



The Gold Standard

Why Marriage Is Best for Men, Women, Children, and Society

by: Brittany Farrell

CASH, OUTSIDE OF ITS ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS, IS REALLY NOTHING MORE THAN SOME PAPER, THREAD, AND DYE. THE “VALUE” OF THIS PAPER, RELIES ON THE PERCEPTION OF WHAT IT REPRESENTS. THROUGH THE COURSE OF HISTORY, GREAT MINDS HAVE DEBATED THE ECONOMIC FUNCTIONALITY OF THAT REPRESENTATION. “THE GOLD STANDARD” WAS THE SIMPLIFIED EXPLANATION OF THIS PAPER MONEY REPRESENTATION. DESPITE BEING NOTHING MORE THAN A COMBINATION OF A FEW RATHER INEXPENSIVE AND SIMPLE MATERIALS, PAPER MONEY IS THE BASIS FOR AN ENTIRE ECONOMIC SYSTEM AND CAN FUNCTION WITH THE CLOUT OF GOLD.

While some want to rouse a similar debate as to the value and functionality of the “gold standard” for society’s most basic institution—the family—the science is in, and it is clear that the nuclear family—consisting of a married mother and father raising their biological children—is a combination much weightier than the value of gold.

A “mule” is a coin that is mistakenly minted with either an obverse or reverse design. Any “misprinted” mules are so few and far between, that they are light-years from the “normal.” Today, marriage is often discussed in terms of the exception scenarios, or the “mules”—the abusive spouse, the barren couple, the divorcee, and the successful businessman who was raised by a single mother. An honest appraisal of the importance of marriage between a man and woman, and why that institution deserves the protection and privileges society has afforded it throughout history, must consider the totality of the institution—what impact do a married man and woman have on each other, on the children their sexual union brings into the world, on their familial well-being, on the economy, and on society, as a whole? Fortunately, the answers to these questions are readily available and straightforward. Marriage provides a tremendous boost to the well-being, happiness, and success of every moving part in society.

Societies and governments do not protect marriage just because common sense dictates that it is the most efficient and appropriate means of populating the world, perpetuating an educated workforce, and acclimating children to live in and contribute to society. Rather, societies and governments recognize that these basic, but significant benefits cannot be provided by any other institution with the same levels of success and stability, be it today’s loose definition of an adult relationship, the church, or the government. The natural family is just that—natural. It naturally provides the “gold standard” for men, women, and children to relate to each other—bringing society a desperately needed “weight” that can not be substituted for by any other “fill-in” that claims to represent the *real* thing.

Benefits to Children

Despite a gradual shift in the deviations that Americans have come to accept as a “family,” the fact remains that the nuclear family is undeniably the best recipe for raising healthy children. Numerous medical, sociological, psychological, and economic studies have reached the same conclusion—children raised by their married biological parents do better than children that are raised in any other environment.¹

Empirical Data. It is important to recognize, though, that children do not just need two adults as parents. Rather, they need a mother and a father, who are committed to each other and the family unit in a lifelong marriage.² Mothers and fathers are not only undeniably biologically necessary for the creation of new life, but, as parents, they bring unique and equally necessary talents and approaches to parenting that, combined, create the best environment in which to raise children. For example:

- The nation’s leading non-partisan child advocacy organization, Child Trends, concluded, “An extensive body of research tells us that children do best when they grow up with both biological parents in a low-conflict marriage.... Thus, it is not simply the presence of two parents, as some have assumed, but the presence of *two biological parents* that seem to support child development.”³

“**Marriage provides a tremendous boost to the well-being, happiness, and success of every moving part in society.**”

- After examining family status and child well-being, including children raised by same-sex parents, the Center for Law and Social Policy concluded that: “on average, children do better when raised by two married, biological parents who have low-conflict relationships.”⁴
- Children who grow up with their married mother and father are healthier physically, mentally, and emotionally; more successful academically; less likely to use and abuse drugs and alcohol or to engage in early sexual activity or to be party to a teen pregnancy; more inclined to have healthier relationships and marriages as adults; and, boys are especially less likely to engage in juvenile delinquency or be incarcerated.⁵
- Sociologist Dr. David Poponoe, former director of the National Marriage Project wrote in



his book, *Life Without Father*, “Beyond being merely a second adult or third party, fathers—men—bring an array of positive inputs to a child, unique and irreplaceable qualities that women do not ordinarily bring. Despite their many similarities, males and females are different to the core. They think differently, and act differently.... By every indication, the expression of these differences is important for child development.”⁶

- Dr. Popenoe notes the special importance of fathers, who generally serve as: protectors and providers; as role models, especially for boys—teaching them how to be men, and teaching girls how to relate to men. Fathers have a distinct and vital interaction style with babies, tending to encourage freedom by holding babies further away, facing out to the world, or over their shoulders, or bouncing them up and down. Fathers put more emphasis on rough and tumble play, and encourage independence. Their communication style is brief and direct.⁷
- Mothers, on the other hand, generally tend to be nurturers, who hold babies close, cradling them, and sheltering them from the world. They get down on a child’s level when they play. Mothers encourage emotional security and personal safety, and they tend to talk more openly and stress the importance of relationships.⁸

Childhood Experiences. Science is not the only recognizer of the benefits of the nuclear family for children. Children recognize the importance of having a mom and a dad. As Dr. Popenoe writes: “children instinctively realize that the world is made up of two sexes, that each sex possesses biological and psychological traits that balance and complement the other, and that each sex brings something unique and important to children’s lives.”⁹

With the advent of reproductive technologies that separate children from their biological parents, such as *in vitro fertilization* using sperm or egg donors, studies of the children created by science are finding that no matter how children are conceived or in what type of family environment they are raised, all children desire to know from where they came and who they resemble in appearance and personality. Most especially, studies show that all children long to not only know who their mother and father are, but to know them personally.¹⁰

This recognition by both science and children—that children do best when raised by their own mother and father—is a reflection of what Patrick Fagan, Ph.D., who directs the Marriage and Religion Research Institute at the Family Research Council, describes as the “universal right of every child to have the married love of both parents to reach his full potential.”¹¹

Benefits to Men and Women

While the benefits of a nuclear family founded on the marriage of a man and woman are clear for children, the benefits for men and women are equally powerful. A myriad of benefits to adults stem from the traditional family structure, including: increased family wealth; less poverty, especially for women; better health and longer life expectancies, especially for men; lower rates of depression, especially for women; less risk of domestic violence, especially for women; and better relationships with children, especially for fathers.¹²

Once they begin families of their own, the benefits of an intact faith-practicing family continue to materialize for adults. Dr. Patrick Fagan’s *Mapping America Project*, which analyzes the impact of family structure and religious practice on children and adults, has found that:

- “[A]dults in intact marriages who worship regularly enjoy greater happiness, engage in more positive behaviors, and have more positive attitudes about marriage, childrearing, their work, and their fellow man, than married adults who do not worship regularly and/or adults who are divorced or separated.”
- “Adults in always-intact marriages who also worship at least weekly are more likely than all other adults to be proud of the type of work they do.”
- Frequently worshipping adults in always-intact marriages “take the greatest pride in the type of work they do.”
- Nearly three-fourths (74.8 percent) of the “adults in always-intact marriages who attend religious services at least weekly report that being married is either very important to them or one of the most important values they hold, followed by 73.2 percent of adults in always-intact marriages who never attend worship.”

- More than three-fourths (75.6 percent) of the adults “in always-intact marriages who attend religious services at least weekly believe in the importance of having their own children.”
- “Adults in always-intact marriages who attend religious services at least weekly are the least likely to believe that most people try to take advantage of others.”¹³

The benefits of an intact married family life are not limited to those adults who currently live in such a family structure. The benefits reaped by adults who were raised by their biological parents in a family that regularly worshipped together, include being happier and less likely to engage in criminal activity or to use alcohol.¹⁴

Economic Benefits for Families

Marriage is good for economies in general, and especially good for individual families’ economies. According to Dr. Fagan, “the monogamous culture is inexpensive.”¹⁵ In his landmark report, *Marriage and Economic Well-Being: The Economy of the Family Rises or Falls with Marriage*, Dr. Fagan concluded, “the stable, intact married family outperforms other sexual partnering structures” across a variety of “basic economic measures such as employment, income, net worth, poverty, receipt of welfare, and child economic well-being.”¹⁶ Specifically, married families earn higher incomes—with a median household income as much as “twice that of divorced households and four times that of separated households”—than any other family structure¹⁷ and have a higher net worth.¹⁸ Additionally, the children of married families “experience more economic mobility and less poverty in childhood than children in any other family structure.”¹⁹

Marriage Premium. Married men boast a substantial marriage premium in the form of increased productivity and earnings directly resulting from their decision to marry. One study found “that married men make, on average, almost 30 percent more than their non-married counterparts in hourly wages.”²⁰ A portion of this marriage premium results from the increased hours married fathers spend working to provide for their families. Dr. Fagan’s research found that “[t]wice as many (32 percent) married fathers worked 45 hours or more per week in 1997, compared to cohabiting fathers (16 percent).”²¹

The difference in earnings attributed to the marriage premium increases significantly as men age. Research by Nobel Laureate George Akerlof has found that young men who are married are more likely than their unmarried counterparts to not only be in the labor force and employed, but to have a full-time job.²² Married men in the 20 to 24-year old range earn 11 to 14 percent more than their single peers.²³

This marriage premium also applies across the racial spectrum with a 24 percent earnings increase for white husbands and a 20 percent earnings

increase for black husbands.²⁴ Once they reach the ages of 55-64, married white men make nearly 20 percent more than divorced, separated, and widowed men, and a full 32 percent more than all unattached men.²⁵

Asset Benefits. In his study on marriage and economic well-being, Dr. Fagan cites research from RAND Corporation economist James P. Smith that found that “the median value of the assets owned by married families was \$132,200, [while] [t]he medians among other family structures were significantly lower: \$35,000 among never-married households, \$33,670 among divorced households, and \$7,600 among separated households.”²⁶ He went on to highlight additional data showing that “the median net worth of married households is three times greater than the median net worth of widows, four times greater than that of divorced and never-married individuals, and over 16 times greater than that of separated individuals.”²⁷ Non-married men have 63 percent less net worth than married men, on average.”²⁸

As part of the comparison of net worth by family structure, Dr. Fagan found that “[m]arried couples generally save more,²⁹ have higher net worth,³⁰ and enjoy greater net worth growth from year to year.”³¹ The net worth growth rates of married households range between \$3,000 and \$17,000 more per year than all other households.³² These net worth benefits are even more pronounced for black married couples than for white married couples.³³

Welfare Benefits. Married families are substantially less likely (5.8 percent compared to 16.9 percent of male householders and 29.9 percent of female householders in 2009) to live in poverty.³⁴ They are also “less likely than cohabiting families or single individuals to have ever participated in the Food Stamp Program³⁵ (now the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program).”³⁶

Knowing that the individuals within a family reap personal benefits from the environment created by the natural family, it makes sense that the economic health and well-being of families reflects some of these same benefits. The responsibility of heading and caring for a family partly motivates men and women to make decisions and sacrifices that contribute to the financial stability of their individual family.

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Economic Benefits for States

The benefits of marriage for individuals from a personal and societal perspective are well-documented. Interestingly, the benefits of marriage also spill over to real economic gains for states. Maggie Gallagher recently wrote an article for *Family North Carolina* in which she compared the economies of those states that protect and defend marriage with those that have bought into today's "hip" new trend to attempt to redefine the world's most basic institution. Her findings include:

- Eight of the top 10 and four of the top five "states with the fastest income growth per capita have state marriage protection amendments, and none have same-sex 'marriage.'"
- CEOs' rankings of the top five states for job growth in 2009 (Texas, North Carolina, Florida, Georgia and Tennessee) included only states that do not allow same-sex "marriage," and four of the five, with the exception of North Carolina, currently protect marriage in their state constitution.
- "The top five states for middle-class job growth between 2002 and 2009 are: Utah, Wyoming, Nevada, Hawaii and Texas. Once again, four out of the five have state marriage protection amendments, and none have same-sex 'marriage.'"
- The U.S Chamber of Commerce's list of states that are top "overall growth performers" included a top three that all have state marriage protection amendments (North Dakota,

Virginia, and South Dakota). None of the top five allow same-sex "marriage."³⁷

Benefits to Society

Society benefits from marriages that aid in the development of healthy children, society's next generation, and healthy adults who keep society working. For this reason, society should recognize its responsibility to defend the right of children to grow up in a home that consists of their own married mother and father as the key ingredient in raising well-adjusted, healthy, and happy citizens.

Raising Children. According to economist Dr. Jennifer Roback Morse, economists "assume adults—everyone comes into the market somehow ready to make contracts, ready to defend their property rights, ready to respect other's property rights. Well, it is not automatic that a person starts from infancy and becomes a functioning adult."³⁸ As Dr. Morse notes, children must be taught to appropriately interact in society. The long and arduous process of taking a newborn from a state of knowing nothing about the world and being completely reliant on the care of others to a mature state of being able to make decisions to not only provide for their own essential needs, but to potentially care for a family of his or her own and to contribute to society and the economy at large, must be undertaken by someone. Parents are the most natural and successful persons to undertake this important task. "The first thing the mother and father do is to prevent really bad outcomes, but the larger thing they do is to help a young person develop into a functioning adult who can contribute and collaborate with other people in a normal and social way," Dr. Morse writes.³⁹ "There are thousands of things that mothers and fathers do that they can not articulate, but that have profound consequences, and so even an average, good enough parent is doing enormous social service."⁴⁰ To put it bluntly, she writes that the natural nuclear family, consisting of a married mother and father raising their children, "is a low cost means for facilitating a lot of human effort and a lot of collaboration and cooperation."

These societal benefits from the formation and functioning of natural families have far-reaching consequences that no other family structure can replicate quite so well. An expanding body of research continues to find that the central ingredient to raising healthy children that form a strong society is the marital union of one man and one woman, who provide children with a father and mother within their immediate every day family structure.⁴² Sixteen of the nation's top family scholars have concluded that, "Marriage is an important social good, associated with an impressively broad array of positive outcomes for children and adults alike."⁴³ The same 16 family scholars also concluded that, "Marriage is an important public good, associated with a range of economic, health, educational,



and safety benefits that help local, state, and federal governments serve the common good.”⁴⁴

Parents are especially key in the emotional and relational development of children. Dr. Morse points out that it is socially beneficial for children to be attached to their own parents because that is how children develop “an internalized sense of right and wrong” that is necessary for a working society. She emphasizes that one of the most basic things “a marriage does is to prevent attachment disorder,” which often results from a broken family structure, and can become a very expensive situation for families, and often ultimately relies on the government through social welfare or criminal justice programs to mitigate the expense or damage wrought by such a difficult situation.⁴⁵ More children growing up with their own married mothers and fathers will result in fewer societal ills, and therefore less reliance on local, state, and federal governments for assistance, such as welfare, child support, other social services, and the associated costs taken on by the state.⁴⁶

Dr. Fagan, through the *Mapping America Project*, has concluded that, “the intact married family that worships weekly is the greatest generator of human goods and social benefits.”⁴⁷ A society that embraces, preserves, and promotes lifelong married love between husbands and wives raising their children “is more effective in raising citizens with habits and aptitudes needed by society, especially by democratic republics.”⁴⁸

More Than a Government Construct

Marriage is timeless. The nuclear family was established by God during creation, when He created Adam and Eve, giving them the charge to “be fruitful and multiply.”⁴⁹ For all of human history, this foundational institution of human existence and relationship has been recognized and upheld by society and governments. In his discussion of the clash between the polyamorous and monogamous civilizations seen in today’s world, Dr. Fagan emphasizes, “Western society, the fruit of Christianity, is based on and organized around lifelong sexual monogamy—that is, having a sexual relationship with only one person, a spouse, in a lifetime.”⁵⁰ He goes on, “the constitutional state was the product of a monogamous culture; it could never have emerged from a polyamorous culture, cannot survive there, and has not emerged in non-monogamous cultures.”⁵¹

Marriage, based on the complementary male-female union, is truly the foundational institution of society. It is found in nearly every human society in recorded human history as the norm and preferred family structure.⁵² Governments have consistently granted public recognition and privileges to marriage because of the universal understanding that

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the marital union of a man and a woman creates the safest, healthiest, and happiest environment for adults to live and in which to raise children.⁵³

Because marriage is so integral to the continuation and success of not only society, but also the human race, governments have recognized the inherently selective nature of marriage. Marriage is reserved for those who accurately qualify under the parameters of the institution—not just anyone can get married. For instance, most governments have said that children, certain blood relatives (like siblings), more than two people, or animals cannot legally marry. Governments, for thousands of years and across a variety of civilizations, have consistently chosen to preserve this universal institution that is meant to bring men and women together for the purpose of creating the most ideal environment for raising children, who represent the continuation of the human race in general and individual societies specifically.

More Precious Than Gold

Marriage, as ordained by God and accepted by societies across time and place, has consistently held a place of honor among both people and governments because of the extraordinary value it brings to people and society. The marriage of one man and one woman, who together create and raise children, has been revered as the gold standard for human relationships because it undeniably provides the best environment for the promotion of healthy and happy adults and their children. The value of this “gold standard” is nearly immeasurable when one considers the personal benefits to men, women, and children, the economic benefits to families and society, and the prevention of untold social costs. Marriage is so much more than a young man and woman looking lovingly into each other’s eyes, exchanging rings on a beautiful summer day surrounded by beautiful flowers and loving friends and family. Marriage is a commitment that a man and a woman make to jointly dedicate their lives to bet-

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tering the world by the ways they serve each other and their children—ways that hold much more weight than all the gold in Fort Knox. ❖

ENDNOTES:

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