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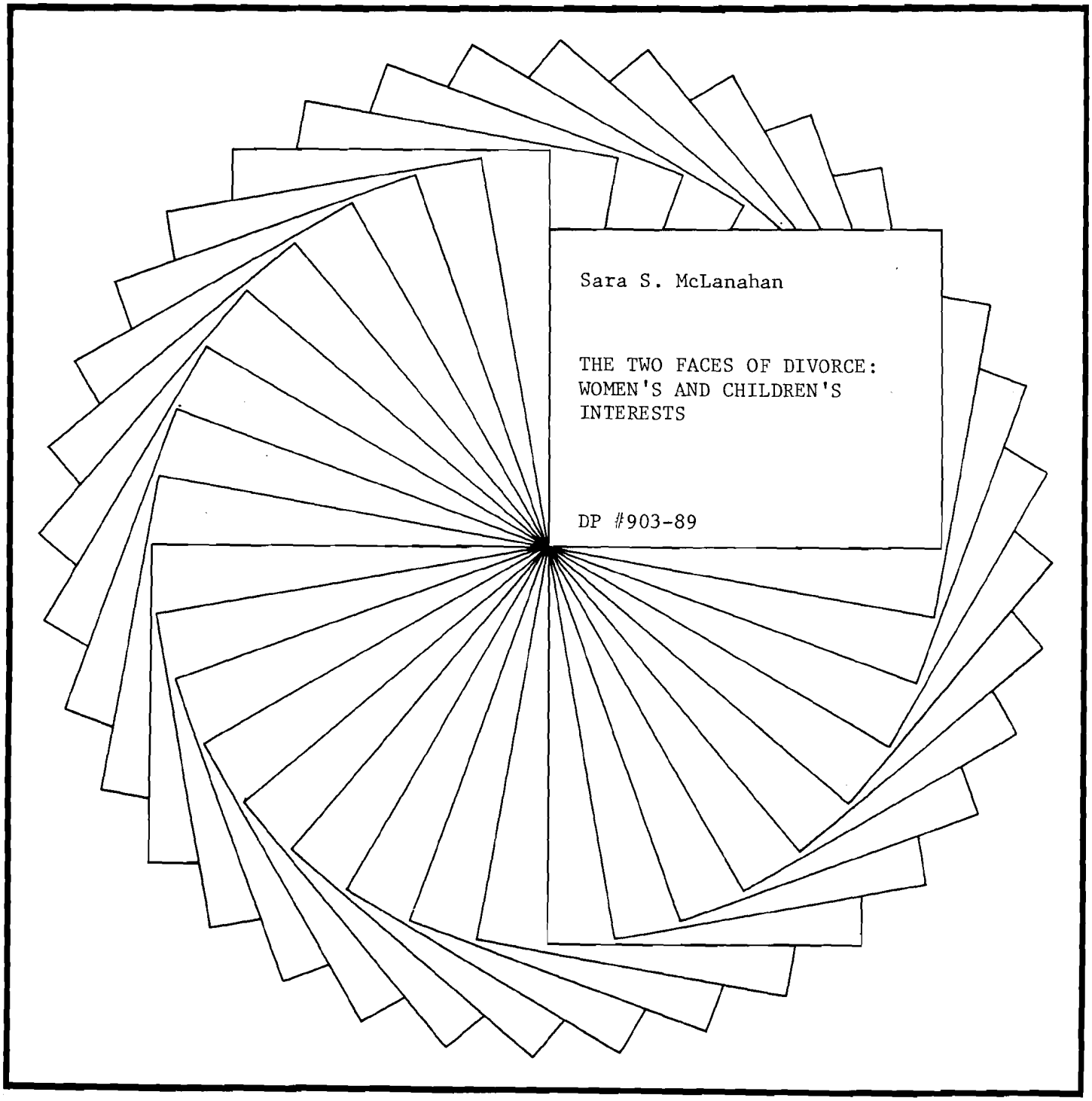

Institute for Research on Poverty
Discussion Paper no. 903-89

THE TWO FACES OF DIVORCE: WOMEN'S AND CHILDREN'S INTERESTS

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December 1989

This paper was prepared for the thematic session on "Family Responses to Macro Economic Change," at the American Sociological Association annual meetings in San Francisco, August 1989. It was also presented at the Annual Meetings of the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management in Washington, D.C., November 1989. The research was supported in part by the Russell Sage Foundation, by a grant from the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development (HD19375-05), and by a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to the Institute for Research on Poverty. Computing was provided by the Center for Demography and Ecology, which receives core support from the Center for Population Research of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. The opinions expressed in the paper do not necessarily reflect those of the funding agencies. I would like to thank Irwin Garfinkel and Judith Seltzer for their comments on a previous draft of the paper.

Abstract

In this paper I examine the consequences of divorce and single parenthood in terms of women's and children's well-being. Theory as well as empirical evidence lends support to the notion that, on balance, the recent increase in divorce is indicative of an overall gain in women's well-being. In contrast, new data from longitudinal surveys suggest that the long-term effects of living apart from a parent are negative for children. After weighing the individual and social costs of divorce, I describe the policies that seem to be in order--those designed to improve the economic well-being of single mothers and their children, with particular attention to child support reform and employment and training programs.

THE TWO FACES OF DIVORCE: WOMEN'S AND CHILDREN'S INTERESTS

No other change during the twentieth century has had a greater impact on the American family than the emerging economic independence of women.[1] Since the early 1900s, the labor market has become increasingly favorable for women in terms of both greater employment opportunities and higher wages. In response, women have been entering and remaining in the labor force in ever greater numbers, and their personal earnings have been growing steadily. While job segregation and the gender wage gap continue to exist, there can be little question that women are more equal to men today in terms of their economic opportunity and earnings capacity than they were at the turn of the century.[2]

The macro-level changes in women's economic status have led to changes in family formation and family structure, which in turn have further fueled the increase in women's independence.[3] Greater personal income has provided women with the option of maintaining independent households and raising children alone. As a result, they have become more selective about when and whom they marry and more willing to leave unhappy marriages. Indeed, one might argue that the family has adapted to macro changes in women's economic status by reorganizing itself into increasingly smaller units, the most prominent of which is the mother-child dyad. Mother-only families have increased by over 250 percent since 1960, growing from 9 percent of all families with children in 1960 to nearly 23 percent in 1987.[4]

This is not to say that women's economic independence is the only cause of family reorganization. Changes in family structure may also reflect shifts in social values and institutions as well as fluctuations

in job opportunities for male workers. Some argue that the liberalization of attitudes about divorce and single parenthood have made it easier for couples to dissolve unhappy marriages or relationships. Others argue that changes in the characteristics of a desirable spouse have increased uncertainty and undermined marriage. Still others claim that increases in welfare benefits for poor single mothers accompanied by declines in jobs for low-skilled male workers have made it more difficult for young couples to establish and maintain families.[5] While each of these arguments has merit, I believe they are less important than women's economic independence in accounting for the long-term trend in family structure.

Whereas changes in expectations, welfare benefits, and male employment are relatively recent, divorce has been increasing since the turn of the century.[6] Thus the former set of changes cannot account for the increase in divorce prior to the sixties, although they may account for the acceleration of the trend during the past two decades. Second, the growth in welfare benefits and male unemployment are not really alternative hypotheses to the argument for women's economic independence. Welfare provides an income floor for single mothers with low earning capacity, which makes it possible for them to care for their children and maintain a household alone. Similarly, male unemployment contributes to increases in women's **relative** economic status. While a decline in male employment does not improve women's standard of living or ability to maintain a household, it reduces the gains from marriage and undermines their dependence on men.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the consequences of divorce and single parenthood for the well-being of women and children and to explore the potential conflict of interest between mothers' and children's interests in marriage and marital stability. I begin by looking briefly at the costs and benefits of marital disruption for women.[7] Next, I summarize my own research on the long-term effects of family disruption on children. Finally, I examine society's interest in maintaining family stability and discuss what, if anything, should be done to reconcile the conflict between women's independence and children's well-being.

WOMEN'S INTEREST IN DIVORCE

Are women better off living independently and raising children on their own, or are the gains associated with independence offset by losses in other areas of personal welfare? Certainly divorce has substantial economic costs for women. About 26 percent of divorced mothers live below the poverty line, and an even larger proportion of these women have experienced a substantial drop in their standard of living.[8] In addition to economic problems, single mothers have primary responsibility for making family decisions, for performing domestic work, and for meeting the emotional needs of their children. Not surprisingly, numerous studies have shown that single mothers report higher levels of anxiety and depression than married mothers.[9]

Nevertheless, most people would probably agree that, on balance, the increase in divorce and decline in marriage symbolize a gain in

women's status. Economists would say that women's behavior speaks for itself. Assuming that individuals know and seek to maximize their well-being, it follows that women who divorce (or never marry) find more satisfaction living separately than they did in their marriage. Many feminists would agree. Women's economic dependence on men has long been viewed as a cornerstone of gender inequality, and freedom from the institution of marriage is seem by some as a necessary if not sufficient condition for women's emancipation and empowerment.[10]

The empirical evidence lends support to the notion that, on average, divorce improves the well-being of women. In a recent national survey, individuals who had divorced in the past five years were asked whether they had wanted their divorce and whether they were better or worse off after the divorce.[11] Women were two and a half times as likely as men to report having wanted a divorce. Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of women reported substantial improvements in the quality of their social lives and sexual relationships, in their career opportunities, and in their overall level of happiness after divorce. Over half reported improvement in their standard of living.[12]

CHILDREN'S INTEREST IN DIVORCE

What about children? Are they also better off living apart from their biological fathers, or has the increase in family instability lowered their well-being? While many people would like to believe that women's economic freedom translates directly into gains for children, there are logical as well as empirical reasons for questioning such an

assumption.

First, there is no reason to expect the interests of women and children to be the same at all times. Mothers and children are separate individuals, and while many women have been taught to believe that motherhood is their primary purpose in life, it is doubtful that identification with the mother role has ever been complete, even in the most traditional societies. Given the extension of individual rights to women during this past century, and given the increase in women's opportunities outside the home, it is reasonable to assume that in some instances, the interests of mothers and children diverge.

Second, assuming that conflicts of interest arise from time to time, children have very little power over their parents' decisions. While the state protects children against extreme parental abuse, and while most parents consider their children's well-being in making important decisions, there is no reason to believe that parents give greater weight to their children's interests than to their own. In cases where parents place a higher value on their personal interests, children have very little recourse to alter the decision.

Finally, in its current form the institution of marriage almost ensures that parents' and children's interests will diverge at some point. Whereas at one time marriages were held together by an economic bond that was based on the common interest of all household members, marriages today are increasingly based on sexual attraction and the pursuit of individual fulfillment. Sexual attraction and personal satisfaction are private goods that may or may not coincide with the needs of the larger family unit. Where marriage and divorce are subject

to the ebb and flow of sexual attraction and personal happiness, there is a greater likelihood that children's and parents' interests will diverge.

Consider the following examples: A father drinks heavily and refuses to contribute to the support of the family, emotionally or financially. At times, he is abusive toward the mother and child, and family life is generally chaotic. In this instance, the interests of the child and the mother are similar; both are better off living apart from the father. Now consider a case in which the father provides economic support to the family and emotional support to the child but no longer loves the mother. He may have fallen in love with someone else, or perhaps he has just grown indifferent to the mother (the sex of the parents may be reversed). In this instance, the mother may conclude that she is better off living apart from the father, whereas the child is probably better off if the parents stay together.

What does the empirical evidence tell us about the life chances of children from nonintact families? Interestingly, public perceptions about the consequences of divorce and single parenthood for children have undergone several transformations during the past three decades, responding in part to the dramatic increase in the rate of marital disruption during the 1960s and 1970s.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the prevailing view was that single parenthood was indicative of individual pathology and the children of such unions were expected to exhibit similar psychological problems. This view was seriously challenged in the early 1970s by Herzog and Sudia (1972), who, in their lengthy review of the literature, noted that

most of the existing studies contained serious methodological flaws, including a failure to control for differences in race and socioeconomic status. Herzog and Sudia ushered in a new perspective on divorce and single parenthood, which was accompanied by studies focusing on the strengths as opposed to the weaknesses of single-parent families. A common assertion during this period was that parents' personal fulfillment was a necessary component of good parenting and children were better off living with one happy parent than with two unhappy parents. Interestingly, the shift in consciousness coincided with and served to legitimate the dramatic increase in divorce that occurred during the 1960s and 1970s.

More recently, the pendulum has swung back toward a more critical view. While not making assertions about individual pathology, researchers have become less optimistic about the consequences of family disruption for children. For the past six years, my colleagues and I at the University of Wisconsin-Madison have been examining the intergenerational consequences of family disruption, focusing specifically on the long-term costs of single parenthood for children. Our analyses are based on data from three longitudinal surveys, the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), the National Longitudinal Survey Youth Cohort (NLSY), and the High School and Beyond Survey (HSB), as well as data from several cross-sectional surveys, including the 1980 Census public use tapes, the National Survey of Family Growth, and the National Survey of Families and Households. Taken together, this body of research points to a number of consistent findings about the effects of divorce on children.[13]

First, children who live apart from one or both parents appear to be disadvantaged across a wide range of outcomes: they are more likely to drop out of high school and less likely to attend college than children who live with both parents; they are more likely to marry and have children while still in their teens; and they are more likely to form single-parent families themselves, either through marital disruption or nonmarital births. All of these outcomes increase the risk for long-term poverty and economic dependence.

Second, the effects of family disruption are more or less constant across a variety of racial and ethnic groups. Thus far we have found that family disruption is associated with lower attainment among whites, blacks, Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Native Americans. The cumulative effects of single parenthood appear to be stronger (more negative) for whites than for nonwhites, which could occur either because the institutional supports for single mothers are stronger in minority communities or because stress is higher across all types of minority families. Either way, divorce is less important in determining the life chances of minority youth than of white youth.

Third, the demographic characteristics of nonintact families do not matter very much. Whereas children of widowed mothers are less likely to drop out of school than children of divorced, separated, or never-married mothers, they are just as likely to give birth out of wedlock. Nor does the sex of the child or custodial parent make much difference. Both boys and girls are more likely to drop out of school and start families early if they come from nonintact families, and daughters living with single fathers are just as likely to give birth out of

wedlock as daughters living with single mothers. There is some evidence that the presence of a grandmother in a mother-only families reduces the risk of a daughter's premarital birth.

Fourth, remarriage does not reduce the disadvantages associated with family breakup, even though stepfamilies have more income than single-parent families. In fact, when income is taken into account, children living with stepparents appear to be even more disadvantaged than children living with single parents. Whether stepparents have other economic commitments outside the household or whether they are unwilling to share income with their stepchildren is not clear at this point. However, the evidence that remarriage may not be a solution to the problem of single parenthood is consistent across several studies.

Finally, family disruptions in adolescence seem to have the same consequences as disruptions in early childhood, though perhaps for different reasons. Early disruptions increase the risk of long-term exposure to single parenthood, whereas later disruptions reduce parental authority during adolescence, which is a time in which children require a good deal of parental guidance and control.

DIVORCE AND DISADVANTAGE: CAUSE OR EFFECT?

The studies described above show a positive correlation between family stability and children's long-term socioeconomic attainment. They do not, however, establish that the relationship is causal. One might argue that the lower attainment of children from divorced families is due entirely to conditions predating parents' divorce. If this were

true, children from divorced families would be expected to be worse off than children in two-parent families, even if the divorced parents had remained together. In fact, they might have been worse off. This argument, which is called the **selection hypothesis**, assumes that predivorce conditions resemble those of the family described above, in which the father provides neither emotional nor financial support to the mother and the household is chaotic. If all family disruptions were of this type, we would still be concerned about the welfare of the children in such families, but not about the parents' decision to divorce.

Assuming that at least some marital disruptions resemble the case in which both parents love their children but not each other, what evidence do we have that divorce itself reduces children's well-being? In such families, wouldn't both parents continue to love and support the child after a divorce, and wouldn't the child benefit from less conflict and more parental satisfaction? Apparently, children do not always think so. In their recent book, Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1989) report that children in conflict-ridden families were angry and disappointed to learn that their parents were getting a divorce. Even after 10 years, many of the offspring in their sample still resented their parents' decision and felt they had lost something very precious because of the divorce.[14]

Apart from children's perceptions, there are theoretical as well as empirical reasons for believing that divorce itself has negative consequences for children. Perhaps the most important change after a divorce is the decline in parents' economic investment in children. In part, this is due to a loss of economies of scale: parents' income must

support two households instead of one. In part, it is due to changes in the costs and benefits of children. Parents who live apart from their children are less likely to experience the psychological benefits of parenthood than parents who live with their offspring, and the costs of supporting their children go up, since the nonresident parent loses control over expenditures.[15]

Divorce also alters the quantity and quality of the time parents spend with their children. Time with the nonresidential parent declines because of increases in transportation costs and the costs associated with interacting with the residential parent, and time with the residential parent declines because single mothers must work more hours to compensate for the loss of income. The quality of parent-child relations is affected by the fact that parents are under a considerable amount of stress during the first year after separation, and also by the fact that parental conflict over child support and visitation may continue for many years.[16] Stress and parental conflict undermine parental authority and interfere with the child's internalization of parental role models and values. Socialization theory suggests that such disruptions have negative consequences for children's cognitive and emotional development.[17]

Finally, divorce affects the quality of children's community resources and their claim on these resources. Divorce increases the likelihood that a child will live in a disadvantaged community, where jobs are scarce and schools are poor. The benefits of completing high school and delaying parenthood are lower in such communities and therefore adolescents are less likely to stay in school and more likely

to become teen parents. Even among children living in middle-class neighborhoods, divorce may interrupt community ties and promote membership in deviant subgroups. Residential mobility is much higher among recently divorced families than among two-parent families, which means that a substantial proportion of children from newly divorced families must adjust to new schools and make new friends. When parents are under considerable stress, teenagers turn to peers for support, which can have either a positive or negative effect, depending on the culture of the group.

My colleagues and I have been testing many of these ideas, and the evidence is far from conclusive. The most consistent finding is that income is an important factor in explaining differences between children in one- and two-parent families. Differences in family income account for between 25 and 50 percent of the difference in high school graduation and for about 15 to 25 percent of the difference in early family formation.[18]

Aside from income, we have been able to shed <u>some</u> light on which parenting practices and which community characteristics are important for children's attainment. We know, for example, that single parents and stepparents are less likely to monitor their children's schoolwork and social activities and have somewhat lower educational expectation than parents in intact families.[19] We also know that children from nonintact families are more likely to live in disadvantaged neighborhoods, to attend poor-quality schools, and to associate with deviant subgroups than children living with both parents.[20] Finally, it is clear that family disruption is associated with relocation, and that children

living with stepparents experience the greatest number of moves.[21] Unfortunately, we have not been able to demonstrate that these differences account for very much of the contrast in school achievement and family behavior among children in one- and two-parent families.

Last, we have made some progress toward testing the selection hypothesis. We have determined that inherited ability does not account for the difference in the educational attainment of children from intact and nonintact families.[22] We have shown that changes in family structure (going from a two-parent household to a one-parent household) lead to changes in parental practices, neighborhood conditions, and children's school behavior.[23] And finally, we have shown that family structure effects persist after the use of statistical techniques to control for unobserved heterogeneity.[24] While we are fairly confident that divorce itself has some negative consequences for children, we do not have a good estimate of the magnitude of that effect.

RESOLVING COMPETING INTERESTS

In the concluding section of this paper I want to return to the issue of women's and children's competing interests in divorce and say a few things about what might be done to resolve the conflict. Let me begin by explaining why I chose to focus this essay on the trade-off between women's and children's interests as opposed to simply talking about the effects of divorce on children, which is the subject of my empirical research. The reason for choosing the former was to highlight what is often a hidden tension between those who view divorce from a

woman's perspective and those who view it from a child's perspective. Many people, and women in particular, are uncomfortable with the notion that women's and children's interests may conflict. This is not surprising, given that our society views women (and women view themselves) as the primary caretakers of children. Men may be criticized for neglecting their parental obligations, but a mother who places her own interest above that of her child is the subject of great scorn. Consequently, liberal and feminist discussions of single parenthood often take one of two directions: analysts either argue that single parenthood is harmful for both women and children, e.g., mothers and children are victims of male irresponsibility (or mothers, fathers and children are victims of poverty), or they argue that single parenthood is beneficial for both women and children, e.g., women and children are better off living independently from men.[25] While both of these descriptions are true in some cases, I suspect that many couples break up because one or both of the parties finds their relationship lacking in personal fulfillment, and I suspect that in a majority of these families, the father has something valuable to offer his children.

The research on the intergenerational consequences of family disruption contains important information for women who are in a position to choose whether or not to end their marital relationships. Surely mothers who are in this position will want to know that divorce has costs for children, if only so that they can take this information into account in deciding whether or not to end an unsatisfactory union. Ultimately these women may find that the gains of living independently outweigh the costs for themselves and their children, but this is quite

different from operating on the assumption that family disruption has no negative consequences for children or that women's and children's interests are always the same.

What are the policy implications of this research? Should the government outlaw divorce for couples with children? Should it make divorce more difficult by changing the tax code? To answer these questions, the costs and benefits of such an action must be evaluated from society's as well as the individual's point of view. With respect to costs, outlawing divorce would impose major restrictions on individual freedom and expose women and children who live in abusive situations to considerable harm. Thus the social costs are clearly high. With respect to benefits, the answer is less clear. Until the selectivity issue is resolved, we cannot be sure how much of the negative impact of family disruption is due to divorce per se. Moreover, the magnitude of the effect of divorce on society as a whole is not always large. Outlawing divorce would raise the national high school graduation rate from about 86 percent to 88 percent, assuming no selectivity into divorce. It would reduce the risk of a premarital birth among young black women from about 45 percent to 39 percent.[26]

While preventing divorce is probably not justifiable, less draconian measures may be in order. Reducing economic insecurity in mother-only families, for example, would go a long way toward reducing some of the negative consequences of family disruption for children. At the present time, there are at least two major strategies for increasing the income of single mothers. One set of policies is designed to increase family income by increasing the earning capacity of single

mothers. These policies, which include employment and training programs for welfare mothers, child care subsidies, and pay equity proposals, are aimed at increasing a single mother's ability to support herself and her children on her own. A second set of policies is aimed at increasing the role of fathers in supporting their nonresident children. Child support reform includes proposals for (1) increasing the proportion of children with awards, (2) increasing the level and collection of awards, and (3) instituting a minimum child support benefit for children with a living nonresident parent.[27]

These strategies have somewhat different implications for mothers and children. Policies aimed at increasing women's earnings are consistent with the notion that one parent is sufficient for raising a child so long as that parent has an adequate income. As such, they benefit women, whereas they may have costs for children insofar as they reduce the amount of time mothers spend with their children and increase the prevalence of mother-only families.[28] Child support reform, on the other hand, limits parents' freedom and redistributes the cost of children from mothers to fathers. A guaranteed minimum child support benefit shifts some of the cost from individual families to the public, as is true of child care subsidies. Child support reform is clearly in children's interest in that it strengthens their claim on the nonresident parent's resources. In doing so it redistributes the economic costs of children from mothers to fathers, which increases the cost of divorce for men. At the same time, it redistributes domestic power from mothers to fathers, which increases the cost of divorce for women. Because of the latter, some women may view child support reform

as regressive. One of the few advantages that divorced mothers currently have is the more or less exclusive control over child-rearing decisions. However, if nonresident fathers are held accountable for child support, mothers must be prepared to relinquish some of their parental power. While this may be difficult at first, in the long run I suspect it will be good for children both in terms of economic advantages and greater father involvement. At a minimum, the symbolic value of knowing that one's father has maintained an economic commitment is important to the child.[29]

"Bringing fathers back in" may also be good for women.[30] The fact that so many women today feel torn between motherhood and their quest for economic independence is evidence that the conflict between mothers and children is also a conflict within women themselves. Whereas in times past, economic production and domestic production were complementary activities, today the time and energy a mother invests in the labor market is usually time and energy not invested in children. Most women recognize this fact and experience a major dilemma over how to be good mothers without jeopardizing their future economic security. If women invest all of their time in caring for children, they increase the risk (for themselves and their children) of being poor at some future date. If they invest heavily in market work, their children receive less parental attention. The only way to insure that children do not suffer a loss of parental investment in the future is to encourage fathers to become more involved in domestic production. Not only does increasing fathers' obligations reduce psychological uncertainty, it ultimately increases mothers' earning capacity. Child support increases

the benefits of working outside the home for low-income mothers, since it is taxed at a much lower rate than welfare benefits. It also permits middle-income mothers to be more discriminating in their employment decisions, which should enhance long-term earning capacity. In sum, child support and employment/training programs are complementary policies that strengthen family ties while promoting women's economic independence. Both are necessary for resolving the conflict between women's and children's interests.

Notes

[1]For a discussion of changes in women's status see Bergmann (1986); Fuchs (1988); and Bianchi and Spain (1986).

[2]The gender wage gap, which remained constant at about .60 between 1950 and 1980, has been declining since 1980 for younger cohorts of women (Gunderson, 1989; Blau and Beller, 1988).

[3]In turn, expectations about declining family stability have increased women's propensity to pursue employment outside the home.

[4]For a discussion of the trends in families headed by single mothers, see Garfinkel and McLanahan (1986). The proportion of families headed by single mothers did not change very much between 1900 and 1960. Increasing divorce rates were offset by decreasing widowhood, which meant that the "flow into" mother-only families remained relatively constant. Moreover, remarriage rates were high, which meant that the proportion of single mothers remained low.

[5]For a discussion of changes in attitudes, see Cherlin (1982); for a discussion of changes in characteristics of a desirable spouse, see Oppenheimer (1988); for a discussion of changes in welfare benefits and the decline in male employment, see Garfinkel and McLanahan (1986).

[6]According to Cherlin (1982), changes in attitudes about divorce occurred between the middle sixties and early seventies, <u>after</u> the dramatic rise in divorce rates.

[7]From this point on, I will refer to marital disruption and to divorced/separated mothers as opposed to never-married mothers. Much of

what is said about divorce and families headed by divorced women also applies to informal unions that lead to parenthood. While this may seem inappropriate to some, I believe that the similarities between the statuses of divorced mothers and never-married mothers are greater than the differences. With respect to children's well-being, their effects are quite similar.

[8]Estimates of the postdivorce income drop for women vary from a high of 70 percent (Weitzman, 1985) to a low of 30 percent (Duncan and Hoffman, 1985a, 1985b). See also Duncan and Hoffman (1989).

[9]For a discussion of the overload problems of single mothers, see Weiss (1979). For a discussion of the mental health of single mothers, see Guttentag, Salassin and Belle (1980).

[10]See Sorensen and McLanahan (1988) for a discussion of this position.

[11]For information on the National Survey of Families and Households, see Sweet, Bumpass, and Call (1988).

[12]The seeming disparity between women's subjective reports of postdivorce economic well-being may arise from several factors. Divorced women may minimize the economic costs of divorce in order to justify their decision to live independently. Alternatively, these women may be accurately describing their situation. Whereas their total family income (adjusted for family size) may have been greater prior to divorce, control over that income may have been much weaker. In this case, the

women may indeed be better off economically. (I am grateful to Timothy Smeeding for pointing out this last possibility.)

[13]The following conclusions are based on findings from these studies: McLanahan (1985, 1988); McLanahan and Bumpass (1988a, 1988b); McLanahan, Astone, and Marks (1988); Bumpass and McLanahan (1989); Sandefur, McLanahan, and Wojtkiewicz (1989); Astone and McLanahan (1989a, 1989b); Thomson and McLanahan (1989).

[14]Because Wallerstein does not have a control group in her sample, she does not compare her respondents with adolescents in two-parent families. Therefore, it is possible that many of the problems reported by the young adults in her sample are common to all young people, regardless of the parents' marital status. What is clear from the Wallerstein study is that children who have been through a divorce attribute many of their personal problems to the fact that their parents divorced.

[15]See Weiss and Willis (1985) for a theoretical discussion of the changes in the costs of children after divorce.

[16]Conflict over child support and visitation is practically inevitable, given the shift in the cost of children. In families where fathers continue to contribute substantial amounts of money to their children, the father is likely to resent the fact that the cost of the child is high. In families where fathers pay little child support, the mother is likely to resent the fact that she must bear the cost of the children alone. In the latter case, direct parent conflict may be low,

but the mother's attitude toward the father may be hostile, which itself has negative consequences for the child.

[17]For expositions of this theory, see Hetherington, Cox, and Cox (1978); Hetherington and Arasteh (1988); Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1989).

[18]See the following: McLanahan (1985, 1988); Sandefur, McLanahan, and Wojtkiewicz (1989); Astone and McLanahan (1989a); McLanahan, Astone, and Marks (1988); McLanahan and Bumpass (1988b).

[19]See McLanahan, Astone, and Marks (1988); Astone and McLanahan (1989a).

[20]See Astone and McLanahan (1989b); Sandefur, McLanahan, and Wojtkiewicz (1989).

[21]See Astone and McLanahan (1989b).

[22]See Sandefur, McLanahan, and Wojtkiewicz (1989); Astone and McLanahan (1989a, 1989b).

[23]See Sandefur, McLanahan, and Wojtkiewicz (1989); Astone and McLanahan (1989a, 1989b).

[24]See Sandefur, McLanahan, and Wojtkiewicz (1989), for details.

[25]Examples of these positions include Ehrenrich (1983), who argues that men have abandoned women; Wilson (1987), who argues that family breakup and nonmarriage are due to poverty, and Delphy (1984), who argues that women's economic dependence on men is the root of women's oppression.

[26]The estimate for high school completion is based on McLanahan (1985); the estimate for premarital birth is based on McLanahan and Bumpass (1988a). Both sets of estimates assume that all of the negative impact of family disruption is due to the disruption itself, as opposed to preexisting characteristics of the parents.

[27]See Garfinkel and McLanahan (1986) for a more detailed discussion of child support reform.

[28]The question of whether contact with the nonresident father has benefits for children is also unresolved at this time. While a number of small studies indicate that the post-divorce father-child relationship is very important for children's well-being (Hess and Camara, 1979; Wallerstein and Kelly, 1979), other researchers have found no significant effects of father contact (Furstenberg, Morgan, and Allison, 1986). Similarly, there is considerable debate over the extent to which the quantity of time with the mother is important for children's well-being (Desai, Chase-Lansdale, and Michael, 1989; Belsky, 1988; Phillips, McCartney, and Scarr, 1987; Phillips, 1987).

[29]Studies show that fathers who pay child support are more likely to spend time with their children and to participate in making decisions about their children's lives (Seltzer and Bianchi, 1988; Seltzer, Schaeffer, and Charng, 1989; Seltzer, 1989; Furstenberg, Morgan and Allison, 1986). For more information on the potential impact of child support reform on parent-child relationships, see Garfinkel and McLanahan (1986).

[30]The use of the word back is intentional. Prior to the rise of the cult of domesticity and the separation of market work from family life, fathers played a more important role in raising children. See Demos (1986).

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