

Making Room For Daddy: Fathers, Marriage, and Welfare Reform

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In 1960, the total number of children in the United States living absent their father was less than 10 million. Today, that number stands at over 24 million, representing nearly four out of every ten children. And things are getting worse, not better. By some estimates, 60 percent of children born in the 1990s will spend a significant portion of their childhood in a home without their father (Furstenberg and Cherlin, 1991). For over one million children each year, the pathway to a fatherless family is divorce. The divorce rate doubled from 1960 to 1980, before leveling off and declining slightly in the 1980s and 1990s. Today, 40 out of every 100 first marriages end in divorce, compared to 16 out of every 100 first marriages in 1960. No other industrialized nation has a higher divorce rate.

The second pathway to a fatherless home is out-of-wedlock childbearing. In 1960, about 5 percent of all births were out-of-wedlock. That number increased to 11 percent in 1970, 18 percent in 1980, 28 percent in 1990, and to nearly 33 percent today. The 1.3 million children born out-of-wedlock each year surpasses 1 million children whose parents divorce each year.

Births to teenagers are especially likely to be out-of-wedlock. Although teen pregnancy rates have been declining over the past decade, the percentage of births to teens that are out-of-wedlock has continued to increase. Today, nearly 8 of 10 births to a teenage mother are out-of-wedlock. And while it is true that most out-of-wedlock childbearing occurs among women in their twenties, about half of unmarried mothers begin childbearing in their teens (Committee on Ways and Means, 1998; p. 539). Children born to an unwed, teen mother are especially likely to grow up without a consistent relationship with their father, to be poor, and to end up on welfare. A conservative estimate is that births to teens cost taxpayers \$8 billion annually (Maynard, 1997).

The absence of fathers in the home has profound consequences for children. Almost 75 percent of American children living in single-parent families will experience poverty before they turn 11-years-old, compared to only 20 percent of children in two-parent families (National Commission on Children, 1993). Indeed, virtually all of the increase in child poverty between 1970 and 1996 was due to the growth of single parent families (Sawhill, 1999). Children who grow up absent their fathers are also more likely to fail at school or to drop out, experience behavioral or emotional problems requiring psychiatric treatment, engage in early sexual activity, and develop drug and alcohol problems (McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994).

Despite the emphasis of the 1996 welfare reform legislation on marriage and two-parent families, most state efforts to date have focused on moving previously dependent mothers into the paid labor force. However, simply moving millions of previously welfare dependent, single mothers into low wage jobs is unlikely to reduce significantly child poverty, especially after taking into consideration reasonable child care expenses. In contrast, two minimum wage jobs provide an after tax income of \$21,000 a year, enough to lift a family of two adults and three or fewer children out of poverty. Hence, if we wish to decrease the number of children growing up in poverty, public policy must focus not only on helping single mothers get jobs, but also on bringing fathers back into the family picture as well.

Encouraging Male Responsibility and Preventing Premature Fatherhood

Half of first out-of-wedlock births are to women under the age of 20. The fathers of these children are sometimes teenage boys but too often they are older males who, given the age of the girls involved, bear disproportionate responsibility for the births involved (Darroch, Landry, and Oslak, 1999). One solution to the problem of teen unwed pregnancy is to encourage such couples to marry. However, research suggests that such marriages are particularly unstable (National Center, 1995). This

has prompted efforts to prevent such pregnancies from occurring in the first place, and increasingly such efforts focus on men and boys, not just young women. Strategies have included abstinence education, more comprehensive sex education, family planning services, media campaigns, and state coalitions devoted to preventing teen pregnancy. There has been a substantial increase in such activities, both governmental and private, since enactment of welfare reform in 1996 (Wertheimer, Jager, and Moore, 2000). For these or other reasons, rates of teen sexual activity (especially among males), teen pregnancy and births have all declined during the 1990s.

Some of these efforts have focused on convincing young men that getting a young girl pregnant is a bad idea. The 1996 welfare reform law called for greater use of statutory rape laws and several states have moved to enforce them more aggressively. However, statutory rape laws are rather blunt instruments that may be ineffective in dealing with deeply ingrained cultural norms.

A better approach may be to provide support to religious and other civic organizations that work with young men and women. Many of these organizations encourage more responsible sexual behavior, including abstinence, but also engage young people in a variety of constructive activities such as after-school programs and community service. Some of these efforts have been effective (Kirby, 2001). Certainly, sexual attitudes and behaviors have changed quite dramatically in the 1990s. For example, the proportion of college freshmen agreeing that it's all right to have sex if two people have known each other for a short time declined from 52 percent in 1987 to 40 percent in 1999. And a careful study by the Urban Institute found that the shift to more conservative attitudes accounted for a majority of the decline in sexual activity among young men between 1988 and 1995 (Ku et al., 1998).

A final way to encourage male responsibility is stricter enforcement of child support obligations. Any man that fathers a child ought to be held accountable for helping to support that child financially.

Moreover, research generally substantiates that child well-being is improved when non-resident fathers pay child support. And several studies suggest that tougher application of these laws has reduced out-of-wedlock childbearing (Garfinkel, this volume).

Most programmatic efforts to date have focused on reconnecting fathers with their children. But it is worth emphasizing that preventing premature fatherhood is at least as important as trying to reconnect men to children they never planned to have in the first place; and that recent efforts to accomplish this objective appear to have had some success.

Helping Fathers Meet Their Responsibilities

The historic policy answer to the problem of absent fathers has been child support enforcement. However, many fathers of children residing in low-income households are under-educated and under-employed themselves, and may, therefore, lack the resources to be able to provide meaningful economic support for their children. Too strong a focus on child support enforcement may lead these already marginally employed men to drop out of the paid labor force in favor of participation in the underground economy, making it even more difficult to be an involved father.

Moreover, an exclusive focus on child support enforcement ignores the many non-economic contributions that fathers make to the well-being of their children. If we want fathers to be more than cash machines for their children, we need public policies that support their work as nurturers, disciplinarians, mentors, moral instructors, and skill coaches, and not just as economic providers. Focusing solely on paternity establishment and the payment of child support effectively downgrades fathers to, in the words of social historian Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, "paper dads."

For these reasons, some recent initiatives have attempted to help fathers support their children, both financially and as involved parents. The best known, and most comprehensively studied, of these

efforts is the Parents' Fair Share program. Parents' Fair Share was designed to help non-custodial fathers of children on welfare who owe child support to: (1) find more stable and better-paying jobs; (2) pay child support on a consistent basis; and (3) assume a fuller and more responsible fathering role. Key services included peer support, employment and training services, and voluntary mediation between custodial and non-custodial parents.

A recent report, based on two years of follow-up data, found that Parents' Fair Share produced some increases in employment and earnings among the most disadvantaged subset of fathers, but no impact on the sample as a whole (Martinez and Miller, 2000). Regarding child support payments, Parents' Fair Share participants were significantly more likely to pay child support than the control group (50 percent versus 43 percent) and paid significantly higher amounts (\$397 per quarter versus \$313). The study also found that many fathers provide informal support to their children and that pressuring them to provide more support through the formal child support system reduces levels of informal support (Knox and Redcross, 2000).

In terms of the non-economic aspects of father involvement, Parents' Fair Share reported that the non-custodial fathers seemed genuinely to care about and wanted to be involved with their children. Program fathers also reported finding the peer support groups, designed to teach effective fathering skills, helpful. The program did not, on average, increase the amount of visitation, although it did produce some increase in father-child contact in families with very low levels of initial visitation. One reason that Parents' Fair Share may not have been more effective is its close ties to, and emphasis on, increasing child support rather than on simply encouraging the social and emotional involvement of the father in his children's lives. Such an emphasis may have led many participants to view Parents' Fair Share as a kinder and gentler version of child support enforcement rather than a program intent on

helping them be more involved fathers. Indeed, an early process evaluation of a fatherhood program operated by the San Mateo, California, Attorney General's office (in which the office of child support enforcement is housed) found many of the non-resident fathers recruited for the program believed it was really a "sting" operation for collecting past child support (Price, 1999). These findings suggest that, to be successful, fatherhood programs may need to operate independently of the formal child support system.

Fragile Families Initiatives

Another criticism of Parents' Fair Share is that it intervened too late. To be included in the program, a non-resident father must have already built up substantial child support arrearages. By that time, many unwed fathers have become disconnected from their children, alienated from the child's mother or moved on to other partners. Indeed, one study found that 57 percent of unwed fathers with children under 2 years of age visited their children more than once per week, but only 22 percent were in such frequent contact with their children at age 7 1/2 or older (Lerman, 1993). Contrast this to the fact that, at the time of the child's birth, 82 percent of unmarried mothers and fathers are romantically involved with each other, 44 percent are cohabiting, and 99.8 percent of the fathers express a desire to be involved in raising their children in the coming years (Bendheim-Thoman Center, 2000).

This "earlier is better" approach is being implemented in a number of cities throughout the United States. Known as "Fragile Families" programs, they target low-income, non-married couples shortly after, if not before, their child's birth and provide the same kinds of services as Parents' Fair Share. Although no formal evaluations have yet been reported in the peer-reviewed literature on the effectiveness of fragile families programs, several such evaluations are underway.

Thus far, fragile families initiatives have been reluctant to integrate a marriage message into their programs. Instead, most fragile families programs concentrate on helping cohabiting couples strengthen their relationship. Supporters of these programs argue that what is important is the involvement of the father, not the marital status of the parents. They also argue that bringing back marriage to many low-income communities is not realistic.

There is, however, little empirical evidence to date supporting the idea that it is possible to keep fragile families together absent marriage. To the contrary, some existing research indicates that as many as three-fourths of children born to cohabiting parents will see their parents split up before they reach age 16, compared to only about one-third of those born to married parents (Popenoe and Whitehead, 1999).

Once a father ceases to cohabit with the mother of his children, that father tends over time to become disconnected, both financially and psychologically, from his children. By one estimate, 40 percent of children with non-resident fathers have not seen their father in over a year. Of the remaining 60 percent, only one in five sleeps even one night per month in the father's home. Overall, only one in six sees their father an average of once or more per week (Furstenberg and Nord, 1985). Remarriage, or, in cases of an unwed father, marriage to someone other than the child's mother, makes it especially unlikely that a non-custodial father will remain in contact with his children (Stephens, 1996).

Moreover, even when non-resident fathers do stay involved in their children's lives, the constraints inherent in traditional visitation arrangements often preclude the kind of father-child interactions most associated with improvements in child well-being. That's because when time with one's children is limited, many non-resident fathers strive to make sure their children enjoy themselves when they are with them. As a result, non-resident fathers tend to spend less time than in-the-home

fathers helping their children with their homework, monitoring their activities and setting appropriate limits, activities known to enhance child well-being. Rather, nonresident fathers spend more time taking their children to restaurants or movies, activities which have not been found to be associated with enhanced child outcomes (Amato and Gilbreth, 1999).

Another problem with promoting cohabitation is that many men in cohabiting relationships are not the biological father of the children in the household, or at least are not the biological father of all the children in the household. By one estimate, 63 percent of children in cohabiting households are born not to the cohabiting couple, but to a previous union of one of the adult partners, most often the mother (Graefe and Lichter, 1999). This is problematic in that cohabitation with a man who is not biologically related to one's children increases the risk of both physical and sexual child abuse (Daly and Wilson, 1996).

Furthermore, cohabitation seems to enhance relationship instability. The experience of cohabitation appears to alter a couples' attitudes toward marriage and divorce in ways that make the couple more prone to divorce should they subsequently marry (Axinn and Thornton, 1992).

This does not mean that fragile families initiatives are unwise. Children do better when their fathers are actively and positively engaged in their lives. This goes for unmarried fathers as well as married fathers, whether cohabiting with the mother or not. It is to suggest, however, that if the goal is to produce lifetime fathers for children, and not merely a temporary increase in father involvement, something else needs to be added to the mix. That something else is marriage.

The Marriage Option

The empirical literature clearly demonstrates that children do best when they grow up in an intact, two-parent, married household. That these results are not simply due to differences in income is

attested to by the fact that step-families, which have household incomes nearly equivalent to continuously married households, offer few of these benefits to children (Horn, 1999).

Some argue that the benefits of marriage are largely due to selection effects. In other words, those who marry have unmeasured characteristics, such as strong interpersonal skills or emotional maturity, that simultaneously make them good partners and good parents. Certainly, there is something to this argument. Simple comparisons between the married and the unmarried are not reliable and even relatively sophisticated efforts to tease out the effects of marriage per se have their limitations. Nonetheless, recent research suggests there is something about marriage itself, such as the expectation of permanency and the commitment and security that this engenders, that produces good outcomes beyond what can be explained by selection effects alone (Waite, 1995).

Of course, not all marriages between biological parents are ideal. Domestic violence and other irreconcilable differences will, at times, necessitate single-parent families. But while acknowledging the reality of domestic violence and accepting the inevitability of divorce and even out-of-wedlock childbearing in some circumstances, it should also be acknowledged that marriage is the most reliable pathway to a lifetime father for children. As Hillary Clinton (1996) has pointed out in her book *It Takes a Village*, every society, in order to function properly, requires a critical mass of married, two-parent families, both to raise their own children well, and to serve as models for those who are being reared in something other than a married, two-parent family. The great tragedy today is that there are communities, and especially low-income communities, which have already lost that critical mass.

The Importance of Social Norms

Given that marriage is good for children and adults, why isn't everyone rushing to the alter to get married? In explaining why people do or do not marry, most social scientists and policy analysts have

relied heavily on explanations that emphasize economic changes over time. If marriage has declined, many assert, it is because men's earnings or employment opportunities have declined or because women have independent sources of income in the form of welfare or their own earnings.

There is little doubt that these economic factors have played some role in the decline of marriage, although their impact has not been large (Sawhill, 1999). Certainly, they cannot fully explain the rather precipitous changes in marriage rates that have occurred over the past three decades. Something else must have been at work and that something else is a massive shift in social norms or public attitudes. Charles Murray (this volume) refers to this shift as a change in the *zeitgeist*. He notes that the merits of the two-parent family came under assault in the 1970s and 1980s and that such attitudes may have at least partially reversed during the 1990s.

Survey data on attitudes suggest that Murray is right. Consider, for example, changes in attitudes toward premarital sex. The proportion of the population that believes premarital sex is always or almost always wrong has declined sharply from close to 70 percent for cohorts born in the early part of this century to close to 20 percent for the youngest age groups (Inter-University Consortium). This shift in attitudes produced, in turn, a major increase in rates of very early sexual activity. The proportion of teenaged girls, aged 15 to 19, who were sexually experienced increased from 30 percent in 1970 to 55 percent in 1990 (National Center, 1995). This growing permissiveness regarding premarital sex, combined with increasing rates of sexual activity and later marriage has, in turn, been responsible for the increase in out-of-wedlock births, the most important source of the growth of father-absent families in recent decades.

There has also been considerable change in social norms concerning the importance, or even desirability, of life-long marriage. Forty years ago, for example, there was some consensus that couples

in troubled marriages should “stay together for the sake of the kids.” Now divorce among couples with children is commonplace. Moreover, surveys consistently find that majorities of teens and young adults consider cohabitation a reasonable substitute for marriage. In a recent survey, for example, three-quarters of high school seniors agreed a man and woman who live together without being married are either “experimenting with a worthwhile alternative lifestyle or doing their own thing and not affecting

Although the longer-term attitudinal trends have been unfavorable to marriage and family life, the 1990s have produced at least a partial reversal of some of these trends. As noted earlier, attitudes about premarital and casual sex have shifted in a more conservative direction, and young people are becoming more interested in marriage (Survey Research Center, 1995). In addition, recent ethnographic research suggests that being an involved father is becoming a more highly respected role among lower-income males (Cohen, 1999).

If norms are not stable, and especially if they can be influenced by public policy, this opens up a whole new arena for public action. It also raises difficult and controversial questions about which norms or values society wants to promote. But if individuals are less autonomous than traditional models imply, and instead are to one degree or another influenced by the behavior or opinions of others, then it is no longer sufficient to argue that decisions about marriage or childbearing are entirely private. Not only do they have social consequences; they have social determinants as well, including messages embedded in public policy and in the popular media. Social psychologists who have studied this phenomenon have found that behavior is very much conditioned by individual’s perceptions of what others around them are doing as well as by what others are likely to approve or disapprove. For

example, teens are more likely to become sexually active when they believe that “everyone else is doing (Cialdini and Trost, 1998).

This is not to say that the trends we have been describing (less marriage, more divorce, more premarital sex, and more cohabitation) are all bad. The kind of conformity to marriage as a norm that prevailed in an earlier era forced some people to marry who might have been better off single and trapped others in abusive relationships. It is only to say that norm regimes matter, that we must come to some judgments about the kind of regime in which we want to live, and that public policy can influence this regime if policymakers are willing to adopt the kind of public marketing strategies that have been used effectively in other areas, such as smoking.

Economic Disincentives for Marriage

While emphasizing the importance of social norms, it is nevertheless also the case that when couples get married, public policy frequently punishes them economically. The marriage penalty in the U.S. tax code for higher wage earners is well known. Less well known is the financial penalty for marriage found in the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), an income supplement that provides up to \$4,000 a year to low-income working parents with children. This tax credit is now the largest antipoverty measure in the federal arsenal. The good news is that the EITC encourages work because only those with earnings are eligible. The bad news is that it can discourage marriage by making it very expensive. That's because a low-wage mother who marries another low-wage earner typically moves into an earnings range that reduces eligibility for the EITC. Thus, two low-wage earners are better off, at least as far as the EITC is concerned, if they stay single or cohabit than if they marry.

Admittedly, there is little evidence that low-income couples alter their behavior due to marriage penalties in the EITC (Ellwood, 2000). However, anecdotal evidence suggests there is a sense in low-

income communities that if you get married you "lose stuff." They may not know exactly how much "stuff" they stand to lose, but they know marriage is a bad deal. And they are right. A mother earning \$10,000 stands to lose \$1600 in EITC benefits alone if she marries a man with similar earnings (Ellwood and Sawhill, 2000). And it is not just the EITC that discourages marriage. The entire panoply of means-tested programs is rife with marriage penalties because benefits are often scaled back when a new wage earner is added to the household. In addition, 17 states have different rules for two-parent than for one-parent families under TANF, even when both have similarly low incomes (Primus and Beeson, 2000).

When one takes into account the full package of income-tested benefits, the marriage penalty for a single mother who chooses to marry an employed man can be very severe (Steuerle, 1997). For example, when a single mother working full-time at the minimum wage marries an \$8 per hour full-time worker, the marriage penalty is a shocking \$8,060. Under such circumstances, marriage simply makes no economic sense. Even if one cannot demonstrate individual couples alter their marital decisions as a result, such policies no doubt have larger "signaling" effects about the desirability, or in this case, undesirability, of marriage, further weakening the social norm of marriage, especially in low-income communities.

The Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation recently reported an example of how the removal of financial disincentives for marriage can positively affect marriage rates and stability in an evaluation of the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP; Knox, Miller, and Gennetian, 2000). Implemented prior to 1996, MFIP was an experiment designed to help welfare dependent families achieve self-sufficiency through work. For MFIP participants, separate eligibility requirements for two-

parent families were eliminated. In addition, MFIP allowed two-parent families to disregard more of the money they earned than what was allowed in the traditional AFDC program.

At three-year follow-up, 11 percent of previously single MFIP recipients were married compared to only 7 percent of single mothers randomly assigned to the traditional AFDC program. Even more impressively, 60 percent of two-parent families in the MFIP group were still married at three-year follow-up compared to only 49 percent of two-parent families assigned to the traditional AFDC program. This is the first clear demonstration of the positive effects removal of financial disincentives for marriage can have on both marriage formation and marital stability.

Recommendations for the Next Phase of Welfare Reform

If welfare reform is to deliver on its promise not just to reduce caseloads but also to improve the well-being of children, the next phase of welfare reform must recognize the importance of reducing non-marital childbearing and increasing marriage. Unfortunately, there are no proven remedies for achieving these goals. Nonetheless, given their importance, we urge experimentation with a variety of approaches, some of which will be controversial. As such, they should be tried out on an appropriate scale and carefully evaluated.

First, in reauthorizing TANF, Congress should provide resources to nonprofit and faith-based organizations committed to reducing teen out-of-wedlock pregnancies, engaging fathers, and promoting marriage. Most welfare case workers and many political leaders have been reluctant to address such issues as sex and marriage for fear of offending some particular constituency (Ooms, 1998). This reluctance to bring up the topic of marriage, however, sends the not-so-subtle message that marriage is neither expected nor valued. Although one can hope that the president, governors, members of Congress, and others in public life will use the power of the bully pulpit to encourage childbearing within

marriage, faith-based and nonprofit organizations are in a better position than government itself to provide leadership on this set of issues. Indeed, unless faith-based organizations and other civic groups become more strongly involved, and are provided with the resources necessary to do so, any changes induced by political rhetoric alone are unlikely to be sustained.

Second, Congress should take steps to reduce the financial disincentives for marriage. As we have seen, current policies impose significant penalties on couples that get married. At the very least, the EITC needs to be reformed to ensure it does not punish low-income couples that choose marriage. There are a number of different ways to accomplish this objective (Ellwood and Sawhill, 2000). One proposal would extend the phase-out range for the EITC by \$6000 for married couples at a cost of roughly \$5 billion a year (Sawhill and Thomas, 2001). In addition, TANF re-authorization could encourage states to treat married couples more favorably, allowing them to keep more of their welfare benefits as earnings rise and eliminating rules that discriminate against two parent families with low incomes. Murray (this volume) goes one step further and proposes that one state experiment with a plan that would deny all welfare benefits to unmarried girls under 18.

Third, Congress should consider providing incentives for marriage. Removing financial disincentives for marriage, while helpful, is not the same thing as promoting marriage. Congress should consider earmarking funds to provide explicit financial incentives for low-income couples to marry or at least to avoid bearing children out-of-wedlock. Currently, West Virginia is the only state that provides an explicit financial incentive for marriage, giving couples on welfare that choose to marry a \$100 bonus payment. Robert Rector of the Heritage Foundation has proposed an even more dramatic financial incentive for marriage in which women at high-risk for having a child out-of-wedlock would be given a \$5000 bonus if they have their first child within marriage. The \$5000 payment would be made in \$1000

annual installments over a five-year period dependent upon the woman remaining married. A less dramatic proposal is for states to suspend the collection of child support arrearages in cases where the biological father and mother get – and stay -- married to each other.

Although controversial, such proposals make the following important point: Marriage is in trouble, especially in low-income communities. If we are serious about restoring marriage, public policy may have to do more than simply strive toward marriage neutrality by removing existing financial disincentives for marriage. It will also need to provide a clear message that marriage is valued by rewarding those who choose it for themselves.

Fourth, TANF reauthorization should require states to provide the same employment services to low-income men as they currently do to low-income women. Admittedly, research on the effectiveness of providing employment services to low-income men has been disappointing (LaLonde, 1995). This may be because many employment programs in the past have emphasized classroom training at the expense of job placement or on-the-job training, have not been adequately linked to employers' needs, and have put too little emphasis on the acquisition of "soft skills" such as dress, attendance, and relationships with supervisors and customers. Nevertheless, improving the employment status of low-income men may encourage marriage by improving their marriageability. Existing Welfare-to-Work grants can be used for this purpose, but more of the funds could be earmarked for services targeted to this group. In so doing, however, care should be taken not to condition receipt of services on being a non-custodial parent as this might serve to introduce perverse incentives for men to father children out-of-wedlock, in much the same way the old welfare system provided perverse incentives for women to bear children out-of-wedlock.

Fifth, TANF reauthorization should include funds specifically targeted for programs that enhance the marital and parenting skills of high-risk families. Unfortunately, many men and women lack the necessary skills to sustain a marriage and raise children well. Some may have grown up in broken homes and never experienced positive role models. Others may have had inadequate or abusive parents. Too many African-American men, in particular, have never experienced what it means to have a committed father (Patterson, 1998). In order to help couples sustain marriage and be good parents, funding should be provided to religious and civic organizations that offer pre-marital education to low-income couples applying for, or on, public assistance.

Finally, TANF reauthorization should be used to rebuild cultural norms surrounding sex, teen pregnancy, and marriage. It is naive to think that a single program will yield strong effects if that program operates within a broader culture which regularly and consistently suggests that casual sex outside marriage is the norm, that sexual exploits are a test of one's manhood, that teenage pregnancy and out-of-wedlock childbearing are no big deal, and that marriage itself is old-fashioned. These messages suggests that the next phase of welfare reform might also attempt to change the culture by earmarking some TANF funds for broad-based media campaigns designed to publicize the importance of delaying childbearing until marriage and making lifelong commitments to children, even if they are born outside marriage.

There is reason to believe that well-targeted public education campaigns can affect both attitudes and behavior. Take, for example, the change in social norms concerning smoking. Adult smoking rates declined from 42 percent in 1965 to 24 percent in 1998 (Giovino et al., 1994; U.S. Department, 2000). A multitude of factors contributed to this decline including evidence establishing a link between smoking and health in the 1950s, the dissemination of this information to the public

(particularly in the first Surgeon General's report in 1964) the television and radio anti-smoking campaigns associated with the 1968 Fairness Doctrine, and the ban on broadcast advertising of tobacco products in 1971 (U.S. Department, 2000). The impact of these external factors was greatly magnified by growing social disapproval of smoking. Once considered a normal social behavior, smoking is now done furtively or apologetically, even among adults, and as the number of people involved drops, the social acceptability of the activity further erodes.

Independent evaluations of other media campaigns have shown positive results as well. For example, an evaluation of the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy's public service ad campaign found changes in awareness and attitudes, as well as increased conversation with their parents, among teenaged boys and girls exposed to the ads. Similarly, an independent evaluation of a state-wide responsible fatherhood media campaign in Virginia found that one year after the implementation of the campaign, 40,000 fathers reported they were spending more time with their children and 100,000 non-fathers reported they had reached out to offer support or encouragement to a father in their community (Guterbock et al., 1997).

Media campaigns have thus far been underutilized in the public arena. The fact that corporations spend billions of dollars every year in attempts to influence consumers to buy their products, and must justify such expenditures in terms of the bottom line, suggests that such efforts can be effective. This is a case where government has a lot to learn from the private sector.

The new consensus is that fathers matter to the well-being of children. The next phase of reform needs to take this new consensus into account by focusing on effective ways to increase male responsibility and the involvement of fathers in the lives of their children. Part of that work must include promoting the ideal of married fatherhood.

Some will argue that promoting marriage in low-income communities is not just a fool's errand, but also an unwanted imposition of majority culture values on minority communities. Recent data from the Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Study, however, suggest otherwise. When asked their chances of marrying the baby's father, 52 percent of these low-income, unwed mothers answered "certain" or "near certain." Over 70 percent of these low-income, unwed mothers thought the chances of marrying the baby's father were at least "50-50" (Bendheim-Thoman Center, 2000). Rather than being a value foreign to minority communities, the ideal, if not the reality, of marriage seems to be something to which many low-income couples do aspire.

Of course, welfare reform cannot, by itself, solve the problems of unwed parenting, fatherlessness, and marriage any more than it alone will ever, by itself, solve the problem of poverty. So much depends on both individual choices and broad societal and cultural influences. Moreover, effective mechanisms for reducing out-of-wedlock childbearing and encouraging marriage are scarce. Reauthorization of TANF presents a unique opportunity to experiment and evaluate some new approaches. If the ultimate goal of welfare reform is not simply to move large numbers of previously dependent single parents into the paid labor force, but to insure that more children have two parents, then the next phase of welfare reform needs to challenge states, communities, and the nonprofit sector to find creative solutions to this problem.

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