



Fathers and Children: Policies to Strengthen the Father Bond

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Are Fathers Fungible?

- From Hollywood to the halls of academe, we often hear that fathers don't matter.
- Hollywood Star Jennifer Aniston: "Women are realizing it more and more knowing that they don't have to settle with a man just to have that child."
- Cornell Psychologist Peggy Drexler: "[W]omen possess the innate mompower that in itself is more than sufficient to raise fine sons."



My Story



The Difference Dads Make

Providing

Play

Challenging children

Discipline



Providing

- Money matters
 - Married fathers bring in about 2/3 of family income (Pew 2023; Wilcox 2014)
 - Husbands: \$65,000; Wives: \$35,000
 - Non-resident fathers pay about \$6,500 in child support (CRS 2021)
 - Dads model work to their sons (Autor & Wassernan 2013; Chetty et al 2016)

WILL SMITH

the PURSUIT of HAPPYNESS



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Inspired by a true story.
CHRISTMAS 2006

The Power of Play

- Fathers' distinctive approach to physical play
 - Rough and tumble play
 - Helps socialize children
 - Psychologist John Snarey (1993): "children who roughhouse with their fathers... quickly learn that biting, kicking, and other forms of physical violence are not acceptable."
(Sources: Parke 2013; Popenoe 1996)



Challenging Their Kids

- Fathers excel in pushing their children to embrace challenges, difficulties, outside world (Parke 2013; Popenoe 1996)
 - Psychologist Daniel Paquette (2004): “Fathers play a particularly important role in the development of children’s openness to the world. They also tend to encourage children to take risks... thus permitting children to learn to braver in unfamiliar situations, as well as to stand up for themselves.”

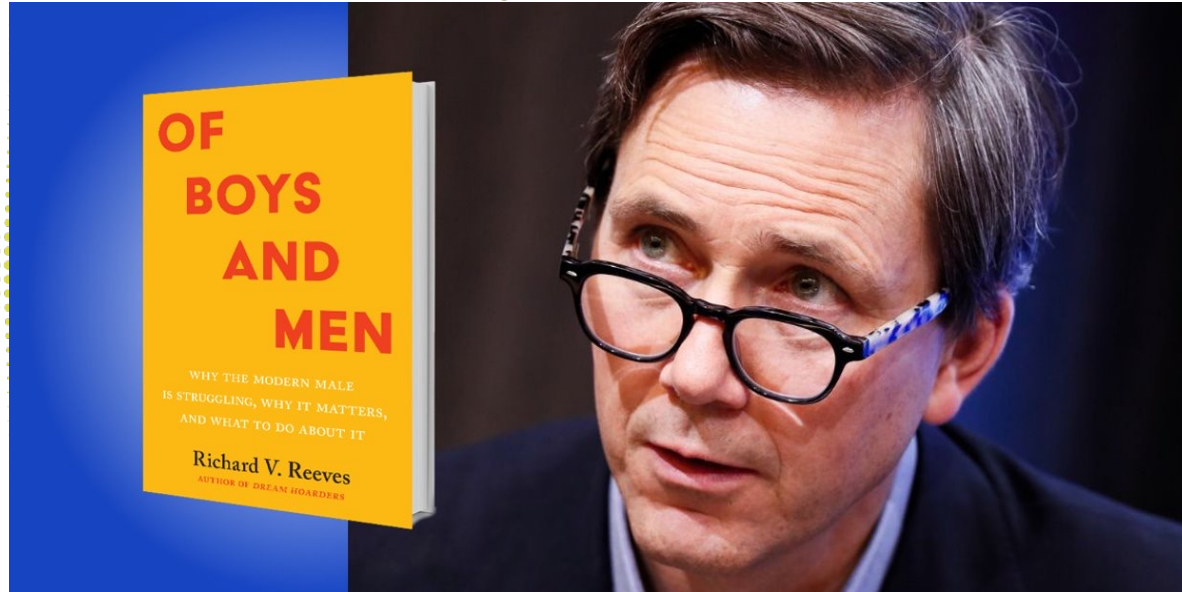
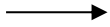


Dad's Discipline

- Fathers' distinctive style of discipline
 - Yale psychiatrist Kyle Pruett: "Fathers tend to be more willing than mothers to confront their children and enforce discipline, leaving their children with the impression that they in fact have more authority" (Pruett & Pruett 2009).



New Voices Highlighting the Value of Dads



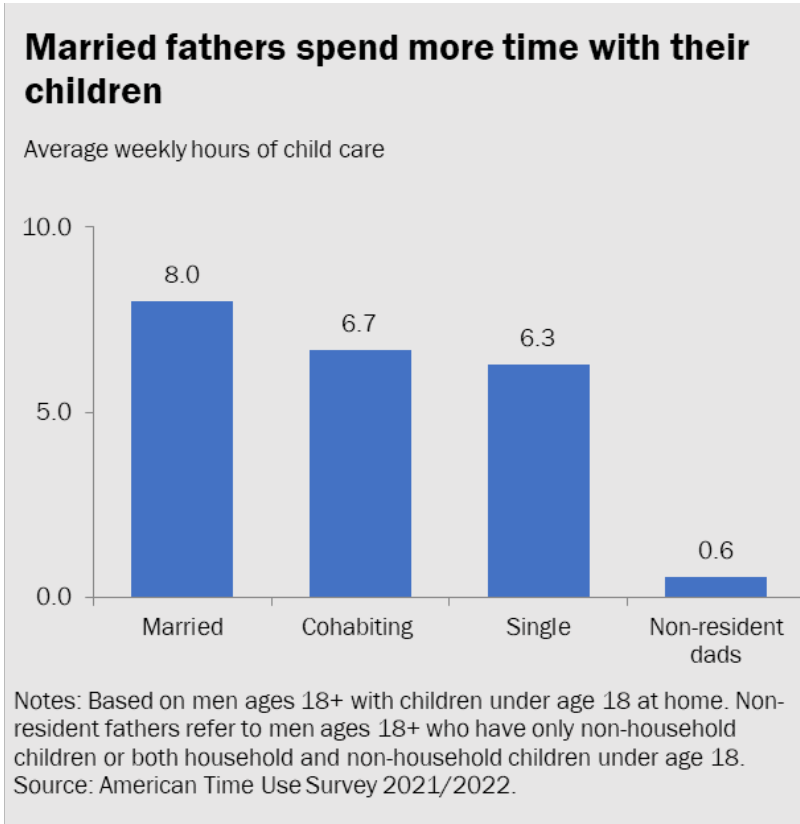
Is Marriage Unimportant?

"The goal then is to bolster the role of fathers as direct providers of care to their children, whether or not they are married to or even living with the mother."

~ Richard Reeves, Brookings



Married Fathers More Engaged



Above: Weekly time spent with kids

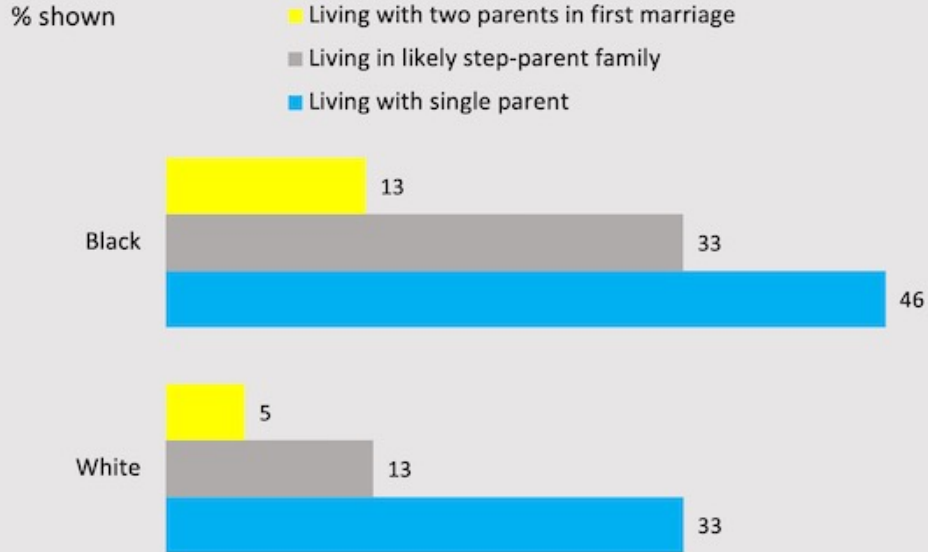


What Difference Does Marriage Make?

Looking at Child Outcomes

Family Structure & POVERTY

Figure 1. Child Poverty Rate, By Child's Race and Family Living Arrangements



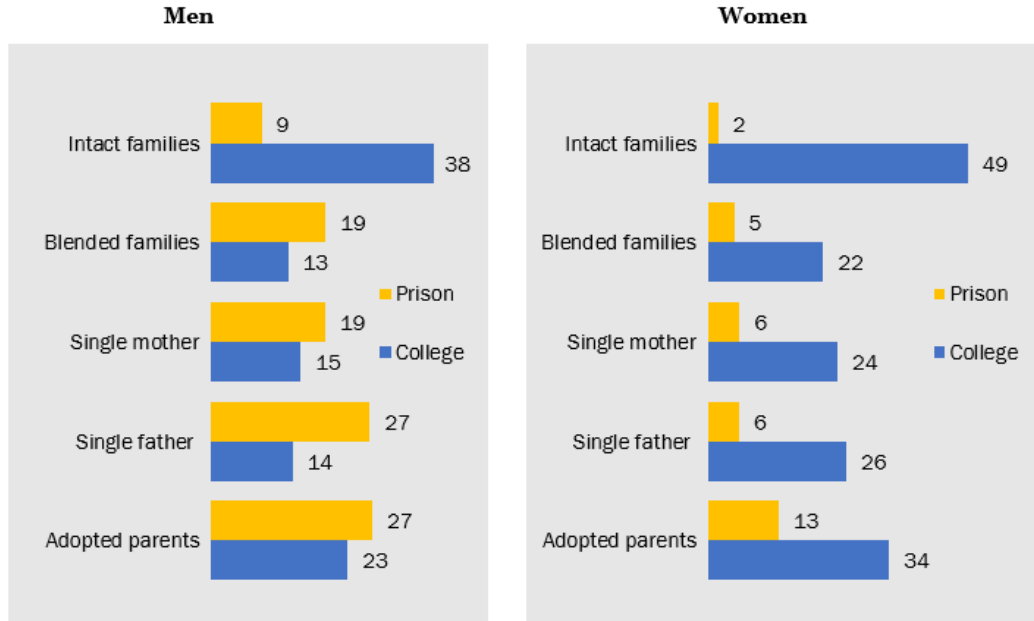
Notes: Based on children under age 18. ACS identifies "social" parental relationship and not necessarily biological parents. Children with widowed parents are excluded from analyses.

Source: American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates, 2015-2019

College Or Prison?

Prison or College Graduation for Young Men and Women, by Family Structure

%



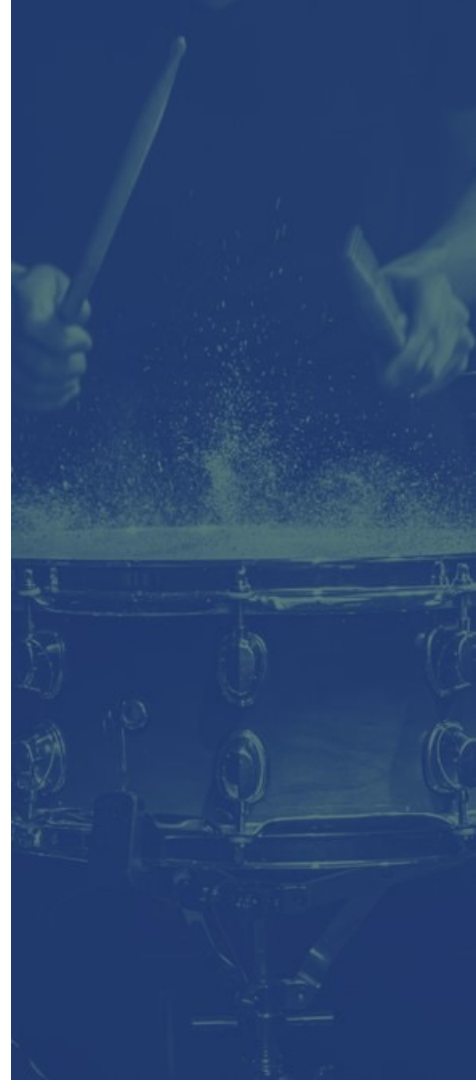
Notes: Young adults' outcomes were measured by age 28.

Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 (NLSY97).

Public Policy Should Support:

- Responsible Fatherhood
- Marriage
- Non-Resident Fathers

**WALK & CHEW GUM
AT THE SAME TIME**





5 Policy Ideas for Tennessee

1) PSAs Honoring All Dads

- Encouraging responsible fatherhood
- Celebrating the difference dads make in their children's lives
- Use Florida and federal campaigns as a guide:
 - "Take Time to be a Dad Today"

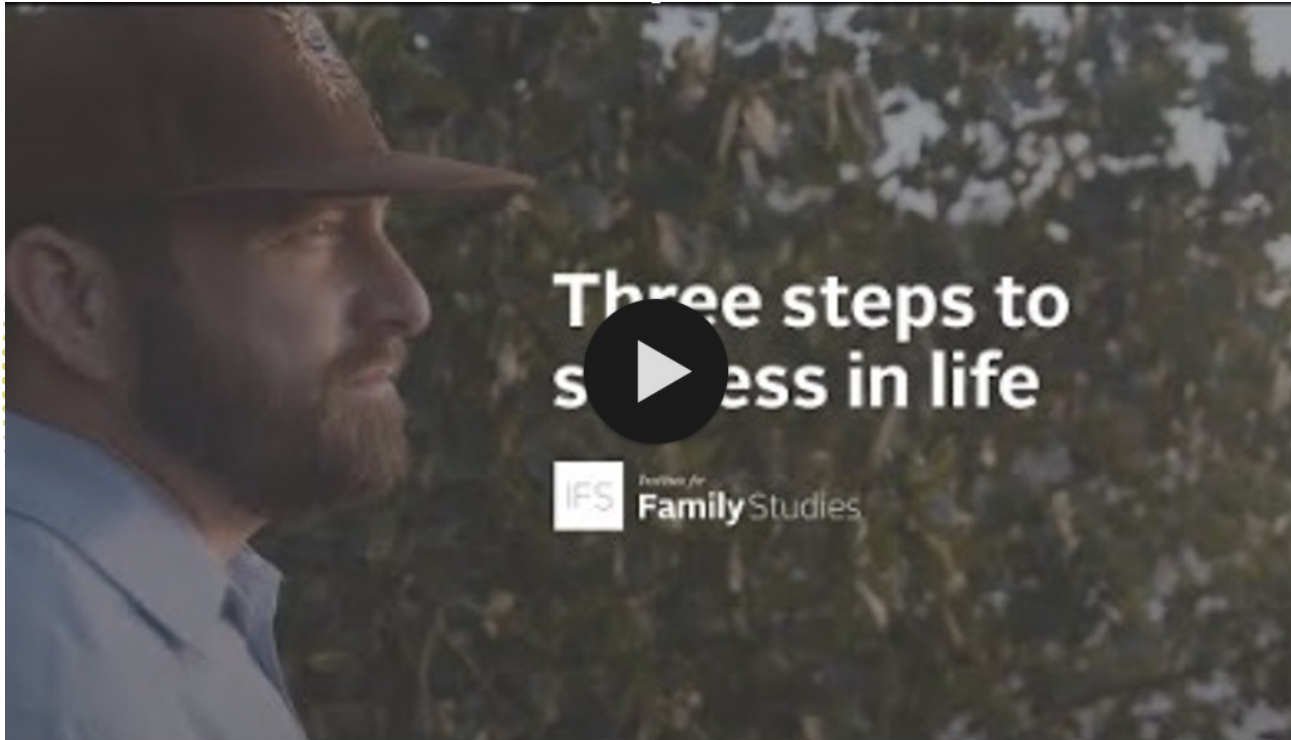


2) Promoting the Success Sequence in Schools and Online

- Success Sequence = 1) High School → 2) Full Time Work → 3) Marriage → Children
- 97% of young adults who follow the Success Sequence are NOT poor (Wilcox & Wang 2017)
- Incorporate into TN social science or personal finance standards
- Produce PSAs online targeting TN teens
- **73% of all Tennesseans** support the idea of all public schools being required to teach the “Success Sequence” (YouGov/Institute for Family Studies 2023)



“His Story”



3) Making Schools Boy-Friendly

- Girls are thriving in schools, too many Boys are floundering.
So:
 - Single-sex public education or classes (Sax 2005)
 - Reforms like more recess & male teachers (Reeves 2022; Sommers 2000)
 - More high-quality Career and Technical Education (CTE) that caters to the vocational opportunities here in Tennessee (Lerman et al. 2019)



4) Responsible Fatherhood Programs

- Given that a large minority of Tennessee children live apart from their dads, TN should fund responsible fatherhood programs that provide
 - Mentorship
 - One-on-one support &
 - Advance the welfare of children and mothers
 - Evaluated for their success



5) Commission on Boys & Men

- To address the unique challenges facing boys and men, TN should form a commission dedicated to
 - Bridging gender gap in educational performance
 - Encouraging pro-social masculinity
 - Preparing young men for marriage and fatherhood
- **83% of all Tennesseans** said they support the idea of a state commission that would study the well-being of boys and men and promote policies that encourage healthy masculinity and responsible fatherhood (YouGov/Institute for Family Studies 2023)



Tennessee is a Magnet for Families

- One of top destinations for families with children
 - Top 3 state destination for families
- Encourage you to do all you can to make sure the Volunteer State leads the way in giving kids the chance to forge strong relationships with their fathers

