Culture of Life, Culture of Marriage: Examining the Linkages
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Introduction

It has become increasingly clear that failure of parents to marry leads, on average, to poorer outcomes for the children born to them.\(^1\) Tragically, this empirical clarity accompanies a major shift in our social understanding of marriage which is currently facing challenges from three major trends—divorce, cohabitation and a growing effort to legally redefine marriage. These trends threaten the core attributes of marriage as a social institution—permanence, mutual faithfulness and complementarity.

While we know that children who are born to parents who are not married are at greater risk for a host of ills from abuse to educational failure to drug use to suicide, less attention has been directed to the possible risks to unborn children when the man and woman who have created them are not married.

The specific inquiry of this presentation is: Are there linkages between the issues of abortion and marriage?

The answer to this question, as will be described, appears to be “yes.” The incidence of abortion is linked to marital status on a number of measures. The implicit logic of abortion is linked to the implicit logic of threats to marriage. The most vociferous contemporary attacks on religious liberty have arisen in the twin contexts of abortion and marriage. The culture of death has arisen, in apparently mutually reinforcing ways, along with a culture of marriage deconstruction.

It is difficult or impossible to determine precise causation in these linkages but the correlation is evident. From these multiple sites of interplay, a crucial conclusion becomes clear: Marriage is protective of unborn children.

Abortion and Marital Status
The most obvious linkage between abortion and marital status is that those who are unmarried are much more likely to have abortions. Census data reports the abortion rate per 1,000 women for the unmarried is 31.2 while for married women (including those who are separated from a spouse) it is 6.1. The percentage of abortions in 2007 to unmarried women was 83.7 compared to 16.3 to married women. The percentage of “unintended pregnancies” ending in abortion in 2006 were: 61 percent for women who had not married and were not cohabiting, 60 percent for those who were divorced and were not cohabiting, 39 percent for cohabiting couples and 22 percent for those who were married. Importantly, the rates of unintended pregnancies were highest among cohabiters at 152 per 1,000 unintended pregnancies, compared to 53 for those who are divorced and not cohabiting, 46 for those who’ve never married and are not cohabiting and 35 for the married. Using this data, Dave Schmidt at Live Action calculated the abortion rate per 1,000 women by family structure as 59.3 for cohabitants, 31.8 for the divorced who are not cohabiting, 28.1 for never married and not cohabiting and 7.7 for married women. Thus, women in cohabiting couples are nearly eight times as likely as married women to choose abortion in the event of an “unintended pregnancy” and those who are unmarried and not cohabiting about four times as likely. John Jalsevac speculates on the connection between cohabitation and abortion: “In the case of less stable relationships, however, when an unintended pregnancy occurs, the man and the woman are more likely to want to ‘get rid of the problem,’ ‘just in case’ the relationship breaks down in the future.” Whatever the reason, it is terribly clear that the “alternative families” are anything but welcoming to children.

There is also a link between marital status and attitudes about abortion. Though apparently less salient than other influences, such as religion, a Gallup study of polls from 2001 to 2003 reports that the percentage of individuals who believe abortion is morally acceptable are 36 percent of the married, 52 percent of those cohabiting, 38 percent of the divorced and 51 percent of the never married. A comparison of attitudes from 1974 to 1986 and 1987 to 1998 show that for both men
and women, not having married is significantly associated with support for abortion compared to being married, though that difference decreased over time. Another study assessing support for abortion in seven different scenarios reported “the married are found to be much less supportive of abortion rights than the single.”

There is also some evidence that women are more likely to feel pressured by boyfriends than by husbands to have an abortion. A volunteer sample of 252 women in a peer support group related to their emotional trauma following abortion were asked whether they felt encouraged to have an abortion by various third parties. For the women who had husbands, 33 percent said they felt no encouragement to abort compared to nine percent who said they felt “very much” of such encouragement with four percent reporting some other level of encouragement. For women reporting boyfriends, 27 percent said they felt no encouragement to abort compared to 33 percent who said they felt “very much” of such encouragement with 13 percent reporting some other level of encouragement (most of it on the higher end).

The marriage-abortion correlation seems to work the other way as well. One reported study “in a post-abortion support group at the Medical College of Ohio found that only 7 out of 66 women who had abortions while single eventually married the father.” A more recent and well-developed study by a sociologist at the Catholic University of America found the proportion of “ever pregnant women over age 35” who remained unmarried was “twice as large for aborters (12.4%) as for nonaborters (6.5%).” The study reported 25.1 percent of those who had abortions and were over age 35 were currently divorced or separated while the comparative group who had not had abortions was 19 percent. Thus, of those who had abortions, 60 percent were unmarried after age 35 compared to 72 percent who had not had abortions. By their late thirties, forty percent of those who had abortions and 22 percent of those who had not had abortions had been married more than once. The study also found “only a minority (37%) of aborters remain in their first marriage, compared to over 56% of nonaborters.”
There is one more interesting possible correlation between abortion and marriage related to the law. An early study (1970 and 1971) reported a “reduction in crude marriage rates in the states with relatively high abortion-birth rates” and suggested “a relationship between less restrictive abortion policies and a decline in crude marriage rates.” More recently, a shared trait of the fifteen states with the highest abortion rates in the United States is that all but two have either redefined marriage to include same-sex couples or created a legal status (typically called civil unions) to provide all of the benefits of marriage to same-sex couples. The states with same-sex marriage and their rankings by abortion rate are: New York (2), District of Columbia (4), Maryland (5), Connecticut (9), Massachusetts (14), and Washington (15). The states with civil unions and their rankings by abortion rate are: Delaware (1), New Jersey (3), California (6), Nevada (8), Rhode Island (10), Hawaii (11), and Illinois (12).

Law and Politics

The legal and political culture of marriage deconstruction is also correlated with increased acceptance of abortion.

Advocates of redefining marriage are hoping that, emboldened by its foray into radical social engineering with abortion, the judiciary will mandate same-sex marriage on the nation. There is reason to believe that abortion jurisprudence might make this result more likely. To take one example, it is common for court decisions concluding that state or federal constitutional provisions require same-sex marriage or civil unions, to refer to abortion precedent. Thus, in the six states that have judicially redefined marriage or where the judiciary has ordered an alternative (California, Connecticut, Iowa, Massachusetts, New Jersey and Vermont), half have cited the U.S. Supreme Court decision in Planned Parenthood v. Casey. This is significant because the Court’s decision in Roe v. Wade was, as Justice White charged “an exercise of raw judicial power,” while the Casey plurality decision was an attempt to provide reasoning for the Court’s abortion project. It was cited for its infamous “mystery of life” passage and for the proposition that law ought not to
mandate a “moral code” in the U.S. Supreme Court’s subsequent decision invalidating sodomy laws.18 (In fact, the remaining three cases in which *Casey* was not cited, all cite to *Lawrence*.)19 These state courts seem to believe the reasoning in the *Casey* decision, such as it was, could bolster attempts to re-engineer the social institution of marriage. Thus, state courts even though construing state constitutional provisions, still invoked *Casey*. The Connecticut Supreme Court cited the mystery passage, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court cited the no “moral code” passage (as did the concurrence in that case), and the Vermont Supreme Court cited *Casey* for the proposition that courts have to exercise “reasoned judgment” in making decisions.20 The dissenting opinion in Maryland’s decision upholding its marriage statute cited to *Casey* for the proposition that fundamental rights can’t be limited by historical precedent and the dissent in the Massachusetts case upholding a residency requirement for same-sex marriages cited it for the proposition that courts should not be bound by social and political pressures.21 More recently, the district court decision invalidating California’s Proposition 8 relied on *Casey* (moral code passage) as did a district court decision striking down the federal Defense of Marriage Act (general discussion of right to marry).22

It seems also that many of the states that have bowed to pressure militating for increased access to abortion on demand have also bowed to pressure to redefine marriage. Americans United for Life ranks states for their protection of the unborn. The bottom fifteen states on AUL’s 2012 state rankings (meaning these states are least protective) include all but one state with same-sex marriage and the other, New Hampshire, is ranked number 32 of 50. Five states on this list have civil unions and the other three are ranked at numbers 29, 31 and 34.23

Ironically, the major pressure groups working for marriage redefinition have links or are formally in favor of the pro-abortion cause. Lambda Legal Defense Fund and National Center for Lesbian Rights have position statements favoring abortion and the president of the Human Rights Campaign was formerly CEO of Emily’s List.24
An important article by George Akerlof and colleagues in 1996 linked the "decline in shotgun marriage" with the technological "shock" of contraception and the legalization of abortion. They argue that a "major role in the increase in out-of-wedlock births has been played by the declining practice of 'shotgun marriage'" and that "if the fraction of premaritally conceived births resolved by marriage had been the same from 1985 to 1989 as it had been over the comparable period twenty years earlier, the increase in the white out-of-wedlock birth ratio would have been only a quarter as high, and the black increase would have been only two-fifths as high." They explain that the ability of unmarried couples to choose to engage in sexual relations with a decreased risk of getting pregnant has led to a decrease in the value of marriage as a way of protecting children who may be born as a result of an unmarried relationship. In other words, before the advent of freely available contraception and abortion, a woman who found herself pregnant out-of-wedlock would probably have seen marriage to the father as the optimal "solution" to the resulting vulnerability. Men would have acquiesced in order to keep open the possibility of continued intimacy. With the possibility of intimacy without pregnancy (at least theoretically) men are not as likely to choose marriage in order to gain access to female sexuality. Thus marriage was displaced by alternatives—contraception and abortion—when a child resulted. This analysis persuasively suggests a way in which abortion (and the related technology of contraception) have harmed a marriage culture.

The deconstruction of marriage requires the displacement of the ethic of unchosen obligation. The most obvious unchosen obligation resulting from marriage is a child. Abortion is a direct attack on that ethic. Marriage, as understood until quite recently began with choice but did not end there. In F.H. Bradley’s words: “Marriage is a contract, a contract to pass out of the sphere of contract.” Cohabitation mimics the initial choice but is premised entirely on the non-existence of any resulting consequence. Divorce makes the obligation of marriage contingent on the desires of
the spouses (often of only one) to fulfill them. Redefining marriage treats choice as the *sine qua non* of marriage—it exalts choice as the only meaning of marriage since it treats as a marriage a relationship that rejects, in its very nature, the conditions that give rise to unchosen obligation (children). “This repudiation of unchosen obligation inevitably results in war on the realities of biology, sexual complementarity, dependence, and vulnerability.”27 These goods are also the targets of the practice of abortion and the culture that sustains it. It turns mothers and fathers against one another, militates against the biological connection between mothers and children, and cruelly exploits the vulnerability and dependability of the unborn child.

When marriage becomes a contingent commitment, children are subordinated to the interests of their parents. When it is redefined as nothing more than adult choice, children themselves are merely optional accessories. In same-sex unions, children are acquired rather than begotten and often in commercial arrangements. This commodification of children runs parallel to the objectification of children caused by acceptance of abortion. With abortion, a child is not a person but a thing to be disposed of at will.

This shift in understanding of the place of children has tangible results. One example is that the growing legal and cultural endorsement of “alternative family forms” has led to increased utilization and acceptance of assisted reproductive technology, which can contribute directly to increased abortion (i.e. selective reduction of fetuses or “surplus” embryos resulting from IVF). As Professor Helen Alvare has explained, “arguments favoring parenting by same-sex couples—via adoption or ART—would be further strengthened by wider recognition of same-sex marriage.”28 Family deconstruction thus reinforces the de-humanization of the unborn inherent in abortion while the abortion facilitates the acquisition of children on adults’ terms.

Another tangible consequence of family redefinition is that religious adoption agencies, providing an important alternative to abortion, have been forced out of business because they cannot, in good conscience, place children with same-sex couples.29
**Sites for Incursion on Religion**

Both abortion and same-sex marriage create significant and pressing questions related to accommodation of religious organizations and believers who object to facilitating practices that conflict with their faith. While the most common religious liberty conflicts probably relate to zoning regulations and use of public facilities, the attempts to require religious groups and believers to facilitate abortions and same-sex unions are certainly the most high-profile conflicts now. They also represent a dramatic shift in the aggressiveness of the state *vis a vis* religious groups and believers. While the zoning and public facilities conflicts are typically a failure of accommodation by the state, these new conflicts represent an attempt to coerce religious individuals into participation in secular projects antithetical to their faith.

Examples of the parallel threats to religious liberty related to marriage and the sanctity of life involve the contexts of employment benefits, health care professionals, and counselors.

The most egregious threat now faced by religious groups stems from the contraception and abortifacient mandates. Regulations issued under the 2010 Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act require nearly all employers and health insurance products to cover sterilization and contraception (including likely abortifacients) regardless of religious objections. The only exemption is for religious groups that serve only their own members. In the marriage context, the Archdiocese of Washington, D.C. was forced to change its health coverage for employees so as to avoid discrimination claims for not offering benefits to employees’ same-sex partners. As a condition of access to city housing and community redevelopment funds, a religious charity in Maine was required to extend employee spousal benefit programs to registered same-sex couples.

In the past three years two major hospitals have reversed their policy of allowing employees to decline to assist in abortions for religious reasons. These employees should have had legal recourse. In fact, in 2008, the Department of Health and Human Services adopted rules to enforce longstanding federal law that prevents employees from being forced to assist with an
abortion “contrary to his religious beliefs or moral convictions.” The Obama Administration, however, reversed this policy, removing the enforcement provision. Similarly, five states require pharmacists or pharmacies to offer “emergency contraception” regardless of their religious convictions. In the marriage context, the California Supreme Court decided a doctor could not claim a religious exemption to the civil rights law after he referred a woman in a same-sex couple to another doctor for artificial insemination because of his religious concerns about participating in the procedure.

A parallel issue illustrates potential threats to free speech rights. A number of localities have attempted to force pregnancy resource centers to provide onerous “disclosures” about the services they offer (the idea being to dissuade women seeking abortions from going to the centers). Laws in New York City and Baltimore have been enjoined on free speech grounds but San Francisco, Austin and Montgomery County Maryland all have such laws on the books. Pending legislation in California would require counselors willing to assist those with unwanted same-sex attraction to meet heightened requirements for consent, ban such treatment for youth and create extremely long statutes of limitations for malpractice claims brought against these counselors.

Conclusion

Marriage is protective of unborn life. Marriage that is stable, lasting and inextricably linked to complementarity and the primacy of children’s interests is a rebuke to the culture of death founded on choice, dispensability and contingency.

Those who defend the sanctity of unborn life, justifiably, look askance at arguments that public policy and law ought to ignore the legality of taking unborn life and focus rather on purported “root causes” of abortion such as poverty. (It does not help that the suggested panacea is typically increased contraception, a “solution” likely only to increase the problem.) Considerations of justice suggest that alleviating poverty should be an auxiliary to more direct protection of the unborn.
The findings discussed here suggest that strengthening marriage should be considered as another auxiliary to securing basic protection of human life. This strengthening can take place culturally even when it is impossible for a time to effect the needed legal changes. As Timothy Reichert has pointed out, strong social mores can defeat the cultural traps threatening marriage and the sanctity of life.41

In the same way that efforts to decrease the “supply” of abortion (such as defunding Planned Parenthood) have been accompanied by increasingly effective efforts to decrease “demand” (such as the heroic work of pregnancy resources centers), the legal and policy effort to end the regime of abortion on demand should be accompanied by an effort to strengthen marriage. Success in both aims would establish and secure a renewed culture of life.

5 Id.
14 The Washington and Maryland laws will likely be subject to referendum in November 2012.
17 Id. at 222 (White, J., dissenting).
19 Varnum v. Brien, 763 N.W.2d 862 at 876, 885, 889 (Iowa 2009); In re Marriage Cases, 43 Cal. 4th 757 at 811, 836, 854 (2008); Lewis v. Harris, 908 A.2d 196 (N.J. 2006).

North Coast Women's Care Medical Group v. San Diego Superior Court, 189 P.3d 959 (Cal. 2008).


California Senate Bill 1172.
