Abstract:

On June 26, 2015, SCOTUS decided to change the definition of marriage to include same-sex couples. Many pro-marriage organizations are left with the question of “now what”? For the past decade, many pro-marriage organizations have been fighting to defend, define, or re-define marriage. However, the societal institution of marriage itself has become increasingly seen as obsolete and irrelevant in today's culture, particularly among Millennials. The state of Millennial marriages today is in major jeopardy, and pro-marriage organizations can seize the moment by being a voice that preserves, sustains and encourages the intuition of covenantal marriage. This paper discusses why Millennials are not getting married, why marriage should matter to Millennials, the consequences economically and socially of not getting married and how to effectively reach the Millennial generation by being relevant in the approach. This paper will also help the reader understand how preserving, sustaining and encouraging healthy marriages among Millennials will strengthen our culture, our families, and our economy.

Bio:

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Y Knot Marriage?
The case for Generation Y to tie the Knot.

For the past decade, many pro-marriage organizations have been fighting to defend, define, or re-define marriage. However, the societal institution of marriage itself has become increasingly seen as obsolete and irrelevant in today's culture, particularly among Millennials. Many of these pro-marriage organizations with a conservative or Christian affiliation are not necessarily pro-marriage per se, but rather can be best described ideologically as anti-gay marriage. While much of their focus and energy has been spent on the fight against the legal recognition of same-sex marriage, the institution of marriage as a whole has begun to deteriorate right before our eyes.

On June 26, 2015, the United States Supreme Court ruled to make it legal for same-sex couples to enter into “holy” matrimony in every state. Now what? The conversation MUST change. With the decline of marriage among Millennial heterosexuals, the perception of marriage must change so that the intuition and its’ sanctity can be preserved and sustained. I have learned something tremendous from the homosexual community: they are willing to fight with deep conviction and tenacity for an institution that Millennial heterosexuals are so willing to give up!

Who are Millennials?

Millennials were born between the years of 1980 and 2000, equaling 75.3 million just within the United States alone, not to mention 50% of the world’s population is under the age of 30 years old (Fry, 2015). Millennials are the most diverse, most educated, and most technologically savvy generation on the planet that is “relatively unattached to organized politics and religion, linked by social media and burdened by debt” (Taylor, 2014). Millennials were
raised with the notion that they could do and be anything they set their minds to and that their dreams can become a reality.

Millennials are experiential both in their approach and execution of life. This is seen in their actions, behaviors, and their worldview. Millennials are overwhelmed by “free choice.” Consequently, this has developed an entitled generation that is in need of instant gratification both professionally and personally. In short, Millennials have a self-determined humanistic worldview which is every bit as much the byproduct of postmodernity as it is the instant gratification consumer-centric culture that has become the hallmark of western society in the 21st century. Professionally, this has led to a generation who jumps from one job to another in the need to feel fulfilled (Meister, 2012). In fact, “91% of Millennials expect to stay in a job for less than three years, according to the Future Workplace survey of 1,189 employees and 150 managers. That means they would have 15 – 20 jobs over the course of their working lives!” (Meister, 2012). Meister continues by defending Millennial job hopping by saying it “leads to greater job fulfillment, which is more important to Gen Y (Millennials) workers than it was to any previous generation” (Meister, 2012).

With unemployment rates among Millennials at an all-time high of 15.2% as of summer of 2014, experts believe that Millennials are just waiting for their dream job rather then being willing to take entry-level positions that will provide experience so they can work their way up the corporate ladder (Starr, 2014). It is believed that Millennials want to stay in their pajamas all day, binge watching Downton Abbey on Hulu, while searching on Indeed.com for their perfect high paying, mid-level management job directly out of university. This is the stereotype that the business world sees when they look at the Millennial worker. Millennials have been stereotyped as entitled, impatient, needy, and uncommitted. While many Millennials are walking away from
each job with a new skill set and perspective, it makes it hard for Baby Boomers to feel comfortable hiring Millennial employees, therefore, keeping unemployment at an all time high.

This type of fickleness has found its way into the marriage and family scene. This has lead to a hedonistic hook-up culture that focuses on instant gratification and the need to feel fulfilled rather than being committed. This lack of commitment can be seen by the 40% increase of children born out of wedlock (Marquardt et al., 2012). In return, an enormous amount of single income households, many of which are Millennials, have fallen into poverty. “Based on a recent Child Trends analysis of data from the National Center for Health Statistics, a front-page story in the New York Times revealed that among women under 30 in the United States today, more than half of births—53%—now occur outside of marriage” (DeParle and Tavernise, 2012). The dissolution of marriage today is affecting our children and will ultimately impact our nation in a disastrous way.

**Why are Millennials not getting married?**

There are many reasons why Millennials are not getting married. Some of their justifications are completely understandable, while others are rooted in fear. Studies have shown that 30% of Millennials have not gotten married because they have just not found the right person to marry (Luscombe, 2014). Rather than rushing into marriage and possibly ending in a bitter divorce, waiting awhile might be the more prudent choice. The truth is that 50% of Baby Boomers (parents of Millennials) are divorced and that has affected the way Millennials view and approach marriage (Schwartz, 2013). Millennials are cautiously avoiding marriage because of fear that their marriage too will end in divorce. This has caused many Millennials to wait until they are much older and more mature for marriage.

Another reason that Millennials are not getting married is because they do not feel
financially stable enough to enter into a union. In fact, 27% of Millennials are stacked with a mountain of debt and do not want to bring this into a marriage (Luscombe, 2014). According to Pew Research, “millennials are the first in the modern era to have higher levels of student loan debt, poverty, and unemployment, and lower levels of wealth and personal income than their two immediate predecessor generations (Gen Xers and Boomers) had at the same stage of their life cycles” (2014). While at the same time, the Millennial Generation feels entitled to have the same quality of life as their parents and grandparents (Taylor, 2014). According to Project Student Debt, Millennials are starting out on their career path with an average debt of $26,600 from their four-year undergraduate university. In fact, there has been an increase of students attending graduate school simply because they have not been able to find gainful employment to repay their student loans. This is certainly a serious concern and an understandable deterrent from marriage.

While the first two reasons could be reasonable motives why Millennials are not getting married, the sad truth is that 22% of Millennials are not ready to settle down, often choosing cohabitation rather than committing to marriage (Luscombe, 2014). While fear grips the hearts of Millennials contemplating marriage, the personal, emotional, social, and financial benefits of marriage will outweigh fear time and time again.

**Why should Millennials care about marriage?**

Soon, the religious right and moral conservative’s fight to define marriage as between one woman and one man will cease. At that point, marriage will no longer seem to be a liberal vs. conservative or religious vs. nonreligious battle, but rather should be replaced by a common cause that will protect, encourage and educate heterosexuals on the benefits of marriage. Statistics show 50% of Millennials label themselves as politically independent, and almost one
third say that they are non-religious according to the Pew Research Center (2014). Marriage provides the American society with the building blocks for a healthy, stable, supportive long-term environment for the family and economy. Currently, the lack of marriage is making the income gap larger, children are suffering due to the instability, and our economy is financially distressed.

**Marriage affects our Economy: Middle America**

In the past, marriage was the starting point for young people. They got married, started a career, had children and built a life together. Now, Millennials “feel they have to be more established, especially financially, before they even consider walking down the aisle” (Luhby, 2014). However, research has shown that married couples who are part of Middle America are better off financially than those who are not (Fry and Cohn, 2011). Sadly, our “national unemployment rate is 15.2% among Millennials” and nearly a third are underemployed according to Gallup, making it difficult for single young people to make ends meet alone (Starr, 2014, Gallup, 2014). This has been one reason that more than 1 in 3 young Millennials are living with their parents rather than on their own (Gross, 2012).

While some Millennials are waiting to get married when they achieve financial stability, others just do not want to get married at all. In fact, 25% of Millennials are choosing not to get married all together (Luscombe, 2014). A “survey of Gen Y women revealed that an astonishing 59% feel that “living together” is a legitimate lifestyle, and a majority said it is okay to remain unmarried even if they have children” (Gross, 2012). A majority of Millennials feels that marriage is unnecessary and is irrelevant to raising children in a healthy environment. In fact, 53% of Children born from Millennial women today are born out of wedlock (Marquardt et al., 2012). Many times, families who have a single income depend on social programs provided by
the United States Federal Government. These governmental assistance programs are costing taxpayers “$112 billion dollars annually, or more than $1 trillion per decade, by one cautious estimate” (Scafidi, 2008). They have also “suggested that even a very modest increase in stable marriage rates would result in large savings for taxpayers. These scholars calculated that if family fragmentation were reduced by just 1%, U.S. taxpayers would save an estimated $1.1 billion annually” (Scafidi, 2008). As more and more Millennials choose not to get married, Middle America is becoming smaller and the lower class is becoming larger. The income gap among the wealthy and poor will become so wide that our nation will not be able to support the burgeoning lower class financially without heavy taxation. Middle America represents those who are high school educated but not college educated (Marquardt et al., 2012).

“As W. Bradford Wilcox argued in a recent edition of State of Our Unions, when marriage among the moderately-educated middle begins to resemble the fragile state of marriage among the poor, the family patterns of the high school educated become “more likely to resemble those of high school dropouts, with all the attendant problems of economic stress, partner conflict, single parenting, and troubled children” (Marquard et al., 2012).

This fact will be devastating to our nation, keeping our children and their children’s children stuck in the seemingly endless cycle of poverty. Marriage is not just a private contractual union between two individuals, but it is an institution that has a profound impact on culture and society, both socially and economically.

**Marriage Affects Children**

Healthy and committed marriages can break the cycle of poverty. Children who come from a home with married parents have only an 18% chance of living in poverty (Mcguire, 2014). Unfortunately, one in four Millennials will never marry and Millennials are extremely likely to say, marriage is becoming obsolete. While it is understandable, given the high
percentage of Millennials reared in divorced households, it is also concerning that 52% rank “being a good parent” as a higher priority than having a successful and committed marriage (Wang & Taylor, 2011). If this concept becomes the new generational attitude towards marriage, we will not be likely to see a healthy society and economy for future generations. “But what Millennials just don’t seem to grasp is that a key to being a good parent is having a successful and committed marriage” (Mcguire, 2014). It is vital for Millennials to understand the lasting impact of their choices regarding marriage. Millennials are faced with the fact that many of them come from single-family homes, often blinded by the ongoing effects that this has had on society as a whole.

Millennials are less likely than their elders to have grown up in intact families. Asked about their parents’ marital status during most of their own childhood, about six-in-ten (63%) of Millennials say that their parents were married, while 20% say their parents were divorced and 12% say their parents were never married to each other. By contrast, 76% of Gen Xers, 83% of Boomers and 89% of Silent Generation adults say their parents were married most of the time they were growing up (Taylor and Wang, 2011).

Because so many Millennials come from divorced homes, they “are less likely to say that a child needs a home with both a father and mother to grow up happy and that single parenthood and unmarried couple parenthood are bad for society” (Wang & Taylor, 2011). But those who are “born to married, well-educated parents are increasingly likely to have the same advantages when they become adults, graduating from four-year colleges and establishing marriages that are, on average, more stable and of better quality than in the recent past. But those born to fragmented families are increasingly likely to repeat their parents’ patterns and to experience the heartache, hardship, and risks that result” (Marquardt et al., 2012). Encouraging and educating a generation on the positive benefits of marriage can help break this cycle.
Why not cohabitate?

Looking at the facts, it can be said that Millennials fear commitment. Nearly 40% of Millennials believe that the “till death do us part” vow should be abolished from wedding vows altogether (Bennett, 2014). Marriage has become so irrelevant to Millennials that “almost half support a marriage model that would involve a two-year trial—at which point the union could be either formalized or dissolved, no divorce or paperwork required” (Bennett, 2014). So in other words, they would rather test the waters by cohabitating rather than entering into a legally binding committed union of marriage.

In Mexico City, lawmakers tried unsuccessfully to implement this type of renewable marriage concept that would give couples a way out after two years without any penalties (Bennett, 2014). This is simply the cultural DNA of a generation that does not value marriage and the benefits it offers to society. Commitment is perceived as a farce and has no relevance in the Millennial generation. In fact, cohabitation has doubled since the mid-1990’s and has risen 1000% in four decades (Fry & Cohn, 2011). It is believed by some that cohabitation has the same benefits as marriage, but this is far from the truth (Fry & Cohn, 2011). “While most children born outside of marriage are born to cohabiting couples, such unions are far more likely to breakup than married ones” (Wilcox, 2011). “Cohabiting couples who have a child together are about twice as likely as married couples to break up before their child turns twelve” (Marquardt et al., 2012). Children seem to be paying the highest consequences for Millennials’ lack of commitment. In Why Marriage Matters: Thirty Conclusions from the Social Sciences, scholars have concluded that:

Children are less likely to thrive in cohabiting house-holds, compared to intact, married families. On many social, educational, and psychological outcomes, children in cohabiting households do
significantly worse than children in intact, married families, and about as poorly as children living in single-parent families. And when it comes to abuse, recent federal data indicate that children in cohabiting households are markedly more likely to be physically, sexually, and emotionally abused than children in both intact, married families and single-parent families (Wilcox et al, 2011).

As you can see, cohabitation does not nurture and sustain a healthy family. Nor do children in a cohabitated environment thrive like those in healthy and committed marriages. Instead, cohabitation provides a foundation for a cycle of instability that could last generations.

Many Millennials believe that they should never marry someone they haven’t lived with first (Donevan, 2014). But, Millennials must not be naïve to the fact that breaking up when living together is tough and can be compared to a divorce. Those who cohabitate often get stuck in financial leases or mortgages that makes it difficult to step away from the relationship when things go awry. The concern is that dating couple issues will eventually become married couple issues — and potentially divorced couple issues (Donevan, 2014). In fact, “couples who move in together before getting engaged or committed to marry are a little more likely to have lower-quality marriages” (Donevan, 2014). Cohabitation is most definitely not the answer.

**What can we do to solve the problem?**

As you can see, there is a major problem with Millennials and marriage that should and can be changed. There are many recommendations, but here are just three that will help encourage Millennials to marry: pro-marriage policies, pro-marriage educational programs, and pro-marriage cultural engagement through Hollywood and media.
Pro-Marriage Policies

The United States government does not make it easy for people to get married, but rather penalizes middle and lower class Americans, consequently putting them at an even greater disadvantage. Policy makers have the power to change this. Here are two ways that lawmakers can change laws that will strengthen the case to marry among the lower and middle class. First, the government should end the marriage penalty for low-income Americans. Secondly, there should be no Medicaid marriage penalty for married mothers.

End the Marriage Penalty for Low-Income Americans

Politically conservative leaders and citizens often state that the poor are taking advantage of the welfare system. However, the United States has made it easy to become dependent on governmental assistance programs by discouraging marriage and encouraging singleness. As a case in point, the welfare system advises mothers to not report if they are married so they may obtain the maximum amount of financial assistance.

The poor community and the welfare offices across our country freely share this “good” news while the cycle of poverty never seems to get broken. The United States tax and transfer systems better known as our welfare system, impose financial penalties to low-income families, up to 20% of the family income if they are married. The low-income population sees this as a huge deterrent to marriage. These penalties have made it almost impossible to sustain a married couple in the middle class, therefore making it easy to rely on governmental assistance programs (Marquardt et al., 2012). The National Marriage Project has proposed a way to reform the marriage penalty:
A recent proposal suggests a new solution: give low-income couples a refundable tax credit for the exact amount of their marriage penalty for the first years of their marriage. This measure can eradicate the marriage penalty without overspending on broad structural reforms. There is already a technology to support such a reform. The Urban Institute and the Administration for Children and Families at the Department of Health and Human Services have created a “Marriage Calculator,” an easy-to-use online program that can determine a low-income couple’s penalty. As part of the process of filing taxes, low-income couples could—with the assistance of civil society and governmental organizations as needed—calculate their penalty and be reimbursed (Marquardt et al., 2012).

Their recommendations should be considered as a way to end the marriage penalty for low-income families. However, Senator Brownback from Kansas has another proposal to ease the financial strain on newly married couples.

Our proposal is simple: Don't make them pay it. We should allow newly married couples to continue to receive all of their benefits for the first three years of marriage, thus mitigating the marriage penalty currently paid by lower-income couples. This adjustment should give newly married couples a sufficient grace period to realize the economic benefits of marriage — and save some money to stabilize their financial situation — before government benefits cease (Brownback & Blankenhorn, 2008).

This is especially beneficial for Millennials who have just graduated from university with student loan debt. Marriage is a wealth generating institution and creates more economic assets on average than those who choose to cohabitate or raise a family in a single income household. This makes it much easier to pay down on student loan debt while building a life together.

**End the Marriage Penalty in Medicaid for Married Mothers**

In the United States, juvenile public defenders can attest to the effects of broken families as they seek to defend children who have committed violent crimes, theft, and misdemeanors. Fathers are absent and mothers are struggling day in and day out, but this demographic seems to continue
in a downward spiral as their families continue to remain fragmented. But because low-income families are penalized so heavily if they marry, it makes marriage unappealing to these communities and demographics.

One program that low-income women depend on is Medicaid. Unfortunately, Medicaid discourages “parents from marrying and therefore increases the long-term risk of poverty and welfare dependency” (Marquardt et al., 2012). Losing Medicaid coverage is one benefit that impacts low-income families in a tremendous way. One way to help disadvantaged families is by extending the income regulations for Medicaid coverage for married couples to include consideration of monthly expenditures. In addition, the Federal government should examine a family’s income after taxes rather than before.

**Pro-Marriage Education Initiatives**

Nelson Mandela once said, “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” When it comes to pro-marriage education, it should start as early as childhood and teenage years. Studies have shown that teenagers DO have a desire to have a good marriage and family life. However, at the same time, “they are pessimistic about the possibility of a long-term marriage. Both boys and girls have become more accepting of lifestyles that are alternatives to marriage, including unwed childbearing and premarital cohabitation” (Marquardt et al., 2012). This is troublesome.

In the past, the government has funded programs to educate students about family issues. This current administration has not focused its attention on the family like prior administrations have (Marquardt et al., 2012). By educating the American youth about the benefits of marriage, especially those from low-income families, it could open their eyes to a
different perspective. With such a huge marriage gap in America (upper vs. lower class marriage rates), many children from low-income families may not even know any married couples. Many believe that low-income families have all but given up on the idea of the institution of marriage. “Low-income children commonly grow up in an environment where marriage seems inaccessible, or, when it is accessible, unsustainable” (Cardone & Cahn, 2014). Through pro-marriage educational programs in public schools serving low-income families, it could slowly reverse the cycle that plagues the poor. Carbone and Cahn continue by explaining, “for the majority of Americans who haven’t graduated from college, marriage rates are low, divorce rates are high, and a first child is more likely to be born to parents who are single than to parents who are married. The result is that marriage has emerged as a marker of the new class lines remaking American society. Stable unions have become a hallmark of privilege. The result of these changes is a new elite—an elite whose dominant position is magnified by the marriage market” (Carbone and Cahn, 2014).

**Invest in Marriage and Relationship Education and Enrichment Programs**

Research has shown that couples who participate in marriage relationship education and enrichment programs will positively see effects on the quality their relationships as well as promote a healthier environment for the children (Marquardt et al., 2012). This is a great time for federal and state governments, as well as nonprofits, to invest in making marriage and relationship education services easily accessible to both “at-risk” couples, as well as newlyweds. These courses should include effective communication, father engagement, household management and finances, parenting skills, domestic violence prevention and anger management to name a few. On the federal and state level, it is recommended:
…that states devote 1 to 2 percent of Temporary Assistance to Needy Families block grant funds to preventative efforts to help at-risk individuals and couples to form and sustain healthy marriages and relationships with the goal of improving child well-being. A strategic, integrated set of marriage and relationship education services across the early life course is more likely to yield positive results than a scattershot of uncoordinated, free-standing programs. State governments can take policy actions to provide incentives, encouragement, and sometimes even requirements for engaged, step-, or divorcing couples to participate in such services (Marquardt et al., 2012).

**Engaging Hollywood and the Mass Population though Media Campaigns**

The conversation must change when talking about marriage in our popular culture. Young people tend to idolize celebrity couples and often desire to emulate their lifestyles. Couples such as Kourtney Kardashian and her boyfriend Scott Disick (McGuire, 2014, Grey, 2015) have chosen not to wed at all even after three children. Other couples such as Gwyneth Paltrow and Chris Martin have “consciously uncoupled” after 10 years of marriage (Miller, 2014). Bravo has introduced a new television series called “Untying the Knot” that seems to make the case against marriage even stronger (Miller, 2014).

Our popular culture is painting a picture for Millennials that makes children being born out of wedlock or cohabitation accepted as the new norm. But there are other stories that must be told, stories of celebrities who have beaten the odds, invested in their marriages to leave a far more positive legacy. Sarah Jessica Parker and Matthew Broderick have been married for 17 years. Meryl Streep and Don Gummer have sustained their marriage for 35 years, while Ozzy and Sharon Osbourne have stayed together for 32 years. The beautiful country singing stars, Tim McGraw and Faith Hill have been a positive example for 18 years of married life (Finn, 2014). Many times celebrities have not spoken up about being “pro-marriage” in the fear they would be seen as anti-gay marriage. We must be able to engage Hollywood in “culture ideas about
marriage and family formation, including constructive critiques and positive ideas for changes in media depictions of marriage and fatherhood” (Marquardt et al., 2012).

A Grassroots Media Movement

Celebrities are not the only ones who can change the conversation about marriage in our culture. Anyone can use the tools now available to set a new tone, engaging those around us by participating in community and nationwide media campaign movements. Media is a powerful tool that can send a message of what the people want on a grassroots level. By using media outlets such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and Blogs, the average citizen can now have a voice to speak out on issues that are prevalent in society. Now is the time to start a movement and engage the culture before the new norm becomes even more prevalent. Social media campaigns that harness social interest and human concern like the Instagram page "Humans of New York," or videos that are intentionally designed to harness the power of virality are powerful ways to engage our culture. These media tools can be crucial to changing the public dialog and attitudes towards marriage. By using social media to engage Millennials, we can change the conversation from Millennials against Marriage to Millennials for Marriage.

Millennials for Marriage: Conclusion

After SCOTUS’s decision, the hope is that the conversation changes about marriage. This is a chance for those of political affiliations to reach across party lines; people of faith to work together with deep conviction and tenacity for the institution that is worth preserving and sustaining. The sanctity of marriage will strengthen our culture, our families, and our economy for a better tomorrow. People can change the conversation in a way that will make Millennials view marriage as an attractive, beneficial, and relevant institution once more.
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