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What’s Happening to Marriage
The United States is increasingly “separate and unequal” when it comes to marriage.

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

- Highly educated = college degree
  - 30% of U.S. adults

- Moderately educated = high school degree
  - 58% of U.S. adults ➔ Middle Americans

- Least educated = high school dropout
  - 12% of U.S. adults
Divorce in First 10 Years
Source: NMP/IAV 2010

- Least Educated: 46%
- Moderately Educated: 36% (1970–74), 36% (1995–99), 37% (data not shown)
The Class Divide in Nonmarital Childbearing

Source: NMP/IAV 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>1982</th>
<th>2006–08</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Least Educated</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately Educated</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly Educated</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>6%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Children with Both Parents at Age 14
Source: NMP/IAV 2010

The Growing Marriage Divide

The Bottom Line:

- The U.S. is in danger of “devolving into a separate-and-unequal family regime, where the highly educated and the affluent enjoy strong and stable households and everyone else is consigned to increasingly unstable, unhappy, and unworkable ones.” (Wilcox 2010)
Why the Marriage Divide?
Why Class?

- Fifty years ago, minimal class divides in married life.

- What accounts for the growing marriage gap?
  - Liberals tend to stress economic arguments.
  - Conservatives tend to stress cultural and policy arguments.
Who is Right?

- Both are.

3 causes:
- A changing culture;
- The rise of the post-industrial economy; and,
- Bowling Alone: The retreat from civil society.
Almost all Americans honor the ideal of marriage in theory but increasingly tolerant of departures from the ideal in practice.

• In the name of a kind of “expressive individualism” that seeks both to give American adults maximum freedom to pursue their own desires and to enforce a public ideal of “tolerance” for family-related choices.

Cultural dynamic most consequential for less-educated Americans, who are now less likely to have a “marriage mindset” and live by norms that lead to strong marriages.
In Fact, Marriage Mindset Has Returned Among Upscale Americans
Restrictive Attitudes Toward Divorce
(Source: GSS)

- Least Educated: 53% in 1970s, 39% in 2000-2012
- Moderately Educated: 50% in 1970s, 48% in 2000-2012
- Highly Educated: 36% in 1970s, 46% in 2000-2012

UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS
Adult Attitudes Toward Premarital Sex
(Source: GSS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>1972-1978</th>
<th>2000-2012</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Least Educated</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately Educated</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly Educated</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>20%</td>
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</table>
Teens Embarrassed by Pregnancy

Source: NMP/IAV 2010

- Least-educated Mother: 48%
- Moderately Educated Mother: 61%
- Highly Educated Mother: 76%
The Retreat from Institutions

- Middle Americans—especially men—are increasingly disengaged from the institutions of work and civil society—including religion.

- These institutions have traditionally supplied money, moral direction, & social support to marriage in America.
The Post-Industrial Economy

- Middle Americans—especially Middle American men—have seen their economic fortunes fall over the last 40 years:
  - Falling real wages for high-school educated men;
  - Increasing spells of unemployment.

- Not true for highly educated Americans.
Spells of Male Unemployment in Last 10 Years

Source: NMP/IAV 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>1970s</th>
<th>2000s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No high school degree</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/High school degree, no four-year college degree</td>
<td></td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-year college degree</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>29%</td>
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</table>
Bowling Alone in Middle America

- The last half-century has witnessed a marked decline in the civic & religious vitality of American society.
  - This decline is concentrated in Middle America.
Bowling Alone: Percent Belonging to Non-Religious Civic Organization

Source: NMP/IAV 2010

- No high school degree: 51% (1970s), 22% (2000s)
- High school degree, no four-year college degree: 71% (1970s), 52% (2000s)
- Four-year college degree: 86% (1970s), 77% (2000s)
Praying Alone: Weekly Attendees
Source: NMP/IAV 2010

- No high school degree: 0.32
- High school degree, no four-year college degree: 0.4
- Four-year college degree: 0.38

1970s
2000s
Bridging the Marriage Divide

The Bottom Line:

- If you care about bridging the marriage divide, you should care about economic justice, cultural change & the renewal of civil society.
For the Kids’ Sake:
Charting a Path to the American Dream
Compared to children raised single-parent families, children in intact, married homes are significantly more likely to:

- Steer clear of events—e.g., prison—that limit their future economic opportunities;
- Acquire the human capital they need to flourish in today’s labor market.

- (Amato 2005; Hetherington and Kelly 2002)
Young Men in Prison

Odds of Incarceration by 30

Source: Harper and McLanahan 2004
Teenage Girls Pregnant

% Teenage Girls Pregnant

Dad stayed  Dad left 6-18  Dad left 0-5

Source: Ellis et al., 2003
College Graduation, by Family Structure (Wilcox 2013)
Family Structure & Mobility
(Pew 2010)

Relative Mobility for Children by Mother’s Family Structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>CHILDREN OF CONTINUOUSLY MARRIED MOTHERS</th>
<th>CHILDREN OF DIVORCED MOTHERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90%</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80%</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70%</td>
<td>30</td>
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<td>20%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>32</td>
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</table>
The Family Foundations of Economic Success

The Bottom Line

- Children who are raised in intact, married homes (and adults who forge intact marriages) are more likely to realize the American Dream and to steer clear of poverty.
The Family-Go-Round:
Family Instability at Home
Divorce and Remarriage

- Paul Amato, president of National Council of Family Relations, notes (2005):
  
  “Studies consistently indicate, however, that children in stepfamilies exhibit more problems than do children with continuously married parents and about the same number of problems as do children with single parents.”
Cohabitation is becoming an increasingly common vehicle for bearing/rearing children.

- More than 40% of children will spend some time in a cohabiting household.
- 21% of children are born into cohabiting unions.
- Cohabiting families are especially common in Middle America and in poor communities.

- Children do not fare as well in cohabiting households as they do in married families.

- Cohabitation now bigger risk to children in the U.S. than divorce.
Drugs, Drop Outs, & Depression

- **Substance abuse**
  - Teens in cohabiting households are 116% more likely to currently smoke pot compared to teens in intact, married families (Cavanagh 2008).

- **Schooling**
  - Teens are 60% less likely to graduate from high school if they came from a cohabiting household compared to teens in intact, married families (Raley et al. 2005).

- **Psychological well-being**
  - 15.7% of school-age children in cohabiting households experienced serious emotional problems compared to 3.5% of peers in intact, married families (Acs and Nelson 2002).
Fourth National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect

Figure 5-2. Incidence of Harm Standard Abuse by Family Structure and Living Arrangement.
Why are Cohabiting Unions Risky for Kids?

- **Family Process**
  - Cohabiting unions tend to have less commitment, trust, sexual fidelity, more violence, & less parental supportiveness than married unions (Brown 1996; Cavanagh 2008; Waite & Joyner 2002).

- **Family Stability**
  - They are also much less stable, even when biological kids are involved.
  - Instability is linked to numerous problems for children—from delinquency to school failure—and helps to explain why cohabiting unions are on some outcomes more risky for children than a stable, single parent home (e.g., Cavanagh 2008).
Stability for Children: Married vs. Cohabiting

% of families broken by age five

(Child's Age: Age five)

Married Parents
Cohabiting Parents

(Smock and Manning 2004)
From a Child’s Perspective, Intact Marriage is Ideal

The Bottom Line:

If we were to design a family, the “two-parent ideal... [would ensure] that children had access to the time and money of two adults... would provide a system of checks and balances that promoted quality parenting... [and the] fact that both parents have a biological connection to the child would increase the likelihood that the parents would identify with the child and be willing to sacrifice for that child, and it would reduce the likelihood that either parent would abuse the child.”

The Family Foundation: How Marriage Matters for the Nation
Poverty & Crime

Child Poverty
- Brookings study: Substantial share of the growth in child poverty in the United States since 1970 can be attributed to the retreat from marriage (Thomas & Sawhill 2002)

Crime
- Harvard Sociologist Robert Sampson: “Family structure is one of the strongest, if not the strongest, predictors of... urban violence across cities in the United States.”
“Between 1976 and 2000, family structure shifts explain 41% of the increase in inequality” (Martin 2006)
Community Family Structure & American Dream

Source: Data from The Equality of Opportunity Project.
Harvard economist Raj Chetty: Community family structure is the “single strongest correlate of upward mobility.”

- Children from single and two-parent families are more likely to succeed if they live in communities dominated by 2-parent families.
Marriage in the Nation’s Interest

The Bottom Line:

- If you care about poverty, income inequality, & opportunity in America, you should care about marriage.
The Ties that Bind:
The Good News About Marriage & Religion
The Power of Faith

- Men and women who share a common faith are more likely to succeed in their marriages:
  - “God at the center of marriage” is best religious predictor of marital quality.
  - Those who attend are 35% less likely to divorce.
  - Sources: Wilcox 2006; Wilcox 2011
Pre-Cana Helps (NMP 2014)

Odds of Enjoying High-Quality Marriage

Had Premarital Preparation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
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PREDICAN
Malankara Marriage Preparation Course
The Tasks of the Church

- In the public square:
  - Be a voice for economic justice
  - Seek to eliminate marriage penalties in public policy

- In the pulpit:
  - Articulate the benefits of intact marriage for children
  - Stand in solidarity w/ couples in crisis

- Pastoral priorities:
  - Men’s ministries
  - Employment ministries
  - Marriage mentoring & retreats
Conclusion

- Given the clear economic, social, & emotional benefits of marriage for adults, children, & the nation, we need to renew the
  - Economic
    - Better jobs & vocational training for less-educated men
  - Policy
    - End the marriage penalty facing low-income couples
  - Religious &
    - Religious & civic organizations need to target Middle Americans
    - Also need to target men (employment, men’s ministries, etc.)
  - Cultural
    - Hollywood & Madison Avenue
  - Foundations of marriage for our day.
More Information

www.family-studies.org
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