

## Chapter 6

### America's Family Makeover

The changes in family life over recent decades have been no less tumultuous than those throughout the rest of the culture. As already noted, Americans now prefer personal isolationism, which means spending increasingly less time in involvement with others, including even their own family members. <sup>i</sup>

For generations, family counselors and psychologists have recognized and affirmed that both quantity and quality time spent with family members are the bases for a successful family life. For millennia, one way that this had been implemented was through a parent working outside the home to provide sustenance and protection for the family, and the other working inside, nurturing, shaping, and training the children of the rising generation.

In 1940, this was still the practice for 60 percent of American families, <sup>ii</sup> but in recent decades this view of the family has come under attack as antiquated and sexist. Parents are instead encouraged to pursue even greater involvement outside the home and away from the children. By 1969, the percentage of stay-at-home mothers with young children had fallen to 44 percent; in 1979, it was down to 34 percent; in 1989, 25 percent; <sup>iii</sup> and currently, only 12 percent of families reflect this traditional family structure. <sup>iv</sup> In fact, there has been an 85 percent increase in working mothers who say they would like to spend even *more* time working and thus *less* time with their children. <sup>v</sup>

Interestingly, mothers who work outside the home rate themselves as better parents than those who spend full time with their children, <sup>vi</sup> but ironically they are less satisfied with their own lives. Only 31 percent of working moms say they are “very happy,” compared to 45 percent of non-working moms who say the same. <sup>vii</sup>

Much of the change in the family structure may be attributed to America's growing secularism. Even Wikipedia, which largely mirrors the secular leanings of our culture, acknowledges that the concept of the historic traditional family is rooted in “creation myths,” <sup>viii</sup> and that the Judeo-Christian model comes from the Bible book of Genesis. <sup>ix</sup> It is apparent that the more that American society moves away from Biblical knowledge and acceptance, the more strongly it rejects the traditional family.

Secularism, defined as an indifference to or a rejection of religious considerations, <sup>x</sup> is on a rising trajectory in America, even among millions of professing Christians. In 1952, 75 percent of Americans said that religion was “very important” in their lives but that number has fallen to 56 percent today, <sup>xi</sup> and weekly church attendance has likewise decreased from almost half of Americans to its current 39 percent. <sup>xii</sup> In 1958, only 14 percent of Americans felt that religion was losing its influence in American life, but today that number is at 77 percent. <sup>xiii</sup> Additionally, just under 20 percent of Americans (the highest percentage ever recorded – and a sharp increase from just five years ago) now affiliate with no religion at all and say that they are not even interested in finding a religion – none at all – that might be “right for them.” <sup>xiv</sup>

This new group is called the “nones,” because they affiliate with no religious group. They are not only the fastest growing religious segment in the country but they are having a dramatic impact on the cultural landscape. For example, 72 percent of them support abortion and 73 percent same-sex marriage <sup>xv</sup> – a percentage of support dramatically higher than in the general population at large.

As a result of the religious, and therefore the moral changes of recent decades, there has been a corresponding change in public policy regarding the family, and that change reflects a steady movement away from traditional Biblical teachings. The negative societal consequences of this change are measurable.

There are at least three groups in which the effects of children not growing up with a father and a mother can be readily assessed: (1) children born outside of marriage and raised in single-parent homes, (2) children from divorced homes, and (3) children from homes where one or both parents are absent because of incarceration.

Among the first group, children born outside of marriage and raised in single-parent homes:

- Educational scores of children from single parent homes are significantly lower than those of children from traditional families, <sup>xvi</sup> and children from single-parent homes are almost twice as likely to repeat a grade in school, and more than twice as likely to be suspended or expelled from school. <sup>xvii</sup>
- Young men from these homes are twice as likely to end up in jail as those who come from traditional two-parent families. <sup>xviii</sup>
- These children are seven times as likely to be delinquent, <sup>xix</sup> and twice as likely to have pulled a knife or a gun on someone in the past year. <sup>xx</sup>
- Gang involvement is almost twice as high. <sup>xxi</sup>
- 90 percent of the increase in violent crime between 1973 and 1995 was committed by those born out of wedlock and raised in a single-parent home, <sup>xxii</sup> and 75 percent of juvenile criminals come from those homes. <sup>xxiii</sup>
- The highest murder rate is among those born out-of-wedlock. <sup>xxiv</sup>
- Children in single-parent households have less family income and are more likely to be poor than children in married-parent households. <sup>xxv</sup>
- The annual average income of a traditional family is \$101,000, but of a single-mother family is \$35,000. <sup>xxvi</sup>

Children pay a high price for the rejection of the traditional family structure by their natural parents. (By the way, single mothers also pay a high price, especially through the feminization of poverty.)

Another public policy change of recent years that has accommodated the increased selfishness of parents is that of no-fault divorce, whereby after two adults have made a lifelong commitment to each other, either can walk away from the marriage for any cause, or even for no cause. (Strikingly, over 80 percent of no-fault divorces involve one spouse abandoning a relationship that the other wants to keep alive. <sup>xxvii</sup>) As a consequence of these modern laws (in place largely since the early 1980s <sup>xxviii</sup>), divorces have soared – and this provides the second measurable category: children from divorced homes.

Among this second group, children from divorced homes:

- Children of divorced parents experience lower scores in school, higher absenteeism, and a dropout rate of 31 percent, compared to only 13 percent for children from intact homes. <sup>xxix</sup>
- Children who have experienced a divorce are 50 percent more likely to develop health problems. <sup>xxx</sup>
- Children of divorce suffer higher rates of depression, addiction, and arrest. <sup>xxxi</sup>
- Eleven percent of boys from divorced parents ended up in prison before they are age 32, compared with only 5 percent of boys from intact homes. <sup>xxxii</sup>
- Thirty-three percent of girls of divorced parents become teen mothers, compared with only 11 percent of girls from intact homes. <sup>xxxiii</sup>
- Both divorced women as well as daughters of the divorced have higher incidents of poverty. <sup>xxxiv</sup> (Some 30 percent of single-mother families live in poverty, but only about 7 percent of married couples with children are poor. <sup>xxxv</sup>)
- Additionally, “adult children of divorce tend to have: lower paying jobs and less college than their parents; unstable father-child relationships; a history of vulnerability to drugs and alcohol in adolescence; fears about commitment and divorce; and negative memories of the legal system.” <sup>xxxvi</sup>
- The adult children of divorce are 89 percent more likely to divorce than those raised in intact families. <sup>xxxvii</sup>

- While 79 percent of the children of married parents felt emotionally safe when growing up, only 44 percent of children of divorced couples felt the same.<sup>xxxviii</sup>
- The lifespan for children of divorce averages five years less than those who grew up in intact families.<sup>xxxix</sup>

Disrupting the traditional combination of a father and a mother in the home harms children. (The exception to this is in homes where genuine abuse occurs,<sup>xi</sup> but this situation is infrequent.) In describing the current policy of no-fault divorce, one family court judge explained, “It is easier to divorce my wife of 26 years than to fire someone I hired one week ago. The person I hire has more legal clout than my wife of 26 years.”<sup>xlii</sup>

Significantly, the divorce rate has fallen from its high of about 50 percent in 1980 to around 40 percent today.<sup>xliii</sup> But much of this fall may be attributed not to strengthened marriages but rather to a growing practice of co-habitation, which increased tenfold between 1960 and 2000.<sup>xliiii</sup> But this should come as no surprise, for adults who experienced divorce as a child are 61 percent more likely to agree that it is a “good idea for a couple who intend to get married to live together first.”<sup>xliiv</sup> Sadly, divorce takes a toll not only on the lives of those who experience it but also on future generations.

The third category with measurable statistics is children of incarcerated parents, where one or both parents are absent from the home as the children are being raised. This now directly affects nearly three million children,<sup>xlv</sup> with ten million more having a parent under correctional supervision (such as through parole).<sup>xlvi</sup> For these children:

- They have greater physical health problems, including elevated rates of cancer, high cholesterol, asthma, migraines, HIV/AIDS, obesity, and diabetes.<sup>xlvi</sup>
- They have increased rates of mental health problems, including depression, anxiety, and withdrawal.<sup>xlviii</sup>
- They have higher rates of educational difficulties, including cognitive delays, behavioral problems, and school failure.<sup>xlix</sup>
- They have greater levels of material hardship as well as family instability (frequent moves, divorce, introduction of unrelated parental figures, etc.).<sup>1</sup>
- They are “40 percent more likely to have an unemployed father, 34 percent less likely to live with married parents, 25 percent more likely to experience material hardship, and four times more likely to face contact with the child welfare system.”<sup>li</sup>
- They have higher rates for “abuse of drugs and alcohol, engaging in antisocial behavior, dropping out of school or experiencing a decline in school work as well as having high levels of truancy, aggression, and disruptive behaviors.”<sup>lii</sup>
- Seventy percent will themselves end up in prison.<sup>liii</sup>

A solution for these problems is to break the cycle of parental criminal behavior so that the parents can be with their children rather than separated from them in a prison. Statistically speaking, one of the best means of doing this is through faith-based programs.

Currently, in government-run prisons (state or federal), the average recidivism rate is 77 percent (meaning that within three years of release from prison, that person commits a crime that returns him to prison);<sup>liv</sup> but the recidivism rate is only 8 percent in faith-based prisons<sup>lv</sup> – a 90 percent more effective approach than that of secular prisons. Similarly, the average cure rate in government-run drug rehab programs (state or federal) is under 20 percent,<sup>lvi</sup> but in faith-based drug rehab programs such as Teen Challenge, the cure rate is over 70 percent.<sup>lvii</sup> Faith-based programs dramatically reduce the number of parents re-entering prison, thus more quickly breaking the family cycle of crime, thereby reducing future crimes and crime victims as well as increased criminal justice expenditures.

The statistics regarding children from these three atypical family structures (out-of-wedlock, divorced, and incarcerated) makes a strong case that the best arrangement for all involved is what is called the “nuclear family” – that is, a family built around a central nucleus of a father, mother, and children.<sup>lvi</sup> Statistics regarding the typical traditional family arrangement make the case for this proposition even more airtight. For example:

- Married adults have better health, including fewer accidents or injuries, have less depression, live longer, and enjoy greater happiness.<sup>lix</sup>
- Married women have lower domestic violence rates, and are victims of fewer acts of violent crime.<sup>lx</sup>
- Children from intact families have higher literacy and graduation rates, lower teen pregnancy and juvenile offender rates, and also experience higher rates of marital success.<sup>lxi</sup>
- Children from intact homes are five times less likely to live in poverty.<sup>lxii</sup> Significantly, only 22 percent of children in married households experience one year of poverty in their lives compared with 81 percent in other households.<sup>lxiii</sup>
- Nearly all of the increase in child poverty since the 1970s can be attributed to family breakdown,<sup>lxiv</sup> and its direct public costs now exceed \$112 billion a year.<sup>lxv</sup>
- In traditional intact families, children are *less* likely:
  - To be abused<sup>lxvi</sup>
  - To end up in jail as adults<sup>lxvii</sup>
  - To suffer depression<sup>lxviii</sup>
  - To be expelled from school<sup>lxix</sup>
  - To repeat a grade<sup>lxx</sup>
  - To have behavior problems<sup>lxxi</sup>
  - To use drugs<sup>lxxii</sup>
  - To carry weapons<sup>lxxiii</sup>
  - To be sexually active<sup>lxxiv</sup>
- Statistically speaking, “if the United States enjoyed the same level of family stability today as it did in 1960, the nation would have 750,000 fewer children repeating grades, 1.2 million fewer school suspensions, approximately 500,000 fewer acts of teenage delinquency, about 600,000 fewer kids receiving therapy, and approximately 70,000 fewer suicide attempts every year.”<sup>lxxv</sup>

The statistics are clear and unequivocal. The modern experiments to change the traditional family ignore the well-being of those involved, especially children and mothers, and thus weaken the long-term strength and health of the culture.

Not surprisingly, as the traditional family has now been largely rejected in preference for other arrangements, the definition of “family” has correspondingly changed. In law dictionaries at the beginning of the twentieth-century, family was defined as a “father, mother, and children”<sup>lxxvi</sup> (the traditional nuclear family), but by the start of this century, a “family” had come to mean “two or more people who share goals and values, have long-term commitments to one another, and reside usually in the same dwelling place.”<sup>lxxvii</sup> A father, mother, or children is no longer necessary in this new arrangement, which is now known as the postmodern family.<sup>lxxviii</sup>

As late as 1990, 65 percent of Americans still believed that children were an important part of a happy marriage, but that number has declined to only 41 percent;<sup>lxxix</sup> and with the growing de-emphasis on children, the fertility rate has declined by nearly half since 1960.<sup>lxxx</sup> Significantly, the fertility replacement rate for the nation is 2.1 – that is, families must average 2.1 children if the national population is to remain constant and not decline,<sup>lxxxi</sup> but the American rate has dropped to 1.9 (an all-time low)<sup>lxxxii</sup> and is continuing downward. As one expert noted, “There are no cases of peace and prosperity in the face of declining populations.”<sup>lxxxiii</sup>

What do these new trends concerning faith and its formerly positive influence on the family mean for the future of American culture? This question can be answered by examining the beliefs of the rising generation, such as Millennials (generally considered as those born in the 1980s and 1990s).

While the “nones” (those who have and want no religious affiliation) are at an all-time high of 20 percent (and still rising) among the general population, for Millennials, that number jumps to a startling one-third (33 percent).<sup>lxxxiv</sup> And 74 percent of them were raised *with* a religious affiliation<sup>lxxxv</sup> but have now rejected it.

Clearly, the parents of these younger adults failed to transmit to them a vibrant and useful faith, which was largely because the parents themselves lacked a vibrant and useful faith. As proof of this, although eight out of ten Americans claim to be Christians, only 9 percent of these Christians agree with six of the most elementary non-negotiables of the Christian faith.<sup>1</sup> So poorly equipped are Christian young people by their poorly-believing Christian parents that well over 80 percent of Christian youth who now attend college abandon their faith as a result.<sup>lxxxvi</sup>

With the current lack of a Biblical view of Christian faith, it is not surprising that there is also an accompanying failure in Biblical morals. Hence, as the Barna Group has previously documented, “of more than 70 *moral* behaviors we study, when we compare Christians to non-Christians we rarely find substantial differences.”<sup>lxxxvii</sup>

So, too, with Millennials. While they say that they are indeed tempted by porn, lying, cheating, alcohol/drug abuse, and outside sexual involvement (and tempted at a rate much higher rather than were either their parents or grandparents),<sup>lxxxviii</sup> the real problem is that “millions of Millennials do not see temptation as something to be avoided.”<sup>lxxxix</sup> Consequently, nearly half of Millennial mothers have had *all* of their children outside of marriage and nearly two-thirds had at least *one* child out of wedlock; only one-third had all of their children within marriage.<sup>xc</sup> Additionally, the already exploding cohabitation rate noted above rose by an additional 88 percent between 1990 and 2007,<sup>xci</sup> and most of this increase involved Millennials.<sup>xcii</sup> The adverse consequences to be experienced not only by these mothers and their children but by the culture itself have already been documented.

Significantly, any objective examination of the problems currently existing with the family results in the only logical recommendation possible: readopt what the Bible originally established (and what America long embraced) as the basis for the family: the lifelong union of one man and one woman. (Obviously, the same-sex marriage issue has also had a dramatic effect on the conversation about what constitutes a “family,” and that issue will be addressed in the following chapter.)

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.prb.org/Publications/Articles/2007/DoParentsSpendEnoughTimeWithTheirChildren.aspx/>, “Do Parents Spend Enough Time With Their Children?,” *PRB*, 2007.

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.pbs.org/livelyhood/workingfamily/familytrends.html>, “Working Family Values Factoids,” *PBS* (accessed July 7, 2014), referencing a 1997 report from the Bureau of Labor Statistics

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<sup>iv</sup> <http://www.census.gov/hhes/families/data/cps2013.html> “Table FG2: Married Couple Family Groups,” 2013 & “Table A1: Marital Status of People 15 Years and Over,” 2013.

<sup>v</sup> <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/03/14/men-women-work-time/1983271/>, Frank Pompa, “How Parents Spend Their Time,” *USA Today*, March 14, 2013.

<sup>vi</sup> <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/03/14/modern-parenthood-roles-of-moms-and-dads-converge-as-they-balance-work-and-family/>, “Modern Parenthood,” *Pew Research*, March 14, 2013.

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<sup>1</sup> These six include (1) a belief that absolute moral truth exists; (2) the Bible is totally accurate in all of the principles it teaches; (3) Satan is a real being or force, not merely symbolic; (4) a person cannot earn his or her way into Heaven but rather it comes by God’s gift of grace; (5) Jesus lived a sinless life on earth; and (6) God is the all-knowing, all-powerful Creator of the world Who still rules the universe today. (See The Barna Group, “Barna Survey Examines Changes in Worldview Among Christians over the Past 13 Years,” March 6, 2009, <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/21-transformation/252-barna-survey-examines-changes-in-worldview-among-christians-over-the-past-13-years.>)

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