

Marriage

Best for Women, Children, and Nations

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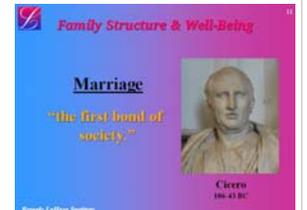
Remarks at a United Nations Luncheon

March 3, 2005



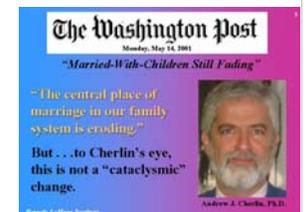
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- Ancient orator and statesman, Cicero, declared that marriage was the “first bond of society.”
- For hundreds of years, nothing changed and marriage was *still* considered the foundation of society!



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- Now, even family scholars like Andrew Cherlin acknowledge: “the central place of marriage in our family system is eroding.”
- But Cherlin – like other scholars – doesn’t see these changes as “cataclysmic.”
- They say: Change doesn’t necessarily mean “decline” or “breakdown” in the family — just differences in household arrangement & family structure.



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THESIS: I will argue today that the changes in family structure are profoundly reshaping American society — indeed such changes in family structure are affecting many nations around the world. These changes are especially detrimental to the well-being of women and children, who are bearing the brunt of the cultural trends.



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Society's Predicament

- **Living together is displacing marriage.**



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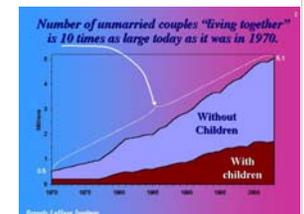
CONSIDER THESE DISTURBING TRENDS IN THE U.S. (which are typical of Western nations in general):

The marriage rate has dropped by nearly 50 percent since 1969; fewer people are getting married and they are waiting later to get married.



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- The number of unmarried couples "living together" in the United States is 10 times larger than in 1970 and many of those households include children.



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Today I will focus on 10 major problems associated with non-traditional households where the relationship is not that of a married husband and wife.

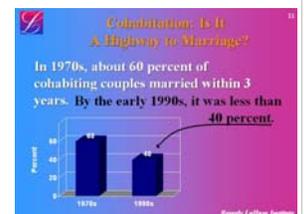
Problem #1: Women believe that living together leads to marriage.



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The majority of cohabiting relationships do not usually end in marriage.

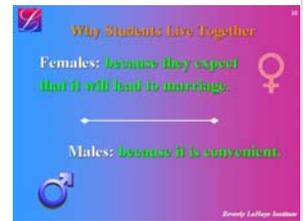
In the 1970s, about 60 percent of cohabiting couples married each other within three years, but now this proportion has declined to less than 40 percent.



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Studies of college students have found that women typically expect that “living together will lead to marriage.”

Men, on the other hand, typically move in with a girlfriend because it is “convenient.”



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A college professor described a survey that he conducted over a period of years in his marriage classes.

When he asked the girls if they were going to marry the guy they were living with, their response was, “Oh, yes!” The professor asked “Why?”

The girls usually replied, “Because we love each other and we are learning how to be together.”



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When he asked guys who were living with a girl, point blank, “Are you going to marry the girl that you’re living with?” The overwhelming response, he reports, was “NO!”

The guys explained that they would not marry the girl they were living with because, “She was easy for me. How can I trust her to be faithful in marriage?”

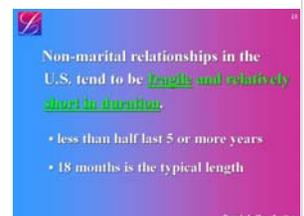
Problem #2: Couples believe cohabiting relationships will last.



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Research shows that non-marital relationships in the United States tend to be fragile and relatively short in duration;

- Less than half of cohabiting relationships last five or more years.
- Typically, they last about 18 months.



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Problem #3: Living together before marriage increases the likelihood of divorce.

Many couples live together to see if they are compatible, not realizing that cohabitation is more a preparation for divorce than it is a way to strengthen the chances of a successful marriage.



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- Researchers estimate that by the 1990s nearly 60 percent of unions began with cohabitation.
- YET....



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Researchers from Yale and Columbia revealed that the divorce rates of women who cohabit are nearly 80 percent higher than the rates of those who do not.



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Problem #4: Living together is financially costly for women.

Not only do both women and children suffer more poverty after a cohabiting relationship breaks up, BUT there is typically an economic imbalance in favor of the man *within* such relationships, too.



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Couples who live together say that they plan to share expenses equally, but more often than not **the women support the men.**

- Studies show that women typically contribute more than 70 percent of the income in a cohabiting relationship.
- Likewise, the women tend to do more of the cleaning, cooking and laundry.



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If they are students facing economic or time constraints requiring a reduction in

class load by one partner, it is almost invariably the woman, not the man, who drops a class.

Clearly such relationships exhibit an imbalance of power that puts women in a perilous position.

Problem #5: Unmarried couples who live together tend to be promiscuous.



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Partners in a cohabiting relationship are more likely to be unfaithful to each other than married couples:

The National Sex Survey (polling 3,500 people) reported that:

- Cohabiting women were 8 times more likely to cheat than were wives.
- Cohabiting men were 4 times more likely to be unfaithful than husbands.



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Problem #6: In light of the above, it is not surprising that non-marital households frequently are less healthy.



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A UCLA survey of 130 published empirical studies documented the fact that marriage is healthier than living together;

BUT marriages preceded by cohabitation are more prone to problems like drug and alcohol use, more permissive sexual relationships, and an “abhorrence of dependence” than were marital relationships that were not preceded by cohabitation.



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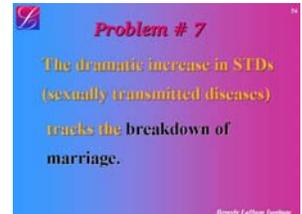
In contrast, while non-traditional households are detrimental to the partners' health, marriage can literally save a husband and wife's life.

Unmarried couples, even when living together, have a higher mortality rate than married couples: 50 percent higher among women and an amazing 250 percent higher among men.



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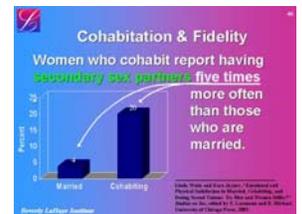
Problem #7: The dramatic increase in STDs tracks the breakdown of marriage.



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- Since about 40 percent of men in cohabiting relationships are **unfaithful**, they endanger not just themselves, but the women who live with them. In fact, the biggest health risk in cohabitation is sexually transmitted diseases.

- A University of Chicago study reported that 20 percent of cohabiting women said they had secondary sex partners, while only 4 percent of married women said they did.



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The Centers for Disease Control reported that:

- Nearly 65 percent of STDs appear in people who are under 25 years of age and more than 20 percent of all AIDS cases are among college-age young people.



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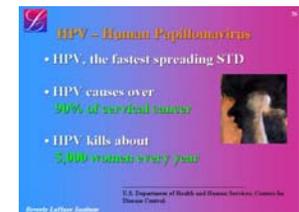
- Approximately 15 million new cases of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) occur every year in the United States.
- The number of cases is increasing — they have tripled in just six years — AND, the types and deadliness are also growing.



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- In 1960 there were only three STDs.
- Currently, there are over two dozen STDs that are *incurable!*

- The fastest-spreading STD — commonly called HPV — causes over 90 percent of cervical cancer and kills about 5,000 American women every year.



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- The number of STD cases among cohabiting women is 6 times higher than among married women.
- One doctor has estimated that a person having three or more sexual partners in a lifetime increases the odds of cervical cancer 15 times.



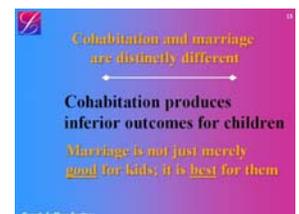
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Problem #8: Children's well-being frequently suffers in unmarried families.



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Research findings follow a general pattern regardless of nationality, age of partners, or income of the couple: Across cultures and over time, cohabitation is distinctly different from marriage and it produces distinctly different — and decidedly inferior — outcomes for children.



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As weak as the marriage bond has become in the era of no-fault divorce, on average the harmony, stability, and longevity of marital unions are still far superior to that of cohabiting couples. **Marriage is not merely good for kids; it is best for them!**

Children in non-intact families have roughly twice the risk of social and behavioral problems compared with children in married-parent families.

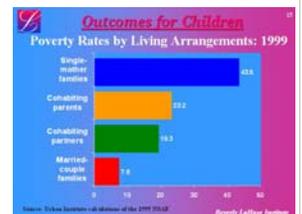
- emotional upheaval
- struggles with anxiety,
- depression,
- eating disorders and
- other psychosocial difficulties.



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The Urban Institute evaluated the well-being of the children living in cohabiting families.

Less than 8 percent of the children living in a married biological/adoptive family are poor as compared to poverty rates of nearly 20 to 43 percent for those who are in cohabiting or single-mother households.



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Urban found that children 6 to 11 years of age exhibited the highest number of behavioral problems living in cohabiting-partner households (nearly five times the rate for those living married parents).



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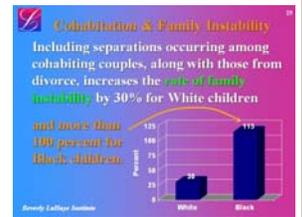
Problem #9: People say that “children are adaptable,” but the negative effects on children who live in unmarried families linger on with a cumulative effect over the years.



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Researchers have documented that “ignoring the breakdown of marriage obscures a substantial amount of instability.”

In fact, they concluded “that adding transitions into and out of cohabitation increases . . . family instability by about 30 percent for White children and over 100 percent for Black children.”



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Problem #10: Abuse and violence are more common in unmarried households.



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A University of Chicago study found that 16 percent of cohabiting women reported arguments with their partners became physical last year, while only 5 percent of married women had similar experiences.



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The U.S. Department of Justice reports that women are 62 times more likely to be assaulted by their live-in boyfriends than they are if living with their husband.



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It is well documented that children in cohabiting households are at greater risk for sexual abuse and violence than are children in married families where the husband is the biological father.

The research shows — the most dangerous place for a child is where the mother is living with a boyfriend rather than the child's biological father.

- Numerous studies report that children are 20 times more likely to suffer abuse when the mother is living with someone rather than being married to the father of her children.



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Conclusion

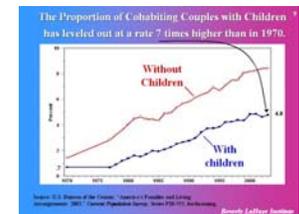
Is there a ray of hope? Will learning the facts help make a difference? Yes. I firmly believe it will. Let's take a look at one positive sign.



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The number of cohabiting couples with children leveled off in 2002 and 2003 and then the proportion actually declined slightly! The 30-year upward trend appears to have ended, a hopeful sign that information provided by research is starting to have an impact.

- **But still** the percentage of cohabiting couples with children is 7 times as high as it was in 1970, so there is tremendous damage to be undone.
- As things stand now it is estimated that an appalling 40 percent of all children will spend some time in their childhood living with unmarried parents.



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These circumstances won't likely change quickly, but the most recent living-arrangements data at least give us a small measure of hope that the research findings — combined with plain common sense about what is best for women and children — are beginning to have an effect.

One study sums it up very bluntly: “[T]he practice of unmarried couples living together does not serve the best interests of adults, children, society, or governments.”

The study continued, living together unmarried too often leaves in its wake “a trail of broken relationships, unstable homes, children at risk, domestic violence, poverty, and thus a weakened society.”



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The overwhelming problem with non-marital households is that they are tentative arrangements; no one can depend upon the relationships — not the partners, not the children, not the community, nor the society.



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The Post-Modern myth shouts from every corner – “All that counts is the quality of a couple’s relationship; marriage is optional.”



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What the facts clearly show, however, is that the quality of a couple’s relationship is heavily dependent upon its structure.



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Our challenge is to effectively communicate the facts — especially to young women. The choice is clear: It is between the strength and protection of marriage versus the weakness, uncertainty, and unreliability of merely living together.



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Thank you for your attention.



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