

July 1, 2010

**To:** Jim Daly and Interested Students of the Family  
**Re:** The Case Against *Newsweek's* Case Against Marriage

**Newsweek** ran a 3-page story titled **“I Don’t: The Case Against Marriage.”** It’s in the issue where they put Sarah Palin on their cover like she’s at the Mount of Transfiguration.

(When your mag is on the block and you’re desperately pimping for readers...any readers...go with the cheap shot: slamming religion and social conservatives, right?)

Now remember this is the same publication that ran the cover story sometime back offering *“The Religious Case for Same-Sex Marriage.”*

*So is Newsweek for marriage or not for marriage?*

It’s exactly what my friend David Blankenhorn, who describes himself as an unapologetic marriage-nut, says, “It’s curious how some people never have anything nice to say about marriage unless it has ‘same-sex’ attached to the front of it!” Indeed.



*Newsweek's* supposed case against marriage is really no case at all, but rather a pessimistic whine. It gets most of its facts wrong and deals with the wealth of strong points for marriage by simply ignoring them. But it garners a response, not because of the merits of its argument, but merely because it's *Newsweek*. So here we go.

### **“Marriage No Longer Practically Necessary”**

They admit that “once upon a time” marriage did indeed make sense without telling us when that time was exactly. But now, they inform us that marriage, from a “practical standpoint at least, is no longer necessary.” *Read that again slowly! Why isn't THAT startling bit of news their cover story?* And then they quote some social scientist no one ever heard of from a no-name university somewhere in Kentucky who warns, “Social science tells us fundamentally that this system is not working.” This man’s university bio says he’s currently working on a book on “marital deviance.” No wonder he doesn’t think it’s working!

*But the social sciences, consistently for the past 100 years actually, tell us that marriage works quite nicely and efficiently at elevating the well-being of women, men and children in every important measure of human thriving. In fact, being married increases all the important well-being benefits more effectively than any other form of intimate or domestic relationship. Social scientists don't really dispute this fact anymore. They are now debating why marriage improves well-being like it does. And most of them are concluding that it is because marriage uniquely makes demands upon us that benefit us, our loved ones and our communities. They call this the protection/support hypothesis.*

Let me run through some of the most significant ways social scientists are finding marriage useful:

**Young People Still Deeply Desire It:** Regardless of what our sophisticated Manhattanite *Newsweek* writers have talked themselves into, research consistently shows that marriage is not only a deeply held life goal for young people today, but that it has actually increased in ranking (against other desires like “a good job,” “lots of money”



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etc.) and number of young people reporting its importance.<sup>1</sup> This fact has led scholars to develop a new research construct entitled "Drive to Marry" (DTM) so this strong desire among young people to marry can be better analyzed and understood.<sup>2</sup> But they are also deeply anxious about their chances of achieving this deep desire.

**General Happiness and Life Contentment:** A major study examined the link between personal happiness and marital status in 17 diverse industrialized nations, finding,

...married persons have a significantly higher level of happiness than persons who are not married. This effect was independent of financial and health-oriented protections offered by marriage and was also independent of other control variables including ones for socio-demographic conditions and national character.<sup>3</sup>

This multi-nation study also concluded that "although persons who are married and persons who cohabit have a live-in partner in common, marriage increases happiness substantially more than cohabitation." The difference was 3.4 times greater for marrieds.<sup>4</sup> In fact, they report, "unlike marriage, cohabitation was negatively associated with both financial satisfaction and health."<sup>5</sup> Increased levels of happiness among the married are found in a number of other studies as well.<sup>6</sup>

And this greater happiness is true for both men and women. Leading sociologist of marriage and family Linda Waite explains in her critically acclaimed book, *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People are Happier, Healthier and Better Off financially* (which the *Newsweek* article didn't mention):

In fact, virtually every study of happiness that has ever been done has found that married men and women are happier than singles. The happiness advantage of married people is very large and quite similar for men and women and appears in every country on which we have information.<sup>7</sup>

**Increased Health:** A UCLA review of more than 130 empirical studies published over the last 100 years on how marriage impacts well-being found "an intimate link between marital status and personal well-being" with marrieds having stronger health and well-being than those in any other relational category.<sup>8</sup> Scholars working jointly at Harvard University and in the United Kingdom observe,

There is remarkable evidence that marriage helps to keep human beings alive. People who are divorced or separated or widowed are at a particularly high risk of dying prematurely. Those never married face somewhat lower risks of death in any given period, but the married have easily the lowest risk of all the groups. Evidence for this is now widespread across the world.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Wendy Manning, Monica Longmore and Peggy Giordano, "The Changing Institution of Marriage: Adolescents' Expectations to Cohabit and to Marry," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 69 (2007): 559-57; L.D. Johnston, J. G. Bachman, & P.M. O'Malley, *Monitoring the Future: Questionnaire responses from the nation's high school seniors, 2005*. (Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research, 2006); "What Makes Kids Happy Will Surprise You," *The Associated Press*, August 20, 2007; Colin Fernandez, "Forget Astronaut Dreams, Most Kids Just Want a Happy Marriage," *Daily Mail*, Sept. 10, 2007; Arland Thornton and Linda Young-DeMarco, "Four Decades of Trends in Attitudes Toward Family Issues in the United States: The 1960s Through the 1990s," *Journal of Marriage and Family* (2001) 63:1009-1037.

<sup>2</sup> Judith E. Owen Blackemore, Carol Lawton and Lesa Rae Vartanian, "I Can't Wait to Get Married: Gender Differences in Drive to Marry," *Sex Roles* 53 (2005): 327-335.

<sup>3</sup> Steven Stack and J. Ross Eshleman, "Marital Status and Happiness: A 17-Nation Study," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 60 (1998): 527-536.

<sup>4</sup> Stack and Eshleman, 1998, p. 534.

<sup>5</sup> Stack and Eshleman, 1998, p.535

<sup>6</sup> Hyoun K. Kim and Patrick McKenry, "The Relationship Between Marriage and Psychological Well-Being: A Longitudinal Analysis," *Journal of Family Issues*, 23 (2002): 885-911.

<sup>7</sup> Linda J. Waite and Maggie Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People are Happier, Healthier and Better Off Financially*, (New York: Doubleday, 2000), p. 168.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Coombs, "Marital Status and Personal Well-Being: A Literature Review," *Family Relations* 40 (1991) 97-102.

<sup>9</sup> Chris Wilson and Andrew Oswald, "How Does Marriage Affect Physical and Psychological Health? A Survey of the Longitudinal Evidence," Discussion Paper No. 1619, Institute for the Study of Labor, Bonn Germany, May 2005.



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Unmarried women and men generally spend twice as much time as patients in hospitals than their married peers, and have lower activity levels.<sup>10</sup> Unmarried middle-aged men, be they single, divorced or widowed, are on average *twice as likely* as their married peers to die prematurely. Unmarried women are about *one and a half times* as likely to die prematurely as married women. These findings are internationally consistent.<sup>11</sup>

A report from a diverse and leading team of American family scholars explains, "Married people appear to manage illness better, monitor each other's health, have higher incomes and wealth, and adopt healthier lifestyles than do otherwise similar singles."<sup>12</sup>

**Mental Health:** Research conducted jointly by Yale University and UCLA reports:

One of the most consistent findings in psychiatric epidemiology is that married persons enjoy better health than the unmarried. Researchers have consistently found the highest rates of mental disorder among the divorced and separated, the lowest rates among the married and intermediate rates among the single and widowed.<sup>13</sup>

Very sophisticated research methodologies - capable of teasing out numerous confounding factors - reveal that male and female cohabitators have notably higher levels of depression (2.8 times) as well as greater levels of alcohol consumption compared to their married peers.<sup>14</sup>

**Domestic Violence:** Data consistently shows that married women are victims of all forms of domestic violence at dramatically *lower levels* than women who are cohabiting or dating. And men who are married are 3 to 4 times *less likely* to commit violence against family members and strangers than their unmarried peers.<sup>15</sup> Marriage is a key safety mechanism. *Newsweek* missed this.

**Sexual Satisfaction:** The largest and most sophisticated study conducted on sexuality in the United States found that people who reported the highest levels of both physical and emotional sexual satisfaction are married couples who came to marriage with no previous sexual experience. In fact, sexual satisfaction tended to diminish as the number of partners in a lifetime increased.<sup>16</sup> This does not bode well for our *Sex and the City* gals who have fabulous shoes but less-than-fulfilling love lives. And married women are significantly less likely to be forced to do something sexually against their will and also reported the highest interest in sex.

**Poverty:** One of the most important indicators of well-being is financial security, and marriage makes a large and practical difference here. U.S. Census data shows us that women and their children are *three times less likely* to ever live in poverty if married compared to their single or cohabiting peers.<sup>17</sup> And married folks make more money on average than their unmarried peers, save more money and are more likely to be and stay employed.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Lois Verbrugge and Donald Balaban, "Patterns of Change, Disability and Well-Being," *Medical Care* 27 (1989): S128-S147.

<sup>11</sup> Yuanregn Hu and Noreen Goldman, "Mortality Differentials by Marital Status: An International Comparison," *Demography* 27 (1990) 233-250.

<sup>12</sup> W. Bradford Wilcox, et al., *Why Marriage Matters, Second Edition: Twenty Six Conclusions from the Social Sciences*, (New York: Institute for American Values, 2005), p. 25.

<sup>13</sup> David Williams, et al., "Marital Status and Psychiatric Disorders Among Blacks and Whites," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 33 (1992): 140-157.

<sup>14</sup> Susan Brown, "The Effect of Union Type on Psychological Wellbeing: Depression Cohabitants Versus Married," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 41 (2000): 241-255.

<sup>15</sup> *Criminal Victimization in the United States, 2007 Statistical Tables*, U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, February 2010, Tables 12, 13.

<sup>16</sup> Robert T. Michael, et al., *Sex in America: A Definitive Survey*, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1994), p. 124-129; Edward O. Laumann, et al., *The Social Organization of Sexuality: Sexual Practices in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 364, table 10.5; Andrew Greeley, *Faithful Attraction: Discovering Intimacy, Love and Fidelity in American Marriage*, (New York: Tom Doherty Association, 1991), see chapter 6.

<sup>17</sup> Rose Krieder, "Living Arrangements of Children: 2004" *Current Populations Reports*, (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008), table 2, page 6.

<sup>18</sup> Brown, 2000; Wilson and Oswald, 2005, p. 10; Wendy D. Manning and Susan L. Brown, "Children's Economic Well-Being in Cohabiting Parent Families: An Update and Extension," Center for Family and Demographic Research, Bowling Green State University, (2003) *Working Paper Series 03-05*, p. 25; L.W. Kenny, "The Accumulation of Human Capital During Marriage By Males," *Economic Inquiry*, 21 (1983) 223-231; George A. Akerlof, "Men Without Children," *The Economic Journal* 108 (1998) p. 296.



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**Infidelity:** The *Newsweek* article offer readers this whopper as fact: 60 percent of men and 50 percent of women will be unfaithful to their spouse. Not even close to being true! The General Social Survey reports that on average, 79 percent of men and 86 percent of women are faithful to their spouse, and that number has improved for men in the 2000s over the '90s and has stayed the same for women. What's more, marrieds are far more capable of being faithful than their cohabiting peers.

The National Sex Survey reports that cohabiting men are nearly *four times more likely* than husbands to have cheated on their partner in the past year, and while women are generally more faithful than men, cohabiting women are eight times more likely than wives to cheat.<sup>19</sup>

**Well-Being of Children:** The *Newsweek* piece made no mention of the needs of children in making its case against marriage.<sup>20</sup> Do they assume marriage is only about adult wishes or desire? The well-being of children cannot be discussed apart from marriage. The data on how marital status affects the physical, psychological and academic health of children is diverse and robust. The non-partisan, child-advocacy organization *Child Trends*, examining the question of how family structure impacts child well-being, concludes,

First, research clearly demonstrates that family structure matters for children, and the family structure that helps children the most is a family headed by two biological parents in a low-conflict marriage. Children in single-parent families, children born to unmarried mothers, and children in stepfamilies or cohabiting relationships face higher risks of poor outcomes than do children in intact families headed by two biological parents.<sup>21</sup>

The more left-leaning *Center for Law and Social Policy* examined the same question on family status and child well-being, reporting,

Over the past 20 years, a body of research has developed on how changes in patterns of family structure affect children. Most researchers now agree that together these studies support the notion that, on average, children do better when raised by two married, biological parents who have low-conflict relationships.<sup>22</sup>

**Conclusion:** So what we have here is *Newsweek* seeking to make a case against what the overwhelming majority of young adults strongly express as a desire for themselves, as well as what is evidently very good for them.

I trust the masses, their natural heart which yearns for the commitment, rewards and sacrifices of marriage, as well as the army of social science, psychological and medical scholars who have conducted the research on whether marriage serves any practical purpose.

*The verdict is clear, impressive and overwhelming: Marriage still yields important and valuable practical benefits for women, men, their children and our communities.*

*Perhaps this is part of the reason the ancient wisdom of Scripture exhorts that "Marriage should be honored by all." (Hebrews 13:4, NIV)*

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<sup>19</sup> Waite and Gallagher, 2000, p. 93.

<sup>20</sup> The only "need" they mention for children is for "stability" and imply that can be found anywhere.

<sup>21</sup> Kristin Anderson Moore, et al., "Marriage From a Child's Perspective: How Does Family Structure Affect Children, and What Can We Do about It?" *Child Trends Research Brief*, June 2002, p. 6.

<sup>22</sup> Mary Parke, "Are Married Parents Really Better for Children?" *Center for Law and Social Policy Policy Brief*, May 2003, p. 1.