

July 2001

Alternatives to Marriage Update:

July 2001

In this issue:

Around the Alternatives to Marriage Project

- ATMP Adds Voice of Concern about Wade Horn
- Statistics Web Page Launched
- ATMP Helps "Marriage" Educators Plan Inclusive Programs
- Welcome to Summer Intern

In the Media

Book Buzz: Here Comes the Bride

Tidbits

Sizzling Statistics

News From the United States

News From Around the World

Domestic Partner News (U.S.)

Heaps of Thank Yous

Quoteworthy

Around the Alternatives to Marriage Project

ATMP Adds Voice of Concern about Wade Horn

The Alternatives to Marriage Project added its name to a long list of organizations opposing the nomination of Wade Horn as Assistant Secretary for Family Support at the Department of Health and Human Services. The letter, which was distributed to members of the Senate Finance Committee, explains how Horn's recommendations to "promote marriage" would penalize unmarried families.

Statistics Web Page Launched

Facts and figures aficionados will be excited about the latest addition to the ATMP website: an up-to-date list of statistics about unmarried people and relationships. We expect the page to have particular value to students and journalists who often contact us seeking facts. Our Experts Speak page is also updated regularly with comments from experts that support ATMP's positions.

ATMP Helps "Marriage" Educators Plan Inclusive Programs

At the recent Smart Marriages, Healthy Families conference in Orlando, Florida, ATMP co-founder Marshall Miller and therapists Leslie Bennett and Dawn Liphrott presented a workshop called "Relationship Education for Everyone." The workshop, which was mentioned in a Boston Globe article about the conference, explored how "marriage" education can benefit people in relationships who choose not to marry or cannot marry, and discussed strategies to make programs more inclusive.

Welcome to Summer Intern

ATMP is thrilled to welcome Wendy Layton, a senior at Smith College who is our talented summer intern. In her first weeks Wendy has been replying to requests for information, doing research, helping with fundraising, updating our website, and generally making herself invaluable. Thanks, Wendy!

In the Media

Columnist Clarence Page Supports ATMP's Point

In June syndicated columnist Clarence Page gave a nod of approval to ATMP executive director Dorian Solot's observation that the marriage rate alone may not be the best indicator of how a society is doing. Solot pointed out that in some countries, child well-being is high despite low marriage

rates, and said, "I'm interested in how the children are doing, not how marriage is doing." Page writes, "She makes a good point."

Papers and Radio Around Country Feature ATMP

This month ATMP was mentioned or quoted in the national Associated Press, The Boston Globe, the San Francisco Chronicle, the National Journal, the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, Women's E-News, the Improper Bostonian, In the Fray, and Creative Loafing (Charlotte, NC). In addition, Newsweek ran a letter to the editor from Miller and ATMP board member Ashton Applewhite praising the magazine for its inclusion of unmarried two-parent families in its recent issue on single mothers, and radio stations KGO San Francisco and Brian's Beat in Massachusetts interviewed Miller.

We post notices of many articles like these on the ATMP homepage as they appear, so check it for regular updates. You can read some of these articles and columns:

Creative Loafing , "Tying the Knot: Is Marriage Outdated?"

Associated Press, "Census: Age of First Marriage Up"

Clarence Page column, "Searching for Your 'Soul Mate'"

Women's E-News, "Fatherhood Movement Has Range of Ideology, Agenda"

In the Fray, "Today I Met the Boy I'm Not Going to Marry"

Book Buzz

Here Comes the Bride: Women, Weddings, and the Marriage Mystique,
by Jaclyn Geller (Four Walls Eight Windows, 2001)

Reviewed by Marshall Miller

Author Jaclyn Geller leaves no doubt as to how she feels about marriage: "We must... adopt the more aggressive stance that, 'it's not okay to be married,'" she writes. Geller's book *Here Comes the Bride* is her means to that end. Whether you share Geller's feelings about marriage, the book is a lively read, particularly for those who love insights on how our culture views marriage, weddings, and contemporary romantic life. Part historical outlook, part cultural criticism, *Here Comes The Bride* is blessed with Geller's brilliant ability to coin a phrase: she calls honeymoons "erotic tourism for the newly married" and describes women like herself as "spinster by choice."

Geller has a Ph.D. candidate's passion for 50-cent words and occasionally overstates her case (she makes several references to "ever-escalating divorce statistics" when in reality, divorce rates have been level and even falling slightly for two decades). But don't let that get in the way of a smart critique of why marriage's allure. Geller writes, "Matrimony's continuing allure, in the twenty-first century, when women have achieved reproductive choice and the actuality of political representation, educational inclusion, and professional mobility is something of a mystery." She explores that mystery for us, and does so in a book that is at times shockingly insightful, at times laugh-out-loud entertaining, and often both.

(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!) You can read the book reviews in archived issues of our newsletter.

Tidbits

Childfree Couples Only for Temptation 2

Casting calls are underway for the second season of Temptation Island, the TV show where singles in bathing suits attempted to seduce committed, monogamous unmarried couples. This time, the strict rules are that all applicants be unmarried and not have any children. One couple from the first season was kicked off the show after it was discovered they had a child, though the couple maintains that producers knew about the child all along.

Saddam Offers Employees Financial Incentive to Marry

As part of his efforts to promote encourage early marriage, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein has said he will give \$1,100 to any unmarried presidential employee who marries within one year. A symposium is being held in Baghdad to help "enhance awareness" in young Iraqi men and women of the "social, moral, religious and health benefits of early marriage."

Sizzling Statistics

U.S. Marries More, Divorces More Than Europe

Given political movements to promote marriage in the United States, it is interesting to note that a new report shows the U.S. already has a far higher marriage rate than any country in the European Union. The report on marriage and divorce in the EU between 1989 and 1999 found that EU countries' marriage rate (number of marriages per 1,000 people) is 5.1, compared to 8.4 in the U.S. But the U.S.'s divorce rate is also much higher than the EU's: 4.2 compared to 1.8. The numbers suggest that the challenge is not how to convince more people to get married, but how to help people create healthy, stable relationships.

U.S. in Middle for Unmarried Birth Rate

In the United States, 33% of babies are born to unmarried parents. Contrary to popular opinion, we are not alone in this statistic -- in fact, many European countries have a higher portion of their babies born to unmarried people. Iceland (62%), Sweden (55%), Norway (49%), Denmark (45%), France (41%), the UK (39%) and Finland (39%) all have higher rates.

The lowest rate of unmarried births in Europe were in Greece (4%), Italy (9%), and Switzerland (10%).

You can read country-by-country data on both of the items above at <http://europa.eu.int/com/m/eurostat/Public/datashop/print-product/EN?catalogue=Eurostat&product=1-12062001-EN-AP-EN&mode=download>

Over a Quarter of American Adults Have Never Married

New Census data finds that in 2000, 31% of men and 25% of women ages 15 and over had never married. In a comparison of households with married couples versus unmarried different-sex partners, the Census finds that 46% of married couples have children under 18, and 41% of unmarried partner households do. Compared to married couples, unmarried male-female partners are more likely to have a woman with more education and who earns more than the man, more likely to have both partners employed, and more likely to be of different races. The report is available at <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hh-fam.html> .

Census Finds Large Increases in Same-Sex Partner Households

The Census has released detailed information for 21 states so far, showing large increases in the number of same-sex partner households, and providing more information about the broader "unmarried partner" category. In the first 21 states, on average same-sex partners made up 11% of unmarried partner households, while 89% were different-sex unmarried partners. The rate of growth of same-sex partner households was quite high, ranging from 66% growth in Washington, D.C. to 781% growth in Delaware. This may be because more couples felt comfortable "coming out" on Census forms and because for the first time the Census is re-classifying those who said they were same-sex spouses as unmarried partners.

Study Finds Most Bush Aides Married

A new study analyzing the demographics of President Bush's choices for key governmental posts found that 40% of the women employed are unmarried, while only 10% of the men are.

Most Civil Unions Obtained by Non-Vermonters

Eleven months after Vermont's civil unions law took effect, giving the state-granted rights of marriage to same-sex couples who get them -- 2,043 civil unions have taken place, according to the state's Department of Vital Statistics. Some 430 couples are Vermonters, while 1,613 couples have come from out-of-state (even though other states may not recognize the unions). Two-thirds are female couples. These days, The Burlington Free Press and The Rutland Herald routinely print announcements of civil unions using the same format used for wedding notices, and community registers include listings of civil unions along with marriages, births, and deaths.

News From the United States

Some Southern Baptists Provide Housing for Cohabitators To Live Apart

At the Southern Baptist Convention, Rev. Tom Elliff recommended that other Southern Baptist preachers offer the same kind of premarital counseling he does in his Oklahoma church. It begins by asking couples if they are living together; if they are, the church provides additional housing so they can live apart until they are married. "Cohabitation is not the plan of God," Elliff said.

Woman Faces Loss of Day Care Due to Cohabitation

A long-time licensed home-based daycare provider faces losing her license because she lives with an unmarried partner in Virginia, where cohabitation is illegal. The couple have lived together for 16 years, and she has been providing day care for more than 30. Although she has always listed her partner on her license renewal applications, this is the first time a state inspector has questioned the situation. With the support of the parents of the children she cares for, the woman plans to fight the issue with the help of the American Civil Liberties Union. You can read a list of the states where cohabitation is illegal on our Fun Facts page.

Students Earn Right to Sue School for Housing Discrimination

New York's highest court has ruled that students at Yeshiva University have the right to sue the Orthodox Jewish university for the right to live with a same-sex partner in school housing reserved for married couples. The school had argued that the housing policy does not discriminate against gays because unmarried heterosexual couples are also not allowed to live

together.

News From Around the World

Canada Says Unmarried Couple Are Spouses for Taxes

A Canadian court has found that a woman who lives with her long-term unmarried male partner must be considered married for tax purposes. The couple have lived together for more than ten years, have a three year old child, and own a house, and the woman says she is opposed to marriage on philosophical grounds. But the court has re-labeled her a "spouse," which will reduce her tax benefits. She has appealed the decision.

UAE Preacher Deported on Cohabitation Charge

The preacher of a mosque in the United Arab Emirates has been sentenced to one month in prison, 90 lashes, and deportation for spending time alone with a woman. The couple were charged with adultery and cohabitation after the police were tipped off that they were alone in a friend's home together.

Jesuit Magazine Recommends Regulation of Cohabitation

A mid-June editorial in an Italian Jesuit magazine says that the Italian parliament should write legislation to regulate the rights and responsibilities of same-sex and different-sex unmarried couples. The editorial said that cohabitation is "a social phenomenon" that should be regulated, particularly to prevent unmarried couples from adopting children.

Chinese Man Jailed for Living with Unmarried Partner

A Shanghai man has become the first person to be jailed under a Chinese law which redefined bigamy to include married people who live with an unmarried partner. A 25 year old man was sentenced to six months in prison after admitting that he had moved in with his female partner nine months after marrying another woman. The National People's Congress has rejected calls to declare all adultery illegal.

UNICEF Asks India to End Child Marriages

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is appealing to the Indian government to put an end to child weddings, which are still common in Rajasthan, a part of India. Although the legal age for marriage in the country is 18 for women and 21 for men, 17% of women are married before age 10, some as infants and toddlers. Unmarried girls are considered a risk; once they are married they become the responsibility of the husband's family. UNICEF says child marriages end the girls' chances of getting an education and makes teenage pregnancy "almost inevitable."

Belgium May Remove Marital Status Distinctions from Tax Code

Belgium's lower house of parliament overwhelmingly approved a tax reform that will put an end to different treatment of married and unmarried couples. The proposal is expected to go to the Senate later this month.

Activist Proposes Legislation To Recognize Unmarried Partners Fairly

British gay rights campaigner Peter Tatchell has called for an Unmarried Persons Act which would allow unmarried same-sex and different-sex couples to choose from "a menu of rights to create a partnership agreement tailor-made to meet their own particular needs." He says that because of the increasing numbers of unmarried partners, "fairness demands a new framework of legal rights to recognize and protect all unmarried couples, both gay and heterosexual."

British Leader Says Gov't Should Teach Children About Marriage

In his first speech as Home Secretary, David Blunkett said it is crucial to teach children about the importance of marriage. His speech endorsed the idea that the state has a role to play in personal relationships. Blunkett's predecessor rejected pressure to include a declaration in the government's White Paper that marriage was best for raising children. He is divorced but stayed with his wife to raise their three children.

New Zealand Politician to Propose Bill to Recognize Unmarried Partners

New Zealand legislator Tim Barnett is working on legislation that would allow same-sex and different-sex unmarried partners to gain the rights of married couples by officially registering their relationships. He hopes to have the proposed Civil Union Bill introduced to Parliament next year.

Domestic Partner News (U.S.)

Furman University, Arizona Town, Others to Offer DPs

Furman University, a private university with a history of ties to the Baptist Church, will become the first college in South Carolina to offer medical, dental, and life insurance policies to the domestic partners of its faculty and staff. Duke University in North Carolina and Emory University in Georgia, considered academic competitors of Greenville-based Furman, instituted similar policies in 1995.

The Scottsdale, Arizona City Council voted to provide health benefits to the same-sex and different-sex domestic partners of city employees, making Scottsdale the fourth city in the state to extend such benefits. The new offering is part of an effort to draw top job candidates to the city, which has experienced a 38 percent drop in the number of applicants for municipal jobs over the past five years.

Other employers that recently announced or implemented DP benefits include Allegheny College, Bank One, Cablevision Systems, ING Group, Intira Corporation, Montgomery County, MD (extended benefits to include different-sex partners of police employees), and The Progressive Corporation

Court Upholds San Francisco's Equal Benefits Law

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld San Francisco's 1997 landmark equal benefits law, requiring city contractors to provide the same benefits to employees' unmarried partners as they offer to spouses. The court rejected arguments by Rev. Pat Robertson's attorneys for an Ohio electrical company that the law was unconstitutional because it interfered with interstate commerce. Over 2,700 employers began offering domestic partner benefits as a result of the law, and several other cities and counties have since passed similar legislation.

Washington Court to Decide Vancouver's DP Benefits

Washington's state Supreme Court heard arguments in a conservative group's

legal challenge to Vancouver's domestic partner benefits program and is expected to rule in the fall. Vancouver extended its family benefits plan to the unmarried partners of all city employees in 1998. The case's funders include a nonprofit group founded by James Dobson, who is head of Focus on the Family; Don Wildmon, head of the American Family Association; and James Kennedy, who runs Coral Ridge Ministries.

Thanks to Wendy Layton for her help with compiling the news and statistics in this issue! If you'd like to learn about becoming a volunteer news compiler for a future issue of the Update (we find the articles, you edit them by email from any location), contact us.

Heaps of Thank You's

Last month's fundraising mailing left our office in record time thanks to the energetic group that volunteered before and during our mailing party: Brie Bourn, Pete Chvany, Martha Ehrenfeld, Lauren, Ulla Figwer, Woody Glenn, Dave Goss, Alan Hamilton, John Kilguss, Emma Lathan, Wendy Layton, Pam Williams, and Nicholas Willis. Thanks, too, to Rev. David Olson and the Community Church of Boston for letting us use their beautiful space. If you'd like to lend a hand for upcoming mailings in Boston, drop us a line!

Continued thanks to of E. and R. Reid Meyers, who listed ATMP in the gift registry for their recent wedding! We have received several generous donations in their honor.

You can show your commitment to fairness while you celebrate your relationship -- contact us if you'd like to learn about designating ATMP as a charity for your commitment ceremony or wedding!

The Alternatives to Marriage Project has modified its system of acknowledging donors. Those who make gifts to the organization will now be named and thanked in our annual report rather than in the monthly Update.

The Alternatives to Marriage Project is funded primarily by individuals who care about marital status fairness. You can help make a difference for unmarried people by making a tax-deductible contribution of whatever size you can afford. You can send a check to ATMP, P.O. Box 991010, Boston, MA 02199, or call us (518-462-5600) to charge your donation to your credit card. You can also show your ongoing support for ATMP making a monthly or quarterly credit card gift. Thank you!

Quoteworthy

"If marriage were a solution to poverty, it wouldn't take an act of Congress to promote it."

- Patricia Ireland, president of the National Organization for Women, on proposed bills that would fund marriage promoting bills as a way to way to help poor families. At the NOW conference, June 30, 2001.