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NEW REPORT FINDS THAT CHALLENGES OF PARENTHOOD ARE EASIER FOR PARTNERS, WITH MARRIED PARENTS HAPPIEST

ADVISES YOUNG COUPLES TO STRIVE FOR “HYBRID” MARRIAGES THAT COMBINE NEWER SOUL-MATE ASPIRATIONS WITH OLDER, INSTITUTIONAL FEATURES

Released today, When Baby Makes Three—How Parenthood Makes Life Meaningful and How Marriage Makes Parenthood Bearable, presents major new findings from the social sciences about the connection between marriage and parenthood. This new 2011 issue of State of Our Unions reveals that despite growing disillusionment about marriage among young adults, most still aspire to be parents. Significantly, parents who are married generally experience more happiness and less depression than parents who are unmarried.

New York, NY—December 8, 2011—Today, the National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia, in partnership with the Center for Marriage and Families at the Institute for American Values, released the 2011 issue of *The State of Our Unions: When Baby Makes Three—How Parenthood Makes Life Meaningful and How Marriage Makes Parenthood Bearable*, which focuses on the emotional wellbeing of parents. This report, based on a new survey of 2,870 married men and women (ages 18-46), examines the critical link between parenthood and marriage.

When Baby Makes Three documents how resilient—even in today’s world of fragmented families—the desire for parenthood is. In surveys, most young Americans still say they would like to have two or more children. Yet, at the same time, researchers find that a growing segment of young women and men believe that a good marriage is personally unattainable, and more are raising children outside of marriage.

“Young adults remain relatively certain about parenthood, but not so sure about marriage,” said W. Bradford Wilcox of the University of Virginia, director of the National Marriage Project and lead author of the report. “Their interest in parenthood seems warranted, given the sense of meaning that parenthood seems to afford adults. But they should not give up

on marriage: we find that the emotional experience of parenthood is a markedly better one for today's parents who are partnered—especially married parents.”

Major findings of the report include:

- Parenting is easier for partners. Married parents report more global happiness and less depression than single parents (and cohabiting parents fall in between).
- Married parents experience more meaning in their lives than their childless peers, and a substantial minority of married parents are “very happy” in their marriages. Married men and especially women are markedly more likely to report that they find life meaningful compared with their childless peers. And, a substantial minority of husbands (35%) and wives (37%) do *not* experience parenthood as an obstacle to marital happiness. This report reveals their secrets.
- A hybrid model of married life appears to be the best path to successfully combine marriage and parenthood for today's parents. The report identifies ten key factors that are linked to increased odds of successfully combining marriage and parenthood. It outlines a path that young married couples can take that combines newer, soul-mate style features of married life (such as shared housework, good sex, marital generosity, and date nights) with older, institutional style features of married life (such as shared religious faith, commitment, and the support of friends and family). **“Indeed, one of the striking findings of this report is that domestic equality has emerged as a predictor of marital success for today's young married parents, even as most married mothers would prefer to work part-time and most married fathers would prefer to work full-time,”** noted Elizabeth Marquardt, report co-author. This hybrid model may help to ensure increased marital happiness and overall success as couples enter parenthood.
- Surprisingly, the happiest married parents have 4 or more kids; they are about as happy as married couples with no children. It appears that particular types of couples end up having large numbers of children, remain married to one another, and also enjoy cultural, social, and relational strengths that more than offset the challenges of parenting a large family.

According to Wilcox, **“When Baby Makes Three shows how parenthood makes life meaningful and marriage makes parenthood bearable.** The ideas presented in this report should give hope to married couples who believe that marital happiness and the realities of parenthood are mutually exclusive. As our research shows, this need not be the case: the report identifies a number of paths couples can take to successfully combine marriage and parenthood.”

Marquardt added, **“Despite upbeat popular media portrayals of single moms by choice who forgo marriage to bear children alone, actual research suggests that women raising children with their children's fathers are happier.”**

THE REPORT presents results from a new, nationally representative survey of more than 1,400 heterosexual married couples between the ages of 18 and 46: “The Survey of Marital Generosity,” conducted by Knowledge Networks in December of 2010 and January of 2011 and funded by the Science of Generosity initiative at the University of Notre Dame, as well as new analyses of nationally representative data from the General Social Survey and the National

Longitudinal Survey of Youth. The report responds to three questions: Is it emotionally easier to parent alone in a world in which a good marriage seems increasingly out of reach? Is parenthood itself an obstacle to a good marriage? What are the social, cultural, and relational sources of marital success among today's parents?

THE NATIONAL MARRIAGE PROJECT is a nonpartisan, nonsectarian, and interdisciplinary initiative based at the University of Virginia and founded in 1997 at Rutgers University. The Project's mission is to provide research and analysis on the health of marriage in America, to analyze the social and cultural forces shaping contemporary marriage, and to identify strategies to increase marital quality and stability. Directed by W. Bradford Wilcox, an associate professor of sociology at the university, its publications include the annual *State of Our Unions* report.

THE CENTER FOR MARRIAGE AND FAMILIES is located at the Institute for American Values, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to strengthening families and civil society in the U.S. and the world. Directed by Elizabeth Marquardt, the Center's mission is to increase the proportion of U.S. children growing up with their two married parents. At the Center's website, FamilyScholars.org, bloggers include emerging voices and senior scholars with distinctive expertise and points of view tackling today's key debates on the family.

WHEN BABY MAKES THREE, the 2011 issue of *The State of Our Unions*, is part of the "Nest and Nest-egg Initiative," a multi-year inquiry by the Institute for American Values, supported by The Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, into the prudential values and institutions that are essential to sustaining a secure and thriving American middle class.

For more information about this report, or to schedule an interview with W. Bradford Wilcox or Elizabeth Marquardt, please contact David Lapp at 212-246-3942 or dlapp@americanvalues.org.

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