

CHAPTER ONE

The Challenge of Family System Changes for Research and Policy

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IN 1963, THE Policy Planning Staff at the U.S. Department of Labor, led by Daniel Patrick Moynihan, first observed that out-of-wedlock childbirth was on the rise. Some forty years later, after a period of denial, we have finally acknowledged it and are as a nation beginning to address it head-on. Moynihan has noted that this 1960s sighting was just the beginning of “the earthquake that shuddered through the American family” (Preston 1984, 451) and still rumbles. It has shaken many nations, ours included, and has led to nearly forty years of demographic statistics, but not to a complete understanding of the structural changes to the family or even serious academic debate of the issues. Here we address Moynihan’s question of what happened, and two others: why it happened and what we ought to do about it.

In addressing the rise in out-of-wedlock childbirth, we also examine a closely related phenomenon, the rise of single-parent families and households. While the term *single parenthood* still needs to be carefully defined, the number of children living either exclusively or primarily with one person has increased dramatically in almost all Western countries, especially in the Anglo-Saxon ones.

What could have caused this trend in so many countries with such different socioeconomic systems at roughly the same time? And it persists, despite the fact that at the same time more effective and more

acceptable forms of birth control have become increasingly available. Was it caused by low wages or poor work opportunities compared to generous income support for single parents, by lack of education, or by the gender revolution and women's growing economic independence?

This issue also has a racial dimension. The level and trend is much more pronounced among African Americans, 22 percent of families with children in 1960 and 53 percent in 2000, than whites, 7 percent in 1960 and 22 percent in 2000. By 1995, the percentage of black women aged fifteen to forty-four who had experienced at least one unmarried birth was 45 percent, compared to 10 percent for whites and 22 percent for Hispanics (Child Trends 2002, 2003).¹ Could higher rates among blacks be caused by culture (Patterson 2000), or by low wages, high joblessness, and low incomes (Rainwater 1970), leading to unmarriageable mates (Wilson 1987)? Could low wages and high joblessness among African American men combined with increased incarceration (Pettit and Western, forthcoming; Raphael 2004) and poor job prospects afterwards (Pager 2003; Raphael 2004) be behind the large and growing numbers of fatherless African American families?

Our goal is to assess this trend, pinpointing, as much as possible, what changed, how it changed, and—most important—why it changed. These changes have negative consequences for children who face long periods of fatherlessness and the economic insecurity inherent in single parenthood; their specific effects must also be documented. We also ask, what should public policy do in the face of uncertain causes but much more definitive poor outcomes for the children? We begin by better framing the issues.

THE ISSUES

As many people, experts and nonexperts alike, are aware and readily acknowledge in one way or another, there have been profound changes over the past half century in American family roles, family relations, and living arrangements. Parallel changes seem to have occurred in most European societies. In this volume a number of well-known authors review the evidence of these changes and consider some of the consequences. Experts in child development, demography and gender, and comparative political economy present additional perspectives. We then assess how American public policy addresses and might address the issue of family formation, living arrangements, marriage, and family relations more generally. Some would argue that these are not a government matter, but rather the domain of churches or communities. Others point out that by its overarching nature government action affects citizens' decisions

about family relations. For them the question is whether and how existing family policies and related tax and transfer policies affect, directly and indirectly, mothers, fathers, and children. For example, family subsidies like the Earned Income Tax Credit and prison policy may have strong, if unintended, effects on family formation.²

The chapters that follow chart statistical changes, examine causal relations, and consider actual and proposed government actions—all abstracted from the complex patterns and meanings of daily life. In the course of these discussions, however, we must not forget that these somewhat dry demographics abstract from often intense and emotional realities. And, probably for this reason, we find that discussions of the values underlying family formation and family policy are often contentious in ways researchers and analysts do not always recognize. But “when research and values collide, values will always win. Analysts who ignore this fact are wasting their time” (Sawhill 1995, 12).

This volume addresses these issues head-on. First, we document the changes in the family more fully and review the current research on the causes and effects of out-of-wedlock childbirth and single parenting (chapters 2 through 5: Ellwood and Jencks; Kiernan; Rainwater and Smeeding; Sigle-Rushton and McLanahan) and put this into perspective (chapters 6 through 8: Gornick; Chase-Lansdale; Wolf). Faced with incomplete knowledge of the determinants of family change, policymakers and policy analysts still advocate agendas in response to these changes that fit their preferences. We therefore then discuss how marriage, childbirth, and children can and should be affected by public policy (chapters 9 through 11: Horn; Marshall and Sawhill; Folbre). Finally, drawing on decades of experience in studying family formation and change, we reflect on what we do and do not know about family change, and how policy has and might affect the family process (chapters 12 through 14: Preston; Furstenberg; Garfinkel).

First, however, using some of these perspectives, we describe how changes in the family system challenge the family and public policy. We begin with Belgian demographer Ron J. Lesthaeghe (2002, n.p.), who observed recently that:

Western European, and consequently also North American, demographic systems of the past were characterized by long celibacy, late marriage and the dominance of the nuclear family. New households were neolocal and could only be established if economic independence was obtained. This “Malthusian” system with “prudent marriage” is an alien form of social organization to other societies and cultures.

4 The Future of the Family

Lesthaeghe goes on to suggest that this system was strengthened by the adoption of family limitation as the key to the first “demographic transition” of declining family size. Now, he argues, we are seeing a second transition characterized by “increased divorce, again later marriage but insertion of periods of premarital cohabitation, marked postponement of parenthood, procreation within cohabiting unions, declining remarriage but increasing post-marital cohabitation or other forms of living arrangements, and persistence of sub-replacement fertility.” While Lesthaeghe’s model of the broad sweep of changes from the sixteenth century to the twenty-first, and particularly in recent decades, is based primarily on West European data, many of the changes described also can be found in the United States, either at the same level or lagging a bit. And America (also Australia, Britain, and Canada) has added the issue of increased births to young unmarried women to the contentious mix.

An unsystematic catalogue of changes over the last century, especially from 1950 to 2000, that affect adult sexual roles, marriage, and what goes on in marriage, and changes in nontraditional family relationships would include the following:

- People moved to the cities to find work as agrarian society declined, increasing the possibilities for intimate contact at younger ages.
- Many upper-class children delayed work to extend their schooling and older workers retired at an increasingly earlier age, even as life expectancy at older ages grew enormously.
- Older people lived increasingly alone but, when possible, near children and grandchildren.
- After the baby boom of the 1950s families decided to have fewer children, but, on average, increased the time and money spent on those they had.
- Women, and especially wives with children, increased their participation in the labor force during the twentieth century; but their earnings remained at about 20 percent of family income until the 1980s, when they increased to about 30 percent.
- Until the 1970s and 1980s there was little relation between husbands’ and wives’ earnings, but that correlation began to rise as well-educated women entered the marketplace. Coupled with “assortive mating” along education lines, a wide gulf arose in measured parental incomes between rich and poor parents.

- Divorce rates increased, especially during the 1960s and 1970s, but leveled off afterward as cohabitation and consensual unions became more common.
- Patterns of family formation, fertility, and change have varied across racial and ethnic groups for some time, with both out-of-wedlock childbearing and single parenthood being highest among blacks (see preface).
- Sexual relations among teenagers grew more common, and to varying degrees more normative, over the past twenty years.
- In most European countries, family planning among teenagers increased so that unplanned teen pregnancies did not rise as rapidly as they otherwise might have. In the United States, family planning and contraceptive use were and are less prevalent, and birthrates among teens thus substantially higher than in other Western countries.
- Despite increasingly effective contraceptives and legalized abortion, the birthrate among unmarried women increased.

These facts suggest that family change in the United States was not limited to out-of-wedlock childbirth and single parenthood (see Wolf, chapter 8).

This century of change has in the main improved people's lives. Certainly the elderly have benefited from increased leisure, independence, and health, and these changes reflect better and more reliable incomes, especially higher Social Security benefits.³ Most adults have been able to pursue more independent and creative lives. But not everyone has benefited equally, in particular, children and, to a lesser extent, their mothers. Public concern about many of these changes is fundamentally concern about how out-of-wedlock childbirth and the weakening of the family affect children's lives.

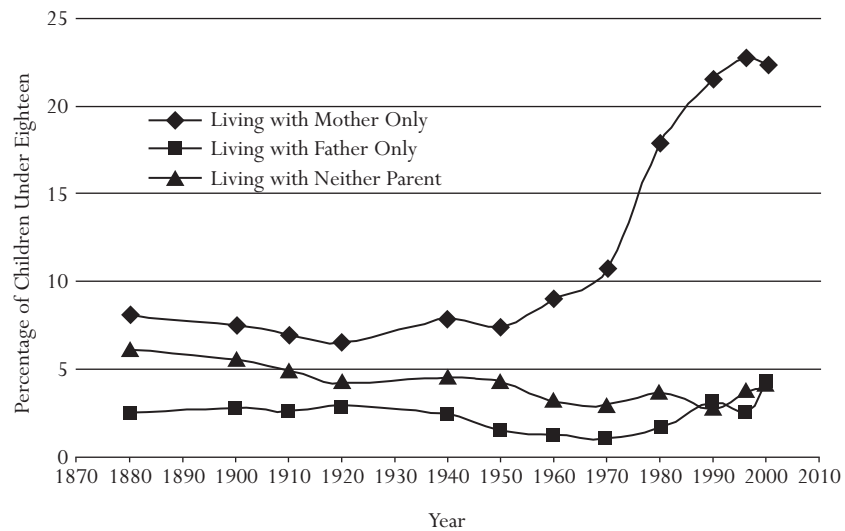
THE NUMBERS

We now consider the differences in family living arrangements among children across countries and over time. These patterns are what need to be explained and interpreted.

Single Parenthood

Most children in the United States traditionally grew up in a two-parent family (see figure 1.1). But what has been taken for granted no longer

Figure 1.1 U.S. Children Not Living with Both Parents, 1880 to 2000

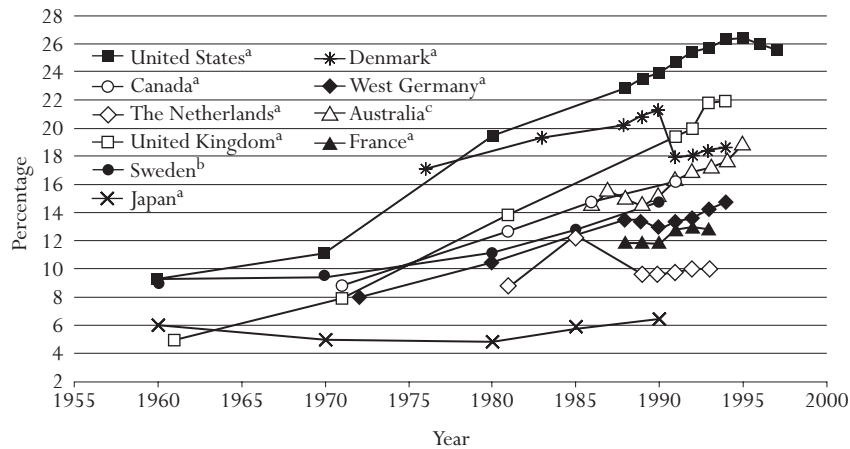


Source: For 1880 to 1996, U.S. Census Bureau (2001). For 2001, U.S. Census Bureau (2003).

can be. From 1880 to 1970 that figure was between 83 percent and 87 percent. By 1990 it dropped to about 73 percent, and by 2000 to 69 percent. Most single parents continue to be the mother. Initially they accounted for about 50 percent of single-parent families, and by the 1990s about 75 percent. Most of the increase in the number of children living in single-parent households was therefore in those living with their mother—from 7 or 8 percent through 1950 to 22 percent in the 1990s. While in the late 1990s the number of children living with single mothers fell a bit, it rose for those living with either the father or neither parent (see O'Hare 2001 and, for more on children living with neither parent, Bitler, Gelbach, and Hoynes 2002). The recent declines in children living with one parent belie a disturbing long-term trend, however. The number of children not living with both biological parents continues to increase.

If this pattern were unique to the United States, and unfortunately much scholarly and public discussion often implies that it is, analysis might proceed without attention to other countries. But, in fact, sharp increases in single-parent households seem to have occurred between 1970 and 1995 in most European nations and in Canada and Australia

Figure 1.2 Children in Single-Parent Households in Ten Countries, 1960 to 1997



Source: Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics (2001).

^aUnder age eighteen.

^bUnder age sixteen.

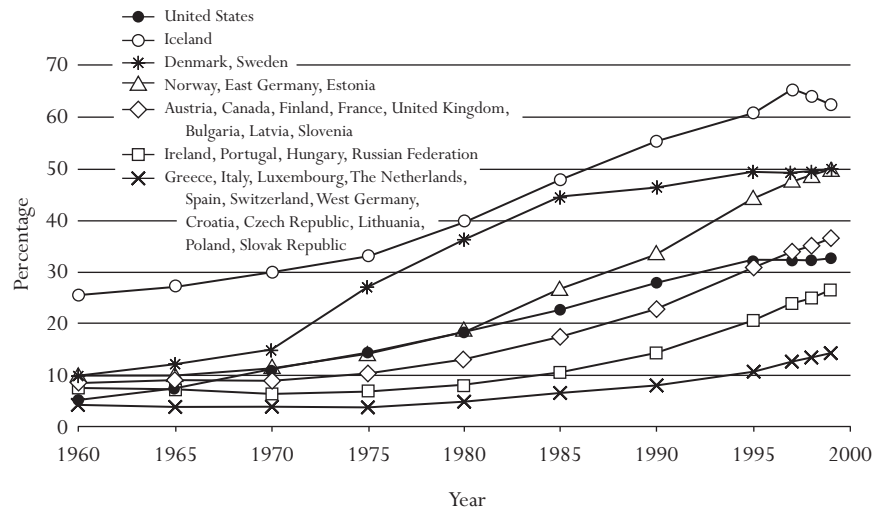
^cUnder age fifteen.

(see figure 1.2). In 1970 all countries had single-parent rates of less than 12 percent. By the mid-1990s a large majority had rates higher than that, with the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia at or above 20 percent. But there is a wide range in the rate. Adding nine countries from a Council of Europe study (2003) to the ten in figure 1.2 we find certain clusters of single-parent rates:

- 6 percent or less: Greece, Italy, Japan, Portugal, Spain;
- 7 to 10 percent: Luxembourg, Ireland, Switzerland, Belgium, the Netherlands;
- 11 to 16 percent: Finland, France, Sweden, Germany, Canada;
- 19 to 26 percent: Australia, Denmark, United Kingdom, United States.

We can hypothesize that several factors account for the sharp increases—rising divorce rates; rises in consensual unions, which sometimes are not counted as two-parent families and in any case have a higher

Figure 1.3 Births to Unmarried Mothers



Sources: Council of Europe (2000) and Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics (2002).

rate of dissolution than legal marriage; and rises in births to unmarried mothers. The last may in turn be a product of increases in unprotected sexual relations, particularly by teenagers. The rising proportion of children born to unmarried mothers is, of course, also a product of declining fertility in married women and the increasing age at marriage, which puts women at risk for out-of-wedlock births for more of their most fertile years.⁴

Out-of-Wedlock Births

Perhaps the most dramatic of the trends is the increase in births to unmarried women (Wu and Wolfe 2001). In the United States the rise is from about 5 percent in 1960 to over 30 percent in the 1990s, with most of it between 1970 and 1990. As before, we profit by comparison. Figure 1.3 summarizes the increasing rates of some thirty countries. We have used cluster analysis to group those with similar patterns for 1960 to 2000, and find six clusters, fairly homogeneous trends, and systematic differences. It is readily apparent that the American rise is not the most extreme. In Iceland the increase was from an already high 25 percent to over 60 percent. Denmark and Sweden moved from about 10 percent in

1960 to 50 percent. Norway, the former East Germany, and Estonia end up at the same 50 percent, but got there only by accelerating greatly during the 1980s and early 1990s.

A large group of countries have rates and growth paths similar to America's: Austria, Canada, Finland, France, and United Kingdom in the West, and Bulgaria, Latvia, and Slovenia in the East. Four countries—Ireland, Portugal, Hungary, Russia—start with rates not too different from the United States, but do not increase as rapidly until the mid-1980s. A very large group of countries show only a slight increase in out-of-wedlock births. These include seven in the West—Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, and West Germany—and five in the East—Croatia, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Poland, and the Slovak Republic.

The phenomenon, then, is common among Western countries. By the turn of the twenty-first century fourteen had rates either nearly as high as or considerably higher than the United States, and four others were not far behind.

Cohabitation

One issue that must be considered, though it is difficult to resolve the trend with current data, is cohabitation. We need to know whether the babies born to unmarried mothers are also the children of mothers who do not have a partner and who are not cohabiting. We know that there has been a rapid rise in consensual rather than legal unions. If the vital statistics offices that assemble data have continued to count mothers in consensual unions as single, then the conclusions we draw could be quite misleading.

In fact, according to the international data recently released from the Fertility and Family Surveys (FFS) in several European nations, large proportions of out-of-wedlock births occur to mothers in consensual unions (table 1.1). More children are born to consensual unions than to single mothers in every country except the United States, from 1989 to 1995, and the former East Germany, from 1984 to 1989. Moreover, Gunnar Andersson (2002) goes on to show that the cumulative percent of children ever living with only one parent is highest in the United States, reaching almost 50 percent by the time a child is fifteen years old (figure 1.4). Excluding the former East Germany, the next highest is in West Germany and in France, each about 30 percent.

To further explore this issue we have graphed the proportion of young couples, age sixteen to twenty-nine, in consensual unions by the percent of births to unmarried mothers in eighteen countries for which we can find both numbers (figure 1.5). Overall the correlation of the two per-

Table 1.1 Relative Distribution of Births (Percentage)

Country	Period	To Lone Mother	In Marriage	In Consensual Union
Sweden	1987 to 1993	5	51	45
Norway	1983 to 1989	7	71	22
Finland	1983 to 1989	3	85	13
France	1988 to 1994	10	68	23
United States	1989 to 1995	17	72	11
Austria	1990 to 1996	10	70	19
West Germany	1986 to 1992	6	83	11
Democratic Republic of Germany	1984 to 1989	18	67	15
Flanders ^a	1985 to 1992	1	94	4
Italy	1990 to 1995	2	94	4
Spain	1989 to 1995	2	93	4
Hungary	1988 to 1993	3	90	6
Czech Republic	1992 to 1997	4	89	7
Slovenia	1989 to 1995	6	78	16
Latvia	1989 to 1995	11	79	11
Lithuania	1989 to 1995	5	93	2
Poland	1986 to 1991	9	89	2

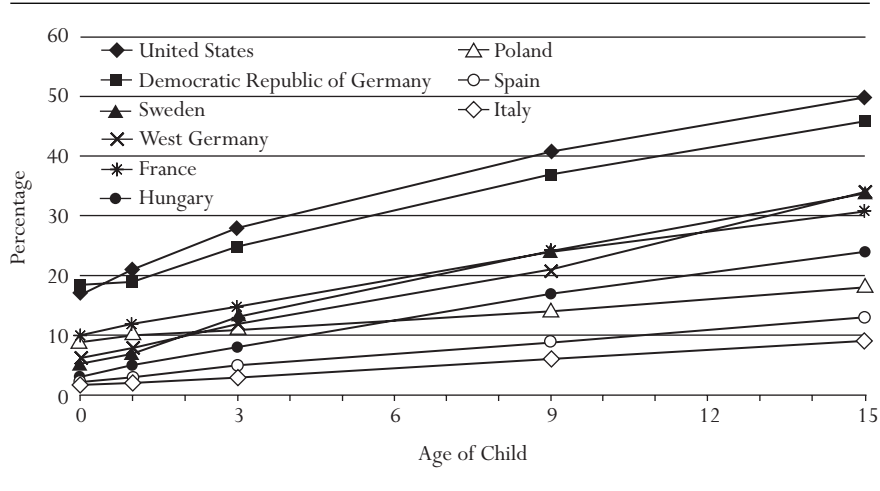
Source: Andersson (2002, table 2).

^aThe Belgian Fertility and Family Survey (FFS) only covers the Flemish-speaking parts of the country (Andersson 2002, 361n4).

centages is quite high (almost 0.8) also suggesting that some of the countries with high out-of-wedlock birth rates may have much lower single-mother birth rates (see table 1.1). This is surely the case for the Nordic countries, where there is strong ideological and traditional support for consensual unions. Even in countries with more traditional Western cultures, the range of acceptable options for coupling and parenting has expanded greatly over the last generation (see also Kiernan, chapter 3).

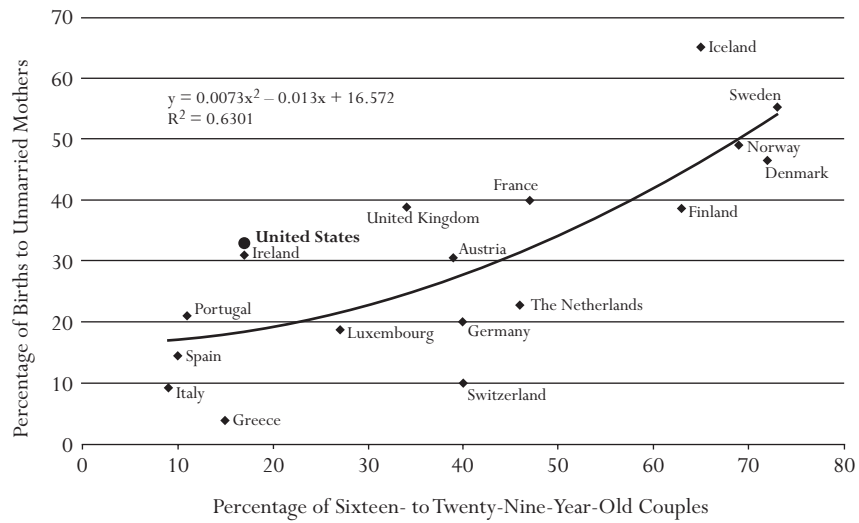
One telling example of acceptability comes from the 2002 election campaign in Germany. The aspiring chancellor, Edmund Stoiber of the very catholic Christian Socialist party, chose as his family expert for the election campaign a twenty-nine-year-old single mother of two, who then told journalists she may some day marry. The appointment was regarded as a valuable political gesture to the growing number of younger and nontraditional Germans (Wosnitza 2002).

Figure 1.4 Percentage Ever out of Union, by Age of Child



Source: Authors' compilation of data from Andersson (2002).

Figure 1.5 Consensual Unions by Births to Unmarried Mothers



Source: Authors' compilation of data from Andersson (2002); Council of Europe (2000); and Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics (2004).

CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

Explanations for what could have caused this common outcome and its consequences for children are explored in the next four chapters. Ellwood and Jencks (chapter 2) begin by systematically addressing the possible causes of single parenthood in the United States over the past fifty years, noting similarities and differences by race, education, and other relevant covariates. They find no one explanation to fit all the facts, but do establish a number of very interesting correlations.

Declining age at menarche combined with a longer period of active childbirth at older ages (and increasing age of menopause), increasing sexual activity at younger ages, and increasing age at marriage have increased the share of the lifespan over which women are exposed to the risk of pregnancy and childbirth. At the same time, better and more available forms of birth control have become increasingly available, but have not affected the trends. It could be that the availability of the pill increased the acceptability of sex outside of marriage.

What about women's rising presence in the labor force, which is occurring over roughly the same period in each of these countries, and how is it related to family change and the decline of marriage? Could the continued increase in women's economic independence, comingled with their valuing children much more than they do men, or at least much more than they do marriage, mean that the decision to have a child is becoming increasingly independent of the decision to marry?

In sum, social science has so far done a poor job in explaining why family structure in the United States and other nations has changed both in terms of marriage and childbearing over the past forty or fifty years, as our next three authors have earlier claimed (Ellwood and Jencks 2001; Kiernan 2001a, 2001b). David Ellwood describes this lack of explanation as "perhaps the greatest embarrassment of social science in recent times." Kathleen Kiernan's contribution (chapter 3) is to show that many different bands of union formations exist in the rich countries of the world, where in some cases cohabitation and consensual union are present for long periods, but in others not. Thus, the crossnational picture is also multivariated. Her findings corroborate those quoted in Andersson (2002; and table 1.1 and figure 1.4).

Lee Rainwater and Timothy Smeeding (chapter 4) document the economic disadvantages of single parenthood and their variance across rich countries. In all nations, single parents do economically less well than two-parent families. Policy, then, can do much to keep single parents and their children from abject poverty. But there seems to be no single solution: the political will to keep children from poverty finds different

ways to reach this goal in each successful country. In some, almost universal low-cost child care allows single mothers to effectively combine part-time work with other subsidies (Sweden, France). In others, child allowances and income-tested benefits, supplemented by guaranteed child support (“advance maintenance”) do the trick (Denmark, Netherlands). In others, income tested benefits alone help keep single mothers with children at acceptable levels of well-being, while earnings supplements and other programs help single mothers combine work and “welfare” (Canada, United Kingdom). Unfortunately, the United States is not as successful at similar efforts.

Wendy Sigle-Rushton and Sara McLanahan look at some of the consequences of these demographic trends for children (chapter 5). Earlier research in the United States (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994; McLanahan 2001; Haveman and Wolfe 1995) and more recently in Britain (Ermisch and Francesconi 2001) suggests that children who grow up in “broken” families, especially in single-parent families, including those with unmarried mothers on their own, grow up at a distinct disadvantage, in part because of the lower incomes of single-mother families. They suffer other disadvantages, however, even after “income” effects are taken account of: less education, more economic inactivity, more distress, and more smoking and drinking. While there is evidence that there may be offsetting influences, for example, increased supervision by grandparents (DeLeire and Kalil 2002), by and large single parenthood is hard on children. While there is some evidence that marriage, even following pregnancy, improves children’s economic circumstances (Lerman 2002; *American Experiment Quarterly* 2001) there is less evidence that the same can also be said for child outcomes. In fact, research on how to promote strong, low-conflict marriages is thin at best (Moore, Jekielek, and Emig 2002). Sigle-Rushton and McLanahan add to this literature and corroborate most of these arguments. While the case for single parenthood producing poor outcomes is yet to be proved, their paper does show us how the two are related in systematic ways.

Chapters 6 through 8 present a series of shorter reactions that broaden and strengthen the developmental, demographic, and gender specific arguments made in the previous five, and extend them in different ways. P. Lindsay Chase-Lansdale’s (chapter 7) comments argue for greater attention to the developmental effects of parent absence on children and the nurturing effects of a good marriage, underpinning Wade Horn’s policy recommendations (chapter 9). Douglas Wolf (chapter 8) suggests that other types of family change are also relevant to the one we consider here. And Janet Gornick (chapter 6) reminds us that marriage is a contract between two consenting adults, with women doing most of the “heavy lifting” in regard to children.

Summary

We believe that these changes in the family are now so deeply set there is no turning back, and that policy will need to proceed without a complete explanation of the causes behind them. Public policy institutions have to some extent adapted to them, but by and large not explicitly encouraged them. Indeed, public institutions are often ignorant of secular changes until they are well underway. And in most countries public policy and institutions are slow to change in any case, particularly on issues as emotionally and culturally volatile as family change and out-of-wedlock births. It is also apparent that social institutions and policies created in one era do not always fare well in another. This is certainly the case, for example, with the Old Age and Survivors Insurance benefits program (Social Security) in the United States of the 1930s (see Steuerle, Favreault, and Sammartino 2002). The next set of essays addresses these issues head-on.

THE POLICY CHALLENGE

If marriage and childbearing have in fact become disconnected in the United States and elsewhere how should public policy react? Is marriage policy a legitimate explicit realm of government activity? What role do moral issues play? Can we treat the patterns of change in family structure from a purely positivist position, as many analysts do, or is it a normative and moral issue as well? As we see it, the question for policy is this: what is the most constructive response to parents sharing responsibility for their children but not in a shared household and not at the same time?

From a policy perspective, one must first ask if we first need to understand why we find these changes, or can policy proceed in any case? The answer seems to depend both on what type of policies we contemplate and on the social legitimacy of public action in each realm. For instance, if we find that growing up with a single parent is bad for children, and assuming that the well-being of children is a legitimate issue for policy action, how can and should we design policies to address the adverse consequences of that situation?

On the other hand, if we want to promote policies to preserve and encourage marriage, or to reduce out-of-wedlock births, or to increase fathers' involvement with their children, a greater understanding of the causes seems to be called for before a response is formulated (assuming that public policy can and should intervene in these decisions). For example, recent studies suggest that among unmarried couples with children in the United States, about half of those parents are biologically tied to at least one other child who lives in a different family unit (Carlson, McLanahan, and England 2004; Mincy 2002). Depending on the relation-

ship with the unmarried mother, 33 to 39 percent of unmarried fathers have a child by another woman (Carlson, McLanahan, and England 2004). This produces divided loyalty—fathers spend money and time on both—and confounds policies designed to involve fathers in supporting their children (Manning, Stewart, and Smock 2001). In fact, in households with unmarried couples each of whom already has a child or children, partners are far less likely to marry than those who have a child in common (Mincy 2002). Marriage promotion policy might be better targeted at this second group, or at mothers and fathers giving birth for the first time.

Clearly, welfare reform has been successful in reducing single parents' dependence on social programs alone for economic well-being and in promoting self-reliance through work. However, not all who have left welfare have done well economically. Moynihan observed about the 1996 Welfare Reform Act that "the premise of this legislation is that the behavior of certain adults can be changed by making the lives of their children as wretched as possible" (1996). For some, work behavior, incomes, and children's lives changed for the good. But for others the outcome is less certain and the effects on the children more mixed (Brooks, Hair, and Zaslow 2001; Gennetian et al. 2002; Chase-Lansdale et al. 2003). To what extent should welfare reform take account of these differences and offer more financial help to the working poor and their children?

The obstacles to stable unions are high for low-income single parents. Incomplete education, irregular employment, low income (whether personal or partner), and poor health all contribute to fewer marriages and less cohabitation among young single parents (Sigle-Rushton and McLanahan 2002; Carlson, McLanahan, and England 2004). It therefore seems that we have to provide financial help to overcome these barriers if we are to promote stable marriages among low-income single parents over and above anything accomplished by welfare reform (Furstenberg 2002). Developing skills to help couples better communicate and understand each other is an important component of a successful relationship, but it works best where there is also a solid and tangible financial basis.

Chapters 7, 8, and 9 cover this territory and more. Wade Horn (chapter 9) passionately argues that we should consider the benefits of marriage to children and use public policy to encourage healthy marriage and better parent-child relations. Most people at the conference were in general agreement with this statement. Relationship training can be used to both strengthen existing marriages (preventing divorce) and at the same time encourage marriage among cohabiters.

Will Marshall and Isabel Sawhill (chapter 10) endorse Horn's policy prescriptions but would be more proactive, would add systematically to family support in a myriad of other ways, including more child care, more child support, and better family leave (see also Sawhill 2003).

Nancy Folbre (chapter 11) offers a fresh and different look at policy, taking “caring” (for children) as the core value. The value of caregiving to children and to the nation, and the cost to mothers, especially, is well documented. When recent policy changes (for example, welfare reform, family leave, child support enforcement) are viewed in this light, they do not perform well. Folbre thus advocates a redesign for American family policy that is based on reinforcing the moral value of “caring.”

Rapporteurs

The final chapters add the wisdom of three longtime researchers of family policy (chapters 12 through 14). In his singularly effective way, Samuel Preston reminds us that children are beneficial to society and that policy needs to better adapt to the “earthquake,” rather than trying to tame it. In terse terms, Preston makes the case for supporting families with children regardless of their family structure. Frank Furstenberg reviews the simple models of family, child, and society links found in these chapters and makes the important point that, in his estimation, a good marriage needs to be supported by a broad set of social policies if we are to be more successful as a society in fostering children. Finally, Irwin Garfinkel quickly reviews the chapters and then suggests that much greater attention be placed on studying the ways that policy affects marriage in both tax and transfer systems. He also suggests combinations of policies from Marshall-Sawhill and Folbre that would increase family income security, but not “welfare reliance.”

CONCLUSIONS

We have raised many questions both of understanding and for policy that many of the chapters here have answered, though not completely. Nations are judged by the way they treat their children. Certainly, the well-being of American children who live with single parents does not measure up very well in crossnational comparison. Slogans like “Leave No Child Behind” ring hollow in the face of the evidence (Smeeding 2002; Rainwater and Smeeding 2004). We can and should do better at improving the economic and social lives of children who are subject to varied family living circumstances, while promoting more stable unions and better parenting by those who supervise these kids. The participants and commentators at the conference and in this volume have helped show us the way, and in so doing, have begun to answer Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s enduring questions about family change: what happened, why did it happen, and what can we as a nation do in response?

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NOTES

1. Child Trends (2002, 73, figure 4.1). Child Trends has recently added a set of racial breakdowns for each of these categories. Find them at <http://www.childtrendsdatbank.org/indicators/75UnmarriedBirths.cfm>.
2. The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is not thought of as “family” policy. However, the decision to marry and/or to have children has large effects on the value of the EITC and therefore possibly large effects on “family” formation (Ellwood and Liebman 2000). Similarly, the movement to imprison increasingly larger fractions of the young adult male population, especially African Americans, many of whom are fathers, has had a lasting effect on family formation (Pettit and Western, forthcoming; Pager 2003; Raphael 2004).
3. See McGarry and Schoeni (2000), Wolf (1995), and Engelhardt, Gruber, and Perry (2002).
4. A recent paper by Smith, Philip, and Koropecj-Cox (1996) finds that this latter factor plays a surprisingly important role in out-of-wedlock childbirths.

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