best interests of the child. Among the White teens, 58 percent said they would consider adoption if they believed that the baby “would have a better chance in life with another family.”⁶⁹

Expert and adult rhetoric notwithstanding, teen mothers themselves consistently describe their decision-making in moral terms. Reports Naomi Farber: “[B]ecoming a mother often represented what they considered to be the most ethical, responsible decision, one congruent with personal or familial values and beliefs about abortion and adoption, the sanctity of life and family.”⁷⁰ Another study of 430 young unwed mothers, about half of whom placed a baby for adoption, concludes: “[W]hether women plan to place or parent, they see their own choice as most likely to benefit the baby’s emotional growth and development.” Young women who choose to keep their babies acknowledge that adoption might produce financial advantages for their babies, but they believe that a mother’s love matters more.⁷¹

Is There a Stigma Against Unwed Childbearing?

Today's adults are increasingly willing and able to deliver strong messages to teenagers about sexual intercourse and contraception. Yet the same adults are typically shy, almost tongue-tied, when it comes to advising a girl or young woman on what to do after she is pregnant, when the decision against abortion has already been made, and when the issue at stake is the life prospects of a child.

This curious reticence reflects what some people, mostly conservatives, call the decline of social stigma, and what others, mostly liberals, call the growing tolerance of diversity. But everyone seems to agree on what is happening. Young mothers today are less likely to be or get married, and less likely to release their babies for adoption, primarily because social pressure no longer forces them into these traditional patterns of behavior. Is everyone right?

Yes and no. In opinion polls, Americans give somewhat contradictory answers about marriage. Marriage remains a highly valued aspiration among all ages and races. Most young people report that they want to marry. Almost 95 percent of college freshman in 1997 said that they hope to get married. Only three percent say that they do not hope to marry.⁷² The proportion of high school seniors who rate having a good marriage and family life as "extremely important" has actually risen slightly since the 1970s, and now stands at about 83 percent of girls and 73 percent of boys.⁷³

Most young adults also take a dim view of divorce. More than 70 percent of young adults, for example, agree that "children do better with both parents." Two-thirds agree that "when parents divorce, children develop permanent emotional problems." More than 70 percent believe that divorcing couples do not try hard enough to save their marriages; about 76 percent believe that current divorce laws are too lax.⁷⁴ Some of these attitudes may stem partly from personal experience. A 1990 survey of young adults age 18-29 whose parents had divorced found that 42 percent say that their parents' divorce has affected them "a great deal."⁷⁵

When it comes to their own families, Americans still clearly disapprove of unwed childbearing. Only about 14 percent of U.S. women in 1989 said that they would consider it acceptable for their daughter to bear a child without being married.⁷⁶ While Black adults are somewhat more accepting than Whites in this regard, only 28.5 percent of African American adults say that they would consider it acceptable for their own daughter to have a child while unmarried.⁷⁷ Interviewing 28 unwed teen mothers in Chicago, Naomi Farber reports: "One consistent pattern was the overwhelmingly negative reactions of the Black middle-class and working-class teens and their families, ranging from disappointed shock to fury . . ." The White teens she interviewed typically described their parents' reactions as "unhappy, concerned, and disappointed."⁷⁸

One White teen mother whom we interviewed put it this way: "'Oh my god, oh my god, my parents are going to kill me!' is the first thing I thought." And a family drama did ensue: "My dad went straight to the bathroom and puked . . . He freaked out because we weren't married. We weren't doing right."⁷⁹

Reports like these represent a challenge to the prevailing view about the decline of stigma. Clearly, most teens who get pregnant believe, correctly, that their parents will disapprove intensely. Moreover, few teens describe their unwed conceptions as a choice. Asked whether or not they intended to get pregnant, the overwhelming majority of young unwed mothers say “no.” In 1987, only 11 percent of births to unmarried teens were “intended.”⁸⁰

The Perils of Ambivalence

On the other hand, when the issue is *other* people’s daughters, adult Americans have become decidedly more tolerant. In 1974, about 68 percent of women and 64 percent of men believed that it should be illegal for adults to have children without being married. By 1998, that figure had dropped to about 48 percent of all adults. In 1974, about 31 percent of adults agreed that “there is no reason why single women shouldn’t have children.” By 1985, the figure had jumped to 47 percent.⁸¹

Moreover, despite their desire for marriage and their dislike of divorce, younger people today are even more permissive about unwed childbearing than older people. In one poll, a majority of teens agreed that people who decide to raise a child out of wedlock are either “doing their own thing and not affecting anyone else” or, even more amazingly, “experimenting with a worthwhile alternative lifestyle.”⁸² When U.S. teenage girls today are asked whether they personally would consider having a child without being married, fewer than half answer unambiguously “no.”⁸³

Today’s teenagers are clearly internalizing and personalizing a tolerance for unmarried childbearing. Not surprisingly, a large body of scholarly literature suggests that, even after controlling for family characteristics, attitudes about the acceptability of unwed childbearing have a powerful, independent effect on the likelihood that a young woman will experience an out-of-wedlock pregnancy.⁸⁴

Taken together, these data suggest that the best word to sum up our society’s current approach to unwed childbearing is: ambivalence. Yet societal ambivalence may be enough to tip the scales decisively in the direction of early, unwed motherhood. After all, for unwed childbearing to spread, it is not necessary for girls actively to favor unwed childbearing. All that is necessary is for them to stop disapproving of it.

As one recent survey of the literature of teen childbearing puts it: “Wanting a child or feeling ambivalent about having a child have both been found to predict having a birth.” In a study of Black urban girls under age 18 who went to a clinic for a pregnancy test, only those girls who firmly did not want to become pregnant in fact had a lower probability of having a child during the next 18 months. Another study of high school sophomore girls found that those girls who were unwilling firmly to rule out having a child outside of marriage were in fact significantly more likely to have a non-marital birth in the next two years.⁸⁵ As the scholars put it: “The rate of conception associated with ambivalence towards childbearing has been shown to be as high as that associated with a positive desire for a child.”⁸⁶

For unwed childbearing to spread, it is not necessary for girls actively to favor unwed childbearing.

The failure of some parents to make their general disapproval explicit may also play a role. When teens in Battle Mountain, Nevada jokingly devoted a page in their class yearbook to profiling their pregnant classmates, they seemed to be surprised that many adults in the community disapproved. The yearbook staff had discussed and approved the photos. Teen motherhood is “something they’re pretty used to and it’s not any big deal to them,” reported Debbie Evans, the yearbook staff’s faculty adviser.⁸⁷

Battle Mountain is a blue-collar, mostly White community. In the 1990s, teen pregnancy came to be seen as a serious local problem. So when the pictures of pregnant students appeared in the yearbook, it “did create a controversy in town,” acknowledges Carol Hensley, a parent and a member of the local Community Action Team for the Prevention of Teen Pregnancy. Yet: “The school nurse felt, in the end, it was a positive experience. Kids were upset to find we adults disapproved of the idea. That was a positive outcome. They learned the community doesn’t necessarily approve.”⁸⁸

This type of ambivalence and tentativity — the adults think that unwed child-bearing is wrong, sort of, an opinion with which the students seem only mildly acquainted — seems to be increasingly common. Consider one sample of White junior high school students from two relatively affluent communities in rural Ohio. These very young teenagers do not see any special advantages to having a child as a single teen, but neither do they detect any great disadvantages.

For example, these students were evenly divided as to whether a pregnancy would cause a rift with their romantic partner. They also split evenly over whether becoming a teen parent would keep them from becoming a successful adult. About one in four were not sure whether, if their partner wanted to have sex and there was no birth control, they would say “no” just to avoid getting pregnant.⁸⁹

The Meaning of Sex

As traditional codes of sexual and procreative conduct weaken, it appears that young people do not so much abandon moral codes altogether as they create their own out of whatever material is at hand. But unlike older marriage norms, these new sex codes often fail to orient young people’s behavior toward pro-social ends. For example, in a racially mixed New York City high school for older troubled teens, one teacher reports that his male students have invented names to describe various versions of sexual intimacy outside of marriage. A “wifey” is a boy’s main girlfriend. A “shorty” is a second-string girlfriend, one who may seek to become a “wifey.” A girl who is “cheese” is sexually available with no strings attached.⁹⁰

According to a study of teen sexuality in a White, working-class Philadelphia neighborhood in which a majority of White births are out of wedlock, teenagers make sharp distinctions between different types of sexual behavior. For example: “The most common reason for not using birth control among these youths is that unprotected sex is a pledge of intimacy and trust which elevates [simple intercourse] to ‘making love.’” Consequently, concludes the ethnographer, these teens “believe in ‘natural sex’ as an expression of romantic love and commitment. Many teens in

this study imbued steady relationships with a sanctity which sharply contrasted with their matter-of-fact portrayal of rampant casual sex.”⁹¹

For some young people, unprotected sex has apparently replaced the marriage proposal as the ultimate expression of romantic love. This cultural shift has been assisted in part by high rates of parental divorce. In a marriage culture, where marriage is typically for keeps, the marriage vow is the ultimate expression of love. But in a divorce culture, where confidence in lasting marriage is low, risking pregnancy and disease is now viewed by many girls and young women as the ultimate in self-giving.⁹² Why should they hold themselves back? What else is there?

Whatever Happened to the Attractions of Marriage?

Why do the dreams and desires of young pregnant women today so often fail to include a husband? Even if fewer pregnant women today are pushed into marriage by social pressure, why are so few *pulled* into marriage by the powerful advantages, both for themselves and their children, of marriage over unwed motherhood?

It’s not that young unwed mothers are hostile to or uninterested in marriage. In a study of a nationally representative sample of young people, drawn from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, unmarried mothers were found to be no less interested in marriage than women who had not experienced a premarital birth.⁹³ Despite the prevalence of casual sex, young women still tend to have the babies of men with whom they are in love.

One study finds that, even though most school-age mothers had sex the first time for reasons other than love, more than 80 percent of both Black and White teen mothers said that they were in love with their partners at the time of conception. Most of the mothers hoped to marry the father.⁹⁴ A recent report on fragile families — poor inner-city, unwed, minority couples with children — finds that 70 percent of these couples, questioned soon after the baby’s birth, say that there is at least a fifty-fifty chance they will marry.⁹⁵

Another study of teen parents from the Pacific Northwest, the majority of whom were White and from homes that were not currently welfare-dependent, finds that three-fourths of these teen mothers were either “planning to marry” or “going steady” with the father at the time of the birth. Yet most of them, of course, do not get married.⁹⁶ In another sample of mostly White, working-class, rural teen mothers, about one in five described herself as “engaged.” Many were cohabiting with the fathers of their children.⁹⁷ Why aren’t they wed?

What are they waiting for? What encourages so many young women to fall in love with men, to have babies with them, and to live with them, but to stop short of getting married? The data clearly show that the dream of marriage remains powerful, even for girls and young women in disadvantaged circumstances. But with each passing year, fewer young women, especially young mothers, realize this dream. Current research, in our view, has not adequately examined or explained this phenomenon.

For some, unprotected sex has replaced the marriage proposal as the ultimate expression of romantic love.

Perhaps some of these mothers cannot convince the fathers to marry. One study argues that, following the legalization of abortion in the early 1970s, many pregnant women who wanted marriage became less able to persuade their partners to see things their way.⁹⁸ On the other hand, in another study of a group of White unwed teen mothers, about 44 percent of the teens said that they and their boyfriends had jointly considered marriage, but rejected it. Only 18 percent of these teen mothers reported that they had wanted to get married, but that the fathers had refused. Nearly 30 percent said that they had never considered marriage.⁹⁹

Follow the Money?

Economic factors clearly play at least some role in the movement away from marriage and toward cohabitation. For example, many researchers have argued that the declining economic prospects facing many young, poorly educated, Black males have contributed to lower rates of marriage and higher rates of divorce among African Americans. As William Julius Wilson recently put it: “The declining marriage rates among inner-city Black parents is a function not simply of increased economic marginality, or of changing attitudes towards sex and marriage, but of the interaction between the two.”¹⁰⁰

Current tax and welfare policies also contain numerous disincentives for marriage.¹⁰¹ In our interviews, some White teen mothers told us that they are delaying marriage until they complete their vocational education, which for many young mothers would be impossible without means — tested state subsidies to cover tuition, medical care, and child care costs — subsidies for which they might well become ineligible were they to marry an employable man.

Some research also suggests that, while welfare benefits may not affect the likelihood that a single female will become pregnant, they do reduce the likelihood a single pregnant woman will marry the father of her child.¹⁰² One study also finds that receipt of welfare permanently reduces the likelihood an unwed mother will ever marry, even though there is no evidence that welfare recipients, compared to other women, have less desire for marriage.¹⁰³ In short, some poor and working-class couples may be substituting informal unions for legal marriages at least partly in order to maintain family income.

At the same time, however, why and to what degree money shapes family behavior must be understood within broader cultural contexts. Especially among the working poor, wage rates matter. But so do subtle changes in values that are at least partly independent of wage rates. “Can’t play house” — can’t afford to get married — is what a number of young Black men in Philadelphia recently told Elijah Anderson when he asked them why they were single.¹⁰⁴ In part, these men are reporting a mundane economic fact. And in part, they are proffering a philosophy, describing a distinctive perspective on the meaning of marriage.

These young men seem to view marriage as a desirable but expensive consumption item — a luxury that you should postpone until you can afford it. White, working- and middle-class adults in their 20s seem increasingly to share this same philosophy. According to a study of non-college graduates in New Jersey by David

Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, young adult women, in particular, “associate marriage readiness with achieving certain economic goals. They place a high priority on owning a home in a good neighborhood as an important personal goal, and some suggested that this goal should be reached before marriage . . . there is little support for the idea that you should marry and then struggle together to build a nest and nest egg. The nest and nest egg should come before marriage.” Several young women told Popenoe and Whitehead that they would consider having children on their own if they did not find a suitable partner. Asked if such a decision would require lowering their economic expectations, some of the young women reminded the researchers that their parents would “be there for me.”¹⁰⁵

Perhaps part of this odd phenomenon — somewhat exaggerated financial prerequisites for marriage, combined with what appears to be relative indifference toward the economic costs of unwed motherhood — stems from young people’s intense desire to avoid divorce. Remember, these are the children of the divorce revolution. An unprecedented proportion of them have personally experienced, from a child’s perspective, the acute pain of divorce. If avoiding or at least postponing marriage will reduce the chances of divorce, even at the cost of enduring the economic and other hardships of single parenthood, then many of these young people may consider it a price worth paying.

One reason why fewer young mothers get married today is that they are actively discouraged from doing so.

The Campaign Against Marriage

One infrequently acknowledged reason why fewer young mothers get married these days is that they are actively discouraged from doing so. As a society, our disapproval of early marriage has become ever sharper and more powerful, while our worries about unwed parenthood have become comparatively vague. In brief, perhaps young unwed mothers are not so much rebelling against, as conforming to, prevailing social norms.

Consider the extreme scarcity of community and church programs aimed at helping unwed couples with children create good marriages. (Have you ever come across one?) Surely this absence is largely the result of overwhelming expert and community disapproval of early marriage as an answer to the risks posed by non-marital pregnancies. In these sorts of ways, our campaign against teen marriage has been much more thorough, and far more successful, than our campaign against teen pregnancy.

As Maris Vinovskis points out, researchers and other experts during the past 25 years have actively discouraged looking at early marriage as anything other than a serious social problem, despite the relative lack of data comparing the consequences of early marriage to the consequences of early unwed motherhood. Here is a 1973 conclusion, typical and quite speculative, from two influential researchers: “[E]arly marriages have not proved stable . . . It therefore appears unwise to encourage teenagers to marry to legalize their sexual activity or their offspring. The rapid making and dissolution of a marriage with all its legal and financial complications may

be more of a psychic trauma to the mother and her child than an attempt to raise a child within her parent's home or independently, or attempt to live unmarried in a temporary but loving relationship with a man."¹⁰⁶

Similarly, a social worker in a home for pregnant girls reported in 1972 that "the feeling here is that an early marriage . . . is not advisable."¹⁰⁷

School counselors have also made preventing marriage one of their explicit goals when counseling pregnant students. A 1973 paper on school-based programs for pregnant teens proudly asserts that "counseling services . . . can reduce the number of inappropriate marriages, diminish the number of repeat pregnancies, and help direct young mothers toward more satisfying lives."¹⁰⁸ More recently, a 1992 RAND study reports that many educators "applaud the decreasing incidence of marriage," citing studies "indicating that early and precipitous marriage usually worsens the long-term outlook for the teenage mother and her child."¹⁰⁹

In fact, these repeated assertions notwithstanding, and especially given that early marriage remains relatively common for White and Hispanic teen mothers, researchers in the 1990s have taken surprisingly little interest in examining how marriage can affect outcomes for teen mothers and their children, especially older teens. After all, a slight majority of White teen mothers, and almost 40 percent of Hispanic teen mothers, currently marry before or soon after the child's birth.¹¹⁰ Yet the costs and benefits of early marriage versus unwed motherhood are relatively unstudied.

Much of the research on teen pregnancy outcomes omits marriage from the range of variables to be investigated.¹¹¹ Similarly, much of the research cited by anti-early-marriage writers fails to distinguish between older and younger teen marriages, or between early marriages undertaken to give a baby a two-parent home and the still substantial fraction of teen marriages that take place without children.¹¹² Why this lack of scholarly curiosity? And given the relative scarcity of reliable evidence, whence comes this seemingly reflexive hostility to the notion that a young mother might consider marrying the father of her child?

IN THE 1950s, the age of first marriage in the U.S. dropped significantly. Reaction among opinion elites was varied, but most of it leaned in one direction. By the 1960s and 1970s, many feminists were criticizing early marriages as homemaker traps that effectively derailed women's educational and career opportunities. Experts worried about overpopulation frowned at the link between early marriage and larger families. People worried about rising divorce rates pointed out that teen marriages, especially those following a premarital pregnancy, are unusually prone to divorce. Compounding all these cultural trends, especially beginning in the 1970s, efforts to lighten the stigma against unwed childbearing increasingly took the form of stigmatizing early marriage. Or marriage for the "wrong" reasons. Or sometimes just marriage itself.

From the early 1970s to the mid 1980s, with shocking speed, the United States changed from a marriage culture to a divorce culture. Philosophically, a new world was born. "I knew I was never going to get married," an affluent single mother, quite *au courant*, told the *New York Times* in 1972: "It's too great a leap of faith.

It would be the end of me. I don't want to be assimilated."¹¹³ That same year, a Baptist minister whose daughter just had an out-of-wedlock child told his congregation that he is proud of his daughter's "realistic and thoroughly human attitude": "[The child's] mother and father made the decision thoughtfully and deliberately, not to marry . . . the two young people decided against marriage, feeling, among other things, that to get married just for the child's sake was not adequate grounds for a healthy marriage."¹¹⁴

These attitudes have been mainstream for many years now. Moreover, in the 1990s, the higher the income and social class, the lower the likelihood of an early marriage. For example, having a highly educated mother today lowers the likelihood that a pregnant teen will get married.¹¹⁵ In earlier generations, daughters of single parents were less likely than daughters from intact families to legitimate a pregnancy by getting married. In recent years, that gap appears to have largely disappeared.¹¹⁶

Certainly, the experts' current disapproval of early marriage is hard to miss. Here is an author writing in 1994 in a Catholic religious journal: "Surely teen-age weddings are one of the most consistent and preventable mistakes made in marriage today."¹¹⁷ Here is a 1996 high school health textbook: Early marriage "can be disastrous." Married teens "often feel like social outcasts." They don't fit in with their peers, and they are likely to "blame each other for their unhappiness," since they are too young to have learned "effective ways to resolve conflicts."¹¹⁸

Many parents seem to agree with this general assessment, actively discouraging their pregnant teenage daughters from considering marriage. Part of the reason, of course, is that some of these girls and young women are impregnated by boyfriends who are, to speak with moderation, uninspiring candidates for marriage. But some of this parental sentiment also seems to stem from the fear that marriage will hurt their daughter's educational and career prospects, and, perhaps relatedly, from the conviction that they, the pregnant girl's parents, are financially more capable than the father of supporting the child.

All of which may be true enough. But why must a young pregnant woman, especially one who is already past high school, so often choose between the support of marriage and the support of her family? Indeed, why must she choose between marriage and career aspirations?

Marriage: A Fate Worse Than . . . Unwed Motherhood?

Research on the effects of early marriage on educational and employment outcomes for young mothers is too sparse to yield definitive conclusions. One recent study finds that school-age pregnant teens who marry before birth are not significantly less likely to graduate from high school, or go on to college, than are unwed school-age mothers. School-age mothers who marry after birth, however, are only half as likely as single teen mothers to get a high school diploma.¹¹⁹

Lessening the stigma against unwed childbearing sometimes took the form of stigmatizing early marriage. Or marriage for the "wrong" reasons. Or sometimes just marriage itself.

Another analysis of high school students in 1972 found that marriage was more detrimental than parenthood to a woman's likelihood of enrolling in college, although, 25 months after the wedding, the negative effects of marriage had declined substantially.¹²⁰ A Canadian study looking at women at age 30 found that mothers who married before age 20 had lower educational attainments than single teen moms. But lower educational achievement among early-married moms did not necessarily translate into lower labor force participation or career achievement at age 30.¹²¹

Little research has looked specifically at how marriages may affect older teen mothers who are already past typical high school age. One 1989 study, focusing on girls and young women who married at or before age 18, finds that marriage does not impose any more long-term career or education disadvantages than either remaining single or postponing marriage into the 20s.¹²² A study from the late 1980s based on nationally representative data concludes: “[T]een parenthood alone greatly reduced the likelihood of school completion, but early marriage, especially for Whites and Hispanics, did not increase the deleterious effect significantly.”¹²³

RESearch to date suggests that it is primarily early childbearing, with or without marriage, that reduces short-term educational and employment attainments for mothers. This general conclusion is consistent with a larger body of research suggesting that the comparatively lower earnings of adult women in the labor market are attributable primarily to parental status, not marital status.¹²⁴ Clearly, the common image of early marriage as typically a “disaster” is not supported by the weight of evidence. Indeed, one study finds that high educational aspirations increase the chances that an unwed pregnant teenager will marry prior to the birth.¹²⁵ Another study suggests that marriage itself has little or no effect on the likelihood of rapid repeat childbearing.¹²⁶

Moreover, the growing practice among young people of substituting cohabitation for marriage — what our previously quoted optimistic researchers from 1973 called the “attempt to live unmarried in a temporary but loving relationship with a man” — has turned out to be a remarkably poor bargain from the 1990s perspective of young mothers and their children. For example, married women are less likely than cohabitators to be victims of domestic violence. This finding does not simply reflect what scholars call “selection effects”: the likelihood that people who are less prone to violence are also more likely to marry instead of cohabit. Getting married itself seems to reduce levels of aggression in the male-female relationship.¹²⁷ To take another example, even after controlling for income, rates of contraceptive failure among cohabiting teens are far higher than those among married teens. About 32 percent of lower-income cohabiting teens who use the Pill get pregnant within the first 12 months of use, compared to nine percent of similar married teens.¹²⁸

When early marriages survive, the benefits to a young woman are substantial. Most obviously, she benefits from her husband's earnings and the gradual accumulation of wealth that is typical of married couples, but not cohabiting couples, and not single mothers.¹²⁹

The independent importance of marriage in increasing the incomes of young mothers is suggested by a national study of single women age 16-22 who had their first birth in the 1970s and early 1980s. Five to seven years later, when those children were entering school, fewer than a third of these mothers were generating enough income on their own (including child support payments and help from relatives) to avoid poverty. The mother's age at birth seemed to have no effect: mothers who had first given birth in their early 20s were no better (or worse) off than mothers who had first given birth as teenagers.

Financially, for this group of mothers, the great divide was between the roughly 50 percent who had married and the 50 percent who had not. When husbands' earnings were taken into account, the proportion of these mothers who were able to avoid poverty increased from less than a third to more than 60 percent. Even though only half of the women had married, husbands' earnings caused the average annual family income for the sample as a whole to more than double.¹³⁰

For children, as well, the advantages stemming from a mother's choice of marriage over unwed motherhood are impressive. Even brief marriages may yield benefits for children. For example, marriage seems to protect young mothers against depression. One nationally representative study finds that, among White 18 and 19 year olds, about 41 percent of unmarried, first-time mothers reported many symptoms of depression, compared to 28 percent of married, primiparous mothers of that age.¹³¹ Maternal depression is a significant risk factor for children, often leading to problems in adjustment that may linger for years after the mother's recovery.¹³²

Can teen marriages succeed? Several studies suggest that, even in the most disadvantaged circumstances, a surprising number of young marriages do succeed. In one study, 85 percent of all 18- and 19-year-old brides were still living with their husbands five years later.¹³³ Another analysis finds that, among Whites, 75 percent of young pregnant women who married before the birth were still married ten years later.¹³⁴

In Frank Furstenberg's longitudinal study of a sample of mostly Black, poor, urban teen mothers in Baltimore, early marriages often played a role in helping teen mothers to avoid welfare dependency and achieve middle-class economic status. Overall, about 40 percent of these mothers married, either before or soon after the birth. Seventy percent of these marriages — all of which, let us remember, began with unwed pregnancies or births, among mostly disadvantaged women in troubled neighborhoods and had the bad fortune to be launched during a time in which the entire society was undergoing a profound divorce revolution — had ended in divorce or separation by the time the child had reached age 16. But interestingly enough, 30 percent of these marriages survived.¹³⁵

Teen marriages as a whole, especially those involving older teens, are significantly more likely to succeed than many Americans, including many experts, seem to believe.

For the child, the advantages of the mother's choice of marriage over unwed motherhood are impressive. Even brief marriages may yield benefits.

The Risks of Nonmarriage

Oddly enough in our gender-conscious era, our society's nearly categorical hostility to marriage for older pregnant teens, as well as our deep and growing skepticism about marriage for adult pregnant women in their early 20s, frequently fails to acknowledge the importance of gender differences. A young man who gets his girlfriend pregnant, but declines to marry on the grounds that he is too young, will typically enjoy ample opportunities in the coming years, as he "grows up," to enter into a lower-risk marriage with another woman. The same cannot be said for the girlfriend. Entering into single motherhood, as against marriage, is likely permanently to compromise her future prospects for marriage.

Even after controlling for family background and the young woman's own desire to marry, one major study finds that bearing a child out of wedlock dramatically reduces the likelihood that a young woman will ever marry. The negative effects are strongest for "older" young mothers; they are particularly strong for women in their early 20s.

Unwed mothers were just as likely as their childless peers to say, prior to pregnancy, that they expected to marry within five years. Yet whereas 45 percent of the women who both remained childless and expected to marry actually did marry within five years, only 28 percent of the unwed mothers who had expected to marry actually did marry. The researchers conclude: "Despite provocative conjectures to the contrary, it seems women generally are not having children nonmaritally as a response to poor marriage prospects. Rather, having a child outside of marriage appears to derail young women's existing plans."¹³⁶

Moreover, because the presence of biologically unrelated stepchildren in a home increases the risk of divorce, a single mother who eventually marries a man other than her child's father also faces a significantly greater likelihood of divorce. One scholar concludes: "several excellent studies provide unassailable documentation of the fact that premarital childbearing increases the risk of divorce in subsequent marriage but that, by itself, a premarital conception does not."¹³⁷

One study found that adolescents "who had a premarital conception and married before the birth are at no higher risk of separation than those who had a postmarital conception" but that "having a premarital birth . . . significantly increases the probability of marital dissolution."¹³⁸ According to another study, women who postpone both marriage and childbearing into their 20s end up with more stable marriages. But among Whites, women who had a child by age 18, but delayed marriage until their 20s, are no more likely to be in intact first marriages than are woman who both had a child and got married by age 18. Among Blacks, by contrast, women who had children by age 18 appear to do better if they postpone marriage.¹³⁹

A recent unpublished analysis of data from the 1995 National Survey of Family Growth found that the decrease in early marriage (before age 23) was the single most powerful explanation for the recent decline in divorce rates, confirming that teen marriages face an especially high risk of divorce. Still, about half of all marriages contracted by young adult teens do succeed, compared to about 70 percent

of first marriages that taking place at age 23 or older.¹⁴⁰ An earlier study found that, after controlling for family background, an early age at marriage appeared to increase the risk of divorce by much less than did cohabitation.¹⁴¹

Overall, from the perspective of maternal and child well-being, do the risks of nonmarriage outweigh the risks of early marriage? The evidence is admittedly mixed, but not so mixed as to justify our current blanket rejection of early marriage. Marriage significantly improves the well-being of adult women, especially mothers.¹⁴² For this reason, a young mother's failure or inability to marry her child's father will frequently elevate the economic, educational, psychological, and other risks facing her and her child. For many of these young women, marrying the baby's father represents not only their best chance for marital success, but also, after all, their only real chance to give their babies the gift of fatherhood.

*We should do much more
as a society to strengthen early
marriages undertaken to
legitimate a pregnancy.*

Marriage as Punishment?

Recent research on the effects of early marriage simply does not support the grim vision of young wives trapped in domesticity, having baby after baby until divorce or abandonment forces them into minimum wage labor or welfare dependence. If we as a society were able to view early marriage less as a punishment for mistakes, and more as a potential social good, we might be more successful in developing the family, religious, and community supports that would help young couples to build strong marriages.

The basic marital values of the surrounding community — what might be called our cultural stories of marriage — can make a big difference in shaping outcomes for young couples. In particular: “the vulnerability of early marriages due to inexperience, lack of preparation, unconsolidated identities, and problems carried over from families of origin is greatly increased by the failure of communities to provide the basic economic and human supports formerly offered by family networks.”¹⁴³ Clearly, very few institutional, policy, or cultural supports are available today either for young married couples or for unwed “fragile family” couples — a lack of societal support which stands in sharp contrast to the considerable public and private sector support that has emerged in recent decades to assist unwed mothers.

In particular, we as a society should make a much greater effort to strengthen early marriages undertaken to legitimate a pregnancy. Few such programs are currently in place. Maris Vinovskis reminds us: “Most service programs for adolescents who are pregnant focus almost exclusively on the needs of the teenage mother and her child . . . [W]e should also help those married couples who try to raise their children together. We should not forget another ‘truly disadvantaged’ person in our society today — the young man who accepts responsibility for fathering a child by marrying the adolescent mother and helping to rear the child.”¹⁴⁴

Young couples considering early marriage today are much more likely to encounter knee-jerk disapproval than balanced counseling. In current high school health textbooks, for example, students are repeatedly told that, with determination, a good attitude, and support from others, many single parents can overcome the problems they face and do a terrific job. No textbook, however, is even remotely as optimistic regarding the prospects of people who marry early.

How Old is Old Enough?

Melissa is 18 years old. Her son, Austin, is eight months old. They live in a mostly White, blue-collar community. Melissa's mother and stepfather live in "a nice house," says Melissa, although their family life has been marred by her stepfather's alcoholism and his periodically abusive behavior. Melissa is engaged to Sean, a 23-year-old chemical warfare inspector who works in the Bangor, Maine, National Guard. She has dated him for over four years, except for a brief but eventful interlude during which she broke up with Sean, got involved with Bobby, "this gangster kid from New York," and conceived Austin. Bobby left three days after learning that Melissa was pregnant.

Sean wants to adopt Austin and help to support the child financially. Melissa says she adores Sean. "I want to be with him," she says. "I've gotten two promise rings." So why isn't she married?

Right now, she does not believe that she is old enough to marry. "I'll be more ready in two years," she tells me. Melissa plans to become an ultrasound technician and "I want to get a two year degree in radiology." Melissa does not believe that she is too young to be a good mother.¹⁴⁵

Regarding marriage, how old is old enough? Most authorities today seem to agree with Melissa, and then some. Here is a current high school textbook: "In general, the older you are before you marry, the greater the probability your marriage will succeed, particularly if you are a woman . . . The chances of a successful marriage are even greater for a woman who marries when she is in her thirties."¹⁴⁶

Yet current evidence on this question suggests a more complex answer. While both teen marriages do face higher risks of divorce, recent research suggests that "little or nothing in the way of marital stability is to be gained by postponing marriage beyond about age 23 for women and age 25 for men."¹⁴⁷

Meanwhile, a growing number of middle-class teens agree with Melissa. They are convinced that they are mature enough to be good mothers, but too young to get married.¹⁴⁸ In this view, while there are both advantages and disadvantages to having a child when you are young, marriage is definitely something that you should do later, after you finish your education, when you can afford it, when you are older. Just because you jump ahead of your age group in one area, motherhood, doesn't mean that you should rush things when it comes to marriage.



At left:
Mother and Child
(1943) by Milton Avery.
Oil on canvas, 43.5 X
31.375 inches.
The DC Moore Gallery,
New York, NY.
©1999, Milton Avery
Trust/Artists Rights
Society (ARS), New
York, NY.

School-Age Mothers and the Wisdom of Mainstreaming

ODDLY ENOUGH, although most teen births are to young women who are either 18 or 19 years old, and therefore either past the typical high school age or nearly past it, most programs to prevent teen births are aimed at high school and junior high school students. Consequently, school officials today play a major role in crafting and passing on the messages about teen pregnancy that society wants young people to hear. Moreover, school officials must necessarily develop and implement policies regarding students who become pregnant. Since the early 1970s, the dominant trend in school policies affecting pregnant and parenting students has been what is often called “mainstreaming.” This policy is reinforced, and to some degree even required, by a U.S. federal statute. The policy’s main objective is to improve the graduation rates of pregnant and parenting students by encouraging them to remain in their regular schools.

Until the late 1960s, the almost universal response to teen pregnancy in public schools was expulsion. Although expulsion reflected the strong social stigma attached to premarital sexuality and unwed childbearing, the general policy also typically applied to married students as well as to teachers who were pregnant and beginning to “show.” But by the late 1960s and early 1970s, a number of large urban school districts, as well as a handful of states, were overturning this policy, taking concrete steps to keep pregnant students enrolled in school.¹⁴⁹

As recently as the early 1970s, most states still viewed these matters as best handled locally, by the various school districts. At the same time, a trend did emerge during this period in which some states sought to intervene, as one authority put it at the time, “with regard to whether or not a [pregnant] girl will receive an education and what kind of education she will receive.”¹⁵⁰ During this time, Florida and Michigan passed laws liberalizing the treatment of pregnant teens; Maryland and California used administrative by-laws to improve services to pregnant teens; and in Pennsylvania, rulings by the state attorney general sought to improve the educational environment for pregnant teens.¹⁵¹

Moreover, by 1973, more than 200 local school systems in the United States had created programs to encourage school-age pregnant girls and young mothers to continue their education, obtain prenatal care, and engage in group counseling “to help solve problems that either may have led to or been caused by the pregnancy.” Most of these programs offered young mothers a “regular educational program in a special setting.”¹⁵²

Meanwhile, at the federal level, a growing tendency to advocate for school-age pregnancy policies in the language of “rights” coincided with, and to some degree helped to advance, the emerging push nationally for mainstreaming. Here is Sydney P. Marland, Jr., President Richard Nixon’s assistant secretary of education: “Every girl in the United States has a right to and a need for the education that will help her prepare herself for a career, for family life, and for citizenship. To be married or pregnant is not a sufficient cause to deprive her of an education . . . The U.S. Office of Education strongly urges school systems to provide continuing education for girls

who become pregnant. Most pregnant girls are physically able to remain in their regular classes during most of their pregnancy.”¹⁵³

In 1972, Congress waded into the fray, creating, through Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, new federal law governing school policies toward pregnant students. Actually, in the Congressional debates surrounding adoption of Title IX, we find no mention of mainstreaming pregnant students. Congressional attention focused primarily on the potential effect of the new gender equity language on athletic and physical education programs, especially football teams, and on school busing.¹⁵⁴ Today, as well, Title IX generates much more attention and controversy for its impact on girls’ sports than its impact on unwed teen childbearing.¹⁵⁵

Yet with Title IX, mainstreaming pregnant teens became more than a growing educational trend. It became the law of the land. Three years later, when the implementing regulations were announced, it became clear that the government had created something very close to a national right to teen motherhood. On pain of losing federal funding, U.S. schools were prohibited from treating pregnant students — or teachers or administrators — any differently than those who are not pregnant. In this respect, Title IX both reflected and legislated the emerging new expert consensus that our society must dismantle all remaining institutional traces of disapproval for unwed childbearing.

“Habilitation and rehabilitation are difficult to achieve within the context of a value system that views the client as bad or evil,” argued a proponent of mainstreaming in 1975. Taking a pregnant girl out of her regular school deprives her of her “civil rights,” her “peer group, friends, and significant adults,” and her “extracurricular activities.”¹⁵⁶

“Continuing in school is a key point in breaking the ‘unwed mother cycle,’” said a group of scholars in 1979: “A comprehensive, non-judgmental, interdisciplinary program of educational, social, and medical services administered in a sympathetic and loving manner is very important to pregnant adolescents . . . A separate school setting exclusively for pregnant adolescents may result in the [sic] increased feelings of isolation. Moreover, a special school may present problems because duplication of facilities and personnel deprive regular schools of resources. We concur with others who feel ‘It is helpful for the girl to stay in her own school, with her own friends, in the mainstream of adolescent growth.’”¹⁵⁷

Today, this basic idea — that mainstreaming represents compassion, while separate programs represent punishment — remains influential. As one scholar put it in 1998, using child care or other incentives to encourage pregnant girls to attend special schools or programs is “overtly a kind of stigmatized tracking,” intended largely to create a “curriculum of [male] domination.”¹⁵⁸

Because the debate is typically framed as one of compassion versus punishment and stigma, surprisingly few scholars have sought to answer the basic empirical questions. First, do pregnant girls do better or worse when they are mainstreamed?

*Do pregnant girls do
better or worse when
they are
mainstreamed?*

Second, does the presence of pregnant students in regular classrooms encourage other students to become teen parents?

We located one scholarly attempt to answer this second question. In this small study, most students said that a pregnant classmate either does not affect, or actually decreases, their own desire to have a child. About 11 percent reported that having a pregnant classmate increased their desire to have a child. This finding comports with the view, frequently expressed by school officials, that allowing students to observe firsthand the difficulties of teen motherhood may act as a disincentive to early childbearing.

On the other hand, the minority of teens who said that observing a pregnant student made them want to have a child were precisely those teens who were already most at risk of a school-age birth: poor students with low educational aspirations who are taking few steps to prevent pregnancy.¹⁵⁹

For these at-risk students, the issue of who constitutes their peer circle at school may be significant. As one study reports: “peers are a critical component in influencing adolescent pregnancy risk-taking behavior. Peers can be both a tremendous source of support and pressure for adolescents.”¹⁶⁰ Students merely sitting next to pregnant teens may not be at increased risk. But the pregnant girl’s own social circle may well be.

IS MAINSTREAMING compassionate? More specifically, does mainstreaming improve educational outcomes for pregnant and parenting students? Current research is far from definitive, but it is suggestive. For example, one national study finds that teen moms who attended vocational programs — which sometimes (but not always) serve as special programs for pregnant teens — were almost twice as likely as similar teen moms in regular schools to graduate.¹⁶¹

More generally, there is nothing inherent in the policy of mainstreaming that produces an especially charitable or compassionate attitude toward pregnant teens. In the wake of Title IX, for example, some school officials who shut down special schools for pregnant teens rallied local support by arguing that separate schools “cost the taxpayer money and reward girls for their bad behavior.”¹⁶² Theresa Smith, an attorney from Tennessee who works with victims of domestic violence, also recently represented a young mother who was expelled from high school for poor attendance. According to Smith, girls in this school with morning sickness, child care problems, or health or welfare appointments are frequently harassed, or at least frequently feel harassed. Some drop out. Some are suspended. Because pregnancy creates special needs and obstacles, strictly or formally equal treatment may actually hinder pregnant and parenting students from doing well in school and may discourage them from staying in school.

Even when schools attempt to accommodate the needs of pregnant teens with counseling, medical, and other services, the girls themselves often say that they feel uncomfortable. An almost universal finding among interviews with pregnant teens and service providers is the sense of relief that teens find in the company of other young mothers-to-be, who understand what they are going through. Says Smith, the

attorney from Tennessee: “Girls were embarrassed about getting stuck in desk chairs. They have to go to the bathroom a lot and they need to eat in the classroom. . . Imagine being 16 years old and getting stuck in the chair!”¹⁶³

“When you say ‘mainstream’ it sounds right. It has a catchy ‘we’re-very-inclusive, we-don’t-judge-you,’ ring to it,” says Nancy Apfel, who has studied the Polly T. McCabe School in New Haven, Connecticut, an alternative school for pregnant students and their children. “But picture going up the staircase in a large urban high school, eight months pregnant, with those big male high school students barreling down.” Girls from the McCabe school “often speak about the comfort of being with each other, in a place where everybody is in the same boat. That theme comes through.”¹⁶⁴

Recent research confirms the importance of the central goal of Title IX: keeping pregnant teens in school through the pregnancy and early postpartum period. For example, continuous schooling reduces the likelihood that a teen mother will have a second, closely spaced teen birth. But what kind of educational approach is most likely to keep young mothers enrolled in school?

The most poorly performing regular-school students are the ones who reap the greatest benefits from McCabe.

The Polly T. McCabe Experience

The McCabe school functions as a short-term “crisis intervention” program for pregnant girls — an example of the type of program that was more common in the era prior to Title IX-mandated mainstreaming.

Girls transfer to McCabe soon after their pregnancy becomes known. Interventions focus around reducing medical complications and in other ways improving the early postpartum functioning of mother and child. A 20-year study of the effects of the Polly T. McCabe experience shows that this separate school, according to the researchers Nancy Apfel and Victoria Seitz, “functioned as an excellent dropout prevention program for students who had been ‘D’ and ‘F’ students prior to their pregnancy.” If girls spent more than one semester at McCabe, educational success rates improved. Moreover: “If students were allowed to remain in the program approximately two months postnatally, then five years later, more than half of them still had not had a second child.”¹⁶⁵

These findings are important because the structure of the McCabe experience allowed a “natural experiment” to take place. All students return to their regular schools soon after the birth of their child. And since the school does not operate during the summer, students who get pregnant in the fall typically attend the school for longer periods of time than do students who get pregnant in the winter or early spring.

Researchers found that the longer a pregnant girl attends McCabe, the better she does. Moreover, the most poorly performing regular-school students are the ones who reap the greatest benefits from the McCabe experience. About 17 percent of pregnant teens who had attended McCabe for only one quarter were educationally successful — defined as either having graduated from high school or being currently

enrolled in high school — two years later. But 80 percent of the students who had attended for four quarters were educationally successful two years later.¹⁶⁶ Because length of attendance at McCabe is not voluntary, what scholars call “selection effects” (the likelihood that the more motivated students would attend for longer periods of time) are unlikely to be present in these findings. Consequently, sending these girls back to their regular schools “appears to exact a cost with respect to educational outcomes . . . as well as with respect to the prevention of rapid repeated childbearing.”¹⁶⁷

As few as six or seven weeks of additional attendance at McCabe significantly reduces the likelihood that these mostly poor, Black young mothers will have a second child within two years. What makes the difference? About 30 percent of those students with seven or more weeks at McCabe report they are not sexually active 18 months postpartum, compared to 8 percent of those students who had attended for less than seven weeks. These effects seem to last. After five years, about 45 percent of those with more than seven weeks at McCabe had had a second child, compared to 70 percent of those who had attended for less than seven weeks.¹⁶⁸

WHAT MADE the McCabe program effective? Seitz and Apfel: “Small class sizes, nurturance, personalized guidance, and mentoring.”¹⁶⁹ The value of mentoring is supported by a 1995 study of welfare-to-work programs. In the area of encouraging teen mothers to complete high school, the most successful intervention was “close monitoring of teenage mothers’ educational activities with follow-up when their attendance drops . . .”¹⁷⁰ Teen mothers need what all teens need, only more so: close adult attention guidance and support, which is often not available for pregnant girls in regular schools.

When it comes to postponing rapid repeat childbearing, a single-sex environment may also help. In particular, it may reduce the pressure to resume dating quickly, during an emotionally vulnerable period — both competitive pressure from other girls and direct pressure from boys and young men who may view young mothers as “easy.” Says a school-age mother in New York: “People call you a whore.”¹⁷¹ Says another young mother from Maine: “They know I have had sex.. Every guy expects me to have it, because they know I’ve had it. And I don’t feel special to anybody.”¹⁷²

The more needy and vulnerable the student, the more important the McCabe experience: “[F]or poorer students, neither continued residence with the mother nor child care help from relatives was associated with greater educational success. Evidently, for students who already have a history of serious school failure, even help from their families will not lead them to return to school and remain there. Students at high scholastic risk appear to require a specialized school program.”¹⁷³

Seitz and Apfel believe that small schools-within-schools — a separate classroom that keeps pregnant students together for most of the school day — may work as well as separate schools such as McCabe. Smaller school districts that lack the funds, or the number of pregnant students, to justify a separate school might, according to these scholars, benefit from this approach.

In interviews with these girls, the human dimension comes through vividly: “In their thirties [teen moms who had attended McCabe] remember that time as a time in which they had some academic success. Twenty years later, they’ll ask me, ‘Is the poem I wrote still up on the bulletin board?’”¹⁷⁴

The Edgar Allan Poe School

Another separate school for pregnant girls created in the pre-Title-IX era is Baltimore’s Edgar Allan Poe School. Founded in 1966, the Poe School was created partly in response to the concerns of local physicians regarding poor medical outcomes for many school-age pregnant teens.¹⁷⁵ At one time, the school district required all pregnant students to attend Poe. After Title IX, attendance became voluntary.

Much of the focus is on health: improved nutrition, better medical care, regular evaluations by physicians, and counseling from school nurses. Early research showed that attending Poe significantly improved medical outcomes for mothers and their children. As was the case with McCabe, the most at-risk students — in this case, the youngest students — seemed to benefit the most.¹⁷⁶

In his long-term study of a cohort of Baltimore teen mothers and their children, Frank Furstenberg and his colleagues found that even a relatively brief attendance at the Poe School during a pregnancy produces benefits that could be measured years later: “Women who attended Edgar Allan Poe School, a special school for pregnant teens, were much more likely to be economically well-off in adulthood than women who either dropped out or remained in their regular school program.”¹⁷⁷ Poe students were also “over two times more likely to be using birth control a year after the study child was born” and significantly less likely to be on welfare 17 years later, even controlling for students’ educational aspirations and performance.¹⁷⁸

Girls who attended Poe did better than mainstreamed girls: “Students who attended regular school were less successful than the Poe matriculants in avoiding welfare, though they clearly did better than the women who dropped out of school in the first year after delivery. In sum, results of the multivariate analysis indicated that the special school for pregnant girls had a decidedly positive effect on preventing disadvantage in later life over and above the regular school program, and that this effect cannot be merely explained by selective recruitment into the school.”¹⁷⁹

How big a difference does the Poe School make? According to estimates by Furstenberg and colleagues, if *none* of Baltimore’s pregnant students had attended Poe, about one-third of them would have been on welfare 17 years later. If *all* of Baltimore’s pregnant students had attended, an estimated 11 percent of them would have been on welfare 17 years later: “The difference is sizable, especially considering that it is net of family background, motivation and academic performance.”¹⁸⁰

*“I had broken up
with my boyfriend.
I wanted to be out of
that school.”*

In 1976, pregnant high school students in New York City actually staged a demonstration at City Hall to protest the phasing out of five special schools for pregnant girls.¹⁸¹

We spoke with several young mothers who had attended separate schools. Kristi is an example of what may be called the new face of teen pregnancy. She grew up in a blue-collar Long Island town with parents who got and stayed married. At age 15, Kristi got pregnant. The school counselor suggested that she attend TAPPS, a separate school for pregnant teens in Seaford, Long Island, and Kristi agreed. Why? Support from peers, more flexible attendance policies, and day care: “At TAPPS, I felt more comfortable, because all the other girls were pregnant or had babies. They also had a nursery, and six weeks maternity leave. My regular school principal wouldn’t have given that to me.” Also: “The teachers were very helpful. The classes were smaller, so you got more help. If you felt sick, they were more lenient and understanding with you. The education was just as good.” Kristi had another reason, too: “I had broken up with my boyfriend. I wanted to be out of that school.” This situation may be more common, and more important, that researchers so far have realized.¹⁸²

The impressive results from schools such as Poe and McCabe suggest that school districts should seriously consider creating or expanding these types of special schools for pregnant students, and encouraging students to remain in them for longer periods of time. Yet the great danger is that the currently reigning philosophy of mainstreaming, now codified nationally in Title IX, but increasingly called into question by the empirical evidence, will continue to dampen local initiative and thwart innovation.

*At left:
Child's Supper (1945)
by Milton Avery. Oil on
canvas, 36 X 48 inches.
The New Britain
Museum of American
Art, New Britain, CT.
Gift of
Roy R. Neuberger.
Photograph by Michael
Agee. ©1999, Milton
Avery Trust/Artists
Rights Society (ARS),
New York, NY.*



Recommendations

THE TEEN pregnancy problem in our society is inseparable from a much larger marriage problem. Changing *adult* ideas about marriage and its relationship to procreation have directly guided the entire cluster of trends in teen behavior — including rising rates of unmarried sex, weak motivation to use contraceptives, rising ages at marriage, and sharp declines in both legitimation and adoption — that we currently describe, somewhat misleadingly, as our crisis of teen pregnancy.

Some three decades into the divorce revolution, we Americans have much less faith in the idea that marriage changes reality: that the institution is bigger than the couple and that the institution can, independently, as it were, help guide the couple toward a successful union. Most of our parents and grandparents had that faith. Many of us are losing it. Many of our teenage children would not even recognize the idea.

For a young woman today who does not see marriage as an essential support to her motherhood, or who does not foresee much possibility of making a good marriage in the future, the decision to become a single mother at age 18 or 19 is not especially irrational or hard to understand. If it is not marriage that confers special meaning to the sexual act, then perhaps it is her giving the gift of unprotected sex, or making a baby. If it is not marriage that a young woman is waiting for before becoming a mother, then how much difference will a few more years of waiting really make?

To a degree that might make many of us uncomfortable, when young women today prefer unwed motherhood over adoption or early marriage, they have not been ignoring adult counsel. They have been heeding it.

Why should a teenager postpone having a baby? What our society as a whole, and especially our “teen pregnancy” rhetoric, currently tells these young people — until you reach age 20, having a baby is a huge mistake, as is getting married, but after that, it’s up to you — is not likely to capture their moral imagination. Does it capture yours?

Surely we can give our young people a better answer. Something like: Wait to have a baby until the father of your child has publicly pledged eternal constancy. Wait until you love a man so much you that are willing to commit yourself to him for life, not just in your heart, but in broad daylight, in front of a minister or judge. Wait to have a baby until you have *already* formed a new family, headed by a mother and father who love each other and who, together, will love and protect their baby. Wait to have a baby until your sexual love has been recognized by your community and blessed by God.

If we as a society decided to embrace that answer, or at least move further toward it, what specifically might we consider doing? Here are 16 recommendations.

1. Retire the term “teen pregnancy” from our public discourse. As a popular name for a serious social problem, the term has outlived its usefulness. It now obscures more than it reveals. In some respects, the phrase has become a standing invitation to avert our eyes from the actual problem: the society-wide weakening of marriage as a childrearing institution. How about “unwed parenthood” as a substitute?

2. Put an emphasis on marriage, not just age, at the center of all of our efforts and programs in the area of teen sexuality and teen pregnancy. When a teenager is postponing having a baby, what is she waiting for? Having more of our young people answer, “a good marriage,” should become our highest priority. Similarly, when we ask young people, “Would you personally consider having a child without being married?”, our primary objective should be to increase the proportion of young people who firmly answer “no.” We should reform existing programs, and create new ones, in light of this newly embraced goal.

3. Focus our discussions with pregnant teenagers more directly on the best interests of the child. Such an emphasis on the child is ethically important. Moreover, considerable research suggests that girls and young women are more likely to be influenced by adult counseling that addresses the question, “What is best for my child?”, than by counseling that dwells exclusively on the hardships faced by young single mothers, or on other versions of the question, “What is best for me?”

4. In discussions with teenagers, recognize them for who they are: moral and social persons. They are more — we are all more — than isolated individuals whose only responsibility is to make private choices. The decision to become a teen mother should not be accepted or portrayed by adults as essentially a matter of personal preference, not least because the girl who makes the decision is unlikely to be the only one who pays a price. We should ask boys and girls to consider not only what is best for them, but also what is best for the child, the child’s other parent, and their own parents, as well as what their moral and religious traditions teach about these questions. The teen years are often a period of intense ethical reflection and moral idealism. So be it.

5. Conceive of new policies affecting teen pregnancy and pregnant teens as directive, not punitive. Girls and young women who get pregnant do not need punishment, but they do need clear adult guidance regarding what might benefit them and what might compromise their own and their child’s well-being. “[T]he less effective curriculums,” concludes a review of 23 school-based sex education initiatives for teens, “tended to use a decision-making model in which the

decision-making steps were taught . . . and students were implicitly instructed to make their own decisions.” By contrast, “effective curriculums” presented “a clear stand and emphasized clear behavioral values and norms.”¹⁸³

6. The U.S. Congress should reform Title IX of the Educational Amendments Act of 1972, so that federal law as it applies to pregnant and parenting students no longer defines all “differential treatment” as unlawful “discrimination.” Federal law should continue explicitly to recognize the right of all pregnant teens to an education. However, federal law should no longer interfere, as it currently does, with the efforts of local school districts to deliver services to pregnant teens more effectively, and to experiment with alternative programs, including separate schools, schools-within-schools, and other initiatives that, consistent with the right of all teens to an education, recognize and seek to reflect local community norms regarding unwed childbearing.¹⁸⁴

7. As part of its reform of Title IX as that law applies to pregnant and parenting teens, the U.S. Congress should make local school districts corporately, rather than school board members personally, financially liable for Title IX violations. The current environment, in which individual board members may be liable, may have an unnecessarily chilling effect on the pace, and even the possibility, of local reform aimed at both providing a good education for every young person and reducing the incidence of unwed teen childbearing.

8. Reassess mainstreaming as the policy of choice for pregnant girls. Pregnant girls appear to do better in separate schools, and school districts interested in helping them succeed should consider expanding these programs. Special schools for pregnant girls are more expensive than mainstreaming, but they seem to pay off in better education, less welfare dependence, and reduced repeat childbearing. Smaller school districts could adopt the school-within-a-school approach. Congress should consider increasing federal funding for these schools.

9. Universities, foundations, and government should sponsor more research into what approaches — mainstreaming, separate schools, home tutoring, distance learning academies, adult learning centers, vocational programs — produce the best educational and overall results for pregnant teens.

10. Expand and develop new marriage education and marriage mentoring programs in schools, churches, and community groups to help teen couples with children, as well as other young adult couples, build healthy marriages. Every federal agency and state program that relates to young unwed mothers should make young unwed couples aware of, and offer to refer them to, community and church based marriage-building programs.

11. Put Norplant at the forefront of programs aimed at increasing contraceptive use among at-risk teens. “At risk” means unmarried girls and young women who have either been pregnant, already had a baby, or received a negative pregnancy test. Young women equally determined to be sexually active and to avoid pregnancy are entitled to know the scientific evidence: when it comes to reducing pregnancy risk, teens on Norplant are about five times less likely to get pregnant than teens using the Pill.

12. The U.S. Congress should eliminate the marriage penalty currently embedded in the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and in other U.S. tax and public policies. In particular, in formulating welfare, poverty, child support, and foster care policies affecting low-income families, policy makers seldom consider the likely effects of these policies on marriage formation. Many of our public policies currently contain financial disincentives for low-income and working-class mothers to marry.

13. Increase the legal authority of adult custodial parents regarding the parenting decisions of younger teens. Currently, we as a society routinely release infants to the care and custody of girls who are too young to drive a car or vote. The girl’s parents, who may disapprove of early or unmarried childbearing, are effectively forced into supporting whatever decision the girl makes, since any alternative would leave legally unprotected both their child and their grandchild. State legislatures should consider requiring a minor, or at least a girl who is under age 16, to obtain the commitment of a parent or other adult to serve as her baby’s legal guardian before the baby is released from the hospital into her custody.

14. For older pregnant teens, develop a message that reflects a more nuanced and supportive attitude toward the possibility of early marriage. Much of the research presented in this report suggests that, if the alternative to marriage is becoming an unwed teen mother, or an unwed 20-year-old mother, then marriage, in many cases, deserves a closer look. Developing a more articulate and compassionate attitude toward early marriage is important not only regarding the decisions that pregnant teenagers must make, but also because the values about marriage that adults convey to teenagers may eventually impact the values and behavior of young people in their 20s and beyond.

15. The U.S. Congress should require the federal government to collect and maintain accurate data on domestic and foreign adoptions in the United States. One reason why adoption has been the focus of so little research, and so little civic and programmatic effort, is that reliable national data on adoption are not available. Accurate data are the necessary precursor for discovering what, if any, programs might be more effective in increasing the willingness of young, unmarried girls and women to place their babies for adoption.

16. Add a clear adoption option to all teen pregnancy and sex education programs and curricula. Anti-teen-pregnancy programs rarely attempt to influence the post-pregnancy choices of adolescents. “We found only one empirical evaluation of a pregnancy resolution program,” report Kristin Moore and her colleagues in a 1995 evaluation of teen pregnancy programs. This program, instituted in 1989 among 29 Adolescent Family Life Care demonstration projects across the country, emphasized pregnancy counseling aimed at encouraging adoption. Participants were more than five times more likely to place a child for adoption than were similar non-participants, even though the great majority of pregnant teens who did not abort and did not marry chose to keep their child.¹⁸⁵ Adoption rates have fallen so low that simply bringing up the subject with pregnant teens would probably boost the proportion of young women and girls willing to consider adoption. If the proportion of single pregnant girls and women who released their babies for adoption could be returned even to the level of 1980 — seven percent — more than 50,000 more babies each year would benefit from being raised by two married parents.

Endnotes

1. Theodora Ooms, "Introduction" in *Teenage Pregnancy in a Family Context: Implications for Policy*, ed. Theodora Ooms (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1981), 9-48. For a more critical view of the social construction of a teen pregnancy epidemic in the 1970s, see Maris A. Vinovskis, "The Use and Misuse of Social Science Analysis in Federal Adolescent Policy" Distinguished Lectures in the Social Science (De Kalb, IL, Northern Illinois University, November 1989): 1-33; Maris A. Vinovskis, "An 'Epidemic' of Adolescent Pregnancy? Some Historical Considerations," *Journal of Family History* 6, (summer 1981): 205-30.

2. Based on birth rates for unmarried girls and women between the ages of 15 and 19. Calculations of proportional increase by Maggie Gallagher. Stephanie Ventura et al., "Births: Final Data for 1997" *National Vital Statistics Reports* 47, no. 18 (April 29, 1999): Table 18.

3. Stephanie Ventura et al., *op. cit.*

4. Just under 96 percent of non-Hispanic Black teen births (ages 15-19) are to unmarried mothers (see Table 17), which means for Blacks, the unmarried teen birth rate and the teen birth rate differ little. Stephanie Ventura et al., *op. cit.*

5. Rebekah Saul, "Teen Pregnancy: Progress Meets Politics," *The Guttmacher Report on Public Policy* 2, no. 3 (June 1999): 6-9.

6. Calculations of percentage increase by Maggie Gallagher. Douglas Kirby, "Reflections on Two Decades of Research on Teen Sexual Behavior and Pregnancy," *Journal of School Health* 69, no. 3, (March 1999).

7. Stephanie Ventura et al., *op. cit.* See Table 17.

8 Douglas Kirby, *op. cit.*

9 Calculations of percentage increase by Maggie Gallagher. Stephanie Ventura et al., *op. cit.* See Table 18.

10. Jennifer Manlove, Carrie Mariner, and Angela Romano, *Subsequent Fertility Among Teen Mothers: Longitudinal Analyses of Recent National Data* (Washington DC, Child Trends, October 7, 1998). See Appendix A.

11. Even after controlling for income, education, and other family and neighborhood characteristics. See, for example, Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur, *Growing Up With a Single Parent: What Helps, What Hurts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994); Kristin A. Moore, Jennifer Manlove, Dana A. Gleib, and Donna R. Morrison, "Nonmarital School-Age Motherhood: Family, Individual and School Characteristics," *Journal of Adolescent Research* 13, no. 4 (October 1998): 433-37.

12. About a quarter of Black teen moms lived in intact families in the 8th grade. Jennifer Manlove, Carrie Mariner, and Angela Romano, "Subsequent Fertility," *op. cit.*

13. Stephanie Ventura et al., *op. cit.* See Table 17. Calculations by Maggie Gallagher.

14. Calculations by Maggie Gallagher. Stephanie Ventura et al., *op. cit.* See Table 17. One 1999 study (of earlier birth cohorts) also finds that birth intervals among teen mothers are "quite similar" to mothers aged 20-24. Furthermore, in the most recent cohort studied, White women who had their first birth at ages 18 or 19 had the same total completed family size as women who had their first birth in their early 20s. S. Philip Morgan and Ronald R. Rindfuss, "Reexamining the Link of Early Childbearing to Marriage and to Subsequent Fertility," *Demography* 36, no. 1 (February 1999): 59-75.

15. The birth rate for Black women in their late teens has dropped since 1991, while the birth rate for unmarried Black women ages 20 to 24 has fluctuated over the last few

years. In 1997, it was 127.8 births per 1000 women, down sharply since its peak in 1991 of 144.3, but rising gently from its low in 1996 of 125.8. Stephanie Ventura et al., *op. cit.* See Table 18.

16. *Ibid.* See Table 17.

17. Saul D. Hoffman, "Teenage Childbearing Is Not So Bad After All . . . Or is It? A Review of the New Literature." *Family Planning Perspectives* 30, no. 5 (September/October 1998): 236ff.

18. Marguerite Stevenson Barratt et al., "Adjustment to Motherhood by Single Adolescents," *Family Relations* 45, no. 2 (April 1996): 209ff.

19. For a review of this literature, see Saul D. Hoffman, *op. cit.*

20. Teen mothers refers to both married and unmarried teen moms. E. Michael Foster, et.al., "The Economic Impact of Nonmarital childbearing: How Are Older Single Mothers Faring?" *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 60 no. 1 (February 1998): 163-174.

21. For poverty and drop out rates, see Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur, *op. cit.*, 23-24 and 40-46. On crime, see, for example, Cynthia C. Harper and Sara S. McLanahan, "Father Absence and Youth Incarceration," paper presented to the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association (San Francisco, August 1998). See also Ross Matsueda and Karen Hemier, "Race, Family Structure and Delinquency: A Test of Differential Association and Social Control Theories," *American Sociological Review* 52, no. 6 (1987): 826-40.

22. Martin Daly and Margo Wilson, "Evolutionary Psychology and Marital Conflict: The Relevance of Stepchildren," in *Sex, Power, Conflict: Evolutionary and Feminist Perspectives*, ed. David M. Buss and Neil Malamuth (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 9-28.

23. Lingxin Hao, "Family Structure, Parental Input, and Child Development," paper presented to the Population Association of America (March 1997): 27-28.

24. Urie Bronfenbrenner, "Discovering What Families Do," in *Rebuilding the Nest: A New Commitment to the American Family*, ed. David Blankenhorn, Steven Bayme, and Jean Bethke Elshtain (Milwaukee, WI: Family Service America, 1990), 34.

25. Kristin A. Moore et al., "Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Programs: Interventions and Evaluations," (Washington, DC: Child Trends, June 1995), 55.

26. Dana A. Gleib, "Measuring Contraceptive Use Patterns Among Teenage and Adult Women," *Family Planning Perspectives* 31, no. 2 (March/April 1999): 73-80.

27. Rates of contraceptive failure are similar for women in their early and late 20s. For example, the pregnancy rate among 20- to 24-year-old Pill users who are single, not cohabiting, with incomes less than twice the poverty level is 11.7 percent; for condom users it is 21.7 percent. ("Poor and working class teens" are those with incomes less than twice the poverty level; middle class teens have family incomes more than twice the poverty level.) See Haishan Fu et al., "Contraceptive Failure Rates: New Estimates from the 1995 National Survey of Family Growth," *Family Planning Perspectives* 31, no. 2 (March/April 1999). See Table 2. Updated data from online version available at www.agi-usa.org/pubs/journals/3105699.html.

28. Jacqueline E. Darroch et al., "Pregnancy Rates Among U.S. Women and Their Partners in 1994," *Family Planning Perspectives* 31, no. 3 (May/June 1999): 122ff.

29. James Trussell and Barbara Vaughan, "Contraceptive Failure, Method-Related Discontinuation and Resumption of Use: Results from the 1995 National Survey of Family Growth," *Family Planning Perspectives* 31, no. 2 (March/April, 1999): 64ff.

30. Douglas Kirby, *op. cit.*

31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*
33. Catherine Stevens-Simon and Lisa Kelly, "Correlates and Consequences of Early Removal of Levonorgestrel Implants Among Teenaged Mothers," *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine* 152, no. 9 (September 1998): 893ff.
34. M. Polanecsky et al., "The Use of Levonorgestrel implants (Norplant) for contraception in adolescent mothers," *New England Journal of Medicine* 331, no. 18 (1994): 1201-6, in Kristin A. Moore et al., "Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Programs," *op. cit.*, page C-174.
35. Rebekah Saul, *op.cit.*
36. Victoria Seitz and Nancy Apfel, "Sibship Spacing Affects Life Outcomes of Children of Adolescent Mothers," paper presented at the Society for Research in Child Development, (Albuquerque, NM, April 17, 1999). Available from Victoria.Seitz@yale.edu.
37. Kristin A. Moore et al., "Adolescent Sex, Contraception, and Childbearing: A Review of Recent Research," (Washington, DC: Child Trends, June 1995), see Figure II-b.
38. *Ibid.*
39. *Ibid.*, 21-38.
40. Research found mixed results from parent-child communication about sex — until researchers started pinpointing what parents were saying about sex. Chats with parents about sex lowers teen sexual behavior only when parents disapprove. See, for example, Kristin A. Moore et al., "Parental Attitudes and the Occurrence of Early Sexual Activity," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 48 (1986): 37-46.
41. When teens reported good relationships with mothers, and also reported that mothers did not discuss birth control, they were twelve times more likely to be virgins. See James Jaccard et al., "Maternal Correlates of Adolescent Sexual and Contraceptive Behavior," *Family Planning Perspectives* 28, no. 4 (July/August 1996): 159ff.
42. See, for example, Charles W. Warren et al., "Sexual Behavior Among U.S. High School Students, 1990-1995," *Family Planning Perspectives* 30, no. 4 (July/August 1998): 170ff.
43. Rebekah Saul, *op.cit.*
44. Amara Bachu, "Trends in Marital Status of U.S. Women at First Birth, 1930-1994," Population Division Working Paper No. 20, (Washington, DC: Population Division, U.S. Bureau of the Census, March 1998). See Table 3. Includes only teens who had a live birth.
45. Kristin Moore et al., "Adolescent Sex, Contraception, and Childbearing," *op. cit.*, see Figure IV-H.
46. Amara Bachu, *op. cit.*, see Table 3. Includes only teens who had a live birth.
47. Stephanie Ventura, *op. cit.*, see Table 17.
48. Kristin A. Moore, "Adolescent Sex, Contraception, and Childbearing," *op. cit.*, see Figure IV-I.
49. *Ibid.*, see Figure IV-K.
50. Amara Bachu, *op. cit.*, see Table 3.
51. G. Zellman, C. N. Feifer, A. Hirsch, *Access to and Use of Vocational Education in Teen Parent Programs*, (RAND Corporation, 1992): 2. Available online at www.rand.org.
52. Kristin A. Moore et al, "Adolescent Sex, Contraception, and Childbearing," *op. cit.*, see Figure IV-G.
53. Kristin A. Moore et al., "Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Programs," 31.
54. *Ibid.*, 55.
55. Dave Condren, "Catholic Charities Program Gives Teen Mother Another Chance,"

Buffalo News, March 11, 1996, B1. Emphasis added.

56. Deidre M. Kelly, "Stigma Stories: Four Discourses about Teen Mothers, Welfare, and Poverty," *Youth and Society* 27, no. 4 (June 1996): 421-449.

57. Joanna Gregson Higginson, "Competitive Parenting: The Culture of Teen Mothers," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 60, (February 1998): 135-50.

58. Jerrold Greenberg and Robert Gold, *Health*, (Austin, TX: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1994), 374-75.

59. Mary McGrath, personal communication with the author.

60. Carl N. D'Onfrio and Ruth Rich, *Discover: Decisions for Your Health*, (Circle Pines, MN: American Guidance Service, Inc., 1993), 383.

61. James Brooke, "An Old Law Chastises Pregnant Teen-Agers," *New York Times*, October 28, 1996, A10.

62. Frances Sienkiewicz Sizer, Eleanor Noss Whitney, and Linda Kelly DeBruyne, *Making Life Choices: Health Skills and Concepts* (Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN: West Publishing Company, 1994), 536.

63. Naomi B. Farber, "The Process of Pregnancy Resolution Among Adolescent Mothers," *Adolescence* 26, no. 103 (fall 1991): 697ff.

64. For an argument about the rationality of childbearing as an effort to cut off these choices (and thus eliminate the risk of uncertainty) see Debra Friedman et al., "A Theory of the Value of Children," *Demography* 31, no. 3 (August 1994): 375-401.

65. Barbara W. Sugland et al., *Understanding Adolescents' Motivation to Prevent Pregnancy: A Literature Review*, (Washington DC: Child Trends, September 1996), 16.

66. Marguerite Stevenson Barratt et al., *op. cit.*

67. Lena Williams, "Pregnant Teen-Agers are Outcasts No Longer," *New York Times*, December 2, 1993, C1.

68. Debra Kalmuss et al., "Adoption Versus Parenting Among Young Pregnant Women," *Family Planning Perspectives* 23, no. 1 (January/February 1991): 17-23.

69. Edmund V. Mech, "Pregnant Adolescents: Communicating the Adoption Option," *Child Welfare* LXV, no. 6 (November/December 1986): 555-67. See Table 1. Black pregnant teens evinced less support for all reasons (though much more than current rates of adoption would suggest), but in general ranked the arguments in the same order as White pregnant teens; Adolescents of both races placed a higher value on their own education than on finances, though not as high as the value they placed on the child's well-being. This may be because interference with school seems more immediate and relevant than interference with a future job. But it may also be because "getting a good education" is a moral and not just instrumental value in the American culture.

70. Naomi Farber. *op. cit.*, 697-716.

71. Debra Kalmuss et al., *op. cit.*

72. Harris, Louis, and Associates, "Generation 2001: A Survey of the First College Graduating Class of the New Millennium," (New York City, February 1998): 8.

73. The National Marriage Project, *The State of Our Unions 1999: The Social Health of Marriage in America*, (New Brunswick, NJ: June 1999), 29. See Figure 13. Available from <http://marriage.rutgers.edu>.

74. David Popenoe, "Changes in Teen Attitudes Toward Marriage, Cohabitation and Children, 1975-1995" (New Brunswick, NJ: January 1999): 1-10.

75. The Roper Center, "A Roper Center Data Review," *The Public Perspective* 9 no. 2 (February/March 1998) 12-24.

76. Men are only slightly less accepting, with just under 13 percent saying it would be acceptable for their daughter. Deanna L. Pagnini and Ronald R. Rindfuss, "The Divorce of Marriage and Childbearing: Changing Attitudes and Behavior in the United States," *Population Development and Review* 19, no. 20 (June 1993): 331-47. See also Table 1.

77. *Ibid.*

78. Naomi A. Farber, *op. cit.*

79. Personal communication with the author.

80. Kristin Moore et al., "Adolescent Sex, Contraception, and Childbearing," *op. cit.*, see Figure III-F and Figure IV-C.

81. Pagnini and Rindfuss, *op. cit.*

82. David Popenoe, "Changes in Teen Attitudes" *op. cit.*

83. Tabulations from the National Education Longitudinal Survey (NELS: 1988), files for the first follow-up (1990), in Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher, *The Case For Marriage*, forthcoming.

84. See, for example, Robert D. Plotnick, "The Effects of Attitudes on Teenager Premarital Pregnancy and Its Resolution," *American Sociological Review* 57 (December 1992): 800-11; Allan F. Abrahams, Peter A. Morrison, and Linda J. Waite, "Teenagers Willing to Consider Single Parenthood: Who Is at Greatest Risk?" *Family Planning Perspectives* 20, no. 1 (January/February 1988): 13-18.

85. Kristin Moore et al., "Adolescent Sex, Contraception, and Childbearing," *op. cit.*, 124-25. See also, Allan F. Abrahams, Peter Morrison and Linda J. Waite, *op. cit.*

86. Laurie Schwab Zabin et al., "Subsequent Risk of Childbearing Among Adolescents with a Negative Pregnancy Test," *Family Planning Perspectives* 26, no. 5 (September/October 1994): 212-17.

87. Associated Press, "High School Yearbook Criticized for Feature on Pregnant Teens," *New York Times*, May 12, 1997, A13.

88. Personal communication with the author.

89. K. Lyne Robinson et al., "Rural Junior High School Students' Risk Factors for and Perceptions of Teen-Age Parenthood," *Journal of School Health* 68, no. 8, (October 1998): 334ff.

90. Personal communication with the author.

91. Patricia Lynn Stern, "Teen Sexuality Among Inner-City White Youth: Becoming an Adult in Milton," in *Sexuality, Poverty, and the Inner City*, ed. Jayne Garrison, Mark D. Smith and Douglas J. Besharov (Menlo Park, CA: Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, 1994), 51-52.

92. *Ibid.*

93. Neil G. Bennett et al., "The Influence of Nonmarital Childbearing on the Formation of First Marriages" *Demography* 32, no. 1 (February 1995): 47-62.

94. J. W. Scott, "The Sentiments of Love and Aspirations for Marriage and Their Association with Teenage Sexual Activity and Pregnancy," *Adolescence* 18 (1983): 998-897 in Stephanie Schamess, "The Search for Love: Unmarried Adolescent Mothers' Views of, and Relationships with, Men," *Adolescence* 28, no. 110 (summer, 1993): 425ff. Similar results were found in more recent interviews with 341 young mothers in teen parenting programs, Cleo Rodriguez, Jr. and Newlyn B. Moore, "Perceptions of Pregnant/Parenting Teens: Reframing Issues for an Integrated Approach to Pregnancy Problems," *Adolescence* 30, no. 119 (Fall 1995): 685-706.

95. Sara McLanahan, "Testimony of Sara McLanahan before the Subcommittee on

Human Resources, Committee on Ways and Means, U.S. House of Representatives, April 27, 1999." Available from Princeton University Center for Research on Child Well-Being, Princeton, New Jersey.

96. Nancy C. Larson et al., "What about Dad? Fathers of Children Born to School-Age Mothers," *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Human Services*, (May 1996): 279-89.

97. Phame Camarena et al., "The Nature and Support of Adolescent Mothers' Life Aspirations," *Family Relations* 47, no. 2 (April 1998): 129ff. In another survey of 37 pregnant and parenting teens in Oklahoma, 6 were married and 5 lived with their significant other. Nonetheless, when questioned about their future plans, while "a small number said they would like to combine marriage and career, most indicated they wanted to be married, stay at home, and take care of the children." Mona McCullough and Abraham Scherman, "Adolescent Pregnancy: Contributing Factors and Strategies for Prevention," *Adolescence* 26, no. 104 (winter 1991): 809ff.

98. George. A. Akerlof, et.al., "An Analysis of Out-of-Wedlock Childbearing in the United States," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 111 no. 2 (May 1996): 277-317.

99. Some young women may report (or retrospectively recall) the decision not to marry as mutual, in order to avoid presenting themselves as the undesirable one, the one who was "dumped." Stephanie Schames, *op. cit.* A 1995 study of a group of White and Black students in 6 high schools in a large Midwestern city asked students what their preferred pregnancy resolution would be, assuming they had been dating a year and their partner "wants to live with you and your child." Of the approximately two-thirds of students who preferred some form of parent child rearing (i.e., did not choose adoption or abortion) 20.6 percent of boys versus 35.1 percent of girls opted for cohabitation or marriage. There were large racial differences as well. See William Marsiglio and Elizabeth G. Menaghan, "Pregnancy, Resolution, and Family Formation," *Journal of Family Issues* 11, no. 3 (September 1990): 313-33. See Table 1

100. William Julius Wilson, "Fatherhood and Welfare Reform," paper presented at a conference on "The Politics of Fatherhood," (Howard University, Washington, DC, March 23, 1999): 3.

101. See "A Call for Family-Supportive Tax Reform," (Institute for American Values, New York, 1999). See also Eugene Stuerle, "The Effects of Tax and Welfare Policies on Family Formation" in *Family Impact Seminar, Strategies to Strengthen Marriage: What do We Know? What Do We Need to Know?* (Family Impact Seminar, Washington, D.C., 1998).

102. Kristin Moore et al., "Adolescent Sex, Contraception, and Childbearing," *op. cit.*, 18.

103. Neil G. Bennett et al., *op. cit.*

104. Elijah Anderson, *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence and the Moral Life of the Inner City* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1999), 189.

105. Barbara Dafoe Whitehead and David Popenoe, "Why Wed? Young Adults Talk About Sex, Love and First Unions," (New Brunswick, NJ: The National Marriage Project, January 1999): 11-12.

106. L. V. Klerman and J. F. Jeckel, "School-Age Mothers: Problems, Programs, and Policy," (Hamden, CT: Linnet, 1973) in Maris Vinovskis, "The Use and Misuse of Social Science Analysis," *op. cit.*

107. The average age of the girls was just 15, however. Norma Harrison, "Education Goes on for Pregnant Girls," *New York Times*, October 22, 1972, 135.

108. Marion Howard, "Teen-Age Parents," *Today's Education: NEA Journal*, (February 1973): 39ff.

109. G. Zellman, C. N. Feifer, and A. Hirsch, 1992, "Access to and Use of Vocational Education," *op. cit.*, 1.

110. Not necessarily to the baby's father. The proportion of Black teen moms who marry before or soon after birth is less than 5 percent. Jennifer Manlove, "Subsequent Fertility," (1998): see Appendix A

111. Teen pregnancy research often conflates the effects of cohabitation with marriage, or does not distinguish between marriage to the child's father and the effects of later "step-marriages" on a child's development. For example, the promisingly titled "Adjustment of Children Born to Teenager Mothers: The Contribution of Risk and Protective Factors" sheds no light on the question of whether teen marriage is a risk or protective factor, because the only marital status variable included, "no spouse/partner", measures not whether the teen mother married the father, but "the absence of a father-figure in the home" (that is, the absence of mother's spouse or "partner"). Eric F. Dubow and Tom Luster, "Adjustment of Children Born to Teenage Mothers: The Contribution of Risk and Protective Factors," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 52, no. 2 (May 1990): 393-404. Another recent study on child outcomes controls for whether or not a mother was raised in an intact family and whether a child was conceived outside of marriage, but not whether parents' subsequently married, thereby revealing nothing about whether or not legitimating a pregnancy made a difference. Kristin A. Moore, Donna Ruane Morrison, and Angela Dungee Green, "Effects on the Children Born to Adolescent Mothers," in *Kids Having Kids: Economic Costs and Social Consequences of Teen Pregnancy*, ed. Rebecca Maynard (Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press, 1997), 145-73. Astone and Upchurch's 1994 study examined the effect of family formation (defined as getting married or bearing a child) on school dropouts and getting a GED, but not the consequences of marriage or nonmarriage given early childbearing. See Nan Marie Astone and Dawn M. Upchurch, "Forming a Family, Leaving School Early, and Earning a GED: A Racial and Cohort Comparison" *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 56 (August 1994): 759-71. Frank Furstenberg presented some data (in reply to Vinovskis and Chase-Lansdale) comparing outcomes among teen moms who married after age 20 versus before, but his sample is limited to urban African Americans. Also, comparing early and late marriers ignores the fact that unwed parenting substantially increases the risk of nonmarriage for women, and may, as well, for young men. See Steven L. Nock, "The Consequences of Premarital Fatherhood," *American Sociological Review* 63, (April 1998): 250-63; Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr., "Bringing Back the Shotgun Wedding," *The Public Interest* 90 (winter 1988): 121-27; and Douglas M. Teti, Michael E. Lamb, and Arthur B. Elster, "Long-Range Socioeconomic and Marital Consequences of Adolescent Marriage in Three Cohorts of Adult Males," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 49, (August 1987): 499-506). Scholars, of course, have many legitimate reasons for framing their research in various ways. Nonetheless, while there is ample research suggesting delayed childbearing is better than early childbearing, and delayed marriage better than early marriage, it is striking that we could find no study using nationally representative data in the 1990s clearly addressing the topic: Does early marriage in the event of a teen pregnancy produce better or worse outcomes for the young adult teen mother and/or her child than raising an out-of-wedlock child?

112. There are good reasons for thinking that the selection into marriage of teenagers who aren't pregnant may be very different than selection of teen mothers into marriage.

Such women may be particularly uninterested in careers, for example, or they may be particularly anxious to escape parental influence. Teen marriages without children, for example, appear to be more likely to end in divorce than teen marriages undertaken to legitimate a pregnancy. (See Douglas M. Teti and Michael E. Lamb, "Socioeconomic and Marital Outcomes of Adolescent Marriage, Adolescent Childbirth, and Their Co-Occurrence," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 51, (February 1989): 203-12.) Attempting to determine whether marriage or unwed motherhood has a bigger negative impact on a young woman's career merely by controlling for parental status may be conflating the effects of two very different situations. Longitudinal studies that follow similar young mothers who opt for marriage versus unwed motherhood would give a better picture of the consequences of early marriage.

113. Murry Frymer, "An Unwed Mother with a Son, 4, Opts to Stay Single and Raise Him Alone," *New York Times*, October 29, 1972, 72.

114. Raymond P. Jennings, "Out of Wedlock," *New York Times*, May 20, 1972, 33. He was, it should probably be noted, a Baptist minister in Berkeley, California.

115. Kristin Moore et al., "Adolescent Sex, Contraception, and Childbearing," *op. cit.*, 120.

116. Allan M. Parnell et al., "Nonmarital Pregnancies and Marriage in the United States," *Social Forces* 73, no. 1 (September 1994): 263-87.

117. Edward N. Peters, "Too Young to Marry," *America* 174, no. 20 (June 22-29, 1996): 14 ff.

118. Mary Bronson Merki and Don Merki, *Health: A Guide to Wellness*, (New York: Glencoe/McGraw-Hill, 1996), 122.

119. Jennifer Manlove, Carrie Mariner, and Angela Romano, "Positive Educational Outcomes Among School-age Mothers," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, (1997). Available from Child Trends, Washington, DC.

120. They did find, however, that after 25 months, marriage boosted the likelihood a man would enroll in college by 5 percent, while reducing the likelihood a woman is enrolled in college by 9 percent, which is consistent with the theory that wives invest in their husband's careers over their own. Jay D. Teachman and Karen A. Polonko, "Marriage, Parenthood, and the College Enrollment of Men and Women" *Social Forces* 67(2), (December 1988): 512-23.

121. A woman in Canada who has only one teen birth and marries under the age of 20 is about as likely to be in the labor force as a woman who has one teen birth and never marries. A married teen mother is somewhat more likely to achieve the status of a "professional" job. Overall, personal earnings were lower among never married mothers, but the presence of children (regardless of marital status) appeared to have the biggest impact on women's careers. Carl F. Grindstaff, "Adolescent Marriage and Childbearing: The Long Term Economic Outcome, Canada in the 1980s," *Adolescence* 23, no. 89 (spring 1988): 45-58. See Tables 1-4.

122. Douglas M. Teti and Michael E. Lamb, "Socioeconomic and Marital Outcomes," *op. cit.* See Table 2.

123. However, since many of the teen births and marriages analyzed took place after normal age for high school graduation, this study too does not clearly answer the question: How does marriage, in the event of pregnancy, affect women's educational careers? Renata Forste and Marta Tienda, "Race and Ethnic Variation in the Schooling Consequences of Female Adolescent Sexual Activity," *Social Science Quarterly* 73, no. 1 (March 1992): 12-30.

124. See, for example, Kermit Daniel, "The Marriage Premium" in *The New Economics of Human Behavior*, ed. Mariano Tommasi and Kathryn Ierulli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995): 113-25; Jane Waldfogel, "The Effect of Children on Women's Wages," *American Sociological Review* 62 (1997): 209-17.

125. R. D. Plotnick, "The Effects of Attitudes," *op. cit.*

126. Compared to cohabitation. Jennifer Manlove, Carrie Mariner, and Angela Romano, "Subsequent Fertility," *op. cit.*

127. On higher rates of domestic violence among cohabitators, see, for example, Nicki Ali Jackson, "Observational Experiences of Intrapersonal Conflict and Teenage Victimization: A Comparative Study Among Spouses and Cohabitators," *Journal of Family Violence* 11 (1996): 191-203. On marriage reducing violence, see K. Daniel O'Leary et al., "Physical Aggression in Early Marriage: Prerelationship and Relationship Effects," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 62, no. 3 (1994): 594-602. For a discussion of why marriage reduces violence, see Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher, *op. cit.*

128. Haishan Fu et al., *op. cit.*, see Table 2.

129. Lingxin Hao, "Family Structure, Private Transfers, and the Economic Well-Being of Families with Children," *Social Forces* 75, (1996): 269-92.

130. Once again, the data is presented in ways that make it difficult to answer precisely: How much better off (or worse off) were young unwed mothers who married relative to mothers who didn't? The authors also cast a jaundiced eye on the possibility of encouraging marriage as an anti-poverty strategy. "Marriage is not a long-term solution for making all women self-sufficient, particularly among this population whose marriages are especially frail (Furstenberg et al., 1987; Teti and Lamb, 1989). Consequently, we believe that women's self-sufficient income is a more useful concept than a marriage-oriented definition of self-sufficiency for the development of public policy." Jodi R. Sandfort and Martha S. Hill, "Assisting young, unmarried mothers to become self-sufficient: The effects of different types of early economic support," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 58 (May 1996): 311ff.

131. Marriage did not, however, appear to protect school-age mothers or older Black teens from depression. Lisa Deal and Victoria Holt, "Young Maternal Age and Depressive Symptoms: Results from the 1988 National Maternal and Infant Health Survey," *American Journal of Public Health* 88, no. 2 (February 1998): 266ff.

132. See, for example, A. D. Cox et al., "The Impact of Maternal Depression in Young Children," *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 28, no. 6 (1987): 917-28. Barry S. Zuckerman and William R. Beardslee, "Maternal Depression: A Concern for Pediatricians," *Pediatrics* 79, no. 1 (January 1987): 110-17. Mayer Ghodsian et al., "A Longitudinal Study of Maternal Depression and Child Behavior Problems," *Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 25, no. 1 (1984): 91-909; Cheryl Tatano Beck, "The Effects of Postpartum Depression on Maternal-Infant Interaction: A Meta-Analysis," *Nursing Research* 44, no. 5 (September/October 1995): 298-304; Tiffany Field, "Infants of Depressed Mothers," *Journal of Development and Psychopathology* 4 (1992): 49-66.

133. Includes all teen marriages, not just those undertaken to legitimate a pregnancy. Martin O'Connell and Carolyn Rogers, "Out-of-Wedlock Births, Premarital Pregnancies, and Their Effect on Family Formation and Dissolution," *Family Planning Perspectives* 16, no. 4: 157-62. See Table 5.

134. John O. G. Billy, et. al., "The Effects of Marital Status at First Birth on Marital Dissolution Among Adolescent Mothers" *Demography* 23, no. 3, (1986): 329-49.

135. Furstenberg and his colleagues argue that early marriage was an ineffective eco-

conomic strategy, given these high rates of dissolution. Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr., J. Brooks-Gunn, and S. Philip Morgan, *Adolescent Mothers in Later Life* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 30-33, 67, 85-86.

136. Neil G. Bennett et al., *op. cit.*

137. On the other hand, the same review suggests that, even after controlling for premarital pregnancy, young marriages in the 1970s were still more divorce prone. See Jeffrey H. Larson and Thomas B. Holman, "Premarital predictors of marital quality and stability," *Family Relations* 43 (April 1994): 228-37.

138. John O.G. Billy et. al., *op. cit.*

139. Douglas M. Teti and Michael E. Lamb, "Socioeconomic and Marital Outcomes," *op. cit.*

140. Tim B. Heaton, "Factors Contributing to Increasing Marital Stability in the United States," (Center for Studies of the Family and Department of Sociology, Brigham Young University, October 1998). See Figure 2. Cited estimates of the success rates of teen marriage vary not only by race and cohort samples, but depending on whether researchers measure all teen marriages, only teen marriages involving children, "legitimizing" teen marriages that take place before the baby's birth; or teen marriages that take place after the baby is born.

141. Larry L. Bumpass et al., "The Impact of Family Background," *op. cit.*

142. See Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher, *op. cit.*

143. Beatrice S. Reiner and Raymond L. Edwards, "Adolescent Marriage-Social or Therapeutic Problem," *The Family Coordinator* (October 1974): 383-90.

144. Maris A. Vinovskis, "Teenage Pregnancy and the Underclass," *The Public Interest* 93 (fall 1988): 87-96.

145. Personal communication with the author.

146. Carl N. D'Onofrio and Ruth Rich, *op. cit.*, 109-110.

147. Norval Glenn, "Courtship and Marital Choice: Why They Are Important and What We Need to Learn About Them," (New York: Institute for American Values, Working Paper #70, 1999): 14.

148. K. Lyne Robinson et al., "Rural Junior High School Students' Risk Factors," *op. cit.* See also Tim B. Heaton, *op. cit.*

149. See, for example, Marion Howard, "Teen-Age Parents," *op. cit.*; Luella Klein, "Models of Comprehensive Service-Regular School-Based," *Journal of School Health* XLV, no. 5 (May 1975): 271-73; Howard J. Osofsky et al., "An Interdisciplinary Program for Low Income Pregnant School Girls: A Progress Report," *The Journal of Reproductive Medicine* V, no. 3 (September 1970): 103-9; Ruth Sharpe, "Counseling Services for School-Age Pregnant Girls," *Journal of School Health* XLV, no. 5 (May 1975): 284-85; Vivian E. Washington, "Models of Comprehensive Service-Special School-Based," *Journal of School Health* XLV, no. 5 (May 1975): 274-77.

150. Marion Howard, *op. cit.*

151. *Ibid.*

152. *Ibid.*

153. *Ibid.*

154. See, for example, Robert B. Semple Jr., "President Signs School Aid Bill; Scores Congress," *New York Times*, June 24, 1972, 1; "Transcript of the President's News Conference Emphasizing Domestic Matters," *New York Times*, June 23, 1972, 14; Eileen Shanahan, "Nixon Aid Sought on Equal Rights," *New York Times*, March 18, 1972; Nancy

Hicks, "Congress Gets U.S. Rules to End Schools' Sex Bias," *New York Times*, June 4, 1975, 1; "Against Sexist Schools. . ." (editorial), *New York Times*, June 5, 1975, 36.

155. For a feminist critique focusing on evaluating the effects of Title IX on women superintendents, sex harassment, and football, but not pregnant teens, see Catherine Marshall, "Researching the Margins: Feminist Critical Policy Analysis," *Educational Policy* 13, no. 1 (January/March 1999): 59ff.

156. Luella Klein, *op. cit.*

157. Marjorie Berg et al., "Prenatal Care for Pregnant Adolescents in a Public High School," *The Journal of School Health* 49 (January 1979): 32-35.

158. Patricia Burdell, "Young Mothers as High School Students: Moving Toward a New Century," *Education and Urban Society* 30, no. 2 (February 1998): 207ff.

159. Catherine Stevens-Simon and Constance Boyle, "Gravid Students: Characteristics of Nongravid Classmates Who React with Positive and Negative Feelings About Conception," *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine* 149, no. 3 (March 1995): 272ff.

160. Kristin A. Moore et al., "Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Programs," *op. cit.*, 112.

161. Girls in academic programs were more likely to go on to college, however. Jennifer Manlove, Carrie Mariner, and Angela Romano, "Positive Educational Outcomes," *op. cit.*

162. Patricia Burdell, *op. cit.*, 207ff.; see also James Heaney, "Program for Pregnant Teens Aims to Fill School Gap," *Buffalo (New York) News*, November 4, 1996, B5.

163. Personal communication with the author.

164. Personal communication with the author.

165. Personal communications with the author. See also Seitz and Apfel, "Sibship Spacing," *op. cit.*; Victoria Seitz, Nancy H. Apfel, and Laurie K. Rosenbaum, "Effects of an Intervention Program for Pregnant Adolescents: Educational Outcomes at Two Years Postpartum," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 19, no. 6 (1991): 911-30; Victoria Seitz and Nancy H. Apfel, "Effects of a School for Pregnant Students on the Incidence of Low-Birthweight Deliveries," *Child Development* 65 (1994): 666-76; Victoria Seitz and Nancy H. Apfel, "Adolescent Mothers and Repeated Childbearing: Effects of a School-Based Intervention Program," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 63, no. 4 (October 1993): 572-81.

166. Victoria Seitz, Nancy H. Apfel, and Laurie K. Rosenbaum, "Effects of an Intervention Program," *op. cit.*

167. *Ibid.*

168. Victoria Seitz and Nancy H. Apfel, "Adolescent Mothers and Repeated Childbearing," *op. cit.*

169. Seitz and Apfel, personal communication with the author.

170. General Accounting Office, *Welfare to Work: Approaches that Help Teenage Mothers Complete High School. Report to Congressional Requesters*, (Washington, DC: General Accounting Office, September 1995), 20.

171. Donna Liquori, "Teen Moms Learn Skills for a Lifetime," *Albany Times Union*, December 16, 1994, A1.

172. Personal communication with the author. For similar reports from teen mothers see also A. Dalsimer, (1990), unpublished manuscript, cited in Stephanie Schamess, (1993), "The Search for Love," *op. cit.*; Karla Scoon, "Giving Teenage Parents A Chance," *Akron (Ohio) Beacon Journal*, December 27, 1991. C3.

173. Victoria Seitz, Nancy H. Apfel, and Laurie K. Rosenbaum, "Effects of an

Intervention Program,” *op. cit.*

174. Personal communication with the author.

175. Murray Kappleman et al., “A Unique School Health Program in a School for Pregnant Teenagers,” originally presented as a symposium on teen pregnancy at the American Academy of Pediatrics on October 18, 1971. *Journal of School Health* LIV, no. 6 (June 1974): 303-6.

176. Oscar C. Stine and Elizabeth B. Kelley, “Evaluation of a School for Young Mothers: The Frequency of Prematurity Among Infants Born to Mothers Under 17 Years of Age, According to the Mother’s Attendance of a Special School During Pregnancy,” *Pediatrics* 46, no. 4 (October 1970): 581-87.

177. Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr. et al., “Adolescent Mothers,” *op. cit.*, 55.

178. *Ibid.*, 65-66.

179. *Ibid.*, 65-67.

180. *Ibid.*, 137-38.

181. Edward Ranzal, “Schools Closing, Pregnant Girls Stage a Protest,” *New York Times*, October 16, 1976, 27.

182. Personal communication with the author.

183. Douglas Kirby et al., “School-Based Programs to Reduce Sexual Risk Behaviors: A Review of Effectiveness,” *Public Health Reports* 109, no. 3 (May/June 1994): 339-60.

184. Title IX’s guarantee of an education for all pregnant students is important and valuable. No school should expel a girl because she is pregnant. But the part of Title IX that defines all differential treatment as unlawful discrimination is counter-productive. It tends to shut down much-needed local initiative, innovation, and experimentation. It also assumes that how local schools in, say, Paducah or Boise handle the challenge of teen pregnancy in 1999 is best determined by regulations from Washington, D.C. dating from 1975. Consider a specific example of how this law works. Several years ago, Stephen Goldsmith, the mayor of Indianapolis, had an idea. He wanted to make girls who got pregnant, and boys who got girls pregnant, ineligible for extra-curricular activities in the Indianapolis public schools. Drug use and abuse of alcohol were already grounds for ineligibility; Goldsmith argued that unwed teen parenting was at least as harmful, and should be treated at least as seriously. He got nowhere with this idea — in some measure due the insistence of local officials that the mayor’s proposal would be judged to be a violation of Title IX prohibition of differential treatment.

185. Kristin A. Moore et al., “Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Programs,” *op. cit.*, 55 and 32.

About Milton Avery

Described by the art critic Hilton Kramer as possessing “the finest eye for color in the entire history of American painting,” Milton Avery (1885 - 1965) used simplified forms and pleasing harmonies of color to evoke serene emotion and to convey archetypal images and themes. In some respects Avery bridges the gap between realist and abstract art. While his primary concerns were the use of color and the relationships between forms, his paintings were always grounded in representations based on observed reality. Picasso and especially Matisse appear to have been important influences on his work. In turn, U.S. Abstract Expressionists such as Mark Rothko, Adolph Gottlieb, and Barnett Newman clearly owe a debt to Avery’s exploration of color and to what Rothko, at the time of Avery’s death, called Avery’s “poetry of sheer loveliness.”

Avery was born in 1885 in the northern New York town of Sand Bank. His father was a tanner. In 1898, his family moved to Wilson Station, Connecticut, near East Hartford. For ten years, from about 1901 to 1911, Avery was employed as a factory worker. Shortly after his father died in 1905, however, Avery had enrolled in a night class on lettering sponsored by the Connecticut League of Art Students. Starting in 1911, when he was 26 years old, Avery was able to devote himself almost exclusively to art. In 1925, he moved to New York City. The following year, he married Sally Michel, also an artist. For the next four decades, the couple was a notable presence in the New York art world. Milton Avery died in 1965.

This report features several of Avery’s paintings exploring the theme of maternity. He clearly evokes the beauty and intensity of the mother-child relationship, while also suggesting its detachment from the surrounding world — an isolation that, from the perspective of this report, derives partly from the weakening influence of culture, particularly regarding the close connection of motherhood to fatherhood and marriage.

About the Institute

THE Institute for American Values, founded in 1987, is a private, nonpartisan organization devoted to research, publication, and public education on major issues of family well-being and civil society. The Institute's immediate mission is to examine the status and future of the family as a social institution. Its larger mission is to examine the sources of competence, character, and citizenship in the United States.

By providing forums for scholarly inquiry and debate, the Institute seeks to bring fresh knowledge to bear on the challenges facing families and civil society. Through its publications and other educational activities, the Institute seeks to bridge the gap between scholarship and policy making, bringing new information to the attention of policy makers in government, opinion makers in the media, and decision makers in the private sector.

The Institute is widely recognized as an important contributor to our national debate. The Institute has a staff of seven and an annual budget of about \$800,000. It is financed primarily by contributions from foundations, corporations, and individuals.

The Institute's president is David Blankenhorn. The Chair of its Board of Directors is Professor Jean Bethke Elshtain of the University of Chicago. The Institute's Council on Families, its Council on Civil Society and its academic and professional advisory committees bring together many of the nation's most distinguished scholars and analysts from across the human sciences and across the political spectrum.

Tax-deductible contributions of \$25, \$50, or more are deeply appreciated. Copies of this report as well as other recent Institute publications are available from the Institute.

Institute for American Values

1841 Broadway, Suite 211

New York, New York 10023

Tel: (212) 246-3942

Fax: (212) 541-6665

Email: info@americanvalues.org

<http://www.americanvalues.org>

ISBN: 0-9659841-5-X