



## Policy Action Bulletin: Fall Conference 2008 **Contemporary Families – Formation, Function and the Future**

### **MCFR's Role**

MCFR's mission is to “strengthen all families by educating and supporting family professionals and promoting connections among those involved in research, policy and practice.” This Policy Action Bulletin grew out of the MCFR Fall conference, *Contemporary Families: Formation, Function and the Future*, held on December 4, 2008. Visit [www.mcfr.net](http://www.mcfr.net) for more information.

### **Background**

Stephanie Coontz, keynote presenter, is a historian, author, and faculty member at The Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington where she teaches history and family studies. Stephanie Coontz is also the Director of Research and Public Education for the Council on Contemporary Families. Founded in 1996, the Council on Contemporary Families (CCF) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to enhancing the national conversation about what contemporary families need and how these needs can best be met.

Stephanie's presentation brought a perspective to the discussion about family that is rarely heard – the fact that family structure, formation and behavior is continually undergoing change. She used historical data and the changing sociology of the family to help us understand the paths that lead to contemporary family life.

### **Key Questions**

Key questions raised during this conference include:

- How can looking at marriage, families and parent-child relationships from a historical perspective inform our work with families?
- What are the changing social conditions that have thrown traditional family institutions and roles into question?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of different family formations? What are the trade offs?
- How can we move from what we wish for families to helping each family build on and/or discover their particular strengths and weaknesses?
- What does the research tell us about trends in contemporary family formation?
- How can we make this research easily accessible to parents, professionals and policy makers?

These issues and others are addressed in Stephanie's books, including: *Marriage, A History: From Obedience to Intimacy, or How Love Conquered Marriage*. She has also written: *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*, *The Way We Really Are: Coming to Terms with America's Changing Families* and *The Social Origins of Private Life: A History of American Families*. She also edited *American Families: a Multicultural Reader*.

## Research and Informational Links

Additional research and information on contemporary family formation are included in the following links and resources.

- Stephanie Coontz, [www.stephaniecoontz.com](http://www.stephaniecoontz.com)
- Council on Contemporary Families, <http://www.contemporaryfamilies.org/index.php>
- The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, <http://www.fragilefamilies.princeton.edu/>
- Andrew J. Cherlin, Professor of Public Policy, Department of Sociology, Johns Hopkins University <http://www.soc.jhu.edu/people/cherlin/>
- The Future of Children, <http://www.futureofchildren.org/info-url2815/info-url.htm>
- The Gottman Institute. <http://www.gottman.com/research/>
- Harvard Family Research Project, [Harvard Family Research Project](http://www.harvardfamilyresearchproject.org/)
- Institute for Women's Policy Research, [Institute for Women's Policy Research](http://www.instituteforwomenspolicyresearch.org/)

## Books

- *Alone Together: How Marriage in America Is Changing*. Paul R. Amato, Alan Booth, David R. Johnson, Stacy J. Rogers, Harvard University Press, 2007.
- *Unmarried Couples with Children*, Edited by Paula England and Kathryn Edin, 2007.
- *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Robert D. Putnam, Simon and Schuster, New York, 2000.
- *Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women Put Motherhood Before Marriage*, Kathryn Edin and Maria Kefalas, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, California, 2005.
- *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work: A Practical Guide from the Country's Foremost Relationship Expert*, John M. Gottman and Nan Silver, Three Rivers Press, New York, New York, 1999.