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The Family in the 21st Century

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So what is the family in the 21st century?

- The union of a man and a woman in a committed monogamous relationship;
 - The most basic social bond;
 - The most basic social unit within society.
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What does the family do?

- It is home to human relationships;
- It shapes human identity and character;
- It is for bearing and raising children;
- It is our first school, our first hospital, it is the first society we encounter;
- It connects the generations and sustains social order.

Deleire and Kalil (2002) Twelve Family Forms:

- Never married single mothers;
- Never married single mothers in multi-generational households;
- Single mothers with cohabiting males;
- Divorced single mothers;
- Divorced single mothers in multi-generational households;
- Single father families (in the same variations as single mothers);
- Grandparent households with no parent present;
- Two cohabiting couples with one non-biological parent;
- Two biological cohabiting parents;
- Blended or step-families;
- Blended or step-family married couples;
- The two-biological-parent married couple.

Outcomes for children in relation to family form

Children living with two-biological-married parents

- do better in educational attainment and school engagement
(Hao and Xie 2002; Deleire and Kalil 2002; Lamb and Manning 2003; Brown 2004);
- are less likely to be engaged in early sexual activity and fall to teenage pregnancy
(McLanahan and Sandefur 1994; Woodward, Fergusson and Horwood 2001; Deleire and Kalil 2002; Hao and Xie 2001).

This has wide implications for employment, the generation of wealth, future family wellbeing and costs for society.

Outcomes for children in relation to family form

Children from family forms other than the two-biologically-married parent couple more likely to:

- behave anti-socially;
- withdraw from society or be insecure;
- be angry and inconsistent in relationships.

(Lamb and Manning 2003; Acs and Nelson 2002; Hao and Xie 2001)

Outcomes for children in relation to family form

Children from cohabiting families

- one in five cohabiting families falling into the “poor” category;
- two in five children from cohabiting families experiencing food insecurity.

(McLanahan and Sandefur 1994; Acs and Nelson 2002)

The disadvantages they experience seem to be mediated through the following dynamics:

- **income disadvantage**
(McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994; Acs and Nelson, 2002);
- **increased chances of parental depression/distress**
(Brown, 2003; 2004; Dunn, 2002);
- **lower levels of social capital**
(McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994);
- **lower levels of parental commitment towards non-biological children outside of marriage**
(Lamb and Manning, 2003; Thomson, Hanson and McLanahan, 1994);
- **apparent relationship between family change and increased levels of teenage sexual activity**
(Woodward, Fergusson and Horwood, 2001; Cherlin et al 1995).

Single Parent Families

- Children more likely to engage in early sexual activity and become teenage parents

(Thomson, Hanson and McLanahan 1994; Woodward, Fergusson and Horwood, 2001; Deleire and Kalil 2002; Hao and Xie 2001);

- There is substantial difference in income levels between married parent families and single parent families;
- There are lower levels of parent-child quality contact time, general commitment, support and social capital.

Children from single parent homes are at greater risk of:

- lower educational achievement;
- early sexual activity;
- early family formation; and
- late labour force participation.

(McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994; Thomson Hanson and McLanahan 1994).

Cohabitation

- greater risk of being poor or being 'food insecure'
(Acs and Nelson, 2002);
- highest levels of misbehaviour
(Hao and Xie, 2001; Brown 2004);
- a stable family environment does not seem to reduce children's misbehaviour in cohabiting unions (Hao and Xie, 2001);
- no observable benefit with the presence of a non-biological partner in a household (Lamb and Manning, 2003);
- some researchers suggest that the most dangerous place for a child to be is with a non-biologically related male.

Step-families

- greater risk of early sexual activity and pregnancy in teenage girls (Pong and Dronkers et al 2003);
- adversely affect school achievement (Maley, 2001; Carlson, 2006);
- family change in general seems to be associated with early sexual activity and youth offending (Fergusson, 1999);
- lower school achievement than those from married parent families (Brown, 2004);
- lower than average levels of emotional well-being for children (Thomson Hanson and McLanahan, 1994).

Married parent families

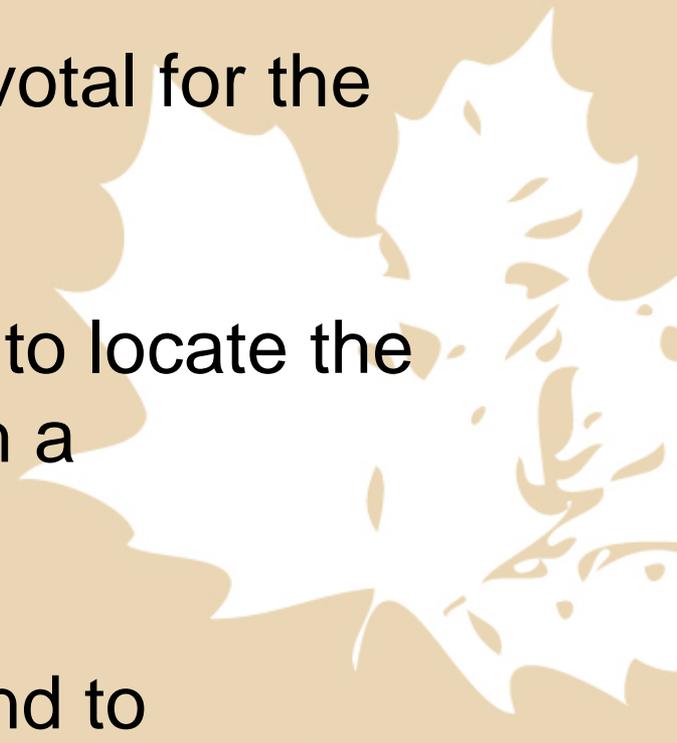
- more likely to graduate from high school;
- attain the highest levels of educational achievement;
- less likely to engage in early sexual activity;
- less likely fall into alcohol and drug abuse;
- less likely to exhibit behavioural problems

(Hao and Xie, 2001; Thomson Hanson and McLanahan, 1994; Lamb and Manning, 2003).

Recommendations

1. Transform contemporary culture;
2. Effect change through policy and law in the field of family;
3. Revisit welfare;
4. Re-examining the provisions made for charitable giving;
5. Re-examine compulsory schooling sector's influence on our attitudes.

Closing Summary

- If the raising of children is pivotal for the common good,
 - then it is reasonable to want to locate the optimal environment for such a responsibility,
 - and then seek to preserve and to strengthen it.
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The optimal environment for raising children is the traditional, or classic family form, as it is described in common law—that is the two-biological-parent married couple.

Therefore...

Efforts in culture need to be made that show marriage for what it really is.

Policy-makers and legislators need to:

- consider a “Marriage Act”,
- revisit welfare,
- revisit tax arrangements,
- and encourage educators to work with the various institutions of civil society, to strengthen marriage in schooling and in our communities.

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