

Artifact #1

Fake Blood and Blanks: Schools Stage Active Shooter Drills

OY, Mo.—In a cramped, carpeted amphitheater in the basement of Troy Buchanan High School, 69 students are waiting to die.

“You’ll know when it pops off,” says Robert Bowen, the school’s campus police officer. “If you get engaged with one of the shooters, you’ll know it.”

“When you get shot, you need to close your fingers and keep ‘em in,” adds Tammy Kozinski, the drama teacher. “When the bad guy and the police come through, they’ll step all over you, and who will be saying they’re sorry?”

“Nobody!” the students cry in unison.

This isn’t a bizarre, premeditated mass murder or some twisted sacrifice led by a student cult. These are the 20 minutes preceding an active shooter drill, the 13th one Missouri’s Lincoln County school district has staged in the past year.

All but 69 students have gone home for the day on early dismissal. These volunteer victims, mostly culled from the school’s drama class, are outfitted in fake-bloody bullet wounds, still wet and dripping down their foreheads, necks and chests. Bowen tells them what to expect: They’ll see “bad guys with AR-15s” shooting blanks during a simulated “passing period”—the moments when one class ends and the other begins. PVC pipes will be dropped on the floor to approximate IEDs. Crystal Lanham, a baby-faced freshman with long, gently-crimped brown hair, receives the dubious honor of being chosen as one of the gunmen’s hostages. She’s thrilled.

“I just really wanna get shot,” she jokes. “Is that weird?”



Image: Active shooter drill JIM SEIDA / NBC NEWS

Before a school shooting simulation at Troy Buchanan High School, students Lauren Timmer, right, and Nick Guyot, use stage makeup to create fake wounds.

In the wake of mass shootings from Columbine to Sandy Hook to many in between, schools have devised new and creative ways to prepare for tragedy. Most have adapted some form of the standard lockdown drill, but some districts

have gone further, with programs teaching kids self-defense, proposals to train teachers with firearms—and full-scale drills like the one that’s about to happen in Troy, a town about an hour northwest of St. Louis.

In Missouri, it’s not only a trend; it’s the law. In August 2013, the state legislature took a cue from a handful of post-Sandy Hook lawmakers, like the ones in Illinois and Arkansas, and voted to require every school district to conduct simulated shooter drills. Because the law goes into effect this year, 20 superintendents from across the state are here to take notes.

Back in the drama room, the energy is jovial and jittery. Some kids, like Lanham, have never participated in a drill before. Others are veterans of simulations staged with high school volunteers in nearby elementary and middle schools (after the younger kids have gone home). Lanham is visibly excited, but some students, like 17-year-old Alex Barga, are a little on-edge.



Image: Active shooter drill JIM SEIDA / NBC NEWS

Stage makeup helps Troy Buchanan High School students create fake bullet wounds as they prepare to play victims for an active shooter drill.

“I’ve done this like 10 times, and it gets me every time,” says Barga, who agreed to do the drill as extra credit for drama class. “This one is even scarier because it’s on my home turf. It’s going to make me second-guess my school.”

“It’s a bit nerve-racking because I’m disabled and can’t really run away,” says Katie Ladlie, 15, who is in a wheelchair. Her plan is to go into the elevator to the third floor and either slump in her wheelchair or fall out of it when the gunman shows up.

Kiera Loveless, 17, who has done eight drills before, “thought it would be fun at first. Now I wouldn’t say fun exactly—it’s scary. But a good experience.”

Loveless signed up because she thought it would look good on college applications. The first time she participated, she was “terrified.” She’d only heard gunshots on television. “I didn’t even really have to pretend. I kept having to remind myself ‘this isn’t real, this isn’t real.’”

Once the drill starts, Lanham and her friend, Jacob Erlitz, camp out near the bathroom. Pretty soon, a group of students sprint down the hallway screaming, just as a piercing fire alarm goes off. Seeing the gunman up close, Lanham realizes it's Bowen, the same man who was giving us instructions a few minutes before. He "shoots" Erlitz and takes Lanham hostage as promised, barking at her to bang on classroom doors and urge the occupants to open them.

"Someone let me in!" Lanham shouts. She isn't smiling anymore. "Somebody, anybody, open the door!"

None open.



Image: Active shooter drill JIM SEIDA / NBC NEWS

During the active shooter drill, student actor Josiah Zimmer runs past school faculty while another student plays dead on the floor.

The energy blast from the guns has filled the hallway with dust from the ceiling tiles and the scent of gunpowder. Bullet shells litter the floor. After several excruciating minutes, a few cops run down the hallway, and when one aims at the gunman, it's all over.

It's been eight minutes and one second. The intruder has been "engaged"—the officers' fancy word for "killed."



Image: Active shooter drill JIM SEIDA / NBC NEWS

Student actors portraying shooting victims lie on the floor.

There are several kids splayed out in the hallway, their fake blood still glistening. The kids start to rise, most nervously tittering, a few picking up shells as souvenirs. One girl, who has fallen on her stomach after getting “shot,” doesn’t get up. Her body is trembling. It doesn’t take long to realize she is sobbing.

Image: Active shooter drill JIM SEIDA / NBC NEWS

After the active shooter drill, Troy Buchanan High School sophomore Alexis McCourt wipes away a tear.

The Lincoln County School District has been holding drills since September but didn’t always include students. The drills, after all, aren’t really for kids—they’re meant to help law enforcement craft strategies to take down active shooters, as well as to familiarize teachers with the sound of guns and teach them to act quickly. The first drill, also at Troy Buchanan High School, simply consisted of teachers lined up in the hallway as an “intruder” shot blanks in front of them.

But it felt stilted and staged. “We figured, ‘we’re not really doing anything,’” says Lieutenant Andy Binder, who helps coordinate the simulations. The drills have since become more spontaneous, and kids were eventually added, Binder says, to ramp up the realism for the teachers. This drill had the most students by far.

“We’re beginning to see what we’ve done wrong and right,” says Binder. “The first time...it took us about two and a half minutes to engage the shooter [once we entered the building]. Today it took 30 seconds.” During another drill, the teachers were told to call 911 from classroom phones, only to discover that they had to dial “9” first to get an outside line. That was swiftly corrected.

And even though they’re mostly there as props, the students learn strategies, too, says Binder—like not hiding in bathroom stalls, since automatic toilet flushes may give them away. That Wednesday, most kids seem to agree it was worthwhile. Even the girl who was shaking and crying, 15-year-old Alexis McCourt, says she “doesn’t regret it at all.”

“It’s so hard to hear all of [those gunshots] and not freak out,” she says. But “I’m actually happy I did do it because now I know what some of the kids who came out alive in Sandy Hook felt.” If there is a shooting, she says, she’ll be prepared and “not just stand there.”

But not everyone felt invigorated. Amy Venneman, who teaches English, says having the student actors there ratcheted it up to a different level. “When I saw all the kids just running and screaming down the hallway, it really hit home for me,” she says.

During the drill, Venneman heard Lanham’s pleas to let her in, and she thought, What do I do? I’m supposed to keep the door shut, but I hear another student out there. “It made my heart hurt immediately,” she says.

The experience left Venneman feeling ambivalent.

“You want kids to feel like school is a safe place to be,” she says. “And I know those kids chose to be there, but for it to be that realistic, that’s almost too much. As a parent, I wouldn’t want that many kids being terrified, just knowing my own reaction to it.”

“It’s so hard to hear all of [those gunshots] and not freak out.”

Other Missourians were more unequivocal about their disapproval. When Wayne Johnson, a firefighter from St. Louis, found out about Troy’s drill via a writeup in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, he tweeted the link with the comment, “B/c this is a thing, we’ve failed, America.” He found the photos of kids spattered with fake blood “surreal.”

“I would have a real problem with them doing that in my kids’ school,” says Johnson, a veteran of Afghanistan who recognized the “mouflage” used for the students’ stage injuries. “Sure, I get it, that’s probably the best drill training that you’re gonna have, but at what cost?” He worries that the drill would “traumatize” some kids and “desensitize” others.

Of course, Johnson’s kids won’t have to volunteer, and even if they did, they won’t necessarily have the same experience as the students at Troy Buchanan. There’s a continuum of possible simulations, ranging from fire drill-like evacuations to the bells-and-whistles variety. Kenneth Trump, president of National School Safety and Security Services, thinks that “a nice happy medium is a tabletop exercise,” which instructs school staff, first responders, and mental health agencies “by Powerpoint in a classroom-type setting, discussing hypothetical situations.” (Incidentally, this model fails to hold up to the new Missouri law, which requires a live simulation.)

Trump warns against “acting emotionally rather than cognitively,” which can distract school districts and law enforcement from preventive measures like counseling services for troubled students.

And according to Stephen Brock, a California State University professor and member of the National Association of School Psychologists, those counselors may be necessary for a fake shooting, too.

“Live drills can be very intense and potentially psychologically harmful for some people,” says Brock. It’s not likely to cause post-traumatic stress on its own, but “if a child has some pre-existing mental health challenges”—up to 20 percent of students do, says Brock—“this could exacerbate that challenge.”

Experts say these reactions hinge on how responsibly the drill is conducted. Across the country, the community hasn’t always been well-informed; one active shooter drill at a charter school in rural Oregon came in the form of a sneak attack that left teachers momentarily terrified.

There’s also a difference between using student actors, who are fully-debriefed volunteers, and involving all students in this kind of exercise. Cary-Grove High School in Cary, Ill., faced criticism from parents last year when they staged an active shooter drill, blanks and all, with the entire student body present. One concerned mother from Hartselle, Ala., started a petition on change.org against a planned active shooter drill that would have involved elementary school students.

“We would never do that,” says Lt. Binder. “Law enforcement agencies that do that are making a grave mistake. We’re not here to create panic or fear.”

“It made me think, you have to look at everyone as a threat. That sounds so harsh, but you don’t know anybody’s story.”

Even though the kids at Troy Buchanan don’t appear to be traumatized by the drill, many of them have adopted a verbal tic: “When it happens, I’ll know what to do.” Or, “When it comes, I won’t be frozen in my tracks.” They seem to have internalized the idea that a school shooting is inevitable—it’s not a question of “if,” but “when.”

Alex Bargen confesses he’s been stressed about it ever since “it almost happened” more than a year ago in Troy. In September 2012, a Troy Buchanan student was arrested after his girlfriend reported to law enforcement that he was planning to kill four students on his 17th birthday. The charges were eventually dropped, but the day the girlfriend reported the incident, the news spread like wildfire. It wasn’t long before people were posting on Facebook that there had been shots fired in schools (there hadn’t been).

“This drill made me think of that,” Bargen says. “It made me think, you have to look at everyone as a threat. That sounds so harsh, but you don’t know anybody’s story.”

Image: Active shooter drill JIM SEIDA / NBC NEWS

Police officers enter Troy Buchanan High School for the active shooter drill.

School shootings are indeed increasing, despite the proliferation of drills and heightened security measures. Yet the likelihood of a violent death in school is still minuscule—about a 1 in 2.5 million probability, says Brock.

“With an event that is just so unlikely, a school needs to critically assess what their drills should include,” he says. “They should ask themselves, ‘What are we going to spend our limited time and resources on?’”

But statistics aside, the headlines keep pouring in, leaving people with what Trump calls “active shooter cumulative stress”—the uneasy feeling that something bad could happen at any time.

In the aftermath of the drill, the kids reconvene in the drama room. Tissues smeared with crimson are piled up in the wastebasket. The “victims” talk excitedly, overwhelmed with emotion and assessments. They describe what it felt like to get “killed,” or where they hid, or how freaky it was to see their teachers so panicked.

One quiet girl named Haylee Martinez begins to wax philosophical about real-life shooters: “It makes me wonder, like, who these guys are who enjoy being powerful. When they hold the guns, how much power do they have over us?”

Whether they enjoy it or not, the answer is clear.

Artifact #2

Affluenza Defense: Rich Texas Teen Gets Probation For Killing 4 Pedestrians While Driving Drunk

12/12/13 09:07 AM ET EST AP

FORT WORTH, Texas (AP) — A North Texas teen from an affluent family was sentenced to probation this week after he killed four pedestrians when he lost control of his speeding pickup truck while driving drunk, a punishment that outraged the victims' families and left prosecutors disappointed.

The 16-year-old boy was sentenced Tuesday in a Fort Worth juvenile court to 10 years of probation after he confessed to intoxication manslaughter in the June 15 crash on a dark rural road.

Prosecutors had sought the maximum 20 years in state custody for the Keller teen, but his attorneys appealed to state District Judge Jean Boyd that the teenager needed rehabilitation not prison, the Fort Worth Star-Telegram (<http://bit.ly/1f8GnvQ>) reported.

If the boy continues to be cushioned by his family's wealth, another tragedy is inevitable, prosecutor Richard Alpert said in court.

"There can be no doubt that he will be in another courthouse one day blaming the lenient treatment he received here," Alpert said.

Authorities said the teen and friends were seen on surveillance video stealing two cases of beer from a store. He had seven passengers in his Ford F-350, was speeding and had a blood-alcohol level three times the legal limit, according to testimony during the trial. His pickup truck slammed into the four pedestrians, killing Brian Jennings, a 43-year-old Burleson youth minister; Breanna Mitchell of Lillian, 24; Shelby Boyles, 21; and her 52-year-old mother, Hollie Boyles.

Boyd said the programs available in the Texas juvenile justice system may not provide the kind of intensive therapy the teen could receive at a rehabilitation center near Newport Beach, Calif., that was suggested by his defense attorneys. The parents would pick up the tab for the center, at a cost of more than \$450,000 a year for treatment.

Scott Brown, the boy's lead defense attorney, said he could have been freed after two years if he had drawn the 20-year sentence.

But instead, the judge "fashioned a sentence that could have him under the thumb of the justice system for the next 10 years," he told the Star-Telegram.

Relatives of those killed in the accident drew little comfort from that assurance.

Eric Boyles, who lost his wife and daughter, said the family's wealth helped the teen avoid incarceration.

"Money always seems to keep you out of trouble," Boyles said. "Ultimately today, I felt that money did prevail. If you had been any other youth, I feel like the circumstances would have been different."

Shaunna Jennings, the minister's widow, said her family had forgiven the teen but believed a sterner punishment was needed.

"You lived a life of privilege and entitlement, and my prayer is that it does not get you out of this," she said. "My fear is that it will get you out of this."

A psychologist called as an expert defense witness said the boy suffered from "affluenza," growing up in a house where the parents were preoccupied with arguments that led to a divorce.

The father "does not have relationships, he takes hostages," psychologist Gary Miller said, and the mother was indulgent. "Her mantra was that if it feels good, do it," he said.

How to Save Marriage in America

Traditional matrimony—he brings home the bacon, she cooks it—is dying. But college-educated couples are pointing toward a new model with children at the heart of the union.

RICHARD V. REEVES FEB 13 2014, 2:12 PM ET

More

What's happening to American matrimony? In 1960, more than 70 percent of all adults were married, including nearly six in ten twentysomethings. Half a century later, just **20 percent of 18-29-year olds** were hitched in 2010. Marriage was the norm for young America. Now it's the exception.

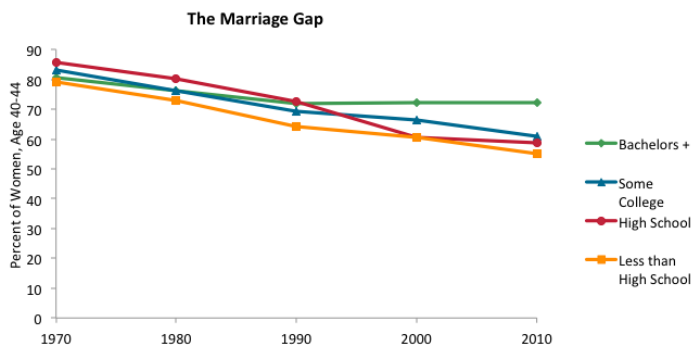
American marriage is not dying. But it is undergoing a metamorphosis, prompted by a transformation in the economic and social status of women and the virtual disappearance of low-skilled male jobs. The old form of marriage, based on outdated social rules and gender roles, is fading. A new version is emerging—egalitarian, committed, and focused on children.

There was a time when college-educated women were the least likely to be married. Today, they are the most important drivers of the new marriage model. Unlike their European counterparts, increasingly ambivalent about marriage, college graduates in the United States are reinventing marriage as a child-rearing machine for a post-feminist society and a knowledge economy. It's working, too: Their marriages offer—more satisfaction, last longer, and produce more successful children.

The glue for these marriages is not sex, nor religion, nor money. It is a joint commitment to high-investment parenting—not hippy marriages, but "HIP" marriages. And America needs more of them. Right now, these marriages are concentrated at the top of the social ladder, but they offer the best—perhaps the only—hope for saving the institution.

The Marriage Gap

Matrimony is flourishing among the rich but floundering among the poor, leading to a large, corresponding “marriage gap.” Women with at least a BA are now significantly more likely to be married in their early 40s than high-school dropouts:



During the 1960s and 1970s, it looked as if the elite might turn away from this fusty, constricting institution. Instead, they are now its most popular participants. In 2007, American marriage passed **an important milestone**: It was the first year when rates of marriage by age 30 were higher for college graduates than for non-graduates. Why should we care about the class gap in marriage? First, two-parent households are less likely to **raise children in poverty**, since two potential earners are better than one. More than half of children in poverty—**56.1 percent, to be exact**—are being raised by a single mother.

2007 was the first year in American history when marriage rates were higher for college grads than non-grads, over the age of 30

Second, children raised by married parents do better on a range of educational, social and economic outcomes. To take one of dozens of illustrations, Brad Wilcox estimates that children raised by married parents are **44% more likely to go to college**. It is, inevitably, fiendishly difficult to tease out cause and effect here: Highly-educated, highly-committed parents, in a loving, stable relationship are likely to raise successful children, regardless of their marital status. It is hard to work out whether marriage itself is making much difference, or whether it is, as many commentators now claim, merely the "capstone" of a successful relationship.

Three Kinds of Marriage

The debate over marriage is also hindered by treating it as a monolithic institution. Today, it makes more sense to think of “marriages” rather than “marriage.” The legalization of same-sex marriages is only the latest modulation, after divorce, remarriage, cohabitation, step-children, delayed child-bearing, and chosen childlessness.

But even among this multiplicity of marital shapes, it is possible to identify three key motivations for marriage—money, love, and childrearing—and three corresponding kinds of marriage: traditional, romantic, and parental (see Box).

Traditional marriage is being rendered obsolete by feminism and the shift to a non-unionized, service economy. Romantic marriage, based on individual needs and expression, remains largely a figment of our Hollywood-fueled imaginations, and sub-optimal for children. HIP marriages are the future of American marriage—if it has one.

A Tale of Three Marriages

| | Traditional | Romantic | HIP |
|----------------------------|---|--|---|
| <i>Money</i> | Male breadwinner, dependent wife | Independent incomes | Shared earnings |
| <i>Gender</i> | Him: work Her: home | Both work, regardless of gender | Shared responsibility for parenting, home and earning |
| <i>Parenting</i> | Mom keeps them safe and fed | No thanks! | Heavy investment, homework, classes, engagement |
| <i>Dinner</i> | Roast | Thai | Whole Foods |
| <i>Saturday</i> | Him: golf or fishing Her: coffee and laundry | Coffee in bed, out for brunch | Coffee in insulated cup on the way to soccer/dance/piano/baseball |
| <i>Watching</i> | Him: Super Bowl Her: Super Bowl commercials | Netflix Binge (e.g., House of Cards) | Homeland or Modern Family (on DVR, a week late) |
| <i>Screen Version</i> | Everybody Loves Raymond; Leave it to Beaver | The Notebook (Or Anything with Hugh Grant in it) | This is 40 |
| <i>Most likely to say</i> | 'Honey I'm home!' | 'You complete me' | 'Put it on the family google calendar' |
| <i>Least likely to say</i> | 'You complete me' | 'Let's just stick it out' | 'Any idea what the kids are doing?' |

1. Traditional Marriage: Going, Going...

The traditional model of marriage is based on a strongly gendered division of labor between a breadwinning man and a homemaking mom. Husbands bring home the bacon. Wives cook it. In these marriages, often underpinned by religious faith, duty and obligation to both spouse and children feature strongly. In their ideal form, traditional marriages also institutionalize sex. Couples wait until the wedding night to consummate their relationship, and then remain sexually faithful to each other for life.

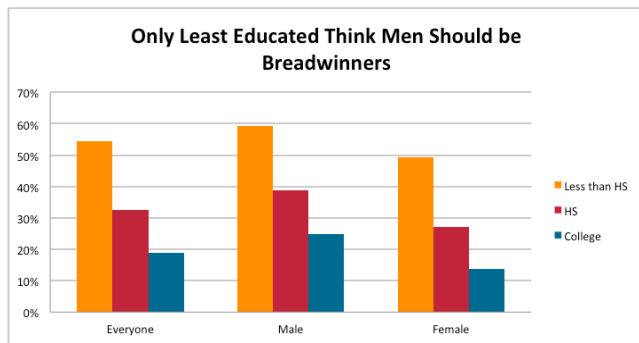
Attempting to restore this kind of marriage is a fool’s errand. The British politician David Willetts [says](#) that conservatives are susceptible to “bring backery” of one kind or another. Many conservative commentators on marriage fall prey this temptation: To restore marriage, they say, we need to bring back traditional values about sex and gender; bring back “marriageable” men; and bring back moms and housewives.

It is too late. Attitudes to sex, feminist advances, and labor market economics have dealt fatal blows to the traditional model of marriage.

Sex before marriage is the new norm. The average American woman now has [a decade of sexual activity](#) before her first marriage at the age of 27. The availability of contraception, abortion, and divorce has permanently altered the relationship between sex and marriage. As Stephanie Coontz, the author of [Marriage, A History](#) and [The Way We Never Were](#), puts it, “marriage no longer organizes the transition into regular sexual activity in the way it used to.”

Feminism, especially in the form of expanded opportunities for women’s education and work, has made the solo-breadwinning male effectively redundant. Women now make up more than half the workforce. A woman is the [main breadwinner](#) in 40% of families. For every three men graduating from college, there are four women. Turning back this half century of feminist advance is impossible (leaving aside the fact that is deeply undesirable).

There is class gap here, however. Obsolete attitudes towards gender roles are taking longest to evolve among those with the least education.



Source: General Social Survey, 2012

The bitter irony is that those most likely to disdain female breadwinners (the least educated men and women) would be helped the most by dual-earner households. The men who want to be breadwinners are very often the ones least able to fill that role.

Traditional marriage, then, is being undermined on all sides. Most Americans think marriage is not necessary for sexual fulfillment, personal happiness, or financial security, [according to Pew Research](#). They're right.

2. Romantic Marriage: Great for a While, but for Whom?

What about love?

If the breadwinner-housewife model for marriage is dying, there is still a romantic model. This is a version of marriage based on spousal love—as a vehicle for self-actualization through an intimate relationship, surrounded by ritual and ceremony: cohabitation with a cake.

Many scholars worrying about the decline of marriage point to a shift from stable, traditional marriages to disposable, romantic ones—what [Andrew Cherlin](#), Brad Wilcox and others describe as a “deinstitutionalization” of marriage. After studying relationships in poor Philadelphia neighborhoods, [Kathryn Edin and Maria Kefalas](#) concluded that “marriage is a form of social bragging about the quality of the couple relationship, a powerfully symbolic way of elevating one’s relationship above others in a community, particularly in a community where marriage is rare.” More recently, Betsey Stevenson and Justin Wolfers have suggested that the family has shifted from being “a forum for shared production, to shared consumption.” As a consequence, marriage has become a “hedonic” relationship that is “somewhat less child-centric that it once was.”

Half of unmarried new parents are in a new relationship by the time that child starts kindergarten.

Romantic marriages are ideal for Hollywood, and ideal for many couples, but they are not ideal for raising children, for the simple reason that the focus is on the adult relationship, not the parent-child relationship. Romantic marriages are passionate, stimulating, and sexy. Parenting, by contrast, involves hard physical labor, repetitive tasks, and exhaustion.

Even when divorced parents re-marry, the negative effects on children can be detected, perhaps because the necessary investment in a new relationship “crowds out” investment in the children. ([Half of the parents](#) unmarried at the birth of their child are in a new relationship by the time they start kindergarten.) These parents are engaged in the intense emotional work of building a new adult relationship, at a time when their children may need them the most. It is hard to have sleepless nights with a new lover when you are having sleepless nights as a new mother.

3. HIP Marriages: It’s About the Kids

Given the obsolescence of traditional matrimony and the shortcomings of romance (for children, at any rate), it is easy to predict a slow death for marriage. In fact, we can see marriage persisting among the most affluent and educated Americans. But they’re not going back to the old model their parents rejected. They are creating a new model for marriage—one that is liberal about adult roles, conservative about raising children.

The central rationale for these marriages is to raise children together, in a settled, nurturing environment. So, well-educated Americans are ensuring that they are financially stable before having children, by delaying childrearing. They are also putting their relationship on a sound footing too—they’re not in the business of love at first sight, rushing to the altar, or eloping to Vegas. College graduates take their time to select a partner; and then, once the marriage is at least a couple of years old, take the final step and become parents. *Money, marriage, maternity: in that order.*

By delaying childbearing, these new-model spouses can actually get the best of both worlds, enjoying the benefits of a romantic marriage, before switching gears to a HIP marriage once they have children. This means the relationship has some built-in resilience before entering the “trial by toddler” phase—and also, that emotional investment in the children can take priority for the next few years, following years of investment in each other. Many couples manage a “date night” every week or so—but every night is parenting night.

Indeed, there is [some evidence that there is less sex in these egalitarian, child-focused marriages](#). But least for this chapter of the relationship, sex is not what they're about.

The HIP Formula: Conservative About Kids ...

Married, well-educated parents are pouring time, money and energy into raising their children. This is a group for whom parenting has become virtually a profession.

When it comes to the most basic measure of parenting investment—time spent with children—a large class gap has emerged. In the 1970s, college-educated and non-educated families spent roughly equal amounts of time with their children. But in the last 40 years, college-grad couples have opened up a wide lead, as work by Harvard's [Robert Putnam](#) (of *Bowling Alone* fame) shows. Dads with college degrees spend twice as much time with their children as the least-educated fathers.

Although college graduates tend to be a reliably liberal voting bloc, their attitudes toward parenting are actually quite conservative. College grads are now the most likely to agree that “divorce should be harder to obtain than it is now” (40%), a slight increase since the 1970s. Although we can't be sure why, this is likely connected to the accumulating evidence that single parenthood provides a steep challenge to parenting.

College grads are conservative on divorce and child-rearing, egalitarian on gender roles, and liberal on social issues.

On the opposite end of parenting too little, there has developed a [small backlash](#) against over-parenting and child-centered marriages. Perhaps a few parents are overdoing it. We don't really know. But we do know that engaged, committed parenting is hugely important. Simply engaging with and talking to children has strong effects on their learning; reading bedtime stories accelerates literacy skill acquisition; encouraging physical activity and feeding them balanced meals keeps them healthy, strong and alert. Marriage is becoming, in the words of Shelly Lundberg and Robert Pollak, a “[co-parenting contract](#)” or “commitment device” for raising children:

“The practical significance of marriage as a contract that supports the traditional gendered division of labor has certainly decreased: our argument is that, for college-educated men and women, marriage retains its practical significance as a commitment device that supports high-levels of parental investment in children.” Scholarly disputes over whether marriage causes or merely signals better parenting miss the point. As a commitment device, HIP marriages do not cause parental investments—but they do appear to facilitate them. Forthcoming work from Brookings suggests that stronger parenting is the biggest factor explaining the better outcomes of children raised by married parents.

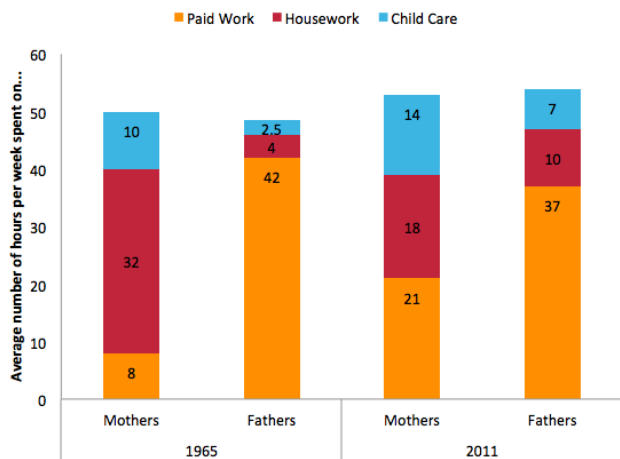
... But Liberal About Relationships

The HIP model of marriage, then, is built on a strong, traditional commitment to raising children together. But in other respects it differs sharply from the traditional model. Most importantly, the wife is not economically dependent on the husband. HIP wives have a good education, an established career, and high earning potential. We cannot understand modern marriage unless we grasp this central fact: The women getting, and staying, married are the most economically independent women in the history of the nation. Independence, rather than dependence, underpins the new marriage.

Of course, affluent couples may decide that for a period, one parent will devote more of their time to parenting than to career, especially when the children are young. If the mother takes some time out, these marriages masquerade, briefly, as traditional ones: a breadwinning father, a home-making mother, and a stable marriage.

But HIP marriages are actually recasting family responsibilities, with couples sharing the roles of both child-raiser and money-maker. There will be lots of juggling, trading and negotiating: “I'll do the morning if you can get home in time to take Zach to baseball.” Since the 1960s, fathers have doubled the time they spend on housework and tripled their hours of childcare.

Parents' Time Use in 1965 and 2011



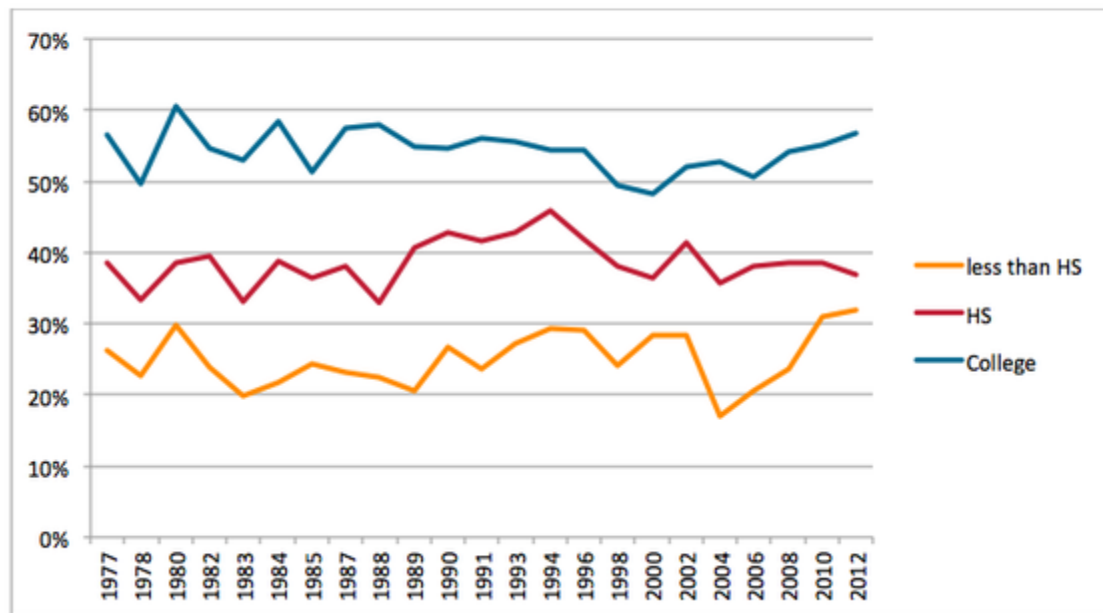
Source: *Modern Parenthood: Roles of Moms and Dads Converge as They Balance Work and*

Family, by Kim Parker and Wendy Wang, Pew, 2013.

College graduates are more likely to approve of women working, for example, even when her husband's "capable of supporting her." The greater liberalism of well-educated Americans extends beyond gender roles, too. Compared to less educated Americans, for example, college graduates are more liberal about abortion, pre-marital sex, legal marijuana, and gay marriage.

College Graduates: Liberal on Abortion...

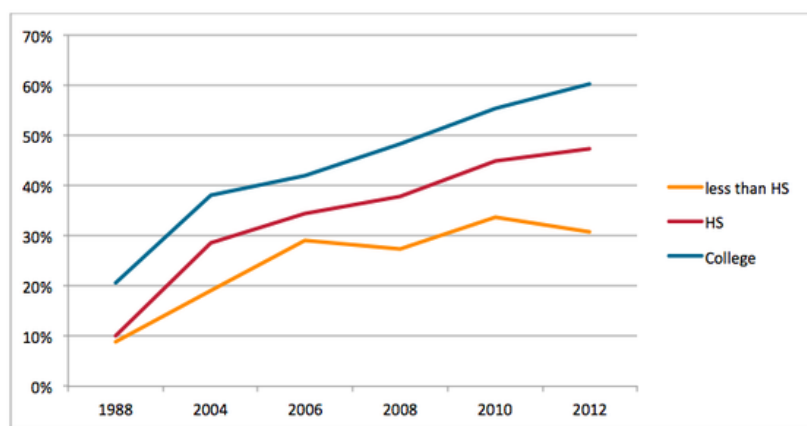
Should Women Be Able to Obtain a Legal Abortion for Any Reason? (% Agree, by education)



Source: General Social

...and On Gay Marriage.

Homosexuals Should Have the Right to Marry (% agree, by education)



Survey

Source: General Social Survey, 201

So: College grads are highly conservative when it comes to divorce and having children within marriage; but the most egalitarian about gender roles; and the most liberal about social issues generally.

Saving Marriage For the Poor

Most Americans support marriage, most Americans want to get married, and most Americans do get married. Why then is the institution atrophying among those with least education and lowest incomes?

A lack of “marriageable” men is a common explanation. It is clear that the labor market prospects of poorly-educated men are dire. But the language itself betrays inherent conservatism. “Marriageability” here means, principally, breadwinning potential. Nobody ever apparently worries about the “marriageability” of a woman: Presumably she just has to be fertile.

If a man can't earn—and that's apparently his only authentic contribution—he becomes just another mouth to feed, another child. But men with children are something more than just potential earners: They are fathers. And what many children in our poorest neighborhoods need most of all is more parenting.

The simple, sad truth is that this nation faces a deficit of fathers.

The proportion of children being raised by a [single parent](#) has more than doubled in the last four decades. [Most black children](#) are now being raised by a single mother. Mass incarceration plays a role here: More than half of black men without a high school degree do [some jail time](#) before they turn 30. In short, the nation faces a fathering deficit. By continuing to see the male role in such constricting terms—as breadwinner or nothing—we are inadvertently contributing to the slow death of marriage in our most disadvantaged communities.

Here, the traditional marriage needs to be turned on its head. In many low-income families, it is the mother who has the best chance in the labor market. But this doesn't make men redundant. It means men need to start doing the “women's work” of raising kids. Although there is a lingering determinism about parenting and gender roles, recent evidence—in particular from Ohio State University sociologist Douglas B. Downey—suggests that [women have no inherent competitive advantage in the parenting stakes](#).

The children who can benefit most from high levels of parental investment, from both mom *and* dad, are the poorest. HIP marriages are an elite invention that could make the greatest difference in the poorest communities, if only attitudes can be shifted. Our central problem is not the slow retreat of the idea of traditional marriage. It is the stubborn persistence of the idea of traditional marriage among those people for whom it has lost almost all rationale.

To Promote Marriage, Promote Parenting

The debate about America's “marriage crisis” focuses on failure—on the forces working to undermine marriage, especially in the poorest communities. It would serve our purposes better to turn our attention to success. Against all predictions, educated Americans are rejuvenating marriage. We should be spreading their successes. Given the implications for social mobility and life chances, we should be striving to accelerate the adoption of new marriages further down the income distribution.

Perhaps propaganda—or, more politely, social marketing—has a role to play. The elites running our public institutions aren't abandoning marriage: but maybe they aren't encouraging it either. In [Coming Apart](#), the social analyst Charles Murray accuses the affluent of failing to “preach what they practice”:

“The new upper class still does a good job of practicing some of the virtues, but it no longer preaches them. It has lost self-confidence in the rightness of its own customs and values, and preaches nonjudgmentalism instead. [They] don't want to push their way of living onto the less fortunate, for who are they to say that their way of living is really better? It works for them, but who is to say it will work for others? Who are they to say that their way of living is virtuous and others' ways are not?”

Murray casts the new marriage as a reversion to old virtues, especially religion. That's wrong. HIP marriages are based on a new virtue, appropriate for the modern economy: heavy investment in children. More important, it is hard to know what Murray wants from the “new upper class.” What would it mean to “push their own way of life onto the less fortunate”?

The idea that marriage can be anything other than a freely-chosen commitment is medieval. Americans, in particular, react badly to the government passing judgment on voluntary relationships between adults: that's one reason the bar on gay marriages has gone. And as it happens, Bush-inspired policies to promote marriages have had little success. What we need is not a Campaign for Marriage, but a Campaign for Good Parenting, which may, as a byproduct, bring about a broader revival of marriage.

The Polish anthropologist [Bronislaw Malinowski](#) once described marriage as a means of tying a man to a woman and their children. Nowadays, women don't need to be tied to a man. Sex and money can be found outside the marital contract. But children do need parents—preferably loving, engaged parents. Indeed they may need them more than ever. In 21st century America, nobody needs to marry, although many will still choose to. Recast for the modern world, and re-founded on the virtue of committed parenting, marriage may yet have a future. That future of marriage matters most for the individuals in the house that aren't in the union: our children.

