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Organization for Unmarried Condemns Cohabitation Report



For Immediate Release

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The Alternatives to Marriage Project (AtMP), a national organization of people who choose not to marry or are unable to marry, today condemned the recently-released report "Should We Live Together? What Young Adults Need to Know About Cohabitation Before Marriage" by Rutgers University's National Marriage Project.

"This is not new research," says AtMP co-founder Dorian Solot. "The report that was released is a review of past research that has been done, much of which is significantly flawed."

"The National Marriage Project that released the report is part of a political movement that wants to force American families back into the Ozzie and Harriet box," says AtMP co-founder Marshall Miller. "This is part of the backlash against today's vibrant, thriving diverse families. Publishing and re-publishing bad science doesn't help anyone."

Solot and Miller point out the following problems with the report:

- The report alleges that living together weakens potential future marriages by increasing the likelihood of domestic violence and divorce. Yet studies have shown that this conclusion is misleading. On average, couples who cohabit are less religious and more likely to believe divorce is an acceptable choice in a marriage gone bad. People who marry without living together first, on the other hand, tend to be more religious and more likely to be strongly opposed to divorce (for citations, see below). "Living together doesn't ruin anyone's marriage, as this report would have us believe," says Solot. "The groups it compares have different beliefs and tendencies, so they act differently."

Miller adds, "A more accurate conclusion would be to write that people who are against divorce are less likely to divorce. That's hardly newsworthy."

- Most of the studies cited in the research review do not control for socioeconomic status. It is widely accepted that marriage rates are tied to economics. On average, married couples have higher incomes than unmarried couples. "Studies that purport to compare happiness or domestic violence rates between married and unmarried people are actually seeing the effects of wealth," says Solot. "Wealthier people have better health care, safer neighborhoods, better access to education, and more choices in their lives. Living together without marriage isn't necessarily a problem," she says. "Poverty is."

Although the report seems to assume that marriage is the goal for all people, Miller and Solot say that Census data show that isn't so. They suggest the rapidly-growing numbers of people who live together before marriage - or choose not to marry at all - show that traditional marriage is becoming less central to many people's lives. The number of cohabitators has increased eightfold since 1970. Today over 5.6 million same-sex and opposite-sex unmarried partners live together.

Miller says many people in unmarried relationships experience discrimination and pressure to get married. "Employers that give health benefits to the spouse of a married employee often won't provide equal benefits to a domestic partner," he points out. "Fortunately, growing numbers of employers are implementing domestic partner benefits so all employees are treated equally." Miller adds that unmarried people also face discrimination in housing, insurance, taxes, child custody, and other areas.

Thomas Coleman, an attorney and Executive Director of the California-based American Association for Single People, questions why research should affect civil rights. "What if data showed that inter-racial marriages were more likely to end in divorce or that inter-faith marriages were more likely to break up?" he asks. "Does that mean society should discourage or punish people who enter into such relationships?" Rather than discouraging people, he advocates for laws prohibiting marital

status discrimination.

Miller points out, "If people are in unmarried relationships are less happy, it may be because they are experiencing discrimination and lack of acceptance. The solution is to provide support for unmarried people, not to discourage cohabitation."

In an attempt to provide resources, advocacy, and support to unmarried people, the Alternatives to Marriage Project offers workshops, sells books, publishes a monthly newsletter, and maintains a comprehensive [website](#). "We find people have a real interest in being connected with others who have made similar choices and had similar experiences," says Solot.

Solot and Miller have conducted their own original research about unmarried couples, which they are preparing to publish. "Marriage is a great option for some people," says Miller. "But for others, marriage may not be the right choice. The institution of marriage is not a magic ticket to happiness. All real-life relationships, married or not, require the same work and love, and can bring the same fulfillment."

Solot agrees. "Pseudo-scientific scare tactics that attack unmarried relationships do not promote 'family values,' she says. "I dream of a day when all relationships, regardless of marital status, will be supported and valued."

Research Cited:

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