

February-March 2002

Alternatives to Marriage Update:

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Around the Alternatives to Marriage Project

New Report Provides Unmarried Perspective on Welfare Reform

Our new report, "Let Them Eat Wedding Rings: The Role of Marriage Promotion in Welfare Reform," has been getting rave reviews from advocates for the poor, staff of some welfare agencies and the media. Sent to key policymakers and members of Congress, Let Them Eat Wedding Rings makes the point that welfare policies promoting marriage do more harm than good for

children and families. You can download your copy for free or purchase one.

Download Flyers - Tell Your Neighbors About ATMP

Many of you told us you had fun posting the flyer we enclosed with our fall fundraising letter, which read, "Your neighbors have discovered the Alternatives to Marriage Project. Have you?", and a row of tear-off slips with the ATMP website. Supporters from all over the country told us they were amazed to see how quickly the slips got pulled off, and we knew the flyers were working when the calls and emails started to roll in. Be part of the grassroots effort to let unmarried people know there's a community for them! You can now download the flyer in Adobe Acrobat format, print out as many as you'd like, and post them on a community bulletin board in a local cafe, library, post office, community center, college, place of worship, or other location. Thanks!

Now Accepting Applications for Summer Internship

Interns make a huge impact in ATMP's work. We invite college students with an interest in ATMP to consider spending the summer learning about family diversity and the working of a nonprofit organization, while making a real difference in unmarried lives. Applications are due March 30th. More information about the position and how to apply is available online.

Volunteer Position #1: Help in the ATMP Office!

As ATMP grows, so does the amount of behind-the-scenes work that keeps our office running smoothly. We are in search of a volunteer who could come to our office in the Boston/Providence area for a few hours a week (flexible, depending on your schedule) to help with administrative tasks like data entry, replying to email, and other activities. The volunteer needs to be comfortable with computers, but beyond that we can teach you everything you need to know. It's the perfect opportunity for someone who'd like to get a closer look at unmarried issues while contributing critical person power to the organization. To learn more, contact us [here](#).

Volunteer Position #2: Moderate an Online Messageboard

We're very excited about a soon-to-be-unveiled section of ATMP's website: messageboards. The boards will allow visitors to the site to post and respond to messages, share stories, ask questions, and connect with others in similar situations at any hour of the day or night. Before the boards go public, though, we need to line up moderators who agree to read their assigned messageboard(s) at least once a day and take any needed action. This can be done from anywhere in the world, as long as you can connect to the Internet. If you're interested, let us know [here](#).

Connecting Sept. 11th Surviving Unmarried Partners

Several attorneys and organizations have contacted ATMP as they work on the cases of surviving partners who were in long-term relationships with, but were not married to, people killed in the September 11th attacks. ATMP is making an effort to connect the lawyers representing surviving same-sex and different-sex partners, to increase the chances that any legal decisions will have a positive outcome for all surviving partners. If you or someone you know is a surviving partner, please let ATMP know [here](#).

Seeking People Who Had Non-Marriage Ceremonies

We're hoping to learn more about the experiences of unmarried people who have commitment ceremonies, rituals, weddings, or similar events without getting legally married. In particular, we'd like to conduct short phone interviews with people who fit any of these descriptions: anyone who had a "traditional" style wedding without the legal marriage; senior citizens who had a ceremony of any kind; anyone who had a ceremony within a Christian or Jewish faith tradition; and people who can share their experiences explaining and discussing their ceremony with friends and family. If you'd be willing to share your experiences, please email us [here](#).

In the Media

Report on Marriage & Welfare Reform Makes Headlines

ATMP's groundbreaking report [Let Them Eat Wedding Rings](#) (see above) has already drawn considerable media attention to our message: welfare dollars should be used to help people get out of poverty, not to promote marriage. Appearances have included:

- Executive Director Dorian Solot debated Family Research Council spokesperson Genevieve Wood on the Fox News Channel show "On the Record with Greta Van Susteran."
- A Washington Times article cited our report extensively, and printed a chart summarizing our "Ten Golden Principles" on which we believe welfare policies should be based.
- The Wisconsin Public Radio call-in show "Conversations with Tom Clark" spent a full hour with Solot as a guest, exploring the dangers of marriage-promoting policies and discussing the real needs of poor families.
- An editorial in The Buffalo News cited and agreed with, and the Bergen Record quoted ATMP's argument that marriage is a personal, private decision, not an area for government to get involved.
- XFM national radio brought co-founder Marshall Miller on as a guest to discuss marriage and welfare.

Associated Press, Morning Edition quote ATMP on Census Report

Marshall Miller's comments about a new Census report on marriage and

divorce appeared in the national Associated Press article that ran in papers across the country. Miller was also featured on CNN radio, and ATMP was mentioned in Morning Edition's (NPR) coverage of the report.

Library Journal Points Surfers at ATMP's Site

During February the Library Journal focused on websites relating to love and relationships. Among the sites it featured was ATMP's website, www.unmarried.org. The Journal especially liked our Resources and Links page, which it said offers "a straightforward and informative look at commitment without ceremony."

ATMP Perspectives in Print Across U.S.

Newspapers around the country continue to turn to ATMP for analysis of marriage and non-marriage. USA Today quoted Solot in an article about single people after September 11th (ATMP has not noticed any difference in our members' attitudes toward marriage). The Roanoke (VA) Times quoted Solot and ATMPers Susan Flowers and Nathan Barnhill about changes in cohabitation and marriage. ATMP was also quoted in articles in the Attleboro (MA) Sun-Chronicle and twice in The Oklahoman.

You can read some of these articles:

"Census: Those in School Longer More Likely To Marry," Associated Press

"In Marriage, New Oklahoma Breaks with Past," The Oklahoman

"Divorce Rate Stays Steady, Study Shows," The Oklahoman

"A New Hitch in Welfare," The Bergen Record

Book Buzz

Wifework: What Marriage Really Means for Women, by Susan Maushart (2001)

Reviewed by Dorian Solot

The role of "wife" is one feminists critiqued harshly in the '60s and '70s, but since that time the assumption seems to be that gender roles in marriage have changed. In *Wifework*, Susan Maushart shows that they have not -- or not nearly enough. Citing hundreds of studies from the US, UK, and Australia (where Maushart lives), she details the modern wife's job description, including not only domestic chores and parenting tasks but also the emotional tasks associated with wifeliness.

Some of Maushart's statistics are astounding, and the stories she shares ring true. She reminds us that even today, the average married woman still does twice as much domestic labor as her husband (not including parenting time), and that on average, husbands of women who work outside the home contribute a mere 10 minutes more a day than husbands of at-home wives. The book takes the analysis to the next level by exploring why, despite the massive inequities, most women report their marriage is "fair." The reality is sure to unsettle the reader -- this is not a book to pick up if you're unprepared to confront the division of work in your relationship.

Maushart thinks there's value in marriage if you're raising children, but otherwise concludes unmarried relationships probably serve women better. Cohabiting women, she says, "will have a much better chance of resisting [the wifework imperative] if she remains outside of marriage than within it." Wifework is a readable and important contribution to our understanding of gender roles within all relationships, married or not.

(If you've read a recently-published book that you think might interest others who like to ponder marriage and non-marriage, we invite you to write a couple of paragraphs about it for this section of our newsletter! [Click here](#) to read the book reviews in archived issues of our newsletter.

Heaps of Thank You's

ATMP was privileged to have the help of intern Anna Levin during the month of January. Anna, an Oberlin student, helped with the editing and mailing of Let Them Eat Wedding Rings, as well as numerous other projects around the office. Thank you!

It took a village to write, read drafts, provide feedback, design, print, mail, and release Let Them Eat Wedding Rings. We're grateful for the contributions of Ashton Applewhite, Tim Casey, Stephanie Coontz, Ulla Figwer, Irene Glassman, Woody Glenn, Alan Hamilton, Brett Hudoba, Kirsten Isgro, Kate Kahan, Jackie Payne, Jeremy Pittman, Alicia Sauer, Judith Stacey, Nicholas Willis, and Sarah Wright.

Thanks, too, to LouAnn Cossette, who has been providing occasional administrative support in the ATMP office.

Tidbits

Widespread Acceptance for

Australian of the Year's Unmarried Pregnancy

Shortly after announcing Pat Rafter as Australian of the Year, the Australian Day Council learned Rafter's partner was pregnant. One columnist observed that the public announcement has drawn almost no criticism, and reporters defended their decisions not to ask Rafter whether he and his partner planned to marry.

Man Offers Granddaughters Cash for Not Cohabiting

A British man has promised each of his granddaughters £1,000 (about \$1,400) if they don't cohabit before marrying. One of the girls, age 17, said, "It's a lovely idea -- he wants us to be happy and safe. Our family are Christians so I don't believe in sex before marriage anyway, but it's a nice incentive even so."

Ugandan Official Wants to Reward Virgin Brides

The minister of health in the Ugandan kingdom of Baganda recently outlined a plan to reward women financially if they are still virgins when they marry. Students at Makerere University where the plan was announced booed the minister and called the proposal sexist and old-fashioned.

Sizzling Statistics

1/3 of American Births to Unmarried Parents

A new report from the National Center for Health Statistics found that just over 1/3 of births in 2000 were to unmarried parents. It also reported that births to teenagers are at an all-time low, and that American women are having more children (an average of 2.1 in a lifetime) than at any time in three decades, perhaps because of the decade-long economic boom.

Births to Unmarrieds Increase in Ireland

In Ireland, the number of births to unmarried parents increased nearly 30% in the last 20 years. The new study suggests that "large proportions" of the births are to cohabiting couples rather than single women, but does not provide specific information on this.

More British Live with Unmarried Partner or Alone

In the late 1970s, only a quarter of British women were married; today that figure is 51%. Nearly a tenth of all British adults are living with an unmarried partner, including more than 1 in 4 twentysomething women. The largest percentage of households, one-third, are occupied by a single adult living

alone.

British Approve of Cohabitation and Unmarried Parents

The annual survey by the National Centre for Social Research. found that 54% of British believe children should be born to married parents, and a quarter of people thought married couples make better parents than unmarried ones. Only a third of 18 to 24-year-olds thought people should be married before having children. Sixty-seven percent of interviewees said cohabitation is acceptable even if the couple does not plan to marry.

Swiss Marriage Rate Falls Dramatically in One Year

The number of Swiss couples getting married dropped by 12% between 2000 and 2001, the biggest recorded fall since 1913. An analyst at the Federal Statistics Office said the change is probably due to the increased acceptance of cohabitation, along with the passage of a new law making it more difficult to get divorced. The percentage of births to unmarried parents rose to 11% in 2001.

2,000 Same-Sex Couples Marry in Netherlands

Nearly 2,000 same-sex couples married in the Netherlands in the first six months after the country last year became the first to legalize same-sex marriage. Same-sex marriages comprised 3.6% of all new marriages during the time period.

Unmarried Births Skyrocket in Japan

According to a 1998 government survey, the number of single mother households in Japan grew 85% in the last 5 years. A Tokyo-based group of single mothers, the Single Mothers Forum, said its membership had increased 28%. The United Nations' Human Rights Commission has repeatedly advised Japan to end its discrimination against children born to unmarried parents.

News From the United States

Family Diversity Complicates Post-9/11 Claims

Lawyers sorting through claims from the surviving family members of September 11th victims say many lived with unmarried same-sex or different-sex partners; some were married but had children with other partners; some had aunts and uncles who were "pivotal" in their lives; at least one had two wives. One attorney said, "The stereotype of a traditional family with a surviving spouse and a couple of kids is probably the exception rather than the rule." Many of these "non-traditional" family members will not be eligible for

compensation.

ATMP believes the families affected by the September 11th attacks demonstrate the way in which the outdated legal definition of family harm children and families. Laws and policies need to be updated to recognize a broader range of the families that exist.

Judge Rules Sept. 11th Partner Not Common Law Wife

A woman who claimed she was the common-law wife of a police officer killed in the September 11th attacks will not receive federal benefits, a judge ruled. The judge said that although the couple lived together for 16 years and had a son together, they never publicly spoke of an intention to marry, didn't wear wedding rings, maintained separate bank accounts, and filed individual tax returns. The couple lived in Pennsylvania, one of a few states that still recognize common law marriage.

Religious Leaders Advise Against Promoting Marriage with Welfare

The Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice has recommended that welfare reform's "Illegitimacy Reduction Bonus" would be better spent as a "Poverty Reduction Bonus." "We need realistic, cost-effective measures to help families overcome poverty, not unproven schemes that coerce women into marriage as a cure for poverty," said Reverend Carlton W. Veazey, president of the national alliance of mainstream religions.

Kansas Moves to Repeal Common Law Marriage

Kansas' Senate Judiciary Committee endorsed a bill that would end the recognition of common law marriage in the state. Kansas is currently one of only thirteen states recognizing common law marriage. An alternative bill being considered would update the existing law by requiring the approval of a parent or judge if one of the potential spouses is under 18.

To learn more about this, check out ATMP's [Common Law Marriage Fact Sheet](#).

Court Rules Civil Unions Not Valid in Georgia

A three-judge panel of the Georgia Court of Appeals ruled against a lesbian mother in one of the first cases to consider the validity of civil unions outside of Vermont. The case involved a divorce decree prohibiting the woman from having their children over when an unrelated adult was staying overnight. Burns and her female partner had obtained a civil union in Vermont and argued that the partner was related, like a spouse. The judges said that Georgia's ban on same-sex marriage made it impossible to recognize the civil union as a marriage.

News From Around the World

UK, Norway Consider Rights for Unmarried Partners

A proposed bill would allow unmarried same-sex and different-sex couples in England and Wales to register their relationships and receive the same rights as married couples. The bill would allow couples to make their own agreement about their rights if their relationship ends, and also create a standard procedure for couples who do not make their own arrangements. Experts expect the bill will not pass, but that some elements of it will become law. Norway is considering a proposal where cohabitators could register in order to gain the right to file a joint tax return and gain more pension and inheritance rights. Cohabitators with children could be required to receive mandatory mediation if they wish to separate.

Abujan Woman May Be Killed for Unmarried Birth

A middle-aged woman is standing trial in Sokoto, Abuja, for giving birth without being married. In a similar case, another woman was recently sentenced to death by stoning for giving birth. The currently-accused woman may face the same fate.

Canadian Commission Advises Same-Sex Marriage, Registration Options

The Law Reform Commission, Canada's leading law reform advisory body to the federal government, issued a report calling for the country to allow same-sex couples to marry and also to create a registration system for any couple who would prefer this. The registration system was recommended not as a substitute for marriage but as an alternative to it.

Domestic Partner News (U.S.)

One-Year Growth in DP Benefits Largest Ever

One in every six large companies now offers health benefits to their workers' same-sex domestic partners, up from one in eight last year, according to human resources consulting firm William M. Mercer. That's the largest one-year jump since Mercer began tracking the data in 1996. Of firms not offering the benefits, 30% said they were concerned health care costs would increase, more than half cited a lack of interest among workers, and 21% said they had moral objections. For more information about these benefits, visit the Domestic Partner Benefits section of ATMP's Resources page.

Federal Workers Won't Receive DP Long-Term Health Benefits

The Bush administration's Office of Personnel Management decided not to grant long-term health care benefits to domestic partners of the nation's 1.8 million federal workers. Although Congress had given the agency authority to extend the benefits, OPM director Kay Cole James reportedly decided against it. The decision came one day after the American Medical Association passed a resolution encouraging employers to offer domestic partner health benefits. D.C., Washington City, Minnesota To Offer DP Benefits A new law allows Washington, D.C. to fund a program that will give domestic partners of city employees access to health benefits. An act to allow the benefits first passed in 1992, but for nearly a decade, Congress blocked the district from using any local or federal funds to implement the law. D.C. now joins 130 other state and local governments that offer domestic partner benefits for their public employees. The Burian, Washington City Council voted to extend benefits to the domestic partners of employees. City officials called it a relatively minor expense that will help attract and retain good employees. The same-sex partners of Minnesota's Senators and state employees will now be eligible to receive domestic partner health benefits under a new contract. Governor Jesse Ventura proposed the benefits. Some legislators objected because equivalent different-sex couples would not be eligible.

New York and Albany Counties Offer DP Benefits

The Albany County Legislature approved domestic partner medical benefits for county employees. The same-sex and different-sex partners of county employees in Snohomish County, Washington will be able to receive health benefits under a new contract. New Jersey Newspapers, Florida Sheriff Offer Inclusive DP Benefits Employees of North Jersey Media Group will be able to add same-sex and different-sex partners to their medical and dental insurance policies under a new policy. The benefits manager for the group said, "It was requested by many employees." The Palm Beach, Florida County Sheriff's Office will also offer inclusive benefits to its employees. The Sheriff said he made the decision because, "It was the right thing to do." Five thousand other Palm Beach employees outside the sheriff's office will not be eligible for the benefits.

Quoteworthy

"We are so accustomed to thinking of marriage as something women need to do, a favor that men might or might not bestow, that we have not yet assimilated how decisively the balance of power has shifted, how far the 'economy of gratitude' has been redistributed between the genders."

- Susan Maushart, Wifework
(2001)