Nostalgia as family policy

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In "For the Sake of the Children" [Summer 1992], Richard Gill criticizes a study several collaborators and I published on the effects of divorce on children.† Gill first charges that our methodology and our interpretation are flawed, then launches into a broader discussion of contemporary marriage and divorce. In an earlier Public Interest article, "Day Care or Parental Care?" [Fall 1991], Gill expressed similar concerns about the direction of family policy and the well-being of American children.

Gill's concern about children is well-founded, and we share it. It was never our intent to conduct a study that would absolve divorcing parents of guilt. In our current research, in fact, we have found some harmful effects of divorce on young children who were assessed shortly after their parents' marriages broke up. Nevertheless, we think that Gill's procedural criticisms are groundless and, more important, that the underlying themes of both his articles are unhelpful as a guide to public policy concerning children and families. In this reply, I will address Gill's specific criticisms and then respond more generally to his two articles.

For our study of divorce, we analyzed statistics from two surveys, one British and one American, that had followed national samples of children and their families for several years. We identified about 12,000 seven-year-old British children and 800 seven- to eleven-year-old American children whose parents were married at the beginning of the survey period, and we tracked these children for the next four to five years. Not surprisingly, children whose parents separated or divorced displayed

more behavior problems and performed more poorly in school than children whose parents remained married. But when we looked back to the beginnings of the surveys, we found that the children—particularly boys—whose parents were then married but would later divorce were already displaying more behavior problems and performing more poorly in school than the children whose parents would remain married. We concluded:

Overall, the evidence suggests that much of the effect of divorce on children cannot be predicted by conditions that existed well before the separation occurred. The British and U.S. longitudinal studies suggest that those concerned with the effects of divorce on children should consider reorienting their thinking. At least as much attention needs to be paid to the processes that occur in troubled, intact families as to the trauma that children suffer after their parents separate.

Although Gill agrees with our call for more attention to troubled, intact families, he disputes our conclusion that much of the harm experienced by children of divorce is due to conditions that exist before separation occurs. He notes that the British study, by far the larger of the two, followed children from 1965 to 1969, when the divorce rate was much lower than it is today. Only 11 percent of British children during that period experienced a divorce before they were sixteen, compared to about 40 percent of U.S. children today. The social climate in Great Britain, Gill argues, must have been more favorable for keeping marriages together and making them work. Gill then goes on to make the crucial assumption—without any evidence—that a high proportion of those British marriages ending in divorce must have been “very troubled.” He speculates that these marriages were characterized by “physical, sexual, or psychological abuses, whether directed toward child or spouse, that not only justify but clearly mandate separation and divorce.” No wonder, he concludes, that the British children were often troubled before the separation—only deeply troubled families got divorced.

But were the British marriages that ended in divorce much more troubled than American marriages that end in divorce today? Although we cannot be sure, we doubt it for two reasons. First, we deleted from our British study all families in which separation occurred before the child’s seventh birthday. We did this because the interviews conducted with the parents and teachers of seven-year-olds in intact families provided us with the first detailed family information that could serve as a pre-separa-
tion benchmark. A fortuitous result is that couples whose marriages lasted fewer than seven years were excluded. In fact, we excluded more divorced couples than we retained. We think it very likely that seriously troubled, abusive marriages tend to break up more quickly than marriages with more minor sources of conflict. If so, then the families we retained are probably more like contemporary families than Gill believes.

Second, each interview with the parent of a seven-year-old was conducted by a Local Authority Health Visitor, a trained nurse employed by the municipality, who normally visited each mother before her child was born and returned afterward, often several times if the family was experiencing problems. The Health Visitor’s questionnaire included a checklist that noted any family difficulties or use of social-welfare services. Relatively few problems were noted for the families that later divorced. Health Visitors checked “domestic tension” for 17 percent of later-divorced families, “financial difficulties” for 16 percent, contact with the child-welfare department for 8 percent, mental illness or neurosis for 7 percent, and alcoholism for 1 percent. To be sure, the Health Visitors may have been unaware of many problems. Still, the reports do not suggest that these families were in great conflict.

Our American survey data were recent enough (1976 to 1981) that Gill could not contend they were collected in an era of lower divorce. Yet we found that American boys, just like British ones, showed many behavior problems before their parents divorced. In the case of American girls, we found that once we controlled for pre-divorce problems they showed modestly better behavior if their parents divorced than if they stayed together. It is understandable that Gill seizes upon this puzzling finding for girls as evidence that our American results are flawed. Yet the gender difference did not surprise clinicians who deal with children. Several leading studies of divorce have found what appear to be greater effects on boys than on girls. In fact, a twelve-year longitudinal study of children in Berkeley, California, found that girls whose families experienced high levels of conflict showed fewer outward signs of problems than girls in less troubled families. Developmental psychologist Robert E. Emery writes in *Marriage, Divorce, and Children’s Adjustment* that girls sometimes react to the stress of divorce by displaying over-controlled, “good” behavior. These girls are, indeed, distressed by the divorce, according to Emery, but they respond to their distress by trying to help out and be accommodating. In divorce—and in reaction to
other sources of stress—girls tend to internalize their distress, which makes it difficult to observe. Boys, on the other hand, externalize their distress through obvious misbehavior. Thus, our American findings are consistent with the observations of developmental and clinical psychologists.

Gill also presents a table from a recent American study showing that children from disrupted families experienced more difficulties, but that study did not take into account what the children's families were like before the disruptions.

Yet Gill's discussion extends far beyond our article and the procedures we followed. He argues that living in a high-divorce-rate society leads couples to focus more on self-fulfillment and less on keeping their marriages together, to the detriment of children:

According to this argument, divorce involves an important externality. My divorce affects not only my own children but also, by adding to the divorce rate, the dysfunction and conflict in other marriages and hence the welfare of children in other families.

The claim here is that in a high-divorce-rate society spouses feel freer to argue because they know divorce is an option if they can't resolve their differences. The opposite position could, of course, be argued: that in a high-divorce-rate society there is less conflict in marriages because couples that can't get along divorce. Moreover, it is possible that one couple's divorce could make other couples less likely to divorce. Studies show that adults who divorce experience considerable anguish and distress; even those who initiate a divorce often report feelings of loss, sadness, and anger for years. The married friends of persons who divorce witness this distress, are often asked to provide comfort, and therefore learn how difficult a divorce is. A greater awareness of the emotional and economic costs of divorce may be one reason why the U.S. divorce rate has declined about 10 percent from its 1981 peak.

I could not find any hard evidence about whether there was less conflict in marriages when divorce rates were lower a few decades ago; nor does Gill cite any evidence. His assertion remains an open question. Nevertheless, intrigued by his argument, I examined the historical literature on the American family in the 1950s. For example, historian Elaine Tyler May, in Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era, studied the records of 300 middle-class couples who were interviewed extensively in 1955. These couples, as Gill would predict,
did indeed try to stifle their anger and avoid conflict so that their marriages would stay together. But the interviews also suggest that the suppression of conflict came at a price—and that wives paid that price.

When the wives were asked to evaluate their marriages, they first listed the benefits: economic security, a nice home, children, companionship. Yet they were twice as likely as their husbands to report that they were dissatisfied with their marriages, and twice as many said they would not marry the same person if they had it to do over again. Many stayed in their marriages despite hardship, strain, and bitterness. One wife wrote:

One particular source of friction: My husband is a firm believer in “woman’s place is in the home”—so it is, to a degree—but I have always felt the need for outside activities and interest in community affairs because I felt mentally stagnant by not taking part in outside programs and because I feel morally obligated to take part, in view of my education and some capabilities. He takes no interest in my interests and belittles most women’s groups.... Whatever I have done has had to be at no inconvenience to him—and often with a scornful attitude on his part.

Another wrote:

Much of our trouble has centered around my husband’s unwillingness to do work around the house, which he says is my sole responsibility.... This was not too bad until I had the third baby within five years.... I became so exhausted that I got very little sleep, even when [the new baby] did, and I had to be up early with the other two little ones.... I believe I had a nervous breakdown but I knew psychiatric help would be expensive and my husband said, “Your trouble is all in your head and you don’t have to feel this way if you don’t want to.”

Nevertheless, imbued with 1950s family morality, this woman said she never considered divorce, never regretted her marriage, and considered it “decidedly more happy than average.” There is no record in the book of the impact of her distress on her children.

If these records are representative, it appears the lower divorce rates of the 1950s were achieved not by greater marital bliss but rather by a rigid division of labor that hid the substantial stress and frustration that many women experienced. This is hardly an original thesis—it was the message of Betty Friedan’s 1963 book, The Feminine Mystique. Yet the 1950s was the decade in which family life came closest to Gill’s ideals. For one thing, the divorce rate was substantially lower then. For another,
far fewer married women worked outside the home while they were raising children.

Gill's preference for the breadwinner-homemaker family is even more explicit in his 1991 article on day care, in which he criticizes a report of the National Research Council's Panel on Child Care Policy (of which I was a member). That report called for more government support for out-of-home child care and for work leaves for infant care. Gill argues instead for greater government support for stay-at-home parents.

I realize that there is no monolithic conservative position on family policy and, for that matter, that Gill may not consider himself a conservative. But his positions exemplify the main themes of conservative writings on this issue. The great contribution of conservatives in the 1970s and 1980s was to focus attention on the effects of changes in the family on children's well-being at a time when liberals were inclined to defend every kind of family and to endorse individualism uncritically. But if the strength of conservatives has been their diagnosis, their weakness is their prescription. Today, conservative observers, largely male, rightly decry the decline in children's well-being, correctly state that sacrifices will be required if the situation is to be improved, and then announce that women should make these sacrifices.

In his article on divorce, for example, Gill outlines the potential drawbacks of plans that would combine tougher child-support enforcement with a guaranteed minimum benefit for custodial parents (usually mothers) who are owed support. Here is a measure that would force fathers to be financially responsible for their children, cut welfare costs (since the government would keep most of the payments collected from fathers if the mothers were on welfare), and provide an income floor for millions of children whose standard of living plummets after their parents divorce. What could be wrong with this plan? It would reduce the economic risk of divorce for the mother, writes Gill. This could make wives "more willing to divorce, since more financial security after divorce is now assured." And so a promising measure that would undoubtedly raise the standard of living of large numbers of children and that, as Gill acknowledges, "could conceivably render husbands more averse to divorce," is implicitly criticized because it might increase women's economic independence.

Similarly, in his day-care article, Gill argues against requirements that employers provide unpaid work-leaves for parents
with newborns (as provided for by the family-leave bill vetoed by George Bush in September 1992). Even many liberals are uneasy about the accumulating evidence that full-time employment of both parents may be harmful to children in their first year of life. At the same time, however, most studies show little or no negative effect from out-of-home care after age one or two, suggesting that the problem is of limited duration. Parental-leave legislation would allow employed mothers or fathers to take time off to be with their new babies. What's wrong with this legislation? "Guaranteed leaves," writes Gill, "may tie the mother more closely to the employing firm and encourage her to return to work as soon as possible." Once again, a measure that would improve the well-being of children is shot down for fear that it might encourage more mothers to return to work after the birth of their children—even though a majority do so already.

Gill seems to wish that many of the millions of employed mothers would quit their jobs and return home. He mourns the passing of the child-centered 1950s. I agree with Gill that in some ways (such as levels of violence and drug use) children were better off in the 1950s than they are in the 1990s. But I question whether it is fair and, even more so, whether it is realistic to make a return to the breadwinner-homemaker family the basis of family policy. What is the moral justification for once again asking mothers to make all of the sacrifices that are necessary to improve children's lives? Why can't we envision alternatives in which men share the burden? Until recently, men with employed wives had not increased the amount of time they spent on child care and housework. But there are signs of change. A 1985 time-use survey directed by John P. Robinson of the University of Maryland showed that men's contributions at home have begun to grow. Moreover, it is increasingly acceptable for men to care for—and to care about—their children. The May 20, 1991 cover of Fortune, a magazine with a heavily male readership, proclaimed: "Can your career hurt your kids? Yes, say many experts. But smart parents—and flexible companies—won't let it happen." Such a cover story would have been inconceivable ten years ago. We need to consider restructuring careers so that both women and men can take some time off during the three or four years that are needed to raise two children beyond infancy. We could, for example, build in leaves of absence for law firm associates before they are evaluated for partnerships, or for assistant professors before they are judged for tenure. We could also allow secretaries, machinists, and postal workers to take leaves of absence.
Even those who judge it fair to ask women to make most of the sacrifices need to ask themselves whether there is any real possibility that millions of employed women can be enticed—or even pushed—to stay at home. The economic reality is that men's wages have remained stagnant since the oil-price shocks of 1973. During the same period, housing prices have increased. For better or worse, many couples are convinced that two incomes are necessary to live the American dream. And for better or worse, the American economy depends on the services of the women who have poured into the labor force, where they typically work for lower wages than firms would have to pay male replacements.

If it is unlikely that we can return to the heyday of the breadwinner-homemaker family, or if it is simply unfair to make that our goal, then Gill's positions on divorce and employed mothers are of little help in formulating family policy. Enticing, coaxing, shaming, and even impoverishing women into staying married and staying home seems to make up virtually the entire conservative program. There is no vision of the future, just nostalgia for the past. Any measure that could remotely increase mothers' economic independence is opposed, no matter how many children it would help. Little thought is given to how men might increase their contribution to their children's well-being. Granted, the conservative lament for a lost era stems from a deep concern for children. But if we won't be returning to the 1950s anytime soon, then conservative writings about the family provide us with little guidance about where to go from here.

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Family breakdown as family policy

RICHARD T. GILL

Professor Cherlin's critique can be summarized in three claims: 1) that my concerns about technical flaws in his Science article are "groundless"; 2) that my hypothesis that the increased availability and social acceptability of divorce may lead
to more marital problems cannot be supported by "hard evidence" (and, in fact, that anecdotal evidence suggests the opposite); and 3) that the positions I express in my articles exemplify the "main themes of conservative writings" and therefore are long on diagnosis, short on prescription, and "unhelpful as a guide to public policy concerning children and the family." I will address these criticisms in order.

With regard to the Science article, I argued that its findings were sometimes inconsistent, at other times inconclusive, and, in general, seriously incomplete. My conclusion was that the article "may well give a misleading impression of the risks we are currently taking with the well-being of our children."

The most notable example of inconsistency was the finding that the behavior of American girls is actually improved by divorce. In response, Cherlin informs us that this result is not inconsistent at all, that girls often "internalize their distress" and show particularly "good" behavior when troubled. Hence the results for American girls are quite in line "with the observations of developmental and clinical psychologists."

Cherlin seems unaware that this response only worsens his problem. For if "behavior problems" do not measure the effects of divorce on girls, why was this index used to judge these effects in the first place? The study becomes simply irrelevant to the question under consideration. Furthermore, Cherlin's response does not even address the consistency question. The sharp difference in effect is shown only for American girls and not for British girls, who seem to respond very much like British boys, and indeed American boys as well.

For that matter, where is this great consensus on the basic difference in boy-girl reactions anyway? In my original article I referred to the 1988 National Health Interview Survey of Child Health covering 17,100 American children (in contrast to the 65 divorce-affected children—girls and boys—out of a subsample of 822 U.S. children in the Science study). In this much larger study, girls in disrupted families showed behavioral problems just as serious as those of boys. Even more strikingly, in a study of a nationally representative sample of 1,197 children, Paul Allison and Frank Furstenberg (the latter of whom happens to be one of the co-authors of the Science study) actually found more serious problems for girls after divorce, with respect both to behavioral problems and distress. In a 1989 article in Developmental Psychology, they concluded:
Our data provide virtually no support for the hypothesis that marital dissolution has a greater impact on boys. Of the 19 outcome measures, only 3 (all in 1981) showed significant differences between boys and girls in the effects of marital dissolution: teacher's report of problem behavior, child's report of dissatisfaction, and child's report of distress. In all three cases, the effects of a dissolution were greater for girls than for boys.

Where the Science findings are not inconsistent—as they clearly are with respect to U.S. girls—they are often inconclusive and essentially uninformative. In my earlier article, I speculated that the reason Cherlin found that British children often had problems before divorce was that in a low-divorce-rate society such as Britain in the 1960s, those few marriages that did break up were likely to have been particularly troubled. The surprise, if any, was that prior marital and family problems accounted for only half the difficulties these children experienced after divorce.

Cherlin's response is more puzzling than his original argument. He now claims that the Health Visitors noted “relatively few problems” in those British families that were then intact but would later break up. But surely the central point of his study is that many of the difficulties children experience after divorce are due to “processes that occur in troubled, intact families.” Is he now saying that these originally “intact” families were not particularly “troubled”? The confusion mounts even further when Cherlin interprets my argument to mean that these British marriages were “much more troubled than American marriages that end in divorce today.” In fact, a pivotal theme of my article is precisely that American marriages today may be very troubled, at least in part because of our current high divorce rate.

Indeed, it is because of the failure of the Science article to consider the possible interaction between a high divorce rate and the quality of marital life that I argued that the study was not only inconsistent and inconclusive, but seriously incomplete. This is the single most important point I raised in my article. When divorces are ubiquitous, socially acceptable, and easily available, might this not, I asked, result in important changes in the character of intact families prior to any actual or even contemplated divorce? My basic logic was that the omnipresence of divorce makes it harder for couples to commit themselves wholeheartedly to the marital union and, indeed, encourages and really requires them to take protective steps that often undermine the quality of the union. If true, the total impact of divorce on children would have to include some estimate of the effects of
family troubles prior to divorce which are nevertheless attributable to the high general divorce rate. Since the Science study not only did not answer but did not even raise this question, I argued that it was seriously incomplete and thus likely to underestimate the overall negative effect of family breakdown on children.

This brings us to Cherlin's second major point. He speculates that, contrary to my hypothesis, marital problems may actually be lower in today's high-divorce-rate United States than in the lower-divorce-rate societies of the past. Since he "could not find any hard evidence" on this matter, he offers anecdotes from the 1950s describing the suppressed distress of wives and suggests that these descriptions may well be "representative."

Actually, if he had looked a little harder, he could have found quite a bit of evidence on this issue. Apart from the several examples I sketched out in my original article (all of which he ignores), there are a number of studies suggesting that marital problems have increased pari passu with divorce rates in the modern era. Roderick Phillips, in his comprehensive history of divorce, Putting Asunder: A History of Divorce in Western Society (Cambridge University Press, 1988), suggests that "marriage breakdown" (referring to troubles within a formally intact marriage) is more frequent today than it was in the past:

In general, marriages were stable in Western society and ... a significant extent of marriage breakdown is peculiar to modern times. This conclusion is at variance with the commonly expressed notion that marriage breakdown has historically been common and that rising divorce rates in recent times simply tend more accurately to reflect an essentially constant incidence of marriage breakdown....

Specific evidence with respect to recent American experience has been amassed by Norval D. Glenn of the University of Texas. In a 1991 summary of surveys, Glenn notes that some surveys have shown an increase in expressed negative attitudes toward marriage since the 1950s—not a surprising finding in view of the fact that Americans' propensity to marry, either for the first time or after divorce, has declined in recent decades. For instance, the Americans View their Mental Health Surveys, conducted in 1957 and 1976, asked respondents how a person's life is changed by being married and classified the responses into positive, neutral, or negative. The positive responses declined from 43 percent to 30 percent from 1957 to 1976 and the negative ones increased from 23 to 28 percent.
Glenn also undertook a study based on data from the General Social Surveys and found that there had been

a substantial decline in the percentage of ever-married Americans who, at virtually all lengths of time after their first marriages, were in intact first marriages they reported to be "very happy." For instance, for persons who first married about a decade earlier, this percentage declined from 46 in the middle 1970s to 33 in the middle to late 1980s. Similar declines occurred in the percentage of ever-married persons who were in marriages of any order (first, second, or subsequent) they reported to be "very happy."

On the basis of his research, Glenn has arrived at conclusions virtually identical to those suggested in my article, namely that a decline in the ideal of marital permanence and an unwillingness of couples to make full commitments to the married state tend to increase the "probability that marriages will become unsatisfactory." In this connection, it is also very important to note that Glenn finds increasing dissatisfaction not only with marriage but also with parenthood. When respondents were asked how having children affects a person's life, positive responses fell from 58 to 44 percent and negative responses increased from 22 to 28 percent over the 1957-1976 period. This is also very much in line with the argument of my article since, as I pointed out, children in a high-divorce-rate society may become a serious economic burden for a divorced mother and may disappear in whole or part from the life of the father, if and when a divorce occurs.

In short, Cherlin is either unaware of or chooses to ignore such evidence as there is on the main issue between us and does not even respond to the underlying analytic questions. This is most unfortunate. For if our high divorce rate does in fact affect the quality of married life, including attitudes toward parenthood, then it is irresponsible to ignore this in an article purporting to measure "the effects of divorce on children." To do so is to provide false reassurance to divorcing couples and thus further undermine an institution—the intact family—that is already under siege and whose breakdown may well be the greatest single threat to the welfare of our children.

The final issue raised by Cherlin's critique deals with politics and whether those who espouse "conservative themes" (apparently including myself) are hopelessly "nostalgic," with no "vision of the future" but only "of the past." Evidently we oppose women's "independence" and yearn for a return to the
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“breadwinner-homemaker family,” with women making “all of the sacrifices” and men failing to “share the burden.”

Not having been designated their spokesperson, I cannot speak for “conservatives”; I can, however, speak with some confidence for myself. That I oppose women’s independence and wish to force them back into the home, as Cherlin claims, comes as a great surprise to me, as indeed it would to readers of my 1992 book (coauthored with Nathan Glazer and Stephan Thernstrom), Our Changing Population. In describing desirable future family structures in that book, we list as the very first objective:

1. Men agree not only in principle but in practice that women shall have equal opportunity to explore the full range of career possibilities open to men. The demographic factors we have been discussing in this book—longer life expectancies and historically low fertility rates—make any other arrangement for women untenable.

I then specifically note that the two-career family is a “basic assumption” of our analysis, though I add that ideally “it must not lead to the neglect of the future generation.” I also argue that all child-care benefits available to wives should also be available to husbands.

I was even more surprised to learn of my opposition to plans that would “combine tougher child-support enforcement with a guaranteed minimum benefit for custodial parents (usually mothers) who are owed support.” I had always imagined that I was strongly in favor of such plans. In my article, I did not consider the desirability or undesirability of child-support enforcement measures, but simply tried to analyze their complex effects from different perspectives. Would they make the husband more or less averse to divorce? The wife? What might be their effect on the quality of the marriage? To establish his case against me, Cherlin is forced to ignore my statement that such measures might have some “positive effects on the quality of the marriage in that the women involved would not have to take as much prior protective action to insure against the unfavorable economic consequences of divorce.” The fact that such measures contribute to a woman’s sense of protection while still in the marriage is a very strong point in their favor. Also, of course, they offer absolutely necessary protection for children in the event a divorce occurs. Would anyone reading Cherlin’s critique even dream that this is my actual position on the matter?

These misinterpretations (and several others) of my positions seem to derive from my efforts to consider more than one side of any given issue. This bad habit of mine often puts me into
sharp conflict with dedicated advocates of particular public policies. For example, the report of the National Research Council’s child-care panel (of which Cherlin was a member) urges a whole series of new government family-policy initiatives, all of which are designed single-mindedly to promote out-of-home care for the infants, toddlers, and preschoolers of working parents, both married and single. The breakdown of the family, whether through divorce, illegitimacy, or the farming out of basic infant and child care to extra-family institutions is taken as a given. In its place, the state will not only take over historic family functions, but will actually tax intact families in which one parent stays home to raise preschool children in order to subsidize families which in many cases are two-earner families to begin with. That a significant effect of such policies might be to accelerate the total collapse of an institution that arguably is still the main hope we have for adequately raising and nurturing the next generation is not even considered.

My own “vision of the future”—if I may borrow the phrase—is quite different. I do not take the total collapse of the family as a given. I certainly do not favor measures that actively promote such a collapse. I believe, first of all, that we must face squarely the harm that many of our current social and political arrangements are doing to our young children. That is why I felt compelled to criticize the Science article. It clearly provides comfort and reassurance to divorcing couples, comfort and reassurance not justified by the weak and uncertain findings of the study itself. When we look at the condition of today’s children—poverty, school performance, crime, drugs, suicides, obesity, behavioral and psychological problems—I say it is time to face up to our responsibilities for their better nurture and care.

Second, I believe that there are important measures that would both benefit children and promote rather than undermine the family. In my article on child care, I mentioned the concept of a Parental Bill of Rights: “parental,” mind you, not “maternal,” since husbands could also apply. The bill would be modelled on the GI Bill of Rights adopted after World War II. Parents who stayed home to raise their young children would accumulate credits toward future training—at high school, vocational school, college, professional school, or even post-professional school—once their children no longer required full-time parental care. There is simply no reason, as I note in the last sentence of that article, that parental care should not “be given at least an equal chance to maintain itself in the years ahead.”
I myself, and I hope the "conservatives" unfairly characterized by Cherlin, will not allow him the exclusive right to conceive of what lies ahead. For Cherlin's vision of the future seems little more than a projection and intensification of current trends into the coming decades. I believe, or at least hope, that for the sake of our children we can do much, much better than that.

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