A Report to the Nation from
the Council on Families
Paul C. Vitz, Principal Investigator

# The Course of True Love
## Marriage in High School Textbooks

**Institute for American Values**

This report was commissioned by the Council on Families, a project of the Institute for American Values, and written by Paul C. Vitz of New York University. Dana Mack and Maggie Gallagher of the Institute staff made important editorial contributions to the report.

*On the cover:* Jealousy and Flirtation *(detail) by Haynes King, 1874. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, Great Britain. © 1998 V & A Picture Museum.*

*Opposite:* Cupid *by Edme Bouchardon, 1744. Samuel H. Kress Collection, © 1998 Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.*



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*And we are put on earth a little space*

*That we may learn to bear the beams of love.*

William Blake

# The Course of True Love
## Marriage in High School Textbooks

### Executive Summary

What are U.S. high schools teaching the younger generation about marriage? Based on a careful review of leading high school health textbooks, the answer is partly reassuring and partly disturbing. These textbooks are considerably more accurate, balanced, and useful than current college-level textbooks on marriage and the family. Yet these high school books are much worse than they ought to be.

In 1997, the Council on Families released *Closed Hearts, Closed Minds: The Textbook Story of Marriage*, a report examining college-level marriage and family life textbooks. That report concluded that "what these students are being taught by these textbooks is probably doing them more harm than good." This report examines how the nation's leading high school textbooks present the topics of marriage, sexuality, and family life.

The six textbooks cited in this study — all high school health textbooks published between 1993 and 1997 — include all of the health textbooks that are currently used in the 20 U.S. states that adopt specific health textbooks at the state level. Moreover, since major textbook publishers are naturally responsive to the criteria developed by the 20 adoption states, the textbooks currently used by the other 30 states are likely to be the same as, or quite similar to, the textbooks examined in this study.

Regarding these textbooks, there is good news and bad news.

The good news is that high school textbooks generally treat marriage respectfully. They present marriage as an important personal commitment. They recommend sexual abstinence for teenagers. They present detailed information about the health risks and potentially harmful consequences of early sexual activity. They directly acknowledge at least the short-term emotional and economic difficulties of divorce and of single parenting. They seek to discourage both teenage marriage and teenage childbearing, emphasizing that marriage and parenthood require maturity.

Especially regarding the importance of marriage, these high school textbooks stand out in marked contrast to college-level texts. The high school texts typically and conscientiously seek to reflect both community values — the basic perspectives shared by the parents and the neighbors of the students who use the books — as well as the recent conclusions of many leading family scholars. Family is important. Marriage matters. All things being equal, children are better off when they grow up with their two, married parents.

The bad news is that these high school textbooks are intellectually weak and often poorly informed. They are sometimes marred by factual errors. They often ignore or distort important bodies of research about why marriage matters and what makes marriages successful. When advising students on how to cope with divorce, they at times substitute wishful thinking for

accurate information and neglect the topic of adult responsibility.

Most importantly, they almost completely bypass the opportunity to acquaint students with rich treasure troves of knowledge about love, courtship, marriage, and family life that are readily available from art and literature and from disciplines such as history, anthropology, philosophy, and theology. By systematically depriving students of intellectual oxygen, these books ultimately present an understanding of marriage that is thin, one-dimensional, and boring.

Trapped within the restrictive confines of a "health" paradigm, with its related psycho-therapeutic emphasis on individual self-actualization, these textbooks seldom even attempt to convey any broader understanding of marriage as a complex institution with many dimensions, including natural, legal, moral-religious, economic, and social. As a result, these books simply cannot address the core questions confronting today's teenagers.

In an increasingly atomized society, what does family commitment look like? Is there any deeper meaning to our sexual drive and how does it relate to our desire for trust and love? What makes for a lasting, satisfying marriage? How might marriage and family life be connected to one's larger sense of purpose in life? These are by far the hardest, most interesting, and most important issues. Yet these books largely ignore them.

The story of marriage and family life contained in these textbooks is not so much wrong — these students will have to wait until they read their college textbooks for *that* — as it is empty: intellectually, emotionally, and morally vacuous. Many of today's teenagers, themselves children of the divorce revolution, are uncertain and even anxious about their own chances of achieving a loving marriage. Many of them are eager to avoid the family chaos that characterized so much of their parents' generation.[1] As they struggle with this challenge — as they struggle in a sense to beat the odds that they have inherited — these textbooks probably won't hurt them. But neither will they help them. We adults can do better for these children.

Finally, these textbooks provide fascinating insights into the overall state of our society, a window through which we can glimpse the current fault lines of the broader cultural debate. On one side, these books clearly expose our often excessive reliance on health, self-actualization, and self-esteem as the main categories for understanding life. In turn, this one-dimensional vocabulary surely reflects a deeper ambivalence as to how, or even whether, in our pluralistic society, we might properly speak to one another in directly communal and moral terms about sexuality, marriage, and family life.

Yet on the other side, these books often reveal sincere efforts to pass on basic values such as teenage sexual abstinence and the importance of commitment in marriage. Many adults today, including many educators, are deeply concerned about deteriorating social morality and, in particular, about the character and values exhibited by young people today.[2] These books reflect that concern. Even as they are weighed down and cramped in by the clumsy paradigm of "health," with only a limited number of mostly psychological and therapeutic concepts at their disposal, these high school books nonetheless reveal an implicitly moral language struggling to get out, and to speak to children in its own name. This is good news. Perhaps it is even a harbinger of cultural renewal. Surely it is a foundation on which future high school textbooks can build.

## Why Textbooks Matter

FIRST, these textbooks matter because growing numbers of educators and policy makers today are calling for more and better efforts to educate students in the areas of sexuality, relationships, marriage, and family life. For example, as of December 1997, 34 states and the District of Columbia were mandating public school instruction about AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. A 1994 survey found that 80 percent of U.S. school districts require instruction about sexually transmitted diseases, while 72 percent require instruction about pregnancy prevention in their health curriculum. In 1998, Mississippi passed a law requiring public high school sex education courses to teach that "a mutually faithful, monogamous relationship in the context of marriage is the only appropriate setting for sexual intercourse."[3] Also in 1998, Florida became the first state to require skills-based marriage and relationship education in public high schools.[4]

Clearly, in response to our society's growing awareness of the social costs of family fragmentation, as well as the public's growing concern about adolescent behavioral problems, many public schools today are taking a significantly more assertive role in seeking to shape young people's basic values. These textbooks reveal the essence of these new and growing efforts.

These textbooks influence both teachers and students. Indeed, for the typical high school health teacher — often a coach or physical education instructor doubling as a health teacher — the assigned textbook is often the only source of expert knowledge about this topic to which he or she will have been exposed. For students, these textbooks probably represent their only, or at least major, encounter during high school with what their teachers and "the experts" would have them know about sexuality, marriage, and family life.

Finally, the information and advice that these textbooks transmit to young people — or conversely, withhold from them — furnish telling indicators of larger community attitudes. High school health textbooks are intended for two purposes: conveying knowledge and shaping values. Consequently, these textbooks seek to combine professional expertise with more general ethical instruction that is anchored in socially approved attitudes. Partly because of this twofold purpose, these books also reveal compromises between the priorities of two groups: professional educators on the one hand, and parents and the public on the other. In sum, these high school textbooks represent that body of scholarly expertise which is both widely accepted by the general public and deemed appropriate for the character development of young people in a pluralistic society.

## The Good News

EACH of these high school health textbooks describes marriage as a serious, lifelong commitment. *As Making Life Choices: Health Skills and Concepts* tells the students:

*The highest form of commitment between two people in our society is marriage, a relationship based on these ideas:*

- *The relationship is permanent, or at least permanence is something the partners will work for.*
- *The partners will be most important to one another. No other relationship with another person will take a higher place (p. 503).*

*Health: A Guide to Wellness* also stresses this point: "Getting married is deciding to spend the rest of your life with someone else. Marriage is a long-term, on-going commitment. It is a very serious decision" (p. 119).

These textbooks emphasize that a good marriage requires flexibility, time, energy, sacrifice, emotional maturity, and work. They place a strong, perhaps even excessive, emphasis on urging teens to "go

beyond" romantic love in carefully choosing marriage partners: "The idea that marriage will magically make people happy is probably the most destructive idea that partners can have," warns *Making Life Choices* (p. 503). *Perspectives on Health*, the textbook that is least supportive overall of the marriage commitment, also urges students to deliberate carefully when choosing a marriage partner: "Couples must seriously consider whether they can make a life together. When couples discuss marriage, it should be because a strong love has developed. The romantic, head-over-heels feeling should have grown into a more mature, steady relationship" (p. 161).

In these books, teenage marriage is strongly discouraged. Students are repeatedly told that teenage marriages are very likely to end in divorce, since a high level of personal maturity is needed to select an appropriate marriage partner.

In marked contrast to the popular and teenage culture, where "dating" is now highly informal and unstructured, and also essentially understood by teenagers as an end in itself, most of these high school textbooks encourage students to consider dating as "courtship," or as an apprenticeship to an eventual marriage. "What you learn about yourself and others through the experience of dating will help you when you are ready to make important decisions about getting married and having children," says *Perspectives On Health* (p. 156).

Building a successful marriage is consistently portrayed as a worthy personal goal. "Many married people who have matured together, weathered life's ups and downs as a team, and become deep friends say there is nothing like it. To have a life partner with whom to share one's goals, dreams, plans, home, children, and old age can be an enriching adventure," suggests *Health: A Guide to Wellness* (p. 124). "The typical married person reports feeling happier and more supported than the typical unmarried person. In addition, married people seem to live longer and to be sick less often," reports *Discover: Decisions for Health* (p. 109).

*At left:* Queen Nefertari Surrounded by Deities (detail). *Egyptian Wallpainting, 19th Dynasty. Tomb of Nefertari, Valley of the Queens, West Thebes, Thebes.* 

## Abstinence: A Prescription, Not a Choice

Regarding sexuality, each of these health textbooks urges teenagers to choose abstinence. Though the vocabulary of "choice" remains, high school health textbooks now offer guidance as well as information, openly advising students on how and what to choose. For example, here is how *Discover: Decisions for Health* defines the word "abstinence": "Abstinence (ABZ sti nuhn(t)s), the decision not to have intercourse, is the only decision a teenager can make that guarantees health. By choosing abstinence, teenagers eliminate the risk of pregnancy, as well as the risk of sexually transmitted disease" (p. 110).

These books not only clearly detail the potential health risks of teenage sexual activity, they also touch on the positive benefits of choosing abstinence, including the freedom to develop deeper emotional relationships. As *Discover: Decisions for Health* points out: "Abstinence can help couples to see if they truly have interests, emotions, and values in common — rather than merely sharing the basic human need for physical pleasure" (p. 110). Another book agrees: "Teenagers who practice sexual abstinence grow by acting responsibly and by learning to develop relationships that are not based on sexual intimacy" *(Health,* p. 376).

## The Difficulties of Single Parenting

Unlike college-level marriage and the family textbooks, which consistently understate the negative consequences of divorce and unwed childbearing, these high school textbooks typically describe divorce as a painful problem for children and view single parenting as a cause for concern.

As *Health: A Guide to Wellness* put it, "raising children alone is not easy."

> *Single parents do not have partners with whom to share decisions, chores, disciplining, financial burdens, or even the joys of parenthood. With no one to relieve them, they often suffer from burnout or depression. Without relief, they also may be more likely to take out their frustrations on their children. They may find it difficult to find time for themselves and may feel they have no life besides their children and their jobs (Health: A Guide to Wellness, p. 126).*

Another book puts it similarly:

> *Raising children without financial support can be difficult, yet single parents also deal with the lack of emotional support. Making important decisions alone can be stressful. Single parents who must both work and raise children may at times feel lonely or overwhelmed (Perspectives on Health, p. 164).*

This candor about the costs of single parenting is unambiguously good news. At the same time, however, these books also reflect the anxieties of our society about where the line between candor and unkindness lies. When these books enumerate the various family forms — married-couple homes, one-parent homes, extended families, and others — they typically strive for a strictly neutral tone, seeking to assure the reader that his or her family is "normal." Moreover, in the quest to reassure, these books at times succumb to false boosterism, making statements that are largely unsupportable by social science evidence and quite unlikely to be believed anyway by, say, children of divorce. For example: "Families vary in structure, but each type of family is as acceptable as any other (*Perspectives on Health*, p. 175). Or: "Each type of family structure is capable of meeting the needs of all family members" (*Discover: Decisions for Heath*, p. 72).

Yet this optimism about the equality of all family forms often appears side-by-side with markedly more realistic appraisals of the emotional impact of divorce. For example, *Health* offers this typically upbeat description of family diversity: "The great variety of family types makes it difficult to describe a 'typical' family. Yet, regardless of type, any family can be healthy and happy" (p. 404). Yet just a few pages later, when the focus shifts to the consequences of divorce,

the tone changes: "Divorce is a shattering experience for all members of a family, yet it is an extremely common experience. . . If your parents divorce, you must make major adjustments in order to cope with the losses that result" (pps. 411-412).

The fascinating tension that thus emerges in these texts — this swaying back and forth between the desire to be non-judgmental and the desire to empathize with children who suffer from family fragmentation — seems in part to be a reflection, in microcosm, of precisely the same ambivalence that defines so much of our larger cultural debate on these matters. The internally inconsistent approach taken by these textbooks seems accurately to reflect the wider community's confusion about how to perform two seemingly contradictory tasks: upholding marriage as an ideal without stigmatizing children from single-parent homes.

## The Bad News

WHEN it comes to advising students, these high school health textbooks clearly deserve a passing grade. In particular, these textbooks generally reflect the importance that most Americans — and increasingly, most family scholars as well — place on the marriage commitment.

But when it comes to *educating* students — presenting them with rich and diverse perspectives on the most important questions of love, sexuality, marriage, and the family — these books fail. As works of scholarship, these books are often marred by important errors. Just as often, relevant and important bodies of research are all but ignored.

While these books do affirm the importance of marriage as a personal commitment, they rarely attempt to convey to students any knowledge about marriage as a universal social institution, with important legal, social, economic, and sacred dimensions. Perhaps most tragically, these books withhold from students virtually all perspectives on sexuality, courtship, marriage, and family life provided by branches of human knowledge other than medicine and modern popular psychology. These neglected branches of knowledge include art, literature, history, cultural anthropology, sociology, economics, moral philosophy, and religion. Even within the field of psychology, these textbooks keep out more than they let in, uniformly presuming a narrowly individualistic psychology of "self-esteem" that is not only badly outdated, but also inconsistent with any understanding of marriage other than as an inherently frail and purely private psychological relationship.

*These textbooks sway back and forth between the desire to be non-judgmental and the desire to empathize with children who suffer from family fragmentation.*

As a result, these textbooks are emotionally unsatisfying and intellectually one-dimensional. In a word, they are boring. They simply shut out most kinds of information, including almost any insight that might enrich a student's mind, provoke intellectual curiosity, enlarge his perspective on life, or cultivate her aesthetically or morally. Hemmed in and dumbed down by the controlling idea of "health," these textbooks convey to students an image of marriage and family life that is radically uninspiring.

### C- for Scholarship

When it comes to presenting and properly handling scholarly evidence about marriage and family life, these health textbooks are frequently unsuccessful. Admittedly, these books serve more than purely academic purposes. They also aim to socialize, warn, and guide students on a wide range of matters, from drug abuse to diet to sexually transmitted diseases. At the same time, these textbooks obviously ought to model basic scholarly competence. Too often, they do not.

For example, in a section on "Child Abuse and Family Violence," *Making Life Choices* makes this remarkable assertion: "Almost half a million children die each year at the hands of their abusers" (p. 120). But in fact, the Census Bureau reports that about 50,000 children in the U.S. under the age of 14 died from *any* cause in 1993. Of these, about 1,500 were homicide victims. Moreover, some proportion of these 1,500 deaths obviously stemmed not from family violence, but from the actions of strangers.[5] According to data compiled by the Child Welfare League of America, 45 states reported a total of 977 maltreatment-related fatalities among children under age 18 in 1995.[6]

Family violence and child abuse are tragic problems in our society. But such a wildly inaccurate statement — exaggerating the prevalence of lethal child abuse in the U.S. by a factor of some 500 to one — does nothing to shed real light on these issues. Several other health textbooks also misstate the prevalence of lethal child abuse and family violence in the U.S., though not to the same degree.

Occasionally, the same elementary error appears in two or more of the textbooks. For example, several of these books repeatedly confuse *monogamy,* which is the practice of having one spouse for life or only one spouse at a time, with *sexual fidelity*, which is the practice of having only one intimate sexual partner at a time. Thus, in a discussion of sexually transmitted diseases, *Perspectives on Health* defines monogamy simply as the "commitment to an intimate relationship with only one person" (p. 584). Only somewhat more helpfully, *Health* defines monogamy as "when two people have intercourse with only each other for their entire lives" (p. 500).

Note that the word "marriage" is completely absent from this definition of monogamy — a strange omission indeed, since monogamy literally means, from the Greek, "one marriage" at a time, and since "marriage" is overwhelmingly the word that people use, and the institution that societies establish, regarding relationships in which "two people have intercourse with only each other for their entire lives."

*At right:* Venus and Adonis *by Titian, c. 1560. Widener Collection, © 1998 Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.*

In a similarly confusing and equally unsuccessful effort, *Discover: Decisions for Health* again conflates monogamy with sexual fidelity — a member of a monogamous couple "honors his or her commitment to maintain a faithful relationship with the other" — then elaborates on the definition by reporting that "members of a monogamous couple do not have an intimate or sexual relationship with another person while married" (p. 111), as if having an extra-marital affair constituted an act of polygamy rather than adultery.

No doubt many people, including many young dating couples, do casually (if wrongly) use the word "monogamous" to describe a sexually exclusive relationship. But in textbooks intended to deepen students' understanding of marriage, it is disappointing to find a basic feature of our society's marriage system — one legal spouse per customer — so frequently misdefined. A textbook that cannot differentiate linguistically between taking one marriage partner for life, and not cheating on one's boyfriend, suggests a curriculum that is confused or ambivalent about the meaning and importance of marriage.

## Unreported News from the Social Sciences

These textbooks commit frequent errors of omission. For example, although several of the books briefly report that married people typically live longer and apparently healthier lives than do non-married persons, none of the books do more than touch upon the large and growing body of research evidence documenting the significant benefits of marriage for adults, both men and women, in areas such as employment and income, education, health, sexual fulfillment, community involvement, and personal happiness.[7] None of these books address the similarly diverse and significant benefits, including health benefits, accruing to children who grow up in intact, married-couple homes.[8] In textbooks explicitly devoted to the topic of health, these omissions seem particularly glaring.

Not one of these textbooks place any serious emphasis on the importance of fathers in the family or on the distinctive contributions that fathers make to their children's well being. Only one book, *Discover: Decisions for Health*, even touches on the subject. Nor do these textbooks convey more than a hint of current research on the determinants of marital success — research that, outside the classroom, is helping to ignite a new grass roots movement, involving religious leaders as well as secular counselors and therapists, focused on skills-based marriage education.[9]

*The textbooks seldom cite recent research on the determinants of marital success — research that, outside the classroom, is helping to ignite a new grass roots movement.*

Another striking omission concerns current research findings on cohabitation, especially since cohabitation among younger people is widespread and increasing, and since many high school students are likely to be privately considering the merits of cohabitation versus marriage. But none of these textbooks inform students of the growing social science evidence suggesting that cohabitation elevates the risk of problems such as domestic violence[10] and is also associated with an increased future likelihood of divorce.[11]

Nor do these books relay the now well-established causal links between family fragmentation (divorce and unwed parenting) and a wide range of family problems, including school failure, domestic violence, child abuse and neglect, poverty, juvenile delinquency, and child sexual abuse. For example, in these books' discussions of the problems of child abuse, conspicuously absent from the list of likely or possible perpetrators is a mother's boyfriend. Yet researchers have clearly established that exposure to unrelated males, particularly mothers' boyfriends, significantly increases the risk of child abuse, especially child sexual abuse. One study, for example, finds that boyfriends commit 27 times more child

*At right:* Two Lovers *painted by Reza-ye Abbasi, in the royal studio of Shah Abbas, Safavid Period, 1630. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Francis M. Weld Fund, 1950. (50.164). Photograph © 1977 Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.*

abuse than their time in child care would lead us to predict, and that, as a result, "a young child left alone with mother's boyfriend experiences substantially elevated risks of abuse."[12]

This relatively 'fact-free' treatment of single parenting is odd. It contrasts sharply, for example, with the fairly detailed medical data in these texts regarding the dangers of sexually transmitted diseases.

Relatedly, while they acknowledge the short-run emotional distress connected to divorce, these textbooks at times ignore, and occasionally try to wish away, the growing scholarly consensus regarding the harmful *long-term* consequences of divorce for children. On the topic of "Children of Divorce," for example, here is how one textbook sums up: "Dysfunctional families sometimes break up through divorce. Although divorce may require an adjustment that is difficult to make, most children soon resume normal life" (*Making Life Choices*, p. 122). *Discover: Decisions for Health* reaches a similar conclusion: "researchers believe that most children are able to adjust to their parents' divorce after one or two years" (p. 102).

Yet the idea, popularized especially during the 1970s, that parental divorce for children is like catching a cold — initial stress and discomfort, but relatively quick recovery — has now been decisively rejected by the weight of clinical and social science evidence accumulated during the past two decades. A number of leading family scholars have explicitly revised their previous views on this topic; most now agree that divorce has effects on children that are both important and long-lasting.[13]

These books also frequently counsel teenagers to take a positive attitude toward their parents' divorce, even when the particulars of such advice come closer to wishful thinking than accurate reporting. For example, *Health* advises students whose parents divorce: "When you have managed to accept your parents' divorce, you will be able to look at it and evaluate it more objectively." Moreover: "The calmer atmosphere [after the divorce] may make it easier to concentrate on school and other activities (p. 413).

*Discover: Decisions for Health* tells the story of Consuelo, a child of divorce, who initially "felt she had lost a parent." Yet it turned out that "her father actually spent more time with her following the divorce" (p.102). *Making Life Choices* similarly reassures children of divorce that they "need not fear that they will lose a parent. People may divorce their spouses, but never their children" (pp. 120-121).

Each of these statements, while clearly well-meaning, is called into question by the weight of evidence. In most cases of divorce, children are rarely able or likely to understand it "objectively," or to find that post-divorce life is calmer and more conducive to schoolwork. Children of divorce do often feel that they have "lost a parent," and the feeling rarely goes away.

Very, very few divorced, non-custodial fathers spend more time with their children

after the divorce, when they have moved out of the family home, than they did before. Typically, father-child contact time following a divorce decreases dramatically and continues to decline over time, especially following remarriage. The cliché that parents divorce one another, but "never their children" — that the man-woman bond is weakened or ended, but never the bond between the child and the parent who leaves — is simply untrue.[14]

Textbooks should surely refrain from making observations about the consequences of divorce, or offering recommendation to teenagers on how to cope with divorce, that ignore or directly contradict current research on the topic.

## Children, Help Your Parents?

Each of these textbooks is emphatic about the obligations of parents to their children: to provide food, clothing, and shelter; to give children time and love; to set limits; and to help children reach their potential. At the same time, these books also strongly emphasize the obligations of children to parents. Much of this emphasis on children's responsibilities is straightforward and commendable. Some of it, however, is troubling, at least in its social implications.

Based on what is probably a realistic assessment of the family situations of many of today's high school students, these textbooks often suggest that overall family health depends just as much on the children as it does on the parents. Roles and responsibilities of parents are more fluid than ever before, these students are told. Family life is changing. There is a lot of pressure on your parents. A lot depends on you.

For example, one book asks students to consider "what things can you do to bring your family members closer to each other" (*Health: Skills for Wellness*, p. 113). Another book similarly asks teenagers to "Make a list of strategies that could make your family stronger. . .Don't be discouraged. Remember that having a strong family takes time and work." (*Discover: Decisions for Health*, p. 73). In one textbook, in a chapter on "Family Roles and Responsibilities," students are told: "All families face challenges. Most face a crisis from time to time." Yet: "Whatever its structure and character, within your family lies the potential for your future. You have an important role to play in shaping what the future holds" (*Perspectives on Health*, p. 168).

Of course, much of this advice is unarguably sound. Yet these books also at times reflect a newer and more problematic line of reasoning, clearly prevalent in current popular advice literature for divorced parents, in which children are viewed as *more* capable than adults of making difficult personal sacrifices for the sake of the family.[15]

For example, in *Discover: Decisions for Health*, under a photograph of two somber-looking teenagers doing household chores — the girl is carrying a basket of laundry, the boy is making himself a sandwich — the caption reads: "Sometimes divorce means that children must take on more responsibilities. Remember that commitment to the family is a characteristic that helps members get through tough times" (p. 103).

In *Health,* a section on "Coping With Family Problems" advises students: "Though it would be wonderful if all families lived happily ever after, we all know that is not the case. . .As a teenager, you are not in a position to solve your family's problems, but you can find ways of coping with them" (p. 411). In the case of divorce, suggested coping mechanisms include talking to a counselor or therapist, sharing your feelings with friends, taking up a new hobby, and realistically recognizing that, if and when a parent remarries, there may be less time and money available for you, especially if new step-siblings or half-siblings are added to the family (p. 413).

While advising teenagers to make adjustments to help their families cope with divorce, these books are completely silent about what, if anything, married parents ought to do either to avoid divorce in the first place or mitigate its consequences for

their children. For example, "divorce occurs when a married couple agrees to legally end their marriage and live apart," reports *Perspectives on Health* (p. 163), then goes on to offer an explanation which similarly begs more questions than it answers: "Marriages break up because two adults can no longer live together happily" (p. 180).

In a similar vein, Consuelo, the child of divorce whose story is told in *Discover: Decisions for Health*, is about to be the bridesmaid at her mother's second wedding. Even though Consuelo was "a hopeless romantic" who "wanted to believe there were relationships that could last," she finally, with regard to her parents' divorce, "told herself that it was probably true that some people were not meant to live together forever" (p. 101).

*Self-esteem is frequently presented as a mood or emotion that can be boosted through "self-talk," "self-dates," and other essentially self-regarding actions.*

This message to students about parental divorce is one-sided and rather grim. Divorce is not anyone's responsibility. It just happens. It's probably for the best. And it's your job to pitch in, look on the bright side, and make the necessary adjustments.

## The Religion of Self-Esteem

A central weakness in these textbooks — one that defines the tone and permeates the content of many chapters — is their firm embrace of a particular school of thought within the field of psychology that emphasizes, as a central way of understanding the nature and destiny of the human person, the ideal of "self-esteem." Indeed, in the majority of these textbooks, the psychology and philosophy of self-esteem is not typically presented to students as one possible way of self-understanding, one theory among many. Instead, it is presented more as truth itself, simply the way things are. In some ways, the ideal of self-esteem operates in these textbooks similar to the way that religion operates in religious societies — as a master organizing principle and an ultimate ideal of human fulfillment.

For example, here is *Health: Skills for Wellness:* **"More than any other factor, self-esteem has a direct effect on all aspects of your health — mental, social, and physical"** (p. 34). Here is *Health: A Guide to Wellness*: "Your self-esteem influences everything you do, think, feel, and are" (p. 11). Here is *Making Life Choices*: "The most important relationship in your life is the relationship you have with yourself" (p. 24).

Notice the absolute nature of these statements. More than *anything* else. *Everything* you do and are. The *most* important. These are, in effect, "religious" assertions — statements of what is the highest and the most.

As if to enshrine this philosophy, any explorations of religion itself — or more precisely, any examinations of morally serious alternatives to the "religion" of self-esteem — have been radically excised from these books. The words "God" and "faith" are scrupulously avoided. Four of the six books do not have the word "religion" in their indexes. Of the two that do, the references are so minute, glancing, and insubstantial — one book mentions that dietary habits are sometimes linked to religious customs, for example, while the other cites African-American churches as an example of "cultural diversity" — that they hardly merit a mention in the index, either. This strict omission serves, at least indirectly, to reinforce the pursuit of self-esteem as one of life's central projects.[16]

At times, the majority of these textbooks discuss self-esteem as if it were a wonder drug. According to *Making Life Choices,* self-esteem, or the absence thereof, is related to almost every possible personal challenge or social problem:

> *Poor self-esteem is closely linked with a wide range of problems: drug and alcohol abuse, addictions of all kinds, crime and violence, child and family abuse, teenage runaways, teenage pregnancy,*

*prostitution, gang membership, and failure of children to learn. Poor self-esteem, therefore, diminishes not only individuals, but also society. Society spends billions of dollars in medical expenses, law enforcement, and education every year because of the problems caused by poor self-esteem. At the same time, a shortage of productive workers means that smaller revenues must stretch to meet all of society's needs" (p. 59).*

Within this overall framework, these books devote an average of about 22 pages each *directly* to the topic of self-esteem. *Perspectives on Health*, the textbook that is least focussed on self-esteem, devotes nine pages explicitly to the topic. *Health: Skills for Wellness* tops the list with 31 pages devoted directly to defining and offering ways to foster self-esteem. (By contrast, both *Perspectives on Health* and *Health: Skills for Wellness* devote seven pages to the definition, importance, and benefits of marriage.)

Discussing the importance of self-esteem as a "life skill," *Discover: Decisions for Health* says: "Your self-esteem is a reflection of your relationship with yourself." And to sum up, the book reports in large, bold type: **"To love oneself is the beginning of a life-long romance**" (p. 13).

Consistent with this idea, this textbook later advises students: "Instead of waiting for others to 'take the hint' and reassure you or give you compliments, take direct action to improve your own self-esteem by giving yourself the attention, time, and support you would love to get from others." For example: "Plan a date to take yourself on — alone." (This event is called a "self-date.") Such a strategy not only "meets your need for support," but also "shows others how to provide such support" (p. 210). Presuming, one supposes, that "others" aren't too wrapped up in their own "lifelong romance" to pay attention to you.

In general, these books treat self-esteem as a mood or an emotion that can be boosted through "self-talk," "self-dates," and other essentially self-regarding actions. But many leading psychologists view self-esteem as an achievement based on relationships with other persons, not as an isolated feeling in one's head. It is not an interior state — how is my relationship with myself going today? — that can somehow be separated from concrete activity in the world. Consequently, finding and feeling good about one's "self" is not simply an *inward* journey, but is also and primarily part of a larger process of identity that naturally projects *outward,* toward connectedness with others and identification with external ideals.

*Above:* Two Lovers *(detail) by Kitagawa Utamaro, 1788. From the album* Uta-makura, The Poem of the Pillow. *Victoria and Albert Museum, London, Great Britain.© 1998, Art Resource, New York.*

Most importantly, self-esteem is not an end in itself. For this reason, it can seldom be attained by pursuing it directly. Healthy self-respect is more of a by-product — one residual effect of a loving and productive engagement with the world. Indeed, our great moral and religious traditions have always taught us that direct self-regard, particularly when viewed as an absolute goal, is the problem, not the solution. Recent research similarly suggests that a simple, end-in-itself focus on self-esteem — especially in the form of efforts by teachers and other adults to prop up unjustified or excessive self-esteem in children — may even be harmful.[17]

Not all of the textbooks take this approach to the topic. Two of them, *Health* and *Perspectives on Health*, do not typically present self-esteem as an absolute end. Instead, these two textbooks generally and much more sensibly urge students to concentrate on goals, actions, and accomplishments as the key to building a healthy self-image. For example, *Perspectives on Health* tells students, "Self-esteem. . .[is] closely related to making changes in behavior." To improve self-esteem, teens are similarly urged, for example, to "Encourage yourself to learn something new" or "Do something positive for someone else" (pps 17-18).

In their emphasis on self-esteem, all six textbooks draw extensively on the work of Abraham Maslow, the U.S. psychologist who proposed an understanding of the human person based on a "hierarchy of needs," beginning with basic physical needs, such as food and shelter, rising up through social needs, such as love and acceptance, and ultimately culminating with what Maslow called "self-actualization," or the full realization of one's inner potential and one's internally defined life project. In Maslow's pyramid of needs, "esteem needs" are near the very top, serving as the gateway to self-actualization.

Each of these textbooks offers a one to three page summary, in effect an endorsement, of Maslow's basic theory as it relates to the central importance of self-esteem. *Health: Skills for Wellness* actually concludes its summary-endorsement of Maslow by showing a photograph of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The caption reads: "Martin Luther King, Jr. is an example of a self-actualized person" (p. 32).

This is an astonishingly misguided statement. Martin Luther King, Jr. was a Christian pastor. His entire philosophy and legacy constitute a rejection, not an embrace, of the idea that self-actualization is the highest good and that "my relationship with myself"

*At right:* Sleeping Cupid *by Caravaggio, (1573 - 1610). Galleria Palatina, Palazzo Pitti, Florence, Italy. © 1998 Scala/Art Resource, New York.*

is the most important relationship in life. He was also the successful leader of a protest movement of people whose "physical needs" and "safety needs" were constantly in jeopardy, but who nevertheless, despite those unmet "lower" needs, acted heroically and non-violently to end legal segregation in the U.S. and thereby redeem the moral basis of the American idea. Whatever "needs" the theory of self-esteem and self-actualization may have, it ought to leave Dr. King alone.[18]

More broadly, neither Maslow's theories nor self-esteem theories in general have held up well with the passage of time. Research has confirmed what common sense suggests. Some people with low self-esteem are remarkable achievers who realize their potential and then some. Some people with high self-esteem are fools, idlers, or worse. Some notorious criminals have unusually high self-esteem. In general, research suggests, self-esteem as an independent variable is of limited use in predicting, for good or for ill, success in school, "health," or any other outcome in life.[19] Findings like these again suggest that self-esteem is best understood as part of something else, not a thing by itself. It is a consequence, not a first cause. Yet in these textbooks, no other psychological concept even comes close to matching the influence of Maslow's theory of esteem needs and self-actualization.

## Sleeping Cupid

One surely unintended consequence of turning self-esteem theory into a master idea is that these textbooks often portray the world as an emotionally dark place, in which self-sufficiency is a much better bet than interdependency. These textbooks try to be upbeat. They even relate inspirational stories of teenagers who meet challenges and overcome problems. But the overall effect is clinical and bleak.

For the world view that these textbooks convey to teenagers is a depressing one: You are alone. You must take responsibility for yourself because, in the final analysis, the only person you can rely on is you. Many families are dysfunctional, even abusive. Everyone's motives are ultimately self-regarding. Even relationships — highly touted in these books as essential to health and wellness — are understood to be important precisely because of the benefits they bring to, the "needs" they fulfill for, the isolated individual.

There is nothing bigger than you, no solace or truth other than what you make for yourself, nothing in life that is higher or nobler or more romantic than "self-actualization." If the goal is to engage teenagers, both intellectually and morally, about the fundamental meaning and possibility of the marriage commitment, could any way of thinking be less helpful?

All the important issues get watered down, deprived of larger meaning. For example, why not have have sexual intercourse as a teenager? The reply from these textbooks is true, but limited. You might get a disease. You could even die. You might have a baby, a heavy responsibility that could limit your future, hurt your chances to grow as a person, and make it harder for you to find satisfying relationships. All true.

But these textbooks rarely ask students to consider their behavior, not as it relates to their "needs," but as it relates to the needs of other people. For example, what about avoiding pregnancy because it would hurt your child to grow up without a father? What about refraining from sex out of respect and concern for your girlfriend? Adolescence is a time of intense, often idealistic concern about the relationship of self to others. Yet these textbooks hesitate to engage teenagers about sexuality and marriage in directly moral terms. The ultimate price of this reticence is a high one, however. For what gets left out of the discussion is precisely the topic that should be at its very center: the meaning and possibility of true love.

From the perspective of students, who surely possess more than an academic interest in the relationship between sexual-

ity and love, what must be particularly disappointing is the general disregard of the meaning and role of sexual love. These are precisely the questions with which young people are struggling. As the clinical researcher (and member of this Council) Judith Wallerstein puts it: "These kids want to talk about love and trust. They want to know: Is my father a good man? How do I know when I am in love? How do I know whether to trust a guy?"[20]

*What gets left out is precisely the topic that should be at the center: the meaning and possibility of true love.*

But in these textbooks, it's as if Cupid were confused or sleeping, unable to act. Most of the big, interesting words — mystery, romance, love, flirtation, jealousy, courtship, passion — are simply left unexamined, as if they were not relevant, replaced instead by smaller and ultimately sadder words such as dysfunction, self-esteem, responsibility, stress, coping, disease, and, most of all, health.

The reasons for this situation are not hard to discern. Given our highly sexualized popular culture, as well as widespread sexual activity among high school students, these textbooks understandably choose to downplay love and romance in favor of unambiguously arguing for sexual abstinence. More broadly, any serious consideration of love, especially of love within marriage, would inevitably raise fundamental moral and at times even spiritual questions, thus taking these textbooks exactly where they do *no*t want to go. Instead of wrestling with these admittedly difficult dilemmas, these textbooks adopt an overall framework that appears to be much less controversial: health.

## Marriage, Mucus, Monounsaturated Fat

All of these large textbooks follow a similar format. Under the broad theme of promoting health, they address a remarkably long and otherwise completely unrelated list of topics. Conserving energy. Suicide counseling. Bicycle helmets. Making friends. Sexually transmitted diseases. Divorce. Tobacco, alcohol, and drugs. Getting a good night's sleep. Recycling. Family roles. The digestive system. Diet. Managing stress. Protecting your skin. Developing a healthy personality. And many other topics.

An anthropologist from Mars would surely be puzzled by this table of contents. How does the diagram of the intestines relate to Maslow's pyramid of needs? Why is the chapter on marriage sandwiched between chapters on "Mental Disorders and Suicide" and "Digestion and Excretion"?

The conceptual construct that unites all of these topics is "health." Not simply physical and mental health — a "strong mind and body," as older generations put it — but also the categories of "social health," which refers to healthy personal relationships, and "community health" or "environmental health," which refers to a healthy natural environment.

In this sense, "health" in these textbooks operates at the macro level similar to the way that "self-esteem" operates at the personal level: as the definition of an ultimate good and a religious-like metaphor for the highest set of values that unite our community. In short, when we want educators to teach our children about character and good habits of living, and especially to talk to children about what is right and how to behave, what we do today is talk about health.

The broad ideal of health, we seem to have concluded, is the new, unifying intellectual paradigm that can bring us together as a diverse people while also permitting us to pass on certain moral values to the next generation. The norms of health, with their obvious roots in the medical sciences, seem to provide a non-threatening umbrella, perhaps even including a patina of objectivity, under which we can struggle to address a wide range of socially and ethically sensitive issues, even those as foundational as sexuality and marriage.

Why abstain from doing pleasurable things like smoking marijuana or having sexual intercourse? Why not be inconsiderate of others, if being considerate is a bother? Why not have a baby, if having a baby is what you want to do? According to these textbooks, our biggest and presumably best answer is: *Because it would be unhealthy*.

This way of thinking can sometimes be useful. In our society, in today's high schools, it is certainly understandable that these textbooks would adopt such an approach. But ultimately, this approach fails. It fails as a curriculum. It fails intellectually and it fails ethically.

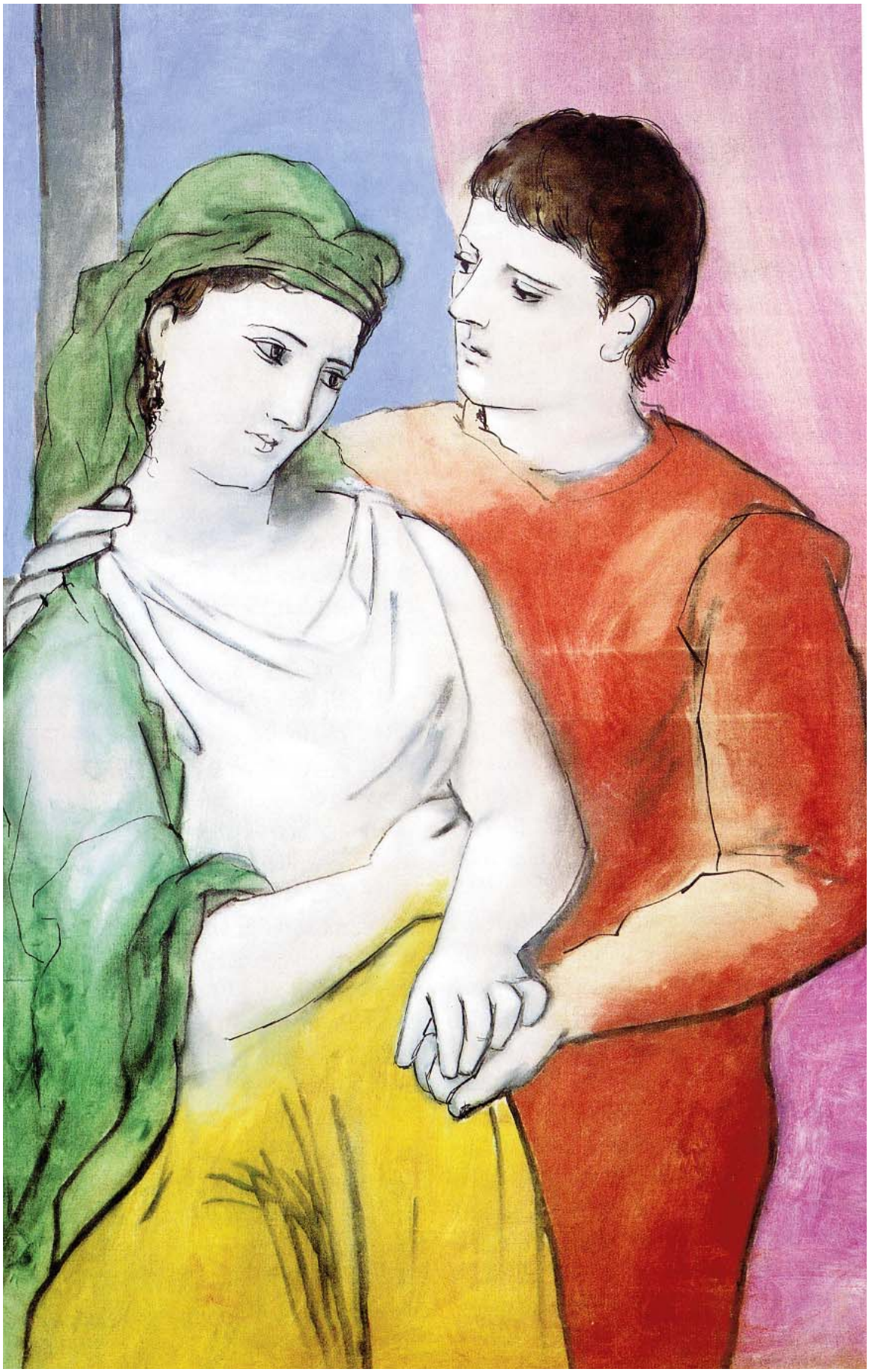
Fundamentally, such an approach requires cutting young people off, to the extent that they are influenced by such textbooks, from exactly the knowledge they need regarding the deepest components of human personality and the deepest motivations for human action. It requires calling important things by the wrong names. It requires a kind of ethical short-sightedness that ultimately distorts our understanding of the ties and ideals that connect people with one another, both within families and across communities and generations. It requires taking parts of life that are intrinsically interesting to teenagers — sex, courtship, love, marriage, family life — and draining them of all drama, intensity, and intellectual depth. Taking a public vow of eternal faithfulness to another human being becomes akin to an act of hygiene, like, say, flossing one's teeth.

Similarly, there is virtually no recognition in any of these books that the study of marriage has ever been taken up by any expert outside the field of psychology. Cultural anthropology might as well not exist. Ditto for history and philosophy. Sociology only fares a bit better. To read these books, one would never imagine that the topics of love and marriage had ever interested a painter, a sculptor, a poet, a novelist, a playwrite, a dancer, a singer, songwriter or musical composer, a photographer, a commercial artist, or a filmmaker.

For all our current celebration of cultural diversity, one would never imagine, based on reading these books, that marriage is a universal human institution, shaped by rich and varied traditions extending across time and cultures. In a world in which marriage is widely understood as containing a spiritual dimension, and in a nation in which about 80 percent of all marriages take place in houses of worship, a reader of these books is never given any reason to suspect that a significant relationship might exist between marriage and religion.

It's as if most of what is truly interesting — most of what would actually awaken a student's curiosity, move his emotions, or cultivate her mind — has simply been left out. Putting at least some of it back in would be the first and most important step toward improving what we are teaching the next generation about the meaning of marriage.

*On this page:* The Lovers *by Pablo Picasso, 1923. Chester Dale Collection. © 1998 Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.*



## Recommendations

ESPECIALLY given the important shortcomings of these textbooks, some will argue that the schools are simply not the place to teach teenagers about marriage. Perhaps. But the reality is that the public schools are already quite deeply — and with strong public support — into the business of educating students about personal and sexual relationships.[21] Driven by growing concern about the deterioration of child and adolescent behavior and values, the involvement of the schools in teaching about relationships and passing on moral values to young people is only likely to increase in the years ahead. Accordingly, the question most educators face is not whether, but how, to teach children about marriage and family life.

This report concludes by suggesting three basic options for reform — three potential strategies for improving what and how we teach the next generation about love and marriage. These options are presented in ascending order of both difficulty and desirability.

### Option 1: Improve the health textbooks.

*Improve the intellectual content*. For example, even within the confines of the health paradigm, these textbooks could and should give students better information regarding the contributions of marriage to personal and public health, as well more realistic information regarding the long-term personal and public health consequences of family fragmentation. In this area, a good topic with which to start would be the unique contributions of fathers to child well being and the costs of fatherlessness to children and society.

More generally, to improve intellectual quality overall, publishers should make sure that forthcoming health textbooks are reviewed not only by medical doctors, psychologists, and health teachers, but also by experts in a range of other fields, including sociology, history, and anthropology.

*Pay attention to skills-based marriage education*. Especially during the past decade, marriage researchers have made large strides in identifying the basic determinants of marital success and failure, and in creating new tools to help both engaged and married couples build stronger and more satisfying marriages. Future health text books should seek to summarize and incorporate this important body of information.[22]

*Recognize the religious impulse and include religious perspectives*. The radical exclusion of religion from the discussion of love and marriage is a form of educational malpractice. In all societies, the marriage vow is viewed, in part, as a sacred promise. Surely well-educated students should be aware of the ideals of marriage envisioned in our various religious traditions, as well as the important role that religion plays for many people in creating and sustaining marriage.

### Option 2: Shift the Focus from Health to Character.

There is a word that describes, much more fully and accurately than "health," the best of what these textbooks are already seeking to convey to students regarding personal responsibility, teenage sexual abstinence, the importance of marriage, and values such as self-control and concern for others. That word is "character." For this reason, character education as a master theme in high schools would be a great improvement over health education, or at least an important supplement to it.

Essentially, character education is rooted in a more realistic psychology, since it permits and even requires adults to speak to students morally, in a language that is broader and deeper than one of pure self-interest. There is a growing character education movement in the United States, offering educators many innovative ideas for replacing or at least broadening the overly restrictive paradigm of health.[23]

*Bottom right:* Cupid *by Lucas Cranach the Elder, (1472-1553). The John B. Johnson Collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art. Photograph by Graydon Wood, 1990.*

**Option 3: Teach Directly from Masterworks of Literature, Art, and Scholarship.**

What do we really want to teach our children about love and marriage? Even to ask the question is to reveal the basic failure of the approach adopted by these textbooks. Eros. Marital love. An eternal vow of constancy to another human being. These are simply not ideas and ideals that we can cram, without seriously distorting them, into a narrow casing called "health" or even into a somewhat bigger casing called "character."

What does a loving wife or husband look like? How can I become more like the kind of person I admire? What makes a good marriage? How do I know when and who to trust? Is lasting love possible? If it is possible, what can I do to get it and to give it?

These are the questions that young people care about, often quite intensely. They are the questions that should be at the center of any educational activity focused on love and marriage. The challenge for educators is to get at them directly, with intellectual and moral seriousness, and without all the extraneous blur and watered-down categories that currently pervade these textbooks.

Perhaps the best way out of this box is to abandon the textbook approach altogether, replacing it instead with exposing students directly to great works of literature, art, and scholarship that examine the themes of love and marriage. After all, for quite some time, and to quite some degree, Cupid has held great fascination not only for novelists, poets, painters, sculptors, and filmmakers, but also philosophers, historians, anthropologists, and great thinkers in general, from Plato to the present day. An innovative, multi-disciplinary course of study would seek directly to connect the intensity of teenagers' questions about love to these larger themes and masterworks of both western and world civilization. The goal of such an approach would be a difficult but worthy one: to explore the fundamental nature and meaning of love and its relationship to sexual union and marriage.

For the great majority of high schools, such a course has yet to be charted. But if our largest goal is to help our children achieve true love rather than merely avoid death — to see them live well rather than simply live long — the unchartered course is the one to explore.

## Textbooks Examined

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Getchell, Leroy H., Grover D. Pippin, and Jill W. Barnes. *Perspectives on Health*. Lexington, Massachusetts: D.C. Heath and Company, 1996. 748 pages.

Greenberg, Jerrold and Robert Gold. *Health*. Orlando: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1994. 693 pages.

Merki, Mary Bronson and Don Merki. *Health: A Guide to Wellness*, 5th Edition. Mission Hills, CA: Glencoe/McGraw-Hill, 1996. 814 pages.

Pruitt, B.E., Kathy Teer Crumpler, and Deborah Pothrow-Stith. *Health: Skills for Wellness*, 2nd Edition. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1997. 752 pages.

Sizer, Frances Sienkiewicz, Eleanor Noss Whitney, and Linda Kelly DeBruyne. *Making Life Choices: Health Skills and Concepts*. St. Paul, Minnesota: West Publishing, 1994. 710 pages.

## Endnotes

1. See, for example, Arthur Levine and Jeanette S. Cureton, *When Hope and Fear Collide: A Portrait of Today's College Student* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 95; and Judith Wallerstein and Julia Lewis, "The Long-Term Impact of Divorce on Children: A First Report from a 25-Year Study," presentation at the Second World Congress of Family Law and the Rights of Children and Youth (San Francisco, CA: June 6, 1997), 15-16.

2. See *Kids These Days: What Americans Really Think About The Next Generation* (New York: Public Agenda, 1997); and *A Call to Civil Society: Why Democracy Needs Moral Truths* (New York: Institute for American Values, 1998), 4-5.

3. Patricia Donovan, "School-Based Sexuality Education: The Issues and Challenges" *Family Planning Perspectives* 30, no. 4 (July/August 1998): 189.

4. "Chiles signs marriage education bill," *Gainsville Sun*, June 12, 1998, 2B.

5. *Statistical Abstract of the United States*: *1996,* U.S. Bureau of the Census, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, October 1996), Table 130.

6. Michael R. Petit and Patrick A. Curtis, *Child Abuse and Neglect: A Look at the States* (Washington, D.C.: CWLA Press, 1997), 52.

7. See Linda J. Waite, "Does Marriage Matter?" *Demography* 32, no. 4 (November 1995): 483-577; Norval Glenn, *Closed Hearts, Closed Minds: The Textbook Story of Marriage* (New York: Institute for American Values, 1997), 10; and Steven L. Nock, "The Consequences of Premarital Fatherhood," *American Sociological Review* 63 (April 1998): 250-263.

8. For a summary, see David Popenoe, *Life Without Father: Compelling New Evidence That Fatherhood and Marriage Are Indispensable For The Good of Children and Society* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 52-73.

9. For example, see Scott M. Stanley, Howard J. Markman, Michelle St. Peters, and B. Douglas Leber, "Strengthening Marriages and Preventing Divorces," *Family Relations* 44 (October 1995): 392-401. For recent media reports on the emerging marriage movement, see Karen S. Peterson, "Making 'I do' harder to undo," *USA Today*, July 21, 1988, 1D; and Pia Nordlinger, "The Anti-Divorce Revolution," *The Weekly Standard*, March 2, 1998, 25-29.

10. As one review of the literature sums up: "[I]n each of the 5 studies which included cohabiting couples, the percentage reporting abuse is between one and a half and two times greater among cohabiting women. Moreover, the more severe the violence, the greater the difference. . ." See Desmond Ellis and Walter S. Dekeseredy, "Marital Status and Woman Abuse: The DAD Model," *International Journal of Sociology and the Family* 19 (Fall 1989): 73. Young women need also to be advised that if a man is abusive in courtship, marriage is unlikely to restrain his violence.

11. See, for example, Lee A. Lillard, Michael J. Brien, and Linda J. Waite, "Pre-Marital Cohabitation and Subsequent Marital Dissolution: Is It Self-Selection?" *Demography* 32 (August 1995): 437-458; and Elizabeth Thomson and Ugo Collela, "Cohabitation and Marital Stability: Quality or Commitment?" *Journal of Marriage and Family* 54 (May 1992): 259-268.

12. Leslie Margolin, "Child Abuse by Mothers' Boyfriends: Why the Overrepresentation?" *Child Abuse and Neglect* 16, no. 4 (July/August 1992): 545-46.

13. See Judith S. Wallerstein and Sandra Blakeslee, *Second Chances: Men, Women, and Children a Decade After Divorce* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1989); Nicholas Zill, Donna Ruane Morrison, and Mary Jo Coiro, "Long-Term Effects of Parental Divorce on Parent-Child Relationships, Adjustment, and Achievement in Young Adulthood," *Journal of Family Psychology* 7, no. 1 (1993): 91-103; Sara S. McLanahan and Gary Sandefur, *Growing Up with a Single Parent*

(Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994); Ronald J. and Jaqueline L. Angel, *Painful Inheritance: Health and the New Generation of Fatherless Children* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993); Paul R. Amato and Alan Booth, *A Generation at Risk: Growing Up in an Era of Family Upheaval* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); and Andrew J. Cherlin, P. Lindsay Chase-Lansdale, and Christine McRae, "Effects of Parental Divorce on Mental Health Throughout the Life Course," *American Sociological Review* 63 (1998): 239-249. For a discussion of scholars revising previous views, see Maggie Gallagher and David Blankenhorn, "Family Feud," *American Prospect* 33 (July-August 1997): 12-15.

14. See, for example, Amato and Booth, *A Generation at Risk*, pps. 175-178 for the effects of divorce on educational attainment, and pps. 67-82 for the effects on parent-child relationships; See also Wallerstein and Lewis, "The Long-Term Impact of Divorce on Children," 9-15; Judith A. Seltzer, "Relationships Between Fathers and Children Who Live Apart: The Father's Role After Separation," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 53 (February 1991): 79-101; and Judith A. Seltzer and Suzanne M. Bianchi, "Children's Contact with Absent Parents," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 50 (August 1988): 663-677.

15. See Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, *The Divorce Culture: How Divorce Became an Entitlement and How It Is Blighting the Lives of Our Children* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), esp. 82-90.

16. For a longer discussion of this point, see Paul C. Vitz, *Psychology as Religion: The Cult of Self-Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1994).

17. See Brad J. Bushman and Roy F. Baumeister, "Threatened Egotism, Narcissism, Self-Esteem, and Direct and Displaced Aggression: Does Self-Love or Self-Hate Lead to Violence?" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 75, no. 1 (July 1998): 219-229.

18. Here, for example, is what Dr. King told a group of striking sanitation workers the night before his assassination: "Like anybody else, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will." Coretta Scott King, *My Life With Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston. 1969), p. 316

19. See, for example, Michael R. Jackson, *Self-Esteem and Meaning: A Life-Historical Investigation*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 2-4; Susan Black, "Self-Esteem: Sense and Nonsense," *American School Board Journal* 178 (July 1991): 27-29; Paul T. Giblin, Marilyn L. Poland and Joel W. Ager, "Clinical Applications of Self-Esteem and Locus of Control to Adolescent Health," *Journal of Adolescent Health Care* 9, No. 1 (January 1988): 1-14 Brad J. Bushman and Roy F. Baumeister, "Threatened Egotism, Narcissism, Self-Esteem, and Direct and Displaced Aggression: Does Self-Love or Self-Hate Lead to Violence?" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 75, no. 1 (July 1998): 219-229; and Roy F. Baumeister, Laura Smart, and Joseph M. Boden, "Relation of Threatened Egotism to Violence and Aggression: The Dark Side of High Self-Esteem," *Psychological Review* 103, no. 1 (1996): 5-33.

20. Interview, August 25, 1998.

21. See Donovan, "School-Based Sexuality Education."

22. For information on current marriage education programs, contact: Coalition for Marriage, Family, and Couples Education, 5310 Belt Road N.W., Washington D.C., 20015; www.smartmarriages.com.

23. Roger Rosenblatt, "Who'll Teach Kids Right from Wrong? The Character Education Movement Thinks the Answer is the Schools," *New York Times Magazine*, April 30, 1995, 36; Barbara C. Unell and Jerry L. Wyckoff, "Teaching Children Virtues, Values, and Morals," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, March 9, 1996, E1-4; and Henry A. Huffman, "Developing a Character Education Program: One School District's Experience," (1994), available from: Character Education Partnership, 918 16th Street, N.W., Suite 501, Washington, D.C. 20006.

## About the Council on Families

THE Council on Families is comprised of twenty nationally prominent scholars and family experts who have come together to form an on-going program of collaborative research, interdisciplinary deliberation, and public education on major issues of family well-being. The Council's mission is to examine the status of the family as a social institution and to make recommendations for the future. Members of the Council serve as unpaid volunteers who have joined together on the basis of a shared commitment to improving child and family well-being. The Council commissions and evaluates scholarly essays on a wide range of family topics and draws upon the expertise of leaders from across the nation and scholars from all branches of the human sciences. It also pursues an ambitious program of public education, regularly seeking to communicate its findings and conclusions to the wider public.

### The Council's Recent Accomplishments

As the culmination of the first phase of the Council's textbook project, the Council in 1997 released a report examining 20 leading college-level marriage and family textbooks, *Closed Hearts, Closed Minds: The Textbook Story of Marriage*, written by the Council's Research Director, Professor Norval Glenn of the University of Texas. In 1995, the Council released *Marriage in America: A Report to the Nation*, summarizing the Council's three-year inquiry into the status of marriage and concluding with its recommendations for revitalizing marriage. To date, the Institute has sold or distributed more than 50,000 copies of *Marriage in America*. As a follow-up to this report, a book of essays, *Promises to Keep: Decline and Renewal of Marriage in America*, was published in 1996 by Rowman and Littlefield. Edited by David Popenoe, Jean Bethke Elshtain, and David Blankenhorn, this book contains twelve scholarly essays on marriage that were commissioned by the Council. In addition, *Marriage in America* has been republished as the book's final chapter. For further information about these and other publications, please contact the Institute.

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## 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 six and an annual budget of about $600,000. 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.

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