

Fragile Families

www.fragilefamilies.princeton.edu

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Overview of Presentation

- Motivation
- The Fragile Families Study
- Findings from quantitative analyses
- Implications for social policy
- TLC3
- Findings from the qualitative data

What are Fragile Families and Why do we Care?

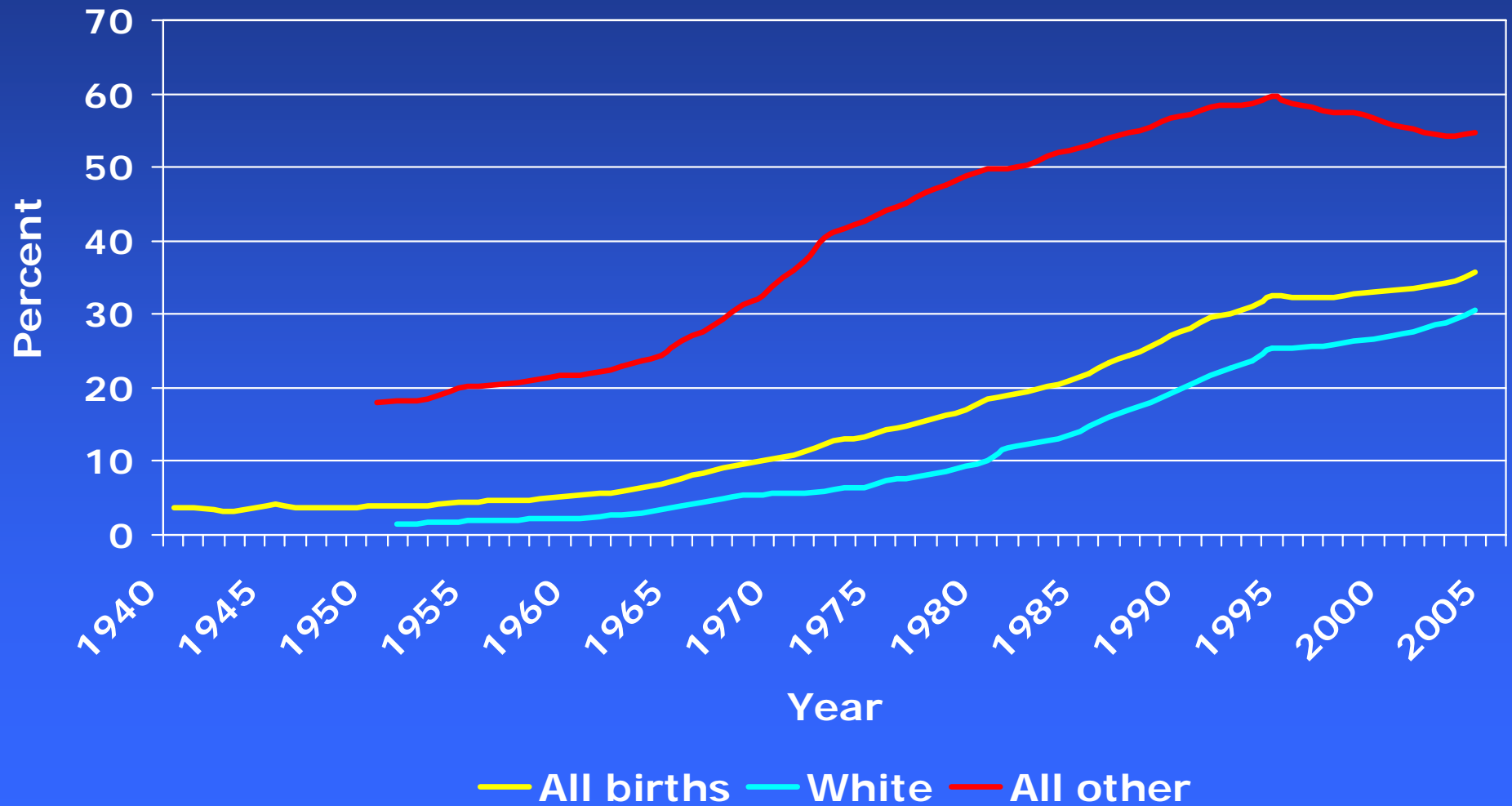
What -

- Unmarried parents and their children
- Fragile in terms of economic and social resources
- Families in terms of biological and social ties

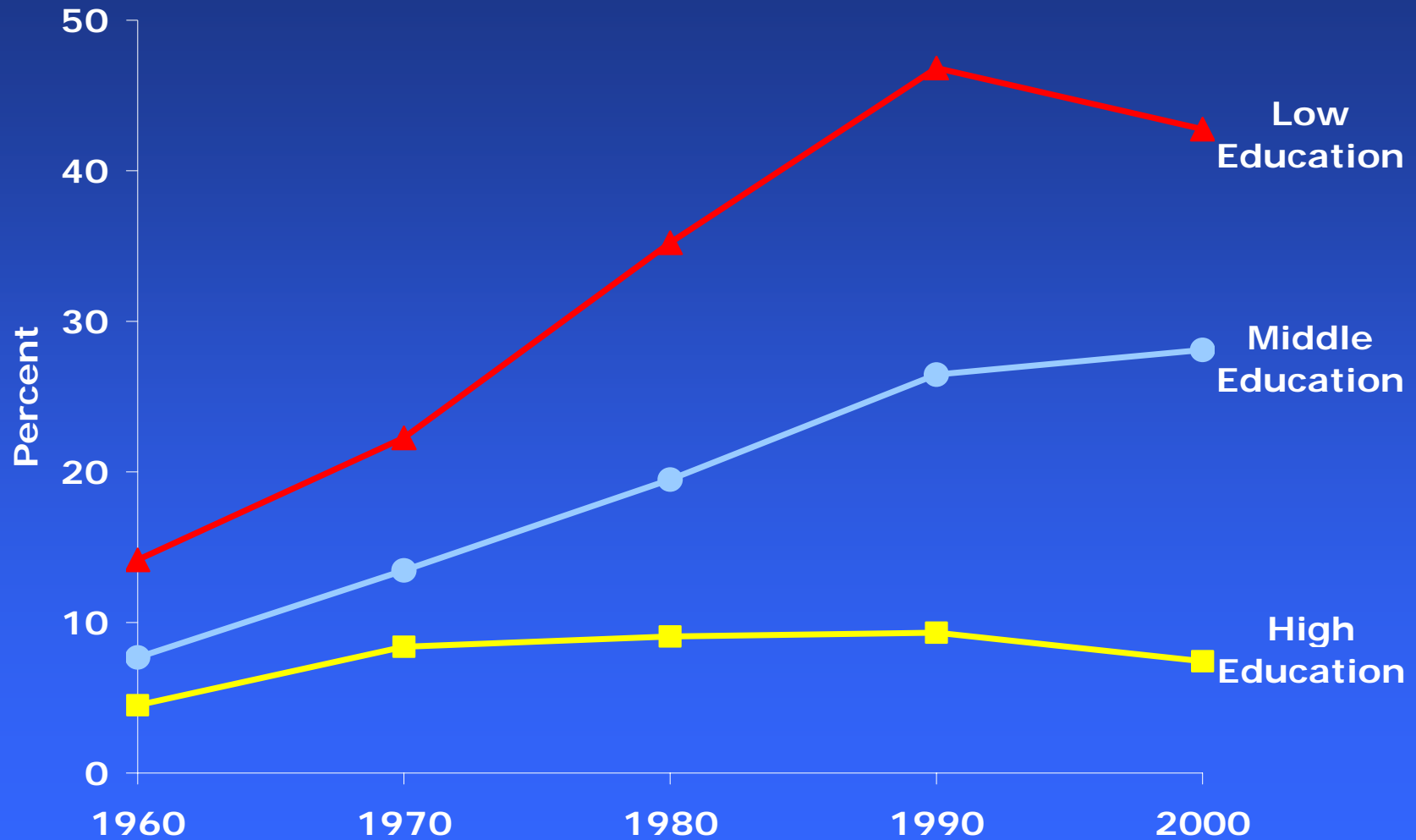
Why -

- Large increases since 1965
- Disparities by race/ethnicity and education
- Links to wellbeing and mobility

Births to Unmarried Mothers, U.S.



Disparities in Single Motherhood



McLanahan (2004)

The Questions

- What are the capabilities of unmarried parents, especially fathers?
- What is the nature of parental relationships at birth; how stable are relationships?
- How do parents and children fare?
- What role do policies play in the lives of fragile families?

The Fragile Families Study

Sara McLanahan and Irv Garfinkel – PIs

- Probability sample of 4900+ new births (1998-2000)
 - 20 cities (200,000 or more people)
 - 75 hospitals
 - 3700 non-marital births; 1200 marital births
- Data are representative of births in large cities
- Interviews conducted with both parents at birth
- Follow-up interviews are conducted when child is 1, 3, and 5 years old (9 year interviews are currently underway)
- Child assessments at 3 and 5 years
- Public use data for core surveys at baseline, 1 year and 3 years; Also data from qualitative interviews, medical records, neighborhood characteristics

Special Features

- Large sample of 'high risk children' (naturally occurring)
- High response rates
 - 88% of unmarried mothers
 - 75% of unmarried fathers (60% at the hospital, 85% at least once)
 - 85% of mothers were interviewed at year 5
- Mixed methods
 - Phone and in-person surveys
 - Interviews with childcare providers and teachers
 - Qualitative interviews in 4 cities – TLC3 and Oakland
 - Medical records data

Collaborative Studies

Study	Principal Investigator
Child Neglect	Paxson, Brooks-Gunn and Waldfogel
Medical Records	Reichman and Teitler
Child Care Providers	Brooks-Gunn
Incarceration	Western
Qualitative studies	MacArthur Network (Edin et al.), Waller
Transitions to Adulthood	MacArthur Network (Furstenberg)

What are parents' capabilities?

Low human capital and earnings
Poor health and other barriers

Parental Capabilities

	Mothers		Fathers	
	Married	Unmarried	Married	Unmarried
Age (mean)	29.6	23.3	31.9	26.7
Teen parent (%)	4	25	0	13
Child with other Partner - MPF (%)	14	42	16	43
Education (%)				
Less than HS	18	45	19	38
High school	25	38	21	40
Some college	21	16	27	18
College	36	1	34	4
Non-white (%)	49	81	48	42
Immigrant (%)	31	19		
Earnings (mean)	\$17,107	\$7,997	\$40,499	\$20,962

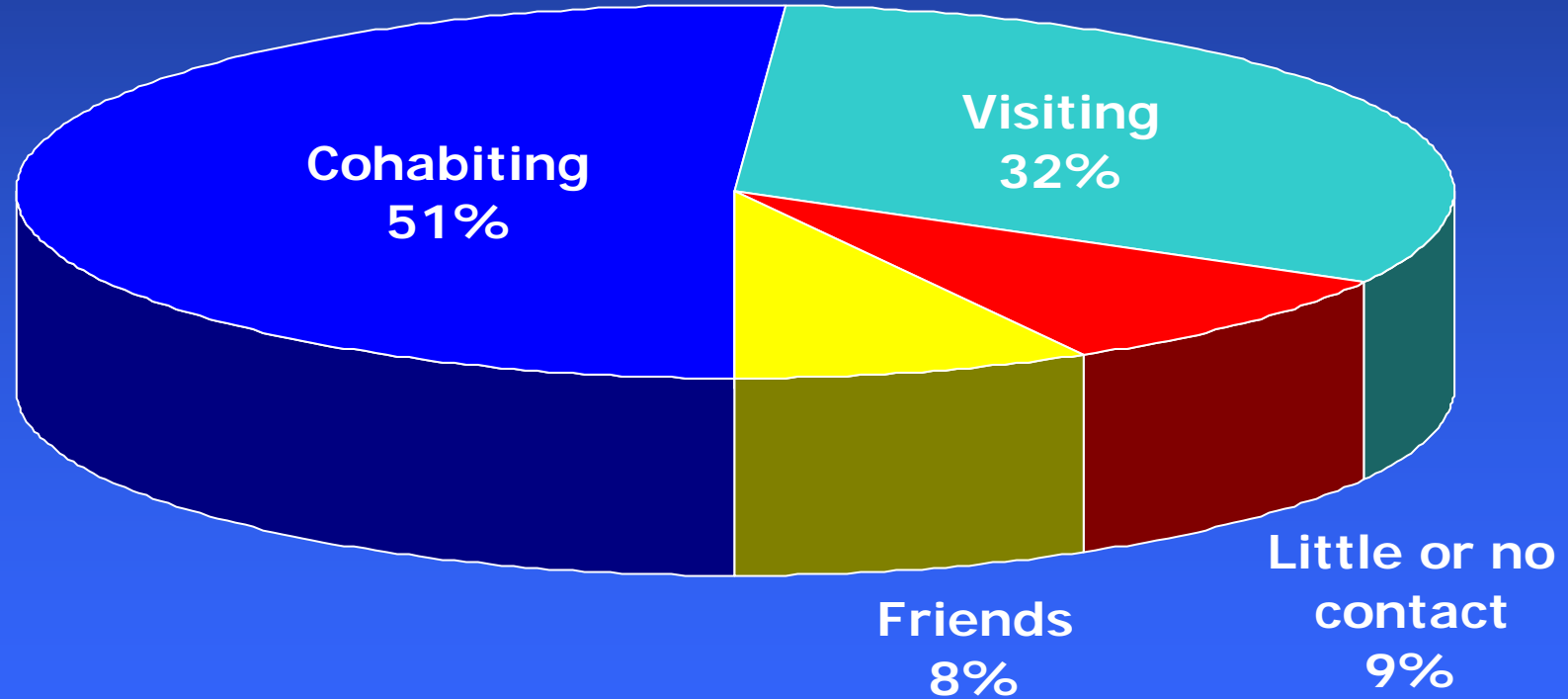
Capabilities, cont'd

	Mothers		Fathers	
	Married (%)	Unmarried (%)	Married (%)	Unmarried (%)
Depression	13	16	7	11
Heavy drinking	3	7	22	27
Illegal drug use	1	2	4	8
Either has problem	42	52	-	-
Both have problem	6	10	-	-
Father incarcerated	-	-	6	40

What is the nature of parental relationships?

High Hopes
High father involvement

Relationships at Birth



Father Involvement at Birth

	Total (%)
Gave money/bought things for child	80
Helped in another way	76
Visited baby's mother in hospital	88
Child will take father's surname	92
Father's name is on birth certificate	84
Mother says father wants to be involved	95
Mother wants father to be involved	94

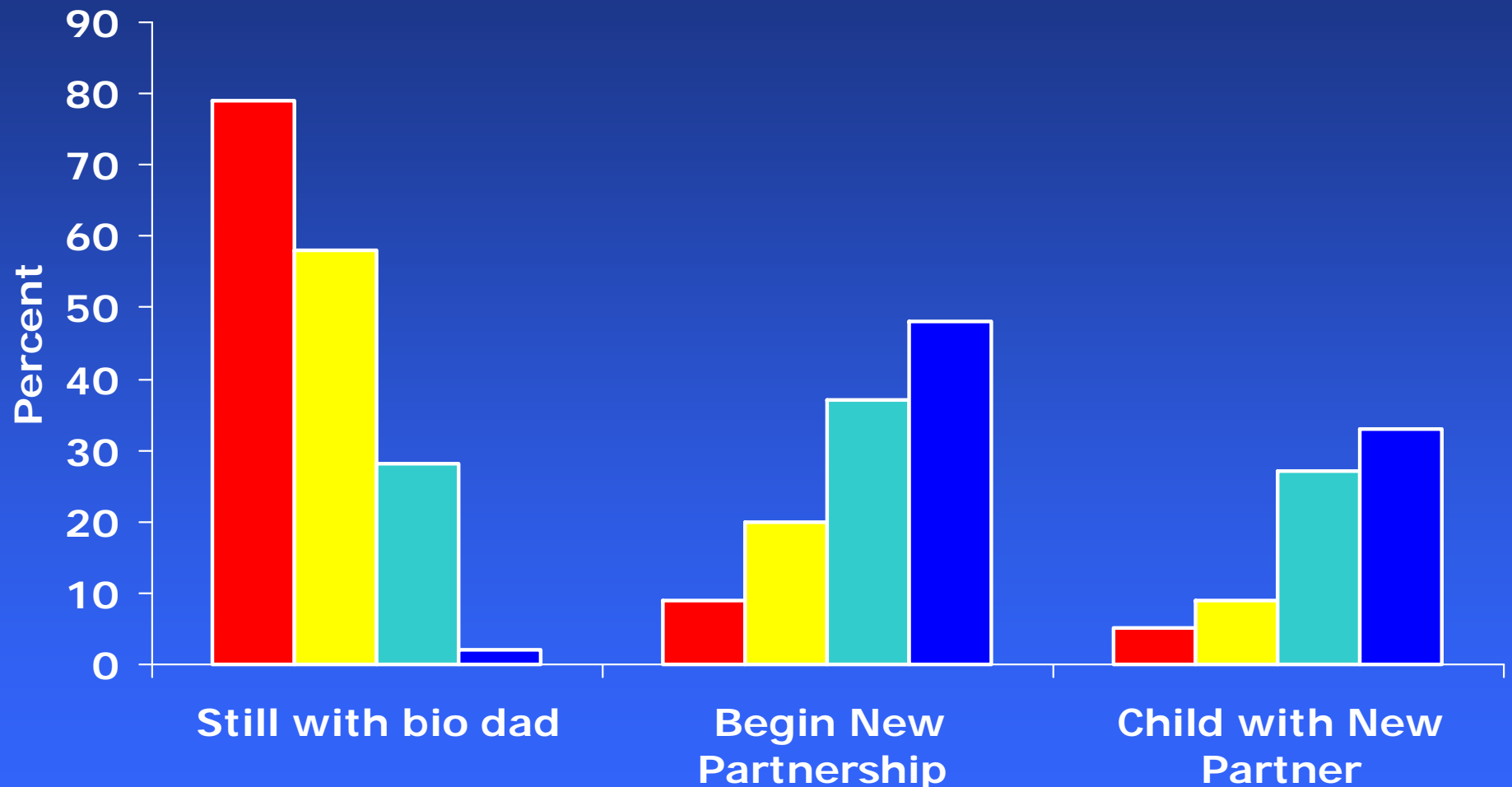
Attitudes at Birth

- Positive views towards marriage
 - High expectations for marriage
 - High relationship quality
 - High father involvement
- Less positive views towards marriage
 - Acceptance of single motherhood
 - Distrust of the opposite sex

How stable are relationships?

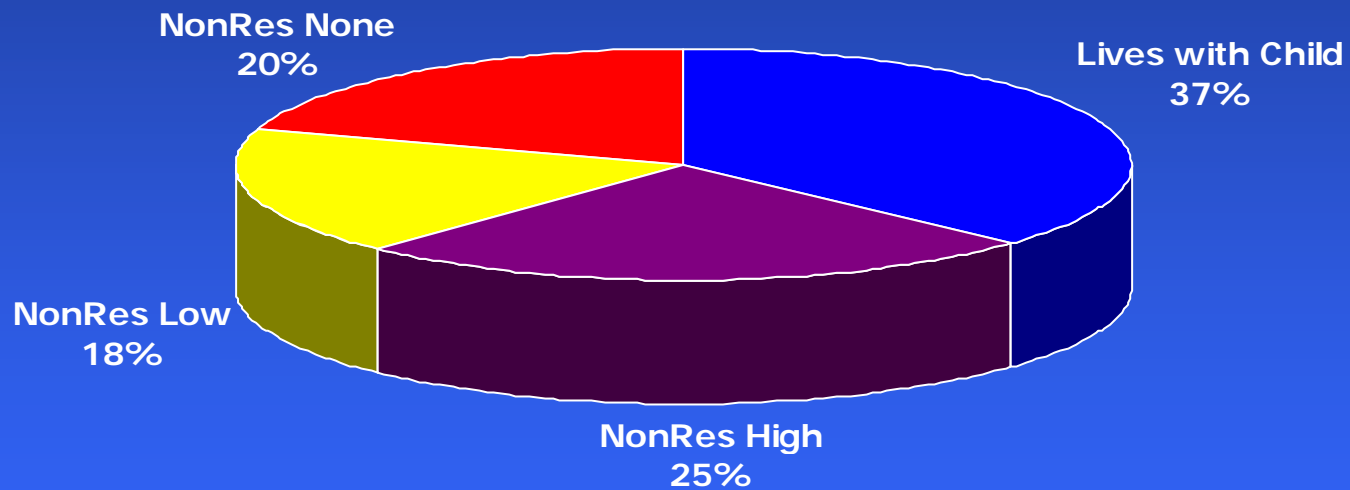
Growing instability and complexity
Declining father-involvement

Endings and Beginnings (age 5)



■ Married ■ Cohab ■ Visit ■ No Rel

Bio-father Involvement (age 5)



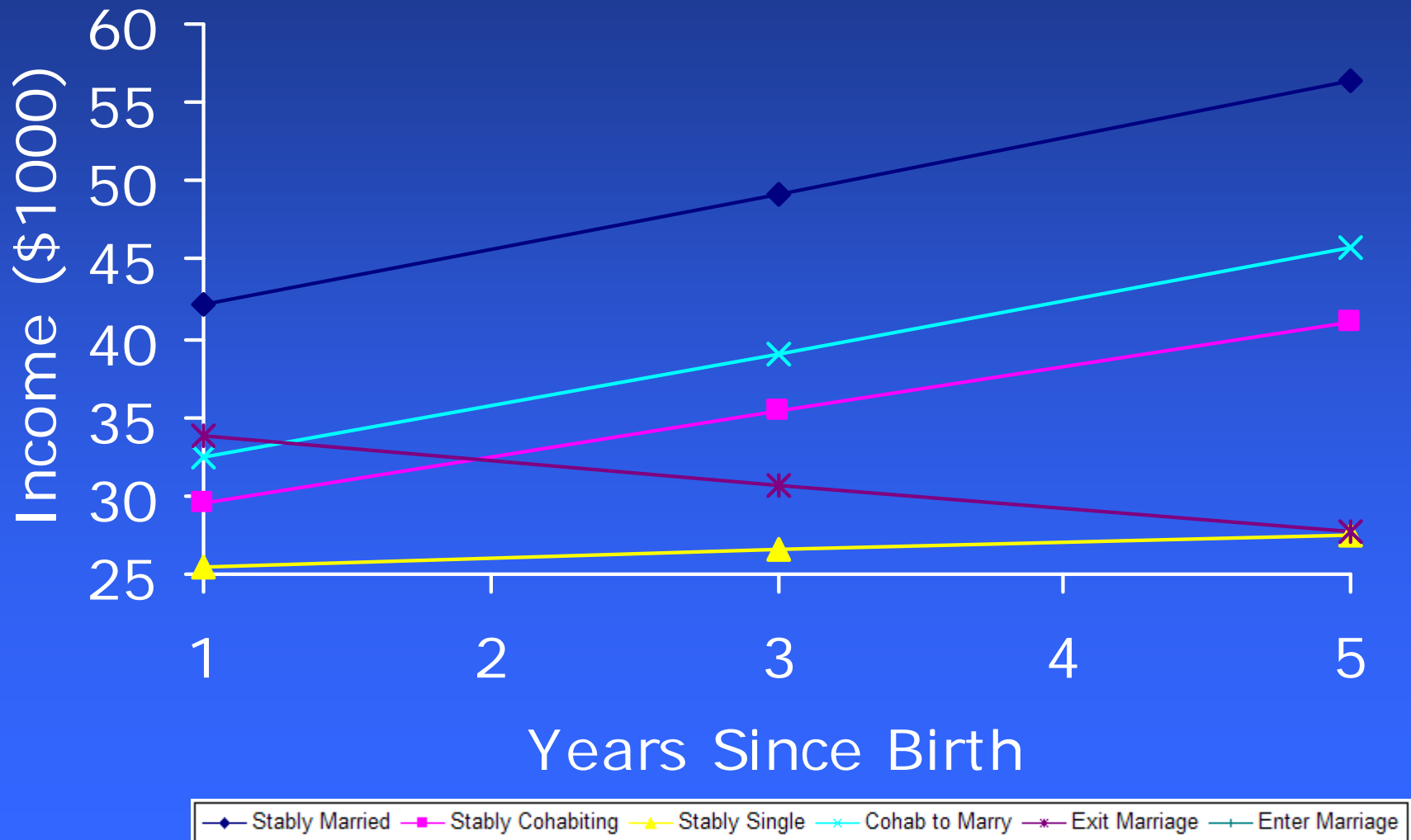
New Partnerships: A Surprise!

Fathers' Characteristics	Social Father (%)	Bio Father (%)
Less than high school	8	36
Not working	15	26
Drugs	1	9
Violence	1	18
Ever incarcerated	18	50

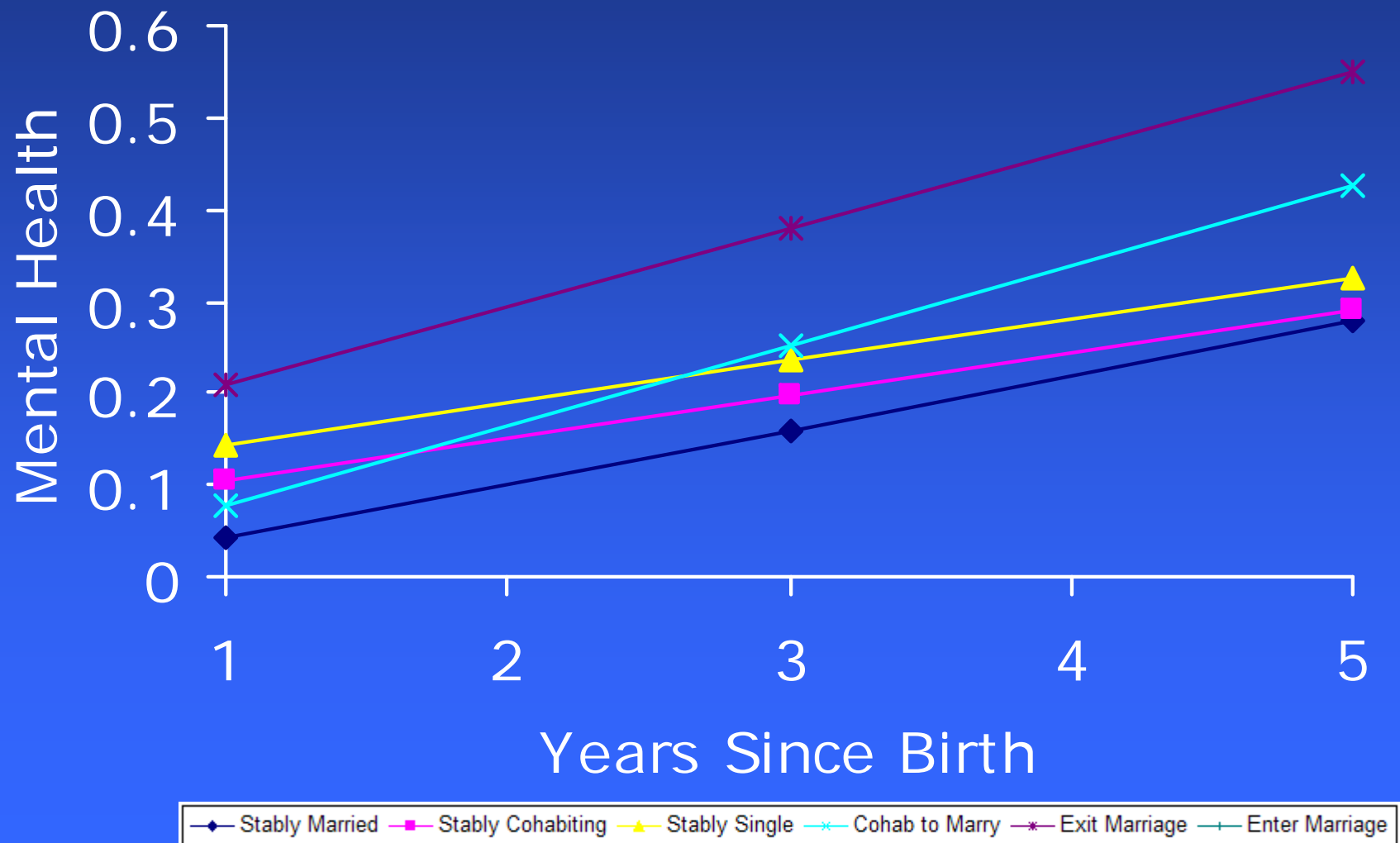
How well do parents fare?

Instability and multi-partnered
fertility lead to
lower resources

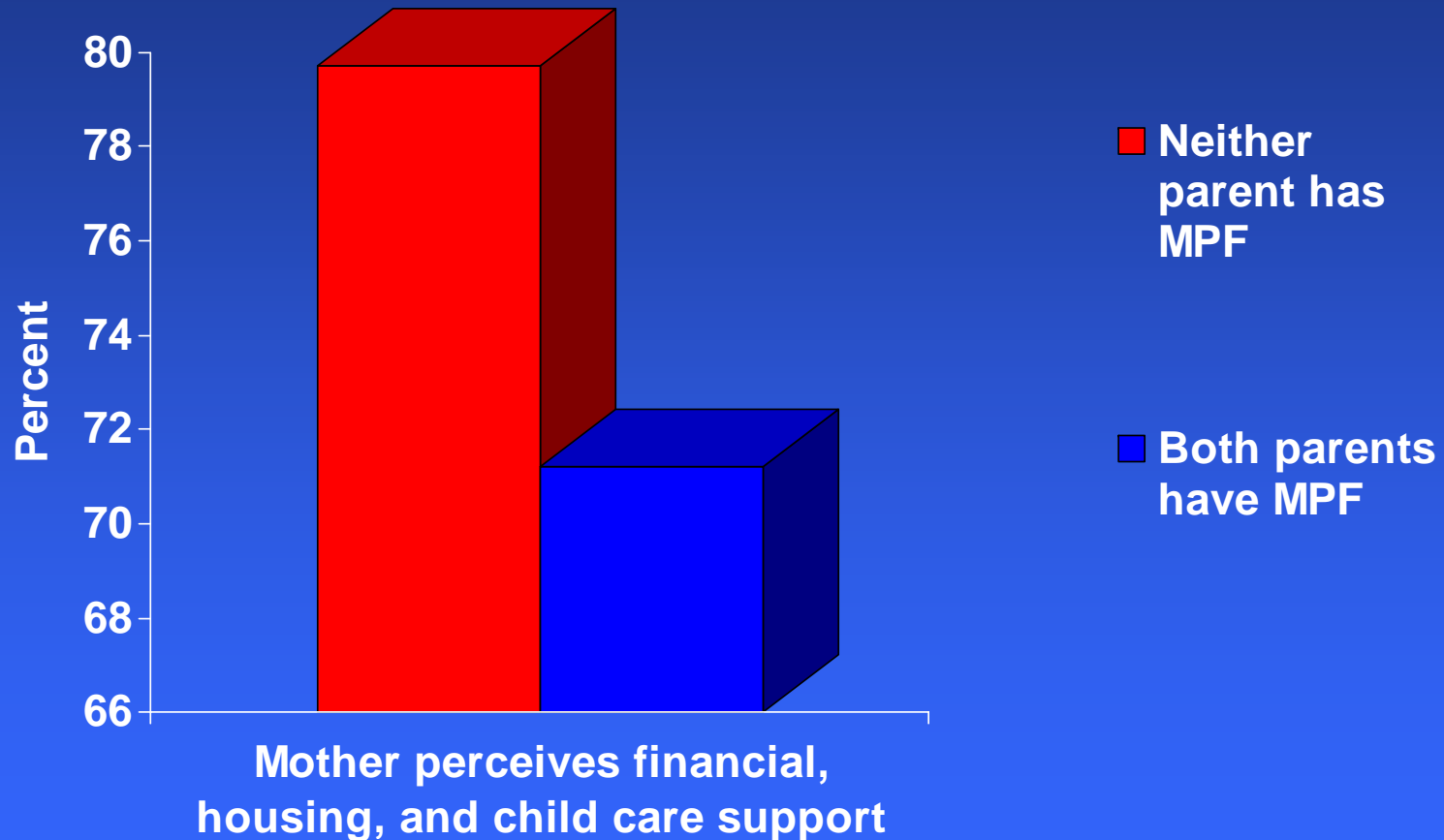
Mothers' Household Income



Mothers' Mental Health Problems



Mothers' Perceived Support



MPF = multipartnered fertility

How well do children fare?

- Partnership changes are associated with
 - Maternal stress and lower parenting quality
 - Child behavior problems and lower cognitive skills
 - Effects are small but accumulate over time
- Stable single motherhood is also associated with
 - Maternal stress and lower parenting quality
 - Behavior problems and lower cognitive skills
- Multi-partnered fertility – just beginning to study

Implications for Social Policy

- Marriage policy

- Some evidence that current policies (welfare and housing) discourage marriage

- Some evidence that new marriage programs *may* work

- High hopes at birth

- BUT,

- Low capacities create barriers

- Some relationships should not be saved

- Some mothers are finding 'better' partners – trade-off

- Fatherhood involvement policy

- Relationship with mother is the key

Thank You

National Institute of Child Health & Development (NICHD), California HealthCare Foundation, Commonwealth Fund, Ford Foundation, Foundation for Child Development, Fund for New Jersey, William T. Grant Foundation, Healthcare Foundation of New Jersey, William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Hogg Foundation, Christina A. Johnson Endeavor Foundation, Kronkosky Charitable Foundation, Leon Lowenstein Foundation, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, A.L. Mailman Family Foundation, Charles S. Mott Foundation, National Science Foundation, David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Public Policy Institute of California, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, St. David's Hospital Foundation, St. Vincent Hospital and Health Services, and US Department of Health and Human Services (ASPE and ACF)

TLC3

McArthur Network on the Family and the Economy

Robert Pollak, Nancy Folbre

Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, Lindsay Chase-Lansdale, Greg
Duncan, Cecilia Conrad, Kathy Edin, Paula England,
Irv Garfinkel, Sara McLanahan, Ron Mincy,
Tim Smeeding, Bob Willis

TLC3 Study

**Macarthur Network on the Family and the Economy,
National Science Foundation, W. T. Grant Foundation**

- 75 couples from the Fragile Families Survey, 48 unmarried and 27 married.
- Fragile Families baseline survey
 - In depth interviews with mom, dad, and couple at....
 - 2-3 months
 - 1 year
 - 2 years
 - 4 years
 - 1,200 pages of transcript per couple

New Book

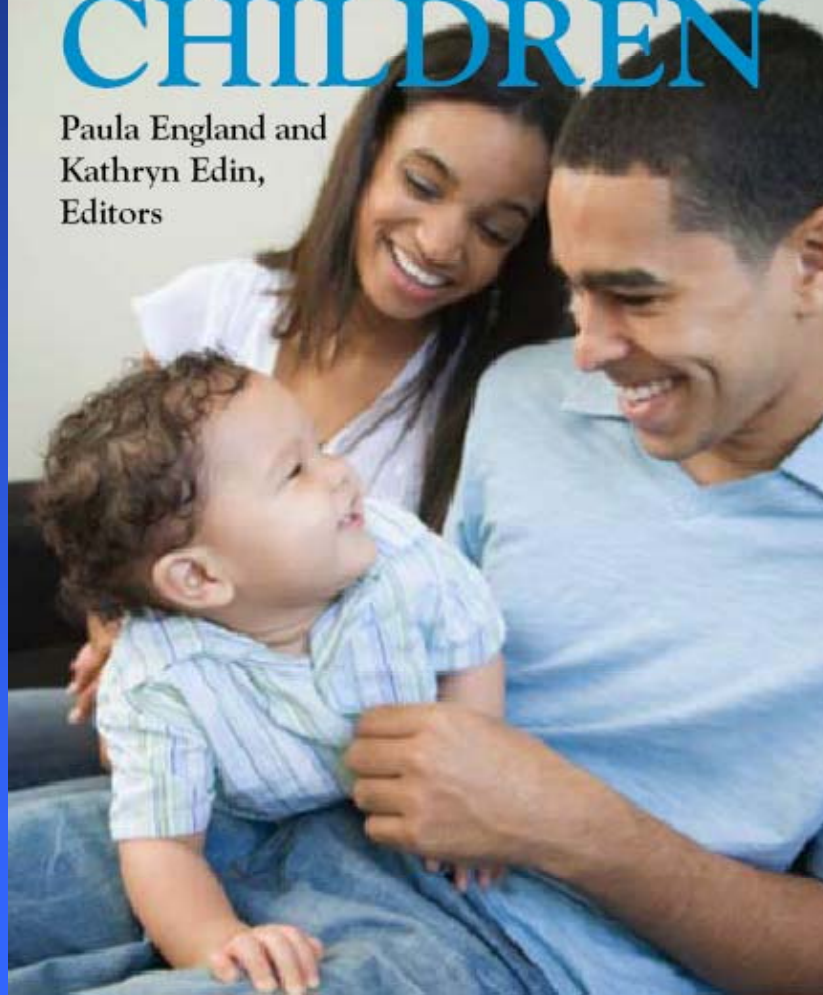
Unmarried Couples with Children

Edited by Paula England
and Kathryn Edin

October 2007

UNMARRIED COUPLES WITH CHILDREN

Paula England and
Kathryn Edin,
Editors



Forming Fragile Families

Edin et al. 2007

Average time from courtship to first conception together,
less than 1 year.

Was the pregnancy planned, accidental, or somewhere in
between? (Dad's report)

Planned	11%
In Between	20%
Inconsistent Contraception	21%
Unplanned, Not Contracepting	26%
Contraceptive Failure	18%

Relationships at Time of Conception

Casual	34% (20%)*
Unstable	11% (17 %)
Stable	55% (64%)

Casual (Dads AND Moms)	
Planned	4%
In Between	14%
Inconsistent	23%
Unplanned, NC	41%
Failure	32%

Father Involvement in Intact Couples

Linnenberg 2007

- Most fathers hold the ideal of 50-50 parenting.
- Few follow through (only the unemployed fathers).
 - Dads in HAPPY AND STABLE partnerships were helpers and playmates, and only rarely family first fathers.
 - Dads in HAPPY BUT PROBLEMS partnerships were playful assistants (more monitoring by mom), or 50-50 fathers.
 - Dads in PLAUGED WITH PROBLEMS relationships were either fun or nothing fathers (not trusted by mothers), or uninvolved fathers.
- The only fathers who take on major responsibilities for their children are those who do not work at all or who work a separate shift from the mother.
- This increases maternal satisfaction with PARENTING but may work against couple cohesion and marriage.

Barriers to marriage, are they real?

Gibson-Davis et al. 2005

Gibson-Davis 2007

- Economic barriers 83%.
- Do they really matter?
 - If income increased by 10%
 - Both are working and going to school
 - Economically self-sufficient
 - Paid all bills each month
 - No mention of financial shakiness
- 78% who met the bar married, 19% of those who didn't meet the bar married anyway.
- Social sanctions for not getting married "the right way."
- Marital instability among those who didn't.

What Separates Fragile Families?

Reed 2007

- Economic factors are never central to these stories, though couples who didn't pool initially were more likely to break up.
 - Infidelity
 - Constant arguments
 - Verbal or Physical Abuse
 - Lack of Love and Attention
 - Substance Abuse
- Relationship quality central.
- Men's bad behavior is key.
- Women almost always initiate the breakup, men move out.

#1 Relationship Wrecker: Infidelity

Hill 2007

- All breakups involve infidelity.
- 55 percent had at least once incident over the course of their relationship.
- Usually men.
- Chronic infidelity almost always ended the relationship.
- Isolated incidents usually did not.

What Separates Fathers from Children?

Claessens 2007

- Fathers blame mothers for gatekeeping.
- Mothers say there are good reasons to restrict fathers' access to children.
 - 72 percent show gatekeeping, though 6 in 10 fathers still say their child in the last two months.
 - Mothers who don't gatekeep value the fathers' role more and rely on him more for childcare.
 - Mom's reasons: inconsistency with visitation, the father's lifestyle, and high conflict.
 - Lifestyle concerns rarely kept fathers out entirely.
 - Where conflict is the reasons mothers shut fathers out entirely, often have restraining orders.
- Gatekeeping is strongly related to mothers' re-partnering, suggesting not all gatekeeping is warranted.

What Happens in New “Blended” Families?

Monte 2007

- Moms legitimate the stepfather role by asserting that time, love and money count more than blood.
- When dad visits other kids, mom is jealous of his time, but visitation prompts sexual mistrust.
- In every case where the new partnership led to marriage, the ex-partner was no longer an active father to her kids and dad was no longer involved with any of his other kids.
- MPF presents a policy dilemma.

Multipartnered Fertility

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Kristen Harknett and Jean Knab. 2007 "More Kin, Less Support: Multipartnered Fertility and Perceived Support Among Mothers" [*Journal of Marriage and Family*. 69\(1\): 237-253.](#)

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Ronald Mincy "Who Should Marry Whom?: Multiple Partner Fertility Among New Parents" CRCW [Working Paper 2002-03-FE](#)

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Julien Teitler, Nancy Reichman, Lenna Nepomnyaschy, Irwin Garfinkel "Effects of Welfare Participation on Marriage" CRCW [Working Paper 2005-24-FF](#)

Maureen Waller, Elizabeth Peters. "The Risk of Divorce as a Barrier to Marriage" CRCW [Working Paper 2005-03-FF](#)

Cynthia Osborne, Wendy Manning, Pamela Smock. "Married and Cohabiting Parents' Relationship Stability: A Focus on Race and Ethnicity" CRCW [Working Paper 2004-17-FF](#)

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- Lenna Nepomnyaschy. 2007. "Child Support and Father-Child Contact In Fragile Families" [*Demography*. 44\(1\): 93-112.](#)
- Marcia Carlson, Sara McLanahan, Jeanne Brooks-Gunn. "Co-Parenting & Nonresident Fathers' Involvement with Young Children After A Nonmarital Birth" CRCW [Working Paper 2005-07-FF](#)
- Nancy Cohen. "Unmarried African American Fathers' Involvement with Their Infants: The Role of Couple Relationships" CRCW [Working Paper 2003-13-FF](#)
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