EDITOR’S NOTES

COVENANT VS. CONSUMER MARRIAGES/ PARENTS DO MATTER/ 
KIDS WHO MISBEHAVE NEED TEACHING/ CHOOSING SHOWS 
WITHOUT EVEN A LITTLE INAPPROPRIATE SEX

You're probably as weary as I am of all the misinformation we are fed every day—such as the recent so-called scholarly conclusion that parents don't matter much in children's lives. From common sense, you know this is ridiculous. You'll find solid evidence that parents do matter in this issue's lead article by Professor Craig Hart.

Then, whether you have young, middle-size, grown, or almost grown children— or are looking forward to these experiences— I think you'll want to read the excellent article about how important it is to teach kids who misbehave instead of yelling and administering harsh punishments. I wish I had understood this a long time ago, along with the fact that kids don't learn much from someone whom they perceive as the enemy. This is why Richard Young, et al., focus on teaching and why I talk so much about mini-scoldings and mini-penalties. Even if you don't have youngsters around your place right now, don't miss this one.

If you're as appalled as we are by the frightening statistics about marriages staying together, you'll be interested in Bill Doherty's comparisons of today's typical consumer marriages to those with real covenants. We are privileged to have this article by one of the country's most notable professors of family social science. You'll smile at the lines Bill uses from consumer advertising to drive home his points. Then you'll gulp as you see some of the tragic realities that are playing out across the stages of American towns and cities when people think little more about trading in a marriage partner than they do taking a television set or bedspread back to Wal-Mart. Professor Doherty's article ends with these words, "We have to unleash the human capacity for sustained moral commitment from the tentacles of the marketplace that is slowly choking it, generation by generation. The stakes could not be higher." We agree. Some won't get it—but some of society's biggest problems would be solved by understanding and following through with these three words—Marriage, Covenants, Commitments.

Now, you may think these notes are enough from me. But following these excellent articles, you'll find my commentary called "It's a good-show—except one little part." I'm scared to death about what these "one little parts" are teaching kids, and others—especially that it's okay to play around with sex and how to go about it. This commentary includes some sources that will help you find movies that are entertaining and decent. I hope these pages will help those you can reach to choose shows that are uplifting instead of destructive.

And on the inside back cover you'll find an exciting news brief about the recent statement about the "Marriage Movement." Our congratulations go out to the one hundred initial signers of the principles for this much-needed movement. And thanks for all the calls, e-mails, and letters expressing appreciation for our publication.

Glen C. Griffin, M.D.

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Over the past decade, a growing number of scholarly voices in North America have suggested that parents don't matter much in children's lives. I asked my 17-year-old son what he thought about this notion. He quickly replied, "That is the most ridiculous thing I have ever heard. How are kids suppose to learn how to get along in life without instruction from their parents?" I agree and view the perspective that parents don't matter as a serious threat to children's well-being. Parents and societies that buy into this thinking will be more likely to abdicate important responsibilities that are vital to fostering healthy development in children.

Since erroneous conclusions about parenting and family life have recently been published in leading scholarly outlets, I'll present some facts that combat the myth that parents don't matter. This myth calls into question the validity of family structures that are vital to fostering positive child outcomes. These include cohabiting couples, single mothers, and gay and lesbian parents.

However, abundant evidence indicates that "natural family" structures, which include married mothers and fathers living under the same roof, are more likely to provide stable and secure environments where children can flourish. Natural family structures benefit nearly every aspect of children's well-being, including greater educational opportunities, better emotional and physical health, less substance abuse, lower incidences of early sexual activity for girls, and less delinquency for boys.

Ample evidence suggests that some alternative family structures can do more harm than good. For example, U.S. data gathered in 1995 indicate that only 10 percent of children under age 18 in families with two married parents lived in poverty. Contrast this with 50 percent who lived with an unmarried mother. Contrary to arguments suggesting that single parenting is as optimal as any other family structure for child-rearing, the data on average suggest that married parents are in the best position to protect their children from poverty. This is particularly important, because poverty is a defining predictor of child academic and social problems, particularly when it is accompanied by frequent changes in residence and multiple intimate adult relationships. Despite the overwhelming challenges associated with single parenthood, I am impressed by many dedicated single parents who find ways to make things work out.

In light of evidence suggesting that
The single most important factor for diminishing delinquent behavior is the presence of the father in the home. Marriage is more likely to protect children from poverty, another angle taken by some academicians is to argue that it is the poverty, not just having a single parent, that poses the greatest risk for children. However, this argument overlooks a significant pool of data suggesting that, although the consequences of poverty and having a single parent are interrelated, each is a risk factor that has independent effects on negative outcomes in children.

Fathers and Mothers Make Unique Contributions to Child Development

Some who oppose heterosexual marriage downplay the importance of fathers in facilitating positive child development. They argue that men and women do not make unique contributions to children's lives. For example, it is suggested that because father absence is associated with other family instability indicators, like less family income, it is more likely that negative child developmental outcomes are due to the disruption of children's lives, rather than simply to the absence of their fathers. In fact, one study cited in the Silverstein and Auerbach paper suggests that a father may add to a family's cost of living because some fathers spend family financial resources on gambling, booze, and cigarettes, which also result in "increased women's workload and stress levels." My question to this is, do we throw away fathers just because of a few bad apples?

Opposing evidence indicates that the single most important factor (more relevant than family income) for diminishing delinquent behavior is the presence of the father in the home. In fact, delinquency is twice as high in cases where the father is absent than when he is present. Boyfriends do not seem to be a substitute for absent biological fathers either, since delinquency rates are lower when the mother is alone with her son than when she has invited a man to live with her.

Significant research indicates that fathers are more physically playful with their children than mothers. Fathers elicit more positive and less negative emotion from children during play, which has been shown to help children learn to read social cues and regulate their emotions in ways that can result in more positive social adjustment with peers. Fathers who are patient and understanding of children's emotions have children with similar positive social outcomes. Studies, such as our research conducted in Russia, have shown stronger links in these regards for fathers than for mothers. Greater playfulness, patience, and understanding with children on the part of fathers are associated with less child aggressive behavior with peers at school.

Fathers provide unique contributions to children's development besides reducing poverty and being playful and responsive. For example, father presence can provide daughters with a stable relationship with a non-exploitive adult male who loves and respects them. Security and trust derived from this relationship help girls avoid precocious sexual activity and exploitive relationships with other males. Fathers contribute to core aspects of children's stability, self-confidence, self-regulation, and self-identities in profound ways.

In other domains of parent-child interaction, mothers seem to matter more. For example, in a study we conducted in Louisiana, we found mothers (as compared with fathers) had greater success in reasoning with children about consequences for their actions. Children who had more reasoning-oriented mothers engaged in more social, cooperative play and were more accepted by peers. These findings suggest that mothers and fathers do indeed make unique contributions to children's development.

Parenting Makes a Difference in Children's Behavior Outside the Home

Recent critiques of developmental research on parenting conclude that there is no evidence that parenting in the home...
is related to ways children behave outside of the home. *Newsweek* as well as other prominent media outlets ran cover stories on this landmark conclusion. However, they overlooked scores of scientific studies demonstrating that parenting styles, as associated with children’s social development, are crucial for optimal growth in children. Children who have social skill deficiencies that stem from poor parenting are often at risk for a host of academic, emotional, and behavioral difficulties throughout their lives.

Parenting plays a vital role in children’s social adjustment outside the home. Numerous intervention studies show that positive changes in parenting behavior are reflected in corresponding changes in how children interact with others inside and outside of the home. Other studies show that parents who are more coercive tend to have children who are more coercive and aggressive with peers, but parents who are warmer and more responsive tend to have children who are more cooperative and sociable with peers. Evidence also indicates that the direction of effect goes more from parent to child than from child to parent, at least in terms of parental influence maintaining child behavior patterns. These types of findings hold up across diverse socioeconomic and cultural groups regardless of research methods used.

**Parents provide far more influence than they have recently been given credit for.***

Scholars’ conclusions as to how much parents matter in children’s lives range from the view that optimal parenting is vital, to the perspective that an “average expectable” environment provided by parents is all that is necessary for most children, to the notion that parents are not essential to children’s development. With regard to the latter view, one major argument stems from the notion that only genetics and peers matter. According to this philosophy, whatever genetics isn’t accounting for in development should be attributed to peer-group influence, not to parents. I have no problem with the notion that genetics and peers both matter, as I will illustrate. However, parents provide far more influence than they have recently been given credit for.

**Peers.** Although scientific understanding of exactly how peers socialize peers is limited, peers do influence other children’s language development, clothing
However, I am not aware of any studies with tendencies towards aggression, then, for good or for ill. There is indeed influence. Peers are in total control by shyness, sociability, impulsiveness, higher not come into play. In fact, recent suggesting that children come into the world genetic, and child temperament research of parents do have a direct influence on whom their children play with and how they interact with peers. Our research shows that active parental involvement in initiating, planning, and supervising peer contacts with young children is associated with social developmental outcomes in a variety of cultural settings, including China, Russia, and the United States.

Some writers also indicate that by the time children reach the age of ten or so, parents have no control over peer-group influence. Peers are in total control by then, for good or for ill. There is indeed scientific evidence suggesting that adolescents choose friends who can influence them in positive or negative ways. However, I am not aware of any studies suggesting that parental influence does not come into play. In fact, recent research has reached quite the opposite conclusion. Parents who are emotionally connected with their teens, set regulatory limits, and foster autonomy in teen decision making tend to have adolescents who are more careful in their selection of peers. This, in turn, has been found to be a strong deterrent to delinquent behavior. Alternatively, negative parenting that includes lack of peer monitoring appears to work through deviant peer associations to produce antisocial behavior.

Genetics. Molecular genetic, behavioral genetic, and child temperament research suggest that children come into the world with tendencies towards aggression, shyness, sociability, impulsiveness, higher or lower activity and emotionality levels, and even religiosity. I believe that many of these tendencies stem from spiritual predispositions as well.

Given different inborn predispositions, children have long been thought to influence their child-rearing environment in a variety of different ways. Because of this, children to some degree “select, modify, and even create their environment.” For example, children by their natures can evoke different parenting patterns for different siblings in the same family. This was illustrated in a recent study finding that adopted children who are at genetic risk for antisocial behavior are more likely to evoke more negative parenting from their adoptive parents. Another recent study suggests that children with inhibited temperaments are more likely to evoke more overprotective parenting in ways that serve to maintain shy and withdrawn behavior. Yet other studies suggest that sociable children are more likely to evoke more parental encouragement for pursuing peer-group interests. However, children are not in total control over parents. Children and parents likely respond to and modify the behavior of the other, illustrating that parent-child interactions are dynamic and transactional in nature.

Molecular genetics research focuses on identifying new genes, discovering their effects, and determining how they effect development. Genetic predispositions are in no way deterministic. Molecular geneticists point out that most personality characteristics are due to a highly complex interplay between multifacted genetic and environmental influences. Genetic markers discovered by molecular geneticists thus far account for only a small proportion of variance in certain child behaviors. Even though ongoing gene mapping should increase our understanding and the new knowledge will be exciting and useful in many ways, it will be limited. Even if we come to know with certainty the probabilities for behavioral risk or childhood abilities associated with certain constellations of genes, we still would likely not know why some individuals are able to override certain biological tendencies and others are not. This would help us understand how individuals exercise their own agency with regard to how they might choose to be influenced by peers or other factors.

Behavioral genetics. A less direct but viable way of assessing genetic influence is through behavioral genetic research, which suggests that variation among individuals can be due to both genetic and environmental sources. Results of behavioral genetic studies using twin or adoption methods typically suggest that many personality characteristics can be partially accounted for by genetic factors. Environmental sources that touch individuals in unique ways are referred to as non-shared environment effects. These factors are not specified in behavioral genetic studies and could be due to parental or peer influences that help make children different from each other. Since genetic factors can vary considerably across siblings in the same family, genetic predispositions can elicit different responses from parents in ways that result in different child outcomes. Or they can serve to predispose children towards
responding to similar environmental influences in different ways. This represents two different ways that parental treatment can result in non-shared effects.

For example, a more spirited child may elicit rules and enforcement from parents in an effort to regulate behavior more than her more-conforming sibling does. However, parents may still try to interact with both children in warm and nurturing ways. In response, the extra rules for the one child may evoke more oppositional behavior directed towards the parent from the difficult child than from the easy-going sibling. Likewise, warmth and nurturance may be interpreted by a more difficult child as license to get away with whatever he wants, while the more conforming sibling may respond to this by being even more open to parental input and direction.

Peer effects might also be assumed in this non-shared effects category. For example, when playing baseball with the same group of peers, a more athletically inclined child who performs better will likely evoke more positive reactions from peers than a sibling who can’t catch the ball whenever it comes his way. This differential experience with the same peers may generate more self-confidence in one sibling and greater feelings of inadequacy in the other. Even if the peers respond similarly to both siblings and are tolerant and affirming towards the less athletic child, he may still feel less adequate due to perceptions of his own athletic skill.

Environmental sources that operate to make siblings alike are referred to as shared environment effects. This could include parental and peer behavior that has a similar effect on children, or differential treatment of children that yields similar outcomes. For example, siblings are more likely to adopt the religious values and political orientations of their parents, despite their different personalities. Likewise, the tolerant behavior and encouragement of peers may inspire confidence and greater success in playing baseball for a less athletic child. This may eventually serve to help him or her become more athletic, like a more athletic sibling. Even different treatment of children can result in similar outcomes. For example, rather than creating more rebellious behavior for one sibling versus another, more rules and limit-setting for a difficult child may serve to foster more conformance in ways similar to the child’s already easy-going sibling. Likewise, less tolerance by peers may serve to inspire a less-athletic sibling to work harder to be accepted by them. These examples illustrate that both peers and family can contribute to both shared and non-shared effects.

Non-shared environmental influence surfaces in all behavioral genetic studies. In the critique of parenting research, sibling differences reflected in non-shared effects were attributed only to forces outside the family: namely, peers. It should be kept in mind that classical behavioral genetic designs can only say that many sibling similarities may be primarily due to genetics. However, the root causes of sibling differences are unspecified. Contrary to the recently promoted assumption that only peers matter beyond genetics, this leaves ample room for the importance of parents as contributors to child outcomes as well. And behavioral genetic research does not suggest that parents don’t matter. Rather, it indicates that many things parents do similarly with siblings often do not make
Good parenting is difficult but fulfilling work.

How Do Parents Matter?

In the recent highly publicized critique of parenting research that concluded parents don’t matter, it was declared that children and parents resemble each other for genetic reasons only. Cordial parents have cordial children and difficult parents have difficult children. This is far too simplistic an explanation. Some difficult sibling personalities the same.

Even though children may share constellations of genes with parents and siblings and somewhat similar environments with them, their natures can create different environmental niches that can contribute to declining resemblance over time. Depending on temperamental characteristics and other factors such as birth order, the ages of siblings, and exposure to peers, children in the same family can experience “non-shared” aspects of their child-rearing environments. Even identical twins, who share the same genetic attributes, do not turn out to be entirely similar because of the different sets of experiences from which they build their environmental niches.

parents have cordial children and some cordial parents have difficult children. This critique of parenting research also noted that siblings in the same family who have the same parents are likely to have quite different personalities. If so, let me suggest three specific ways that parents do matter, given that different child personalities may exert different influences on their socialization environment in ways that can make children different.

First, parents matter by teaching morals and values. Crucial scientific evidence indicates that shared family influences, stemming from parental modeling and encouragement of the same moral, religious, and political interests and values in the home, are as important or even more important than genes in creating likenesses between brothers and sisters. Thus, the vital role of parents in teaching children moral and religious values to help them make wise choices in the face of their own biological proclivities or peer group pressure cannot be underestimated. This evidence tends to be overlooked by proponents of the view that parents don’t matter.

Second, parents can actively help children overcome less desirable inborn characteristics. As I noted earlier, not only do children influence parents, but parents influence children. More than 100 years ago, Brigham Young, after whom Brigham Young University is named, encouraged parents to “study their [children’s] dispositions and their temperaments, and deal with them accordingly.” In line with this, scientific evidence is emerging to suggest that active parenting styles, for example, can enhance or diminish children’s biological predispositions. There is plasticity in inborn predispositions. Genes do not necessarily determine behavior.

Parents who actively work to adjust their parenting styles favorably, increase their sensitivity and nurturing involvement, and accompany those attributes by firm limit-setting and cohesive family relationships, can help diminish difficult child behavioral dispositions such as hyperactivity, antisocial tendencies, and negative emotionality. More inhibited children are more likely to develop internal regulation mechanisms (or a conscience) that play out in socially skilled behavior if their parents use gentle discipline rather than more punitive forms of control. Alternatively, problems may result by not adjusting parenting styles to meet the child’s needs. Parents giving in to punitive control urges or overprotective inclinations in response to spirited or inhibited child characteristics can worsen the behavior of difficult children and evoke more difficult behavior in easier-to-rear children. But when parents change their behavior in positive ways, child behavior in and out of the home changes accordingly.

Third, parents can matter by enhancing many positive inborn capabilities that different children bring with them into the world by providing opportunities for further development. Social, academic, athletic, artistic, spiritual, and musical domains are examples of areas where parents can provide opportunities for enhancement. This can be done by providing opportunities to practice social skills with peers, reading to children when they are young, allowing children to participate in organized sports, emphasizing spirituality through practicing family religious traditions, and providing art and music learning opportunities. Talents along these lines that are less complete to begin with can also be developed with parental encouragement and the provision of opportunity.

In conclusion, good parenting is difficult but fulfilling work. The pattern of interaction with individual children and the climate created by parenting styles in the home can enhance or mitigate inborn child characteristics. Also, what parents teach their children by precept and example about moral and religious values help the children make wise choices, even in the face of biological urges or peer influences that would have them do otherwise. Finally, parents can make a difference by providing opportunities that capitalize on individual
strengths that children have. Married heterosexual parents matter; fathers and mothers do make unique contributions to children’s development; what parents do with children in the home matters outside of the home; and genetics, peers, and particularly parents are important in children’s lives.

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Selected references listed below, many of which stem from our research program at BYU, overview research that supports numerous points made in this article. For an extensive bibliography of scientific studies supporting these views, see the expanded version of this paper at www.worldcongress.org

 Portions of this expanded paper were delivered in a speech at World Congress of Families II in Geneva Switzerland, November 1999.


Rowe, D. C. The Limits of Family Influence: Gene, Experience, and Behavior (New York: Guilford Press, 1994).


Parents typically love their children and are deeply concerned for their well-being. However, parents rarely have any formal training concerning how to raise children; too many go into parenthood with significant questions unanswered: What is the best way to teach children? How do we help them avoid life's pitfalls? How do we help them develop high standards, values, social skills, and other characteristics needed for success? How do we discipline them in a loving, positive manner? If parents do not know how to respond to misbehavior, they sometimes revert to coercive methods such as harsh punishments or threats. Unfortunately, too many children grow up in an environment where coercive, punitive disciplinary practices have unintentionally become the family norm. We need to think seriously about the consequences of such environments.

A Perspective for Viewing Punishments and Environments

For a moment, think of threats and punishment as electric shocks. Most of us have experienced an electric shock. We immediately pull away, trying to escape the pain. As a result of the pain we instinctively try to avoid future shocks. Some shocks are mild and have little effect beyond mild irritation; others deliver a firm jolt. It's not necessarily the effect of a few mild shocks or a single strong shock that causes concern, but the frequency of occurrence. If we have regularly experienced shocks under certain conditions or in particular situations we develop automatic negative reactions to those circumstances.

Similarly, punishments may be mild—lightly stinging little reminders that some boundary of safety has been crossed or some
unwise action has been performed. Some punishments deliver a firm jolt—a sign that repetition of the behavior can be dangerous. Such mild or occasional shocks have been shown by research to be effective in reducing troublesome behavior. However, repeated incidences of harsh punishment might result in serious long-term effects: e.g., an aggressive teenager, a depressed and withdrawn child, or a dysfunctional family situation.2 Associating the family, particularly the parents, with pain, the child may avoid or defy, or both, anything related to the family situation. Even mild shocks such as criticism or reprimands, if experienced regularly over months and years, may cause negative associations resulting in negative attitudes: e.g., feelings of fear, guilt, stupidity, lack of self-confidence, hostility.3 Rather than creating home environments that invite youth to us, we may send them running away to escape and avoid shocks.

Identifying Risks

People think about and define punishment in different ways. When punishment is mentioned, some parents think about how they “grounded” their teenager last week. Others might think of spanking their 10-year-old son. Still others would focus on beatings or deprivations that might be classified as child abuse. We must consider the wide range of actions that come under the label of punishment before generalizing about the effects of punishment. Most caring adults abhor the use of harsh, abusive punishments, but have varied reactions to the effects and effectiveness of milder forms of punishment.

Psychologists often define punishment as the delivery of an aversive stimulus following a specific behavior, resulting in a decrease in future incidents of that specific behavior.4 Many psychologists recommend that parents respond to behavior problems with mild aversive stimuli—e.g., timeout, response cost or fines, loss of privileges—in connection with positive reinforcement for correct behavior. Studies have affirmed their effectiveness. But unfortunately, the use of punishment may be seductive because punishment often has an immediate desired effect: that is, it may temporarily stop the offensive behavior. When parents are successful in stopping a child’s misbehavior, even temporarily, the act of punishing that behavior is reinforced, and they are likely to continue to use punishment and threats of punishment in the future. And punishments may escalate in frequency and severity, particularly when administered by angry parents without any attempt at positive reinforcement.

Research done by Murray Sidman and others has demonstrated that instead of producing positive outcomes, punishing a child on a regular basis often produces undesirable side effects.5 Many adults fail to understand that children who are managed through punishment that is either continual or unduly harsh will often respond with antisocial behavior, including aggression.6 Typically these children attempt to escape and avoid the person delivering punishment. Not understanding how to avoid the shock within the situation, the child avoids the situation altogether. This side effect is potentially toxic because a loving, concerned parent may inadvertently drive the child away and lose future opportunities to have a positive influence on the child’s life. Such children often become non-compliant, aggressive, deviants. They escalate the contention that already exists in their homes.

The damage of the negative home environment soon extends beyond the home. The two major side effects of punishment, escape and avoidance, extend to school and on to society. Children who have become suspicious and fearful of their parents become suspicious of others as well. They don’t form or maintain friendships, and when they attend school their misbehavior creates negative relationships with teachers and peers.7 Parents, teachers, and other youth either avoid the contentious child or react negatively—reactions that only compound the problem. The child becomes more anti-social, avoiding caring individuals—such as parents, teachers, or counselors—who could assist in positive behavior change. These children gravitate to other anti-social youth.

Once the pattern of misbehavior, shocks, and escape or retribution followed by additional shocks has been established, it continues. Think of the many ways schools can deliver punishing shocks: Students are often laughed at and ridiculed, teachers may yell at them or make disparaging remarks, a child who doesn’t understand or can’t do the work receives a paper with a failing grade.
marked in red, or a discouraged and misbehaving student is sent to the office. The natural response is to avoid school. Go late, stuff, get sick—anything to keep away from the "shocks." Suspension from school is a welcome relief for some students, and may be for the teacher who gets her "shocks" from the misbehaving students.

But what is accomplished? Instead of learning how to handle life's shocks by adapting and problem solving, the student learns to distrust and avoid all sources of pain. According to Murray Sidman, we escape by tuning people out or by dropping out—dropping out of school, dropping out of the family, dropping out of society, or even dropping out in its ultimate form—suicide.

Creating a Safer Environment

If the home environment is rich in love, praise, and support, occasional use of reasonable punishment can help parents teach and direct a child. If the shock is mild, the child is reassured that the error resulting in the shock can be easily corrected. If someone who obviously loves the child soothes the pain, the brief pain is bearable and can be instructive.

Ezra Taft Benson suggested some of the components of this safe environment:

"Praise your children more than you correct them. Praise them for even their smallest achievements. Encourage your children to come to you for counsel with their problems and questions by listening to them every day." If children's interactions with their parents are predominantly positive, they do not automatically associate a shock with the parents' presence, nor do they avoid the relationship as one that inevitably results in pain. To establish this positive overall tone to the relationship, adults should try to have at least four to eight positive interactions with their child to offset each incident of criticism or punishment.

Tracing the Consequences of Unsafe Environments: A Case Study

Children's typical anti-social behavior patterns developed in harsh, negative environments can be seen in the following case study of a 13-year-old girl who casually announced to her school counselor, "I'm going to get pregnant."

"Why?" the counselor responded with a startled expression. Then the pain flowed from the troubled youth: "I hate school. The students make fun of me. I don't have any friends. The teachers yell at me and tell me I'm stupid. I'm always getting in trouble. But they won't let me drop out of school. If I get pregnant, they'll have to let me drop out."

And what about the home? Are "shocks" experienced there, or is home a refuge from pain and frustration? Ideally the home should be a refuge, but for many students the home is the place where the punishment began. The 13-year-old girl said to her counselor, "I hate my home and family. I can never satisfy my parents. They are always yelling at me. Sometimes when Dad drinks, he hits me. No one loves me or cares about me. If I get pregnant, I'll get married, leave home. Then I'll have someone to love me." Will life improve? Will the pain go away if this young woman gets pregnant? No, most likely it will increase. Are her perceptions of how painful school is and how unloved and abused she is at home accurate? Perhaps or perhaps not, but that doesn't really matter because she believes they are true. She feels the pain and wants to escape. She has neither the skills nor the inclination to handle the shocks in any other way.

Positive Alternatives

There are positive alternatives to
coercive parenting: ways to teach about electricity without administering deliberately abusive shocks.\(^1\) Even extreme, challenging antisocial behavior has been changed radically through positive approaches.\(^2\) Children rarely learn socially appropriate behaviors by being punished for misbehavior, particularly if the punishment is harsh or unreasonable. To correct misbehavior in positive, lasting ways, children need to be taught in a caring, nurturing manner. Reasonable punishment may be included with the teaching if it is appropriate to the situation and if the environment is positive. Children need to learn to handle the situations that result in shock so that they can deal constructively with such circumstances and do not need to avoid or withdraw from them.

There are many alternatives. We have selected three proven, powerful parenting strategies to discuss here: building relationships, teaching correct behavior, and strengthening behavior through positive feedback. These parenting strategies may be used alone or accompanied by mild forms of punishment administered without anger or coercive purposes.

Recognizing that Parents are Teachers

All parents are teachers. In fact, they constantly teach their children whether they recognize it or not. All of us teach by our actions, our example. Our teaching is more effective when we follow a few basic principles. First, we must remember that what we do speaks louder than what we say. Parents need to model correct, positive behavior. Second, we must treat those we teach with respect, especially our own children. We should speak to them in an appropriate tone of voice and make sure that our messages are clearly and precisely explained. Third, we should remember that learning best occurs under pleasant circumstances. When there is a positive relationship between a parent and a child, the child is far more likely to listen to the parent, value what the parent has to say, and accept the teaching. Positive relationships are the foundation for successful parent-child interactions and effective parental teaching.

Building Positive Relationships

Mutual trust, respect, and consideration characterize a positive parent-child relationship and create a home environment in which learning readily occurs. If a parent-child relationship is negative, possibly based on intimidation, power struggles, or manipulation, family members may spend most of their time and effort battling each other rather than engaging in positive interactions. Teaching and learning are not likely to occur under these negative conditions. Strong relationships facilitate learning in many ways. If a child feels comfortable in the presence of the parents, he or she will want to spend time with the parents and will naturally want to please them by doing what they request. A home environment that is positive will most likely increase opportunities for parental teaching, as children have more of a tendency to adopt the values of their parents when they trust and respect them.

Some people think that positive relationships occur naturally, and sometimes they do, but in most cases relationships require effort. First, the foundation for all relationships must be time. Time spent together. It is crucial that parents spend time with their children, not just "quality" time but "quantity" time. Family time is important, but individual one-on-one time is essential for developing and maintaining positive relationships. As parents we have to make sure that we are available when children want to talk and share their thoughts, not just when we feel we have time or when a period of time is convenient for us.

Parents must also be conscious of their attitudes and behavior patterns during time spent with their children. Research has demonstrated that certain adult behaviors destroy positive relationships...
While others build positive relationships. For example, when a young person shares experiences with an adult who displays anger, uses accusing or blaming statements, makes mean and insulting remarks, acts bossy, makes demands, and talks only about mistakes, relationships are quickly destroyed. On the other hand, when an adult speaks in a pleasant tone of voice, offers to help, compliments performance, treats the youth with fairness, shows concern and enthusiasm, and treats the child politely, relationships are strengthened. One of the most important positive behaviors is the way in which we listen to our children and pay attention to what they value and feel. As we spend time with them working, talking, playing, listening, and so forth, we should always be positive and provide caring, nurturing feedback. And of course humor is important in building relationships. We should joke and have fun, but we should make sure that our humor is free of put-downs and sarcasm.

**Teaching Correct Behavior**

Children need discipline. Specifically, they need clear expectations and standards provided by responsible adults to help guide and direct their lives. How do we effectively discipline? An important start is to think of discipline as teaching rather than punishing. The word **discipline** comes from the Latin word **disciplina**, meaning “teaching, learning.” Discipline shares a common root with the word **disciple**: “one who accepts and helps to spread the teachings of another.”

*Webster’s dictionary includes phrases such as “training that corrects, molds, or perfects the mental faculties or moral character” and “to train or develop by instruction and exercise, especially in self-control.”*  

*Roget’s Thesaurus lists the following synonyms: (nouns) self-control, self-restraint, diligence, drill, exercise, practice, training; (verbs) instruct, train, teach, educate, school, tutor, prepare, drill, practice.*  

The best discipline for misbehavior is to teach alternate positive behaviors. Once parents have recognized the importance of their teaching and have begun building positive relationships with their children, it is helpful for them to learn some teaching strategies to be more effective with their children. Modeling is an important way of communicating to our children which behaviors we hope they will learn. By using a skill ourselves, we show our children that the skill is natural and is important and useful to us. Modeling occurs constantly throughout the day, in all of our interactions. When we are teaching specific skills, we should model what we want our children to do and then ask them to practice what we have demonstrated. Having children role play or practice allows us to check the child’s understanding of what has been taught and assess his or her ability to use the skill correctly. Going through the skill as we watch also provides an opportunity for the child to ask questions that may make aspects of the skill easier or clarify ways the skill may be modified for different situations. As the child practices the skill following our example, we can provide additional feedback and correction if the skill or behavior is weak or incomplete in some ways.

In introducing a new skill, a parent must plan the process and allow sufficient time. Remember that learning doesn’t come through lecturing but through doing. So teaching interactions should be kept short and to the point. The following steps can be helpful when planning to directly teach a child a new social behavior.

1. **Name and describe the skill.**
2. Give the child a reason why the skill is important.
3. Model the skill.
4. Have the child practice the skill.
5. Give feedback and praise for engaging in the practice activities.

This initial teaching opportunity will probably be insufficient to make this new skill a natural, habitual behavior. Internalizing the skill will require a great deal of practice and feedback. Try to "catch" the child using the skill and reinforce with praise and feedback. In commenting on the specific steps of the skill, explain also why using the skill was important in that particular situation. Thus praise becomes additional instruction.

Perhaps an illustration will clarify this approach. After observing your child demanding things from other children or adults, you decide to teach the child to make a polite request. The first step is to check your own behavior: ask yourself if you are making polite requests or just issuing demands. If some correction is needed in your own behavior, start there before attempting to teach the child.

Once you are comfortable with modeling polite requests, schedule time to teach the child, even if it is only a period of five minutes. Begin your teaching by creating a pleasant environment: possibly commenting on several of the child's positive behaviors or empathizing with the challenges of the situation. Then get to the point of the lesson. It might sound something like this: "John, I want to talk to you about making polite requests when you want something from someone else. The best way to make a request is to do these things: (1) look the person in the eye; (2) say 'please' using a pleasant voice; (3) ask specifically for what you want; (4) say "thank you" after receiving it; or (5) if the person says "no" or doesn't do as you ask, accept the response and do not be rude. When we ask politely, people are more likely to agree to do as we ask." Then model making a polite request using the steps you have listed. Following the model, ask the child to make a polite request. If the child successfully demonstrates the behavior, give specific praise: i.e., "I like the way you looked at me, used a pleasant voice, said 'please,' made a polite request, and said 'thank you.'" If the child left out steps, first praise the parts that were correct, then point out the parts that were forgotten, and finally have the child practice again.

After teaching the child, watch for opportunities to give instructive praise. If you observe the child making a polite request of a friend, pull the child aside and say, "John, I liked the way you asked Bill if you could use his ball. You looked at him, you used a pleasant voice, you said 'please may I see the ball,' and then you said 'thanks' when he offered it to you. I am sure he lent you his ball because you made such a polite request." This method of praise provides both sincere positive feedback and an indirect reteaching of the skill.

We should anticipate that after our children have been taught they will still make mistakes. We can use corrective teaching following an application that was not correct. If the child is seen making a demand after being taught the skill for a polite request, this can be regarded as an opportunity for another teaching moment. Briefly restate what you saw, then review the skill for making a polite request and have the child practice it. Follow this practice with positive feedback and encouragement to use the skill in the future. Using this teaching approach may initially take time from the parent, but the rewards are great. The child becomes socially skilled, makes friends, gets along well with adults, and is set for success in life.

**Strengthening Behavior Through Positive Feedback**

Although providing positive feedback
Giving praise, or positive feedback, is an important component of effective teaching.

Dr. K. Richard Young is a professor of counseling psychology. Sharon Black is a writing consultant and editor, and Michelle Marchant is an instructor in counseling psychology at McKnight School of Education at Brigham Young University. Dr. Katherine Mitchem is an assistant professor of educational theory and practice at West Virginia University. Dr. Richard P. West is executive director of the Center for the School of the Future at Utah State University.

In summary, successful parenting requires diligent effort. If we avoid the use of punishment, particularly coercive forms, and focus on positive interactions, we will build strong, positive relationships while we teach high values and appropriate social behavior. We strengthen these behaviors through a steady diet of sincere, genuine praise. This combination is successful in both preventing and remedying misbehavior. Rather than administering deliberate shocks to help children avoid electrocution, teach them how to handle the equipment.

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ADVERTISERS KNOW A CULTURAL TREND WHEN THEY SEE ONE. A recent magazine ad pictures a new Honda Civic with the headline, “The sad thing is, it’ll probably be the HEALTHIEST RELATIONSHIP of your adult life.” Honda explains: “You’ve tried the personals, blind dates, even one of those online chat rooms. Why? The Civic Sedan is smart, fun, reliable and good-looking. Not to mention, it’s ready to commit, today.” Then, lest the reader feel suddenly commitment-shy, the ad ends in the wink of a headlight: “Looking for a good time?”
Apparently we must seek “healthy adult relationships” with cars because, as an ad for Levi's jeans has recognized, marriage can't be counted on anymore. In a lavish six-page spread we see happy dating couples, with captions announcing how long they were together before breaking up. The final page shows two female roommates, one consoling the other about a recent breakup. Just behind the two roommates, on the kitchen wall, is an art poster with the Spanish words, Mis padres se divorcian: “My parents are divorced.” The caption underneath delivers the ad's take-home message: “At least some things last forever—Levi’s they go on.”

The message is that we can only count on what we buy, not on what we share or the people to whom we commit ourselves. And the only role that endures is that of consumer. Companies that want our business will do whatever it takes to meet our needs, unlike our spouses, who sometimes put their own needs, or the children's needs, before ours. Levi's will be there for us, even if our parents divorce and our lovers leave us. How comforting.

Listen to other forms of contemporary discourse about marriage. A New York Times journalist reported hearing a guest at a wedding reception, presumably a relative of the groom, say about the bride: “She will make a nice first wife for Jason.” One national expert endorses what she terms “starter marriages” for marriages that are good learning experiences but not likely to endure. Does this make you think of a “starter house” that you didn't plan to live in for long? One California futurologist uses the term “ice-breaker” marriage to mean the same thing. Feminist social critic Barbara Ehrenreich, in a recent Time magazine piece on predicting the future of male-female relationships, supported “renewable marriages,” which “get re-evaluated every five to seven years, after which they can be revised, re-celebrated, or dissolved with no, or at least fewer, hard feelings.”

What we used to think of as our first love-our first intense dating relationship when we were immature and not ready for a commitment--has now become our first marriage. And what we used to think of as a contract with a bank--or a five-year renewable mortgage--has become the metaphor for our marriages.

Listen also for our contemporary humor about marriage. A joke I heard when I visited the Boston area goes this way: “When choosing a husband, ask yourself if this is the man you want your children to visit every other weekend.” A character in a recent movie says that men should be like toilet paper: soft, strong, and disposable.

Beyond listening to contemporary discourse, just look at contemporary behavior. In August 1999, a Philadelphia couple who desired a more expensive wedding than they could afford got twenty-four companies to sponsor the wedding in exchange for having their names appear six times on everything from the invitations to the thank-you notes. And look at the blockbuster ratings in February 2000 for the television show “Who Wants to Marry a Multi-Millionaire,” in which fifty women competed for selection by a rich man, followed by an immediate wedding on national television. Even the Wall Street Journal, no enemy of the marketplace, editorialized that this show, and the cautions the producers took (such as prenuptial agreements and venereal disease checkups), represented “the dominant view of marriage in today's America: less a partnership than a joint venture between two parties concerned with preserving their own autonomy.”

At the level of individual justifications for ending a marriage, I have also seen a shift over twenty-three years of practice as a marriage and family therapist. I don't mean to say that most people are not experiencing real emotional pain at the time they decide to end their marriages. It's just that the reasons they give are far different from the hard, nasty problems that propelled spouses in previous generations to divorce: abuse, abandonment, chronic alcoholism, infidelity. Now people are more likely to give reasons that come down to being disappointed in what they are getting from the marriage. Here are contemporary reasons for divorce that I hear in my therapy practice and in my personal life: The relationship wasn't working for me anymore. We just can't communicate. Our needs were just too different. I wasn't happy. We just grew apart. I grew and he didn't. She has changed too much. I deserve more of a companion that she is willing to be. We are not the same people we were when we got married.
After the children left home, there was nothing left. The relationship became stale. My husband was a nice guy, but boring. We had no real intimacy.

I used to take many of these as valid reasons to end a marriage. If the marriage is not meeting your needs, especially if you have tried hard to change it, then it is reasonable to leave. In the last decade, however, I have developed doubts about seeing the ongoing ravages of divorce for both adults and children, and about seeing people end their second or third marriages for the same reasons. And as my own marriage has endured for more than twenty-eight years now, I have come to value this kind of permanent bond more than when I was younger. In my writings for therapists, I began to criticize the bias towards individual satisfaction as against family responsibilities and obligations.

Gradually I began to listen differently to people's justifications for ending their marriages. I came to hear them like customer complaints, like someone explaining why they want to trade in a car for a new model, sell a house, or get rid of an old coat. Again, I recognize that people can become genuinely distressed about personal dissatisfactions in their marriage. But these new reasons often come down to saying that my relationship became stale. My husband was a nice guy, but boring. We had no real intimacy.

As I began brooding more about this phenomenon of consumer culture and marriage, I saw a video of a couple reciting new marriage vows that are becoming popular around the country. The promise now is to be together "as long as we both shall love." Translation: as long as we feel happily in love. Can you imagine a more fragile basis for a life-long commitment?

Again, I want to stress that most people who are considering ending their marriages for what I could term "soft" reasons are genuinely distressed and in pain. In the past, this was all I needed to support a spouse's decision to end an abusive marriage that had once made both people happy but was now a source of pain and disappointment. What I now see more clearly is that this pain and distress often come after years of dwelling on what one is not getting from the marriage, of complaining about the spouse's failings, of listening to the spouse defend and criticize back, of comparing one's marriage to other fantasy relationships, and of gradually becoming more distant and resentful. A sense of entitlement to a high-quality marriage leads to a focus on what is wrong with the other person, which leads to more things going wrong, and eventually to misery, which justifies leaving.

**The Evolution of the Consumer Culture of Marriage**

Let me put Consumer Marriage in a bigger context. Around 1880, the mass manufacture of consumer goods brought mass advertising and a new era in American history. The era of the consumer was born. Advertisers realized that the key to successful marketing was convincing potential customers that they couldn't do without the product. Sometimes this meant defining new problems, such as bad breath and hairy legs, that new products would fix. If a company's product was indistinguishable in quality from another's—say, with gasoline, soft drinks, or cigarettes—then advertisers learned to sell an image, a sense of belonging, of having made it, of being with it. We came to define ourselves by what we bought, and exposure to an estimated three thousand ads per day helps us to decide who we are.

Consumer culture has always been based on individuals pursuing their personal desires. But in the late twentieth century, advertisers began to emphasize desire for desire's sake. An example is Nike's slogan: "Just do it!" Or Sprite's: "Obey your thirst." A Toyota ad campaign has a voiceover saying to a father, "Your kids always get what they want; now it's your turn." Consumer culture has always been one of self-gratification, but the entitlement dimension is more prominent now.

Lest I seem to be against markets and consumption, let me reassure you. There is no viable alternative to free-market democratic systems, no feasible way to eliminate advertising without wreaking havoc on the economy, throwing millions of people out of work, and creating unworkable government bureaucracies. Consumer spending is the primary fuel of a free-market economy, and consumer spending relies on advertising to potential customers. Mass advertising is the only way that new businesses and new products can get the attention of consumers. Advertising needs to be regulated for fairness, and should probably be banned for children, but it is here to stay, as is the consumer orientation it supports.
My concern is less with consumer culture in the marketplace, but with how it has invaded the family. Consumer culture teaches us that we never have enough of anything we want, that the new is always better than the old unless something old becomes trendy again. It teaches us not to be loyal to anything or anyone that does not continue to meet our needs at the right price. Customers are inherently disloyal. I want to support American workers, but have always bought Japanese cars because I see them as superior to American cars for the price. I eat Cheerios for breakfast every day, but if the price gets too much higher than Special K, my second choice, I will abandon Cheerios. Or if they change the recipe, I might jump ship. I owe nothing to those who sell to me except my money, which I can stop giving at any time.

We Americans are also less loyal to our neighborhoods and communities than in the past; we move where there are jobs and where we can afford to live. Who asks nowadays whether you should not move because the neighborhood needs you? We are less loyal to particular religious denominations, churches, and other faith communities; we shop for the best religious experience.

Is it surprising that in this new consumer world, we are less loyal to our spouses, to our marriages? And when a marriage breaks up, is it surprising that one of the parents, often the father, exits from the children's lives to create a new life and a new family?

The sociologist Arlie Hochschild observed that in the new American lifestyle, rootlessness occurs on a global scale. "We move not only from one job to another, but from one spouse and sometimes one set of children to the next. We are changing from a society that values employment and marriage to one that values employability and marriageability." This reminds me of a line from the huge 1970s best-selling book, *Passages*, by Gail Sheehy: “Though loved ones move in and out of our lives, the capacity to love remains.” You see, it is your ability to love, not the people you love, that counts as a permanent asset in the consumer culture of relationships.

What happens when we approach marriage and family life as entrepreneurs? When the initial glow fades and the tough times come, we are prepared to cut our losses, to take what we want from our old marriages in order to forge new, more perfect unions until they also must be dissolved. Where does it end? Even worse than the results of business layoffs, there are few soft landings after marital downsizing.

How did we get there? Until the twentieth century, marriage all over the world could be called "Institutional Marriage." It was based on economic security, raising children, and men as the head of the household representing the couple in the world. Families were large and expectations for emotional intimacy between the spouses were low. Husband and wife roles were separate. Divorce was rare, and couples expected to stay together unless someone did quite awful things. The key value in the Institutional Marriage was responsibility. Marriage existed for the welfare of children and families, not primarily for the personal happiness of the spouses.

The social changes of the twentieth century in the United States and other Western nations brought on the "Psychological Marriage." Here the emphasis...
was on the emotional satisfactions of marriage relationships based on friendship, intimacy, sexual satisfaction, and gender equality. For the first time in history, families existed for individuals rather than vice versa. The key value of the Psychological Marriage was personal satisfaction. Commitment in marriage was a "given," as seen by the low divorce rates at the high-water mark of the Psychological Marriage during the post-World War II era.

The social revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s changed the face of marriage again by bringing in a powerful form of me-first individualism combined with a call for far more gender equality than the Psychological Family had delivered. Expectations for marital closeness and happiness skyrocketed along with the divorce rate. For the first time, the "soft" reasons for getting divorced became both acceptable and common, supported by legal changes to "no-fault" divorce. For the first time in human history, marriages could be ended by one of the spouses saying, "It's not working for me anymore." The era of Consumer Marriage was dawning.

During the go-go economic years of the 1980s and 1990s, when market economies triumphed over socialist economies all over the world, the consumer culture captured the hearts-and marriages-of Americans in new ways. Psychological Marriage mutated into Consumer Marriage, marriage with high psychological expectations but now spiced with a sense of entitlement and impermanence. The chief value of the Consumer Marriage is making sure that one's needs are being met and that one's spouse is doing a good job.

In practice, most couples embrace a variety of values for their marriage, including the values of responsibility and commitment emphasized by the Institutional Family. But these values are always in danger of being trumped by the consumer values of personal gain, low cost, entitlement, and keeping one's options open. In consumer culture, the exit door is always available. Commitments are always provisional, as long as the other person is meeting our needs. In some circumstances, we manage to convince ourselves that we need only provide money to keep the relationship intact, as when a noncustodial parent considers the payment of child support his only parental obligation. And when the price gets too high or the relation-

When it comes to marriage, good consumers choose their mates carefully rather than impulsively.
wives. They will use consumer ideas such as "I deserve better" and "I have a right to expect something different." The problem is not that we are constructive consumers in our marriages. The problem arises when that's all we are.

As a culture, we have no new, coherent alternative to Consumer Marriage. The more stable Institutional Marriage is dead, and most contemporary men and women do not want to bring it back. The price in personal freedom and equality for women is too high. We will not turn the clock back to a pre-individualistic era; rather, we must learn to tame individualism. The Psychological Marriage, which assumed commitment but did not work on building it, was not sturdy enough to withstand the me-first consumer world. It's not that most people go into marriage with a full-blown consumer attitude; indeed, most believe that they are fully committed for life. The consumer model kicks in when problems arise and gridlock occurs, as they do in almost every marriage. That's when we begin to ask if what we are getting from the marriage is worth the price of dealing with its problems, whether the costs outweigh the benefits of being with this person.

Towards a New Cultural Ideal of Marriage

We need a new ideal of marriage that re-emphasizes the commitment and responsibility of the Institutional Marriage while embracing emotional satisfaction elements of the Psychological Marriage and the self-advocacy elements of the Consumer Marriage. We need an ideal of marriage that fosters commitment and individual well-being, both permanence and equality between men and women. An ideal that accepts divorce but sees it as the tragic exception and not the norm. I call this Modern Covenant Marriage—"covenant" to connote the religious sense that marriage is a powerful, sacred commitment, and "modern" to suggest that we need a new way to be in committed marriages in the twenty-first century. This form of marriage is similar to, but more than, Covenant Marriage legislation passed in Louisiana and Arizona and proposed in other states.

Every cultural trend, including consumer culture, has something to teach us. As I suggested before, Modern Covenant Marriage is like Consumer Marriage in one important way. It embraces the importance of spouses advocating their needs and rights in the relationship. It stresses that people should not sit still while being taken advantage of by their spouses. It promotes self-advocacy in marriage for both men and women.

But Modern Covenant Marriage goes beyond Consumer Marriage in most other ways. Covenant marriage involves a commitment not only to the other person but also to the marriage itself. In the consumer economics model, I am committed to a product or service as long as it meets my needs, but I am not committed to the relationship I have with the company that makes it. I eat Cheerios, but I am not committed to General Mills. In a covenant marriage, the spouses have an abiding commitment to the "we" as well as to the other spouse, to the marriage along with the person. The marriage becomes the third party in their couple relationship.

This "third party" commitment is especially easy to see if you have children, because you realize how much your children rely on your marriage relationship, in addition to relying on each of you individually. Kids whose parents divorce may still have two parents to depend on, but not a marriage. It is a huge loss.

Modern Covenant Marriage requires the habits of the heart and mind to cultivate a lifelong relationship that is loving and fair to both partners, where the well-being of your spouse and your marriage is as important as your own well-being, where the soft reasons for divorce are off the table, and where efforts for continued improvement of the marriage are tempered with acceptance of human limitations.

I think that most of us dearly want what I am calling a Modern Covenant Marriage, but don't know how to achieve it or hold onto it. It is not enough to start with a loving commitment, or even with a religiously grounded commitment. Most divorces occur to people who start with heartfelt commitment, backed by religious convictions. The battlefields
Marriage puts high demands for self-awareness, empathetic understanding, and negotiation skills. Researchers have found that the ability to deal constructively with conflict is a key factor in long-term successful marriage. But skills are not enough, as evidenced by the fact that male therapists, who presumably have good communication skills, have higher-than-average divorce rates. It is not enough to see through the hardest of times. A covenantal commitment is needed, but with a modern sensibility that recognizes the dignity and worth of both spouses along with the abiding importance of the bond they have created.

I propose several courses of action based on the foregoing analysis. The most obvious implication of this proposal is to support Covenant Marriage laws in the United States. Covenant Marriage laws generally give couples, newly marrying or already married, the option of a legal marriage arrangement that requires premarital education, marriage counseling in times of trouble, and a two-year separation period before a divorce can be decreed, unless there is abuse, adultery, abandonment, or a felony conviction. Covenant Marriage initiatives are an intervention aimed at creating a new cultural conversation about marriage commitment.1

Second, I propose that we form state and national associations of couples in covenant marriages, in order to provide mutual support and affirmation for one another and to be a public force for promoting the ideal of Modern Covenant Marriage. We need a grassroots movement of couples, not led by professionals, to fight Consumer Marriage on behalf of higher ideals.2

Third, I propose that we engage the professionals who practice psychotherapy and marriage therapy in a discussion of Consumer Marriage and Modern Covenant Marriage.3 Towards this end, I have drafted a values statement for therapists who wish to identify themselves as pro-commitment in today's complex world. It can also be used by consumers and referring professionals to seek out pro-commitment therapists.

We have to find the way together, as husbands and wives, as a community. We have to find a new way to be married in a new century, or else I fear that nothing we do for the generations that follow will offset the debilitating losses that failed marriages will inflict on our children and their world. We have to find a new way to be married in a new century, or else I fear that nothing we do for the generations that follow will offset the debilitating losses that failed marriages will inflict on our children and their world. We have to find a new way to be married in a new century, or else I fear that nothing we do for the generations that follow will offset the debilitating losses that failed marriages will inflict on our children and their world. We have to find a new way to be married in a new century, or else I fear that nothing we do for the generations that follow will offset the debilitating losses that failed marriages will inflict on our children and their world.

William J. Doherty is a professor of family social science and Director of the Marriage and Family Therapy Program at the University of Minnesota. Among his books are Take Back Your Kids: Confident Parenting in Turbulent Times (Sorin Books, 2000) and The Intentional Family: How to Build Family Ties in Our Modern World (Avon Books, 1999). This article is adapted from a longer talk presented at the conference on Revitalizing the Institution of Marriage for the 21st Century at Brigham Young University, March 2000.

“IT’S A GOOD SHOW—

except one LITTLE part”

by Glen C. Griffin

“How was the movie?”

“Great—except for one little part.”

“One little part?”

“Well, there was one sex scene, but it only lasted a minute—or so.”

The problem is that “one little part” may effectively teach kids, and others, that it’s okay to play around with sex without bothering to get married.

In movies, sexual content is at an all-time high, and on prime-time television, it has more than tripled in the last ten years. If anyone doubts that movies and TV sell products and ideas, think about the million-dollar Super Bowl ads and the $37.5 billion sponsors are willing to spend each year for 30- and 60-second TV commercials. Advertisers also pay large fees for their products to be seen in motion pictures. If these brief exposures didn’t do such a good job of selling products and ideas, sponsors wouldn’t spend so much money on them.

Suppose the hot pizza you ordered arrived with all your favorite toppings—plus a tiny little mouse that had crawled onto it before being popped in the oven. Would you eat this pizza that was perfect except for one little mouse?

And what if someone put just a little date-rape drug into a serving of fat-free frozen yogurt? It doesn’t matter that this would otherwise have been a healthy dessert if “one little part” was not a scary drug that could fog a person’s brain and wipe out control. Few people would choose to eat something that contained a small dead mouse or a little date-rape drug. Yet many choose to fill their heads, often repeatedly, with movies that have “one little part” that’s disgusting and possibly dangerous.

Years ago a Wall Street Journal article explained the effectiveness of repeating brief messages and slogans that people remember for decades, such as “Things
go better with Coke” and “See the USA in your Chevrolet.” Advertising creates familiarity—and familiarity sells. As you think how this effect is multiplied by repetition, keep in mind that teens often see a movie more than once and children often watch favorite videos over and over.

Developmentally, children learn what is acceptable in life by watching the behavior of family members, friends, and others. Sometimes the imitative behavior of little children as they play “house” is so real that it’s amusing. And sometimes it’s alarming.

Children and adults often imitate the speech patterns someone who speaks differently. Almost without thinking, people may copy dialects, slang, and language idiosyncrasies from other people. And as it is with children’s play and with speech patterns, so it is with other behavior.

Television, movies, and videos bring several sets of new friends into a child’s home. These “friends” have a profound influence in viewers’ lives. Within hours or days, children, teens, and young adults across the country pick up patterns, expressions, attitudes, beliefs, and behavior trends from television and movie characters. Is it any wonder that children and others copy anger, temper, and violence from television and movie friends? By the time the average teenager finishes high school, he or she has watched 26,000 murders on television—and who knows how many in movies? Is it any wonder there are so many violent copycat crimes in schools?

Professors Brad J. Bushman and L. Rowell Huesmann have summarized overwhelming scientific evidence that television violence has a significant effect on children’s aggressive and violent behavior. They add that “The relationship between TV violence and aggression is about as strong as the relationship between smoking and cancer.” Just as some soldiers in battle may become desensitized to the horrors of killing and death, children can become desensitized to violence by watching it on the screen. Citing some excellent research, the authors explain that the more violence children see, the more accepting they are.

This informative movie review web site provides detailed and comprehensive reviews of recent movies and videos. The films or videos are listed alphabetically, and a click of the mouse will display a screen that shows a chart of 15 different categories of possible alerts: Alcohol or Drugs, Blood or Gore, Disrespectful or Bad Attitude, Frightening or Tense Scenes, Guns or Weapons, Imitative Behavior, Jump Scenes, Scary or Tense Music, Inappropriate Music, Profanity, Sex or Nudity, Smoking, Tense Family Scenes, Topics to Talk About, and Violence.

Besides these alerts, a background of the film is given with more details about each of the 15 categories—including descriptions of the sex and nudity, violence, the exact profane language used and its frequency, and an explanation of the imitative behavior. This information and the comments in a section called “Our Word to Parents” makes www.screenit.com an excellent place to check a particular film. Sometimes the information about a film will be reassuring; however, it will often provide good reasons to choose something else to see.
of aggressive behavior.4

And lest one think that on-screen violence can be avoided by choosing G-rated animated films, a recent study by Harvard researchers concludes that "a significant amount of violence exists in animated G-rated feature films." A 1992 press release by the American Psychological Association warned, "After review of hundreds of research findings, three major national studies have concluded that heavy exposure to televised violence is one of the significant causes of violence in society." This report noted that after more than forty years of research on the link between TV violence and real-life violence, the "scientific debate is over," adding that "Sexual violence in X-and R-rated videotapes widely available to teenagers have also been shown to cause an increase of male aggression against females." More and more popular movies that are otherwise worthwhile contain "one little part" that is not. And since it is so hard to find a movie without gratuitous violence or non-married sex, it's easy to rationalize that it's okay to choose a movie that doesn't have "too much" of these things.

"I can handle it," a teenager once told me.

"I'm not sure I can," I answered in all seriousness.

I said this because our memories are likely to store images about sex and violence for a long time. Joseph Fielding Smith said that even though we may have lapses of memory, "In reality we cannot forget anything." Randal A. Wright puts it this way: "Think of the best movie you've ever seen that had just one bad scene. Now think specifically of what the bad scene was. Can you still recall it or have you totally forgotten the inappropriate scene?" Chances are that those images are there, ready for instant recall.

When you or I become involved in a story, we are likely to imagine ourselves as a character in that story. Indeed, escaping from everyday problems while our imaginations play someone else's exciting role is one reason people enjoy reading stories and seeing shows. When this happens, a person vicariously does what his or her movie character does, good or bad. If a person chooses to relate to a grossly violent hero or heroine in a show, he or she imagines being violent. If someone watches a passionate bedroom scene, it's easy to imagine doing what one is seeing. On the other hand, people who identify with a worthy character in an uplifting movie may imagine themselves doing helpful, kind, and good things. Because doing something to do it in real life is careful of the role (and our children).

Moreover, in when so many movies, videos, and television programs are filled with sex and gratuitous violence, what used to be shocking is becoming more and more accepted. Desensitize movie reviews accept non-married cohabitation without hesitation. And many give shows a pass even if there is on-screen sex, especially if it's what the industry calls "simulated sex"—meaning that it's under the covers or somewhat obscured, but often leaving little to the imagination.

Another way some movie reviewers give a pass to sexual content is with the code words "brief sex"—as if to say a short length of exposure makes it acceptable. One may wonder "How brief is brief?" while remembering how effective brief television commercials are in selling products. Another current term that many reviewers use to describe a film's sexual content is "discreet sex." In reality, there is no "discreet" sexual immorality.

The standards of decency have...
and more gross violence, blatant sexual talk, and open sex play have crept into popular TV shows and films with ratings that used to be relatively innocuous.

The generally accepted movie rating system completely misses the point about what is decent. The ratings are also undermined by a major flaw of labeling what's appropriate according to age. From the ratings, one would think a 13-year-old should be able to handle sexual content that is inappropriate for a 12-year-old who is a few days or a month younger. The system's designers must have imagined that when a person reaches the age of 17, magical abilities suddenly appear in the brain making it possible to cope with explicit sex and gruesome violence. This is nonsense. The more you think about it, the more ludicrous it becomes. In reality, if something is garbage for 8-year-olds, it's garbage for 12-year-olds, 16-year-olds, 18-year-olds—and all of us.

Steamy bedroom scenes are always inappropriate—for a person of any age. And to say that watching various levels of sexual intimacies under the covers is appropriate for 13-year-olds, while seeing such activities without covers or clothing is appropriate for 18-year-olds, is the height of intellectual arrogance and

If something is garbage for 8-year-olds, it's garbage for 12-year-olds, 16-year-olds, 18-year-olds—and all of us.

www.moviepicks.org

This web site is an excellent place to find out about good movies, videos, and TV shows that are not contaminated with sex or gratuitous violence. Suggestions and reviews about current movies and videos that meet a high standard of morality and character building can be found on moviepicks.org—as well as suggestions and commentaries about older films available on video.

Because interests vary, videos are categorized under drama, real stories, comedies, musicals, family, and children. And since the standard of decency is the same for all categories, anyone seeking uplifting entertainment can feel confident that movies, videos, and television programs found on moviepicks.org will be good—noting that language or other problems are mentioned in the commentaries.

Reviews about movies and videos don’t appear on this web site if they don’t meet a high standard of decency as set by the American Family League because the staff, national advisory board, review teams, and student interns don’t want to put gross thoughts in their own minds from reviewing such films.

The moviepicks web site also provides tips about worthwhile programs and outstanding new movies that are upcoming on television.

Information about the American Family League’s CAMIE awards for outstanding movies and television programs that reflect Character And Morality In Entertainment can be found at www.CAMIEawards.org.

Note: The author is president of the non-profit American Family League, Inc., which manages the moviepicks.org web site.
poor judgment. Those involved in the movie rating system just don't get it.

A 9-year-old who saw a blockbuster movie, in which teenagers were having sex, reassured her grandfather that the unmarried sex by the teen-age heart throb was okay because "they loved each other." This is the sad new standard of acceptability that children and teenagers are learning today from seeing non-married sexual encounters in movies and on television.

No wonder so many teenagers, and even younger children, are playing around with sex, sleeping together, and cohabiting. It's time to teach children and teenagers that sex is for marriage and that infatuation and physical attraction are not love. It's time to help them choose uplifting, entertaining, and decent movies instead of ones that are not. Look for uplifting movies that help build character, not weaken it.

Good motion pictures can entertain while teaching lessons on overcoming adversity, solving life's problems, and living moral lives.

Obviously, on-screen sexual encounters, with or without clothing or covers, are inappropriate. But so are shows without on-screen sex but whose characters are cohabiting without marriage, reinforcing this mistaken idea. Shows that model cohabiting without marriage, along with inappropriate sex-education that teaches kids anything is acceptable as long as no one gets pregnant, are major contributors to this misguided lifestyle.

So, how can one sort out entertaining and decent movies from those filled with filth? In searching for decent films, some can be eliminated quickly by looking at the title, tag lines, or previews, which often give plenty of clues that a movie is inappropriate. Movie reviews that give a heads-up about films that contain sex, nudity, and violence can help scratch a film from consideration—even when reviewers give the film an enthusiastic endorsement. Photos and descriptions on video and DVD packages can sometimes help exclude a film—but packaging often doesn't provide assurance that a show is appropriate. Word-of-mouth recommendations are sometimes helpful, but may be misleading unless they come from someone who understands that “one little part” can sell destructive ideas.

Some helpful, free online resources provide background information about movies and videos so we can choose decent movies and exclude those we want to avoid. The web site www.screenit.com provides detailed information about movies and videos that have been produced in the last few years—good and bad.

It's fun to watch good shows—but finding them is time-consuming and difficult.

Another web site, found at www.mediaandthefamily.org rates the level of violence, fear, illegal/harmful, language, nudity, and sexual content in movies, videos, television programs, and video games according to age, using green, amber, and red icons. Parents can find a wealth of information on this site. However, if one's standard is that a show should contain no inappropriate sexual messages, the site's amber warnings about the sexual content of many movies and television shows should more appropriately be red warnings—meaning they are not appropriate for teenagers or anyone.

For those who want to find entertaining and decent films without any inappropriate sexual content, www.movie picks.org is a resource created by the American Family League, Inc. This web site provides suggestions for movies, videos, and television programs that are entertaining and decent, with a high standard of morality that excludes shows where there is cohabiting or non-married sex without consequences.

It's fun to watch good shows—but finding them is time-consuming and difficult. And it's easy to be misled into seeing movies that are supposedly good—except for "one little part" that may be as effective in selling inappropriate behavior as radio and TV spots are in selling products.

The bad news is that there is more sex and violence on screen than ever before—and these shows are filling kids' heads with destructive ideas that can lead to destructive behavior.

Much of the foul language on televi-
sion programs and videos can be filtered out with a TV Guardian profanity filter that works on the closed-caption track to clip out obscenities (for more information go to www.tvguardian.com). Of course, a language filter cannot remove inappropriate visuals and the story lines of many shows are so bad that eliminating the crude words in them is not enough.

Many wonder why edited films that exclude inappropriate scenes are not made available to the public. The technology exists to do this. Already, many DVD releases contain versions of a film in several languages. Many could just as easily be marketed without inappropriate bedroom scenes or gratuitous violence. Some of the editing done on films for television or the airlines has turned unacceptable shows into ones that are decent. Unfortunately, the movie industry has not allowed the showing, distribution, or sale of these edited movies. The industry’s policy is hard to understand.

Michael Medved, the well-known film critic, and Robert D. Cain, the director of research for the Screen Actor’s Guild, analyzed the box office revenue figures of films released in 1991 and found that “R-rated films generate substantially less revenue, return less profit, and are more likely to flop than films aimed at teen and family audiences.”

Even if on-screen sex scenes were edited out, as they are in some airline-edited shows, some films would fail the standard of not promoting non-married sex. However, for those films that are outstanding except for a few moments that could be clipped out, individuals can edit these scenes from videos they buy. Or until the industry provides the option of purchasing already-edited films, a service used to edit one’s own videos is available from www.EditMyMovies.com and by some local video businesses.

The entertainment industry is not likely to change overnight. But efforts are being made by a number of individuals and businesses to make airline and edited videos and DVDs available. And many are working quietly behind the scenes to encourage writers and producers to create entertaining and decent films and shows.

A good news is that every once in a while a great show comes along that entertaining and uplifting. Now it’s our job to choose wholesome entertainment for ourselves, lest we become sitzged-and as parents, youth leaders, professionals, and friends, to help children and others find uplifting and decent entertainment.

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Good News for Marriage:
The Marriage Movement States its Principles

A movement in support of marriage, which has been gaining strength among people who work with and care about marriage, resulted in the release of a Statement of Principles at the Smart Marriages conference in Denver this summer. Beyond politics, a broad-based, bipartisan marriage movement has been born.

More than one hundred prominent scholars and religious and civic leaders have pledged that by 2010, they will begin to reverse the pessimistic trends that surround marriage. “In this decade we will . . . reduce divorce and unmarried childbearing, so that each year more children will grow up protected by their own two happily married parents and more adults’ marriage dreams will come true.”

Diane Sollee, director of the Coalition for Marriage, Family and Couples Education, a co-sponsor of the statement, said, “Our current policies are based on acceptance of family breakdown and are focused on dealing with the aftermath and fallout. This statement leads the way to positive, preventable supports for marriage. It’s filled with hope.”


The divorce revolution hasn’t delivered on its promise of happier relationships and families, these experts and leaders warn: “Nostalgia . . . should not blind us to the hard truths discovered over the past thirty years: When marriages fail, children suffer.”

Nor do they seek to denigrate single marriage or unwed childbearing. “Our current policies are based on acceptance of family breakdown and are focused on dealing with the aftermath and fallout. This statement leads the way to positive, preventable supports for marriage. It’s filled with hope.”

Signers say support for marriage does not require “turning back the clock on desirable social change, promoting male tyranny, or tolerating domestic violence.” Nor do they seek to denigrate single mothers: “Many of us in the marriage movement are single parents or the children of single parents. We know first hand how children suffer and parents struggle when marriages fail . . . Few parents, single or married, dream of the day their daughters will become single mothers, or their sons turn into absent fathers.” The goal is not to bring “shame and distress” but new “hope and support” to the nine out of ten Americans who choose to marry.

Drawing on the latest research and signed by diverse experts in social science, psychology, law, political science, relationships, therapy, and theology, The Marriage Movement emphasizes that marriage is public and not just a private relationship, for several reasons.

- Children raised outside of intact marriages are more likely to suffer a wide variety of problems: to be poor, to have health problems and psychological disorders, to commit crimes and exhibit other conduct disorders, to have somewhat poorer relationships with both family and peers, to get less education, achieve less job success, and have more unstable family lives, even after controlling for race, income, and socioeconomic status.
- Additional consequences, these experts note, include “substantial public costs, paid by taxpayers, in the form of increased education, welfare, Medicare and Medicaid, day care, child support collection, foster care, and child protection services costs” in cases of divorce and unwed childbearing.

The signers detail a wide array of existing efforts as evidence that a growing, grass-roots marriage movement exists. They also make concrete recommendations, pointing to new ways that parents, families, faith communities, civic leaders, the legal profession, youth workers, marriage counselors, therapists and educators, and medical professionals, as well as state and local governments, can help strengthen marriage.

Marriage is not a divisive goal, but a shared aspiration. It is time, these leaders say, to focus the nation’s attention on a new question: how “to rebuild the shattered dream of lasting love and to pass on a healthier, happier, and more successful marriage culture to the next generation.”

The Marriage Movement: A Statement of Principles was prepared under the sponsorship of the Coalition for Marriage, Family and Couples Education, the Religion, Culture, and Family Project of the University of Chicago Divinity School, and the Institute for American Values.

We go to great lengths to preserve historical buildings and sites in our cities. We need to apply the same fervor to preserving the most ancient and sacred of institutions—the family!

We cannot effect a turnaround in a day or a month or a year. But with enough effort, we can begin a turnaround within a generation, and accomplish wonders within two generations—a period of time that is not very long in the history of humanity.

—Gordon B. Hinckley
Standing for Something