January 2016 webinar

Generation Unbound:
Drifting into Sex and Parenthood without Marriage
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GENERATION UNBOUND
Drifting into Sex and Parenthood without Marriage

Isabel Sawhill
Senior Fellow, Brookings Institution
January 13, 2016
Outline

• What’s happening
• Why it’s happening
• Why it matters
• What to do
A Large Proportion of Births Occur Outside of Marriage

OVER 40% OF ALL CHILDREN ARE BORN OUTSIDE OF MARRIAGE


Isabel Sawhill
Is Unwed Childbearing Going to be the New Normal?

The problem of unmarried births has shifted up the age range. Though teenage births have been on the decline since the 1990s, births to unmarried 20-somethings remain high.


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Cohabitation is Increasingly Common

Percent of all first unions among women aged 15 to 44


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Cohabitation: The New Marriage-Lite?
Increasingly Common but Unstable

Percent of Parents Separated by the Time Their Child is Age 5

- Married: 20%
- Cohabitating: 48%


Isabel Sawhill
What is Driving the Change in Family Structure?

- Improving Opportunities for Women
- Declining Economic Prospects for Men
- Changing Social Norms
Why it Matters

• Children fare better in stable two-parent families

• Family breakdown contributes to child poverty, inequality, less social mobility

• Child poverty rates are five times higher in single-parent families vs. two-parent families

• Costs to society

• The typical single-parent family receives around $6,000 in government benefits per year.¹

¹ Post-tax, post-transfer income includes earned income, child support, social insurance, means-tested cash benefits, food stamps, housing benefits, EITC, and other tax/stimulus payments; Tabulations by Richard Bavier, based on U.S. Census Bureau March Current Population Survey.
Chicken and Egg

Does poverty → family breakdown

OR

Does family breakdown → poverty?
The growth of single parenthood since 1970 has increased child poverty by 5 percentage points.¹

The growth of the SNAP program alone since 1970 has cost about $44 billion and reduced child poverty by 3 percentage points.² Refundable credits, such as the EITC, cost about $90 billion and reduce child poverty by 7 percentage points.


Can Social Policy Keep Pace with Increased Need?

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Traditionalists vs. Village Builders

“The truth is, the greatest tool to lift children and families from poverty. . . isn’t a government spending program. It’s called marriage.”

“Children are not rugged individualists. . . All of us, whether we acknowledge it or not, are responsible for deciding whether our children are raised in a nation that doesn’t just espouse family values but values families and children.”
Another Solution: Reduce the Breakdown of the Family by Changing Drifters into Planners
What is Drifting?

- Doing something impulsively or without intention
- “Thinking fast,” not “thinking slow” (Kahneman)
- Typically some ambivalence
- What young women say:
  - “It doesn’t matter whether you use birth control or not; when it’s your time to get pregnant it will happen.”
  - “I just wasn’t thinking.”
Drifting into Parenthood is Common

60% OF BIRTHS TO SINGLE WOMEN UNDER 30 ARE UNPLANNED

Less Advantaged Women Have Highest Rates of Drifting

![Bar chart showing unintended pregnancies per 1000 women by race/ethnicity and educational attainment.]

Why So Much Drifting?

• Young adults not using birth control or using inconsistently

• Not using most effective methods

• Long-acting reversible contraceptives (IUDs, implants) change the default from getting pregnant to not getting pregnant
IUDs Are Much More Effective Than Other Forms of Birth Control

How we got these numbers: Data is from Trussell (2011). The probability that a person doesn't pregnant at all over a given period of time is equal to the success rate of her contraceptive method raised to the power of the number of years she is using that method. We then subtract this multi year "success rate" from 100% to get the failure rate (graphed above). This assumes that there is an equal chance of not getting pregnant in every year of condom use and that successful users and failed users (where success is not getting pregnant during a year using birth control) have the same rate. The assumption is reasonable given that figures we use are the figure for a “typical” user of some type of contraceptive.
Changing the Default: Evidence

St. Louis: The CHOICE Project

Colorado Family Planning Initiative

Iowa Initiative to Reduce Unintended Pregnancies
St. Louis: The CHOICE Project

Women using LARCs or shots had lowest unintended pregnancy rates after 1, 2, and 3 years.

Expanding access to LARCs caused a 27 percent decline in births to unmarried disadvantaged women who are younger than 25 between 2009 and 2011.

Iowa Initiative to Reduce Unintended Pregnancies

Percent of Iowa women using an IUD or Implant as primary contraceptive method

- IUD Method
- Implant Method

Percent of pregnancies in Iowa that are unintended


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What Government Needs to Do

Create more opportunity:
• Early childhood education and school reform
• More career and technical education
• Raise minimum wage; expand EITC; etc.

Change the default and empower women to have children when and with whom they want:
• ACA
• Health care providers
• Social marketing campaign
What Individuals Need to Do

Old social norm: Don’t have children outside of marriage

New social norm: Don’t have children until you and your partner are ready to be parents
Now available from Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and the Brookings Institution Press!

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