

It Takes a Family to Raise a Village:
The Significance of the Family for the Free Society
Jennifer Roback Morse
January 30, 2008
Intercollegiate Studies Institute lecture series
The Culture of Enterprise
UCLA

It takes a family to raise a village. Without the family, the village itself can not function. If the family breaks down, or fails to form in the first place, the “village” can not possibly provide adequate help to repair the damage. In any good society, the government must do what only the government can do: keep order internally and externally, enforce agreements and defend property rights. The market must do what only the market can do: create wealth and provide employment by combining goods and services that satisfy consumers. But only the family can create the next generation of human beings who will become citizens and consumers.

Many of the changes in family structure over the last generation have been driven by changes in the behavior of women. Because women can now support themselves economically, they marry later, have fewer children, and are more prone to divorce. But this is only part of the story: we have choices about how to respond to this important social change of women’s higher education and careers. In the 1960’s, a group of Marxist women who called themselves feminists defined

the meaning of these social trends, and pushed them into a very distinct direction. We are all living with their interpretation to this very day. I believe modern women are looking for a new interpretation of their economic independence and a different model for managing their lives. I want to offer an alternative which I believe will be more humane for women and more supportive of the family.

I will do three things in this lecture. First, I will show how the breakdown of marriage leads necessarily to the expansion of the state. Without the family doing its job, the state will necessarily grow larger, more expensive and more intrusive. Second, I will show how Marxist categories of analysis have influenced discussions of women and family. Marxism has failed as an economic system. But Marxism lingers on in its analysis of marriage. Finally, I will offer an alternative to this Marxist-driven model.

Before I turn to these areas however, I want to share with you how I, an economist, began writing about the family. I promise you, I didn't learn this in graduate school.

I. The Free Society Needs the Family.

The family does something the "village" can not do for itself, namely bring the next generation into being. Without the family doing its job, the state will necessarily grow larger, more expensive and more intrusive. Let me illustrate this

by looking at the by-products of no-fault divorce and unmarried childbearing.

A. No-fault divorce and the elimination of the private sphere

Presented to the public as a great expansion of personal liberty, no-fault divorce has led to an increase in the power of the government over individual private lives. This is because no-fault divorce frequently means unilateral divorce: one party wants a divorce against the wishes of the other, who wants to stay married. Therefore, the divorce has to be enforced. The coercive machinery of the state is wheeled into action to separate the reluctantly divorced party from the joint assets of the marriage, typically the home and the children.

At that point, the family courts become involved in the most intimate details of the family's life. Family courts tell fathers how much money they have to spend on their children, and how much time they get to spend with them. Courts tell mothers whether they can move away from their children's father. Courts rule on whether the father's attendance at a Little League game, a public event that anyone can attend, counts toward his visitation time. Courts rule on which parent gets to spend Christmas Day with the children, down to and including the precise time of day they must turn the child over to the other parent.

There is no other agent of the government that we permit to intervene in people's private business, so intimately, so frequently, so routinely. Involving the

family court in the minutiae of family life amounts to an unprecedented blurring of the boundaries between public and private life. People under the jurisdiction of the family courts can have virtually all of their private lives subject to its scrutiny. If the courts are influenced by an ideology, whether it be radical feminism, fifties gender roles or anything in between, that ideology reaches into every bedroom and kitchen in America. ¹

Thus, the social experiment of no-fault divorce, which was intended as an expansion of personal liberty has resulted in an unprecedented intrusion of the state into the private lives of ordinary, law-abiding citizens.

Of course, all of this intervention by the government has to be paid for by the taxpayer. And the costs of the family courts is only the beginning. A study of the cost of divorce in Utah, for instance, found that divorces in Utah in 2001 cost the state and federal government over \$300 million in direct and indirect costs. The direct costs to the state and federal governments include child support enforcement, Medicaid costs, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), food stamps and public housing. Extrapolating to the US as a whole, divorce in the US costs \$33.3 billion annually.²

¹**Taken Into Custody: The War Against Fathers, Marriage and the Family**, Stephen Baskerville, (Nashville, TN: Cumberland House Publishing, 2007).

²“Individual and Social Costs of Divorce in Utah,” David Schram, **Journal of Family and**

B. Unmarried childbearing and expansion of the state.

This is how the break-up of families, or the failure to form families, leads to an expansion of state activity and expenditure. Children from disrupted families do worse than the children of intact married couple households in virtually every way.³ Children are more likely to have physical and mental health problems. Even accounting for income, fatherless boys are more likely to be aggressive⁴ and to ultimately become incarcerated.⁵ A recent British study offers tantalizing hints about the possibility that the children of single mothers are more likely to become schizophrenic.⁶ And an extensive study of family structure in Sweden took account of the mental illness history of the parents, as well as socio-economic status. Yet even in the most generous welfare state in the world, with very

Economic Issues Vol. 27, No. 1, Spring 2006. 133-151.

³For useful summaries, see “Do Moms and Dads Matter? Evidence from the Social Sciences on Family Structure and the Best Interests of the Child,” Maggie Gallagher and Joshua Baker, **Margins**, 4:161-180, 2004; “Marriage from a Child’s Perspective: How Does Family Structure Affect Children and What Can We Do About It?” Kristen Anderson Moore, Susan M. Jekielek and Carol Emig, **Child Trends Research Brief**, June 2002; **Smart Sex: Finding Life-long Love in a Hook-up World**, Jennifer Roback Morse, (Dallas, TX: Spence Publishing, 2005).

⁴“Household Family Structure and Children’s Aggressive Behavior: A Longitudinal Study of Urban Elementary School Children, Nancy Vaden-Kiernan, Nicholas S. Ialongo, Jane Pearson and Sheppard Kellan, **Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology**, 23(5) 553-568, (1995)

⁵“Father Absence and Youth Incarceration,” Cynthia C. Harper and Sara S. McLanahan, **Journal of Research on Adolescence**, 14(3) 369-397 (2004).

⁶“Schizophrenia much more likely in children of single parents,” Sarah Hall, **UK Guardian**, November 2, 2006.

accepting attitudes toward unmarried parenthood, the children of single parents faced double the risk of psychiatric disease, suicide attempts, and substance abuse.⁷ All these issues are expensive to the taxpayer, through health care, special education services, mental health services, substance abuse recovery, or the criminal justice system.

But more important than even the fiscal costs, are the very real human costs to the children themselves. A recent sociological study asked this question: “What if the proportion of US children living with their two married parents were as high today as it was in 1970?” In 1970, 69% of US children lived with their two married parents, compared with 60% in 2000, a drop of 9 percentage points. With US family structure as strong today as it was in 1970, the yearly impact would be that:

643,000 fewer American adolescents would fail a grade each year.

1,040,000 fewer would be suspended from school.

531,000 fewer adolescents would need therapy.

464,000 fewer adolescents would engage in delinquent behavior

⁷“Mortality, severe morbidity and injury in children living with single parents in Sweden: a population-based study,” Gunilla Ringback Weitoft, Anders Hjern, Bengt Haglund, Mans Rosen, **The Lancet**, 361(9354) (January 25, 2003).

453,000 fewer youth would be involved in violence

515,000 fewer youth would begin smoking cigarettes

179,000 fewer youth would consider suicide.

62,000 fewer youth would actually attempt suicide.⁸

These numbers convey a sense of the human price young people have paid for the revolution in family structure. Increasing the percentage of children who live with their married parents to its 1970 level is an achievable goal, not a revolutionary change, and not a retrograde return to the dreaded fifties. I believe this improvement can be made without sacrificing the very important gains that women have made in higher education and economic status.

II. Gender and Marriage in Socialist Thought

I want to turn now to two ideas which I believe have been destructive to the family. The first is that the relationships between men and women are necessarily characterized by conflict, with the continual danger of dominance of men over women. The second idea is that sex and gender are fundamentally political categories and not biological categories. Any observed differences between men and women are automatically suspect, and are presumed evidence of the

⁸Paul R. Amato, "The Impact of Family Formation Change on the Cognitive, Social and Emotional Well-Being of the Next Generation," **The Future of Children**, 15, no. 2, (Fall 2005) pg. 89, quoted in David Blankenhorn, **The Future of Marriage**, (New York: Encounter Books, 2007), pg. 243-4.

dominance of men over women.

But first, let me say something about the term “feminism.” Last semester, I spoke on a dozen different campuses. In that process, I came to the conclusion that feminism is no longer a useful word, because people mean so many different things by that term. Some advocates of feminism believe that the term means the “radical idea that women are human.” Some opponents of feminism have concluded that feminism means men and women are equal except women are better. Both advocates and opponents of feminism are so attached to the meanings they’ve already assigned to the word, that it is impossible to shake them loose. I spent far too much time last semester arguing about what counts as feminism. So, let us bracket the term feminism, and just discuss these issues of male dominance and gender differences.

Both these ideas have Marxist origins. Marx and his followers have had marriage in their cross-hairs from the very beginning. Frederick Engels, Marx’s closest collaborator, equated the dominance of men over women with the dominance of capitalists over workers. He writes of an early, almost mythical period in which group marriage without concern for parentage, was the norm. According to Engels, the transition from group marriage to monogamy marked the beginning of the subordination of women.

The overthrow of mother right was the world historical defeat of the female sex. The man took command in the home also; the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude; she became the slave of his lust and a mere instrument for the production of children.⁹

He argues further that the economic and legal status of women is intimately connected to the organization of the household. I ask your indulgence for an extensive quotation from Engels. I'm not, as they say, making this up.

The legal inequality of the two partners bequeathed to us from earlier social conditions is not the cause, but the effect of the economic oppression of women. In the old communistic household, which comprised many couples and their children, the task entrusted to women of managing the household was as much a public, a socially necessary, industry as the procuring of food by the men. With the patriarchal family and still more with the single monogamous family, a change came. Household management lost its public character. It no longer concerned society. It became a private service; the wife became the head servant, excluded from all participation in social production.

Within the family, the husband is the bourgeois, and the wife represents the proletariat. ... The first condition for the liberation of the wife is to bring the whole female sex back into public industry. This in turn demands that the characteristic of the monogamous family as the economic unit of society be abolished.¹⁰

So there you have it: For Marx, Engels and their followers, the relationship between men and women is a special case of class struggle, with women as the

⁹Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, edited, with an Introduction by Eleanor Burke Leacock, (New York: International Publishers, 1972), pp. 120-121.

¹⁰Frederick Engels, ***The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, edited, with an Introduction by Eleanor Burke Leacock***, (New York: International Publishers, 1972), pp. 136-138.

oppressed class. Sex and gender are fundamentally political categories, not biological categories. Marriage is as intrinsically oppressive and unjust as private property.

Because the Left considers monogamous marriage a central part of the capitalist system of oppression, destabilizing marriage has been a consistent priority for them. Liberalizing divorce laws was one of the first actions of the Bolsheviks in Russia as early as 1917,¹¹ and of the Socialist government in Spain as recently as 2005.¹² Closer to home, Betty Friedan, author of **The Feminine Mystique**, the book that launched the 1960's American women's movement, was not just a random disgruntled housewife. She had written for radical publications, from her college days through her 30's.¹³

The Marxist ideology in the background explains why some thinkers dismiss evidence of biological sex differences. The Marxist analysis implies that

¹¹Carl Anderson, "The Family Beyond Ideology," **Familia et Vita**, Anno XI, No. 3/2006-1/2007, (Vatican City State: Pontificium Consilium Pro Familia) Congresso Internazionale Teologico-Pastorale, Valencia July 4, 2006). The very first decree of the new Soviet government repealed the marriage laws. The Soviet Family Code of 1919 entirely rejected the religious character of marriage, by providing only for civil marriage. The Soviet Family Code of 1926 granted legal rights to civil marriages only.

¹²"Spain's divorce rate soars after rules relaxed," **The UK Guardian**, November 17, 2007. Available on-line at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/spain/article/0,,2212603,00.html>

¹³The publications were **The Federated Press** and the United Electrical Workers Union **UE News**. Daniel Horowitz, **Betty Friedan and the Making of *The Feminine Mystique*: The American Left, the Cold War and Modern Feminism**, (University of Massachusetts Press: 1998).

differences between men and women are socially constructed, merely epiphenomenon. The modern mode of dismissing evidence of sex differences is to label them as “essentialist.” As recently as 2005, Catharine MacKinnon defined essentialism with a sneer as the biologically-determinist view that biological facts, such as being a woman or a man, determine “social outcomes and individual qualities.”¹⁴

Now like many women of my generation, I can go along with the idea that we should relax about gender roles, and not be overly rigid about masculine and feminine qualities. But I can’t go along with the idea that there are no individual qualities or social outcomes that are powerfully linked to gender. I am deeply committed to women in higher education and the professions. But I don’t believe that improving women’s economic opportunity requires the male-bashing that has become so prominent in many quarters of our culture. It is only recently that I realized how much these unfortunate features of modern life has its origins in Marxist theory.

The view that sex is a political category, denoting power and subjugation, also distorts discussions of children. Throughout Engels’ tract, there is virtually no

¹⁴ Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Women’s Lives: Men’s lives* 85 (2005), Quoted in David S. Cohen, “No Boy Left Behind: Single-Sex Education and the Essentialist Myth of Masculinity,” unpublished ms. January 2008.

mention of children, beyond the dubious claim that they were once raised by all the adults within the group marriage. His entire discussion concerns power relationships between men and women. He has almost nothing about the relationship between parents and children, beyond a discussion of inheritance. He does not even bring up the biological differences between mothers and fathers, or the unique contributions each gender makes to child-rearing. The pregnant woman's distinct vulnerability is not worth mentioning.

This is all well and good if you really believe that sex is nothing but a political category. But we are all walking around in bodies. And those bodies are gendered. Some of us actually think the gender of our bodies matters in significant ways.

Not everyone is troubled by the fact that women and men respond differently to issues having to do with sexual activity, with reproduction, and with parenting. Even among sophisticated professional couples, it isn't unusual for women to desire children sooner and more intensely. In fact, it is often the woman who wants the cohabiting relationship to move toward marriage, while the man is perfectly happy with living together as a long-term state. It isn't unusual for couples to respond differently to the birth of a new baby, and for mothers and

fathers to parent differently.¹⁵

If infertility strikes the couple who have waited a long time to start a family, each of them responds differently. Being unable to father a child impacts a man's sense of himself as a man. Being unable to become pregnant impacts a woman's sense of herself as a woman. Infertility is the first time some couples have really noticed how deeply gendered they really are, as they realize that neither envisions themselves exactly as an androgynous "parent."

The claim that all gender differences are evidence of male dominance makes it difficult for us, male and female alike, to see ourselves and our spouses as we really are. We are like gender innocents in some ways: each individual has to discover anew that there are substantive differences between ourselves and our spouses. We are surprised every time.

This is also why so many of the Left's preferred "women's issues," attempt to neutralize the significance of children. I'm thinking of policies that allow women to work uninterrupted by childbirth or child care responsibilities. Policies that allow women to postpone childbearing until they are financially prepared to raise the child by themselves, if necessary. Policies that substitute support from the state for support from the child's father.

¹⁵*Taking Sex Differences Seriously* by Steven E. Rhoads, (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2004)

A. Regulation of Markets

Women's issues worked well for those seeking to justify government intervention in the private sector. Many of us support the stated feminist objective of creating equal opportunities and incomes for men and women. But even this relatively innocuous goal gave the Left political entree into regulating wages and working conditions that American society would never have accepted any other way. Full income equality requires equal behaviors not only in the market, but also at home. Men and women are so different that they are highly unlikely to volunteer to behave identically in all the ways that would be necessary to create identical incomes.¹⁶

So we not only have laws against wage discrimination. We have regulations for hiring, firing and promotion, rules about workplace behavior that might create a "hostile environment." We have regulations of the schools to make sure women and girls feel welcome, so much so that women now outnumber men in most undergraduate programs.¹⁷ The federal government demands equality in college

¹⁶ For a summary of the evidence on gender differences, see *Taking Sex Differences Seriously* by Steven E. Rhoads, (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2004) and Simon Baron-Cohen, *The Essential Difference: The Truth about the Male and Female Brain*, (New York: Perseus Books, 2003).

¹⁷ For undergraduates of the traditional college age, that is, under 25, a clear female majority emerged a decade ago. The male share of undergraduates dropped from 49% in 1995-96 to 46% in 2003-04. Among undergraduates who are aged 25 and older, women outnumber men almost 2 to 1. American Council on Education, July 11, 2006 report, **Gender Equity in Higher**

athletic programs, and some feminists advocate regulating the numbers of students in math, science and engineering programs. Socialist Spain even passed a law requiring husbands to do half of all housework.¹⁸

The Left is not disturbed by the rise in unmarried child-bearing and the increase in the divorce rate. Most people would consider the evidence I cited above showing the suffering that children experience from the disruption of their families as a disadvantage of family break-down. But Marxists do not share this view. From their perspective, these “alternative family forms” reduce the dependence of women on their children’s biological father. They view the married couple family as a conservative tool for “privatizing” the care of the young, a responsibility that ought to be assumed by the state. Allow me to quote from a leading progressive magazine, **The Nation**, referring to proposals to promote marriage among the poor:

Married-couple households might “relieve” the state of the expense of helping to support single-parent households, and of the cost of a wide range of social services, from childcare and disability services to home nursing. Marriage thus becomes a privatization scheme: Individual married-couple households give women and children access to higher men’s wages, and also “privately” provide many services once offered through social welfare

Education: 2006, summary available on-line:

<http://www.acenet.edu/AM/Template.cfm?Section=HENA&TEMPLATE=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm&CONTENTID=17251>

¹⁸“Housework looms for Spanish Men,” BBC News, June 17, 2005. Available on-line at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4100140.stm>

agencies. More specifically, the unpaid labor of married women fills the gap created by government service cuts.¹⁹

To my libertarian friends, to those of you who consider yourselves fiscal conservatives, but social liberals, I would encourage you to take marriage and family seriously. The advocates of large government take these issues seriously. Therefore, you need to do so as well.

B. Unmarried childbearing and the destruction of civil society

But perhaps the most destructive result of the attack on marriage has been the destruction of the little civil society of the family. In most societies, the married couple is the most basic unit of social cooperation. For those who believe in limited government and spontaneous order, it ought to be an awe-inspiring sight. A man and a woman come together spontaneously to create a child and then work together to raise that child.²⁰ Marxists believe that this cooperation is a fiction, a mere cover for a relationship of male power.²¹ Their assertion that marriage is a nothing but a tool for male dominance injects poison and suspicion into the relationship that ought to be the most intimate.

¹⁹ “Holy Matrimony!” **The Nation**, March 2004, NY University Queer Studies Professor, Lisa Duggan.

²⁰ “Marriage and the Limits of Contract,” Jennifer Roback Morse, **Policy Review**, April/May 2005.

²¹ For a detailed and sophisticated treatment of this theme, see Carol Pateman, **The Sexual Contract**, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988).

In countries where this belief has been institutionalized, the combination of government taxes and benefits subsidizes unmarried motherhood. According to Patricia Morgan writing for the Institute for Economic Affairs in London, some British government officials hold that “the treatment of a married couple as a single financial unit... is to be discouraged, along with any predisposition in favor of the nuclear family.” The State is presumed responsible for the support of the children of unmarried parents. The married and the childless are taxed to pay for the children of the unmarried.

The results of this discrimination against marriage is that many women, particularly lower income and less educated women, now raise children completely on their own, with little or no assistance from the child’s father. The number of children being born to unmarried mothers has increased from 8% in 1970 to 42% in 2004, in the UK. ²² In the US, 37% of children are now born to unmarried mothers. Among African Americans, over 70% of children are born to unmarried mothers.

It is instructive to look at the country most influenced by Marxist ideas: Russia. The old Soviet Union implemented all the main Socialist ideas: the family and civil society were destroyed along with the economy. This created one of the

²²**The War Between the State and the Family: How Government Divides and Impoverishes**, by Patricia Morgan, (London: The Institute of Economic Affairs, 2007)

most unstable and unhealthy situations in the world.

Because the Soviets discouraged marriage and wrecked the economy, Russia is in the bottom 5% of fertility rates in the world. At 1.27 babies per woman, the Russian population will be nearly halved every generation.²³ Because people were expected to spy on each other for the last two generations, no one trusts anyone else. This further weakens the economy and reduces the propensity to marry and have children. The net result is that the Russian worker who is expected to support a rapidly aging population will be less healthy and less productive than virtually any other in the developed world.²⁴

Alternatives to the Marxist-inspired vision of the family.

I am not opposed to feminism, whatever that is. I am opposed to Marxism.

²³Data from 2005, **The World Factbook**, US Central Intelligence Agency, available on-line at: <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/rankorder/2127rank.html>

²⁴Russia's average age is now 43.4, compared with a US average age of 35.8 and a Japanese average age of 42. Between the mid-1960s and the start of the twenty-first century, the country's age-standardized death rates climbed by over 15 percent for women and by a shocking 40 percent for men. This upswing in mortality was especially concentrated among the group of "working age," where the upsurges in death rates were breathtaking. (Between 1970–71 and 2003, for example, every female cohort between the ages of 25 and 59 suffered at least a 40 percent increase in death rates; for men between the ages of 30 and 64, the corresponding figures uniformly exceeded 50 percent, and some cases exceeded 80 percent. Demographers and public health specialists do not fully understand the reasons for these gruesome results. Diet, smoking, sedentary lifestyles, and health care (or the lack of it) all play their part. Russia's romance with the vodka bottle is also deeply implicated here. Part of the mystery of the ongoing Russian health disaster, however, is that the problem looks to be worse than the sum of its parts: that is to say, death rates are significantly higher than one would predict on the basis of observed risk factors alone. "Growing Old the Hard Way: China, Russia and India," Nicholas Eberstadt, **Policy Review**, April/May 2006. Available On-line at

The Marxist categories of class struggle and oppression did not work well in the market. They work even less well in the bedroom.

I think women are hungry for a new way of understanding these great demographic changes and their own role in society. So let me take a stab at it.

I believe income equality between men and women should not be the ultimate goal for personal and public policy. Equal incomes require identical behavior. But men and women behave significantly differently in the labor force, at home and over the course of their lives. The attempt to create income equality has led to massive amounts of government regulation and litigation in the labor market. At the personal level, women have forced their work lives into the mold created for male career paths. Traditional male career trajectories demand the most intense investment early in life, which happens to be the time that women's bodies are most suited for pregnancy.

By now, the participation of women in the market at every time in their adult lives has become entrenched in society. Our higher education system, our labor market, even our housing markets, are built around the premise that high-achieving, highly-educated workers will postpone marriage and child-bearing. But by the time women have accomplished enough in their careers to feel financially

<http://www.hoover.org/publications/policyreview/2912391.html>

prepared for motherhood, their peak fertility is behind them.

For many women in the first generation of high powered careers, fertility difficulties came as a rude awakening. Economist Sylvia Ann Hewlett conducted a survey of high-achieving women, hoping to assess the factors responsible for their success. She noticed that none of these women had children. And she discovered that none of them had chosen to be childless. These women are extremely disappointed.²⁵

Women's fertility is impaired with age, in that women are less likely to conceive a child. Men's fertility may be compromised with age as well. There is now suggestive new evidence that a child's probability of genetic defects increases with the father's age. The theory is that the DNA replicates less precisely as men age. This produces minor genetic defects that are not fatal to the infant. But these non-fatal defects are implicated in disorders such as schizophrenia, autism and cancer. Men 40 and older are nearly six times more likely to have offspring with

²⁵Sylvia Ann Hewlett, **Creating a Life: Professional Woman and the Quest for Children**, (New York: Talk Miramax Books, 2002). pg. 2. In a more systematic survey, she found that 33% of high-achieving women are childless at age 40. Among women in "Corporate America," defined as companies with over 5,000 employees, 42% of high-achieving women are childless at age 40. She also found that the vast majority of these women did not choose to be childless. Looking back on their early twenties, only 14% said they definitely did not want children. Among those women who did have children, a fourth of them wanted more children than they were ultimately able to have.

autism than men under age 30. ²⁶

I propose that we embrace our fertility. Women would be better off if we accepted the reality that our fertility peaks during our twenties. Go to college for a liberal, but not necessarily a vocational, education. Get married. Have kids. Let our husbands support us. Maybe go back to school for an advanced degree. Go to work. Help support the kids' college. And, since women live longer than men, we could be working longer and let our husbands relax a bit.

The vision of women moving in and out of the workplace also involves an alternative vision of marriage and family. Marriage is a life-long institution for mutual cooperation and support, rather than the unenforceable non-contract it has become. I need not say that cooperation between spouses would be far better for children. Nor need I say that this is the exact opposite of the Marxist vision, which replaced marital stability with employment stability.

Gender differences are not necessarily sources of conflict, but rather opportunities for cooperation and complementarity. Our dignity as women does not depend on women being identical with men. Nor does our dignity depend upon our being completely independent of men. Women and men can view one another as collaborators, rather than as competitors. We women can place our education and

²⁶“A Man’s Shelf Life,” **Psychology Today**, September/ October 2007, available on-line at: <http://psychologytoday.com/articles/index.php?term=pto-20070830-000004&print=1>

our talent at the service of our families and the community, rather than at the service of employers and our egos. Rather than squeezing our child-bearing around the periphery of our careers, we can integrate the natural cycles of our bodies into the core of our lives.

This is the bargain women have made, under the influence of Marxism. Up until now, we have defined our goal as being equal participants in a labor market designed for people who don't give birth. Rather than change the labor market to accommodate the woman's body, we have insisted that women change their fertility in order to accommodate the labor market. I say we should take women's fertility as given and change the labor market to accommodate our bodies. We have defined our personal goal as being completely financially independent of men. I say we should find ways to strengthen our collaboration with our husbands.

I claim the right to participate in the labor market as women, not as men in skirts. I claim the right to get married and stay married, not the right to raise our children alone, and to spend larger and larger portions of our lives alone.

Conclusion

The family is essential to a free society. And women are essential to the family. The last generation of Marxist-inspired ideas about women and family have made family life unnecessarily difficult. It is time for a new approach. It is time to

let the natural, organic family blossom.

[Jennifer Roback Morse, Ph.D.](#) left a tenured position in the Economics Department at George Mason University to move with her husband and children to California in 1996. She is now the Senior Research Fellow in Economics at the [Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty](#).