

Addressing Family Instability and Complexity

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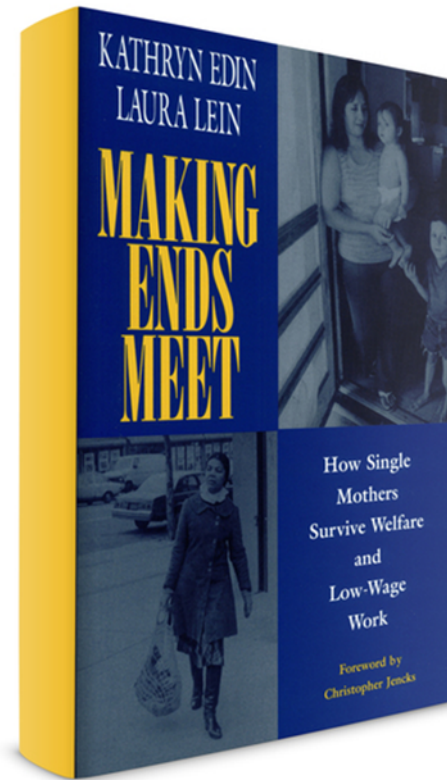
Panel 2: Human Capital and Mobility

Thanks to: Timothy Nelson, Laura Tach, U.S. Partnership on Mobility from Poverty

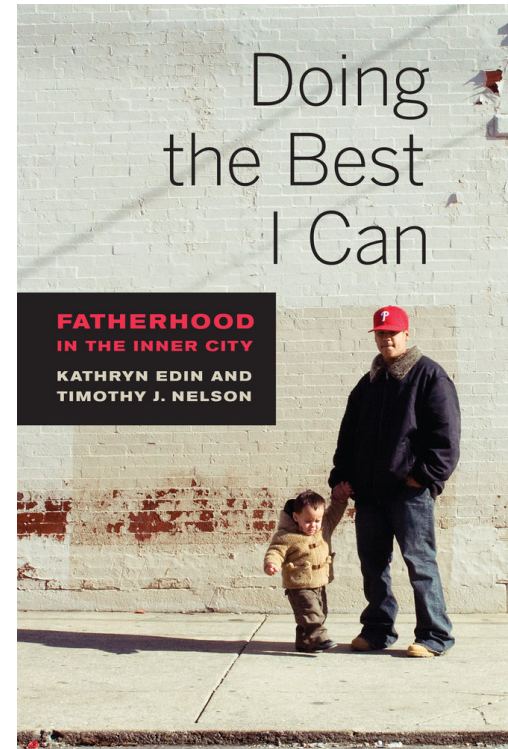
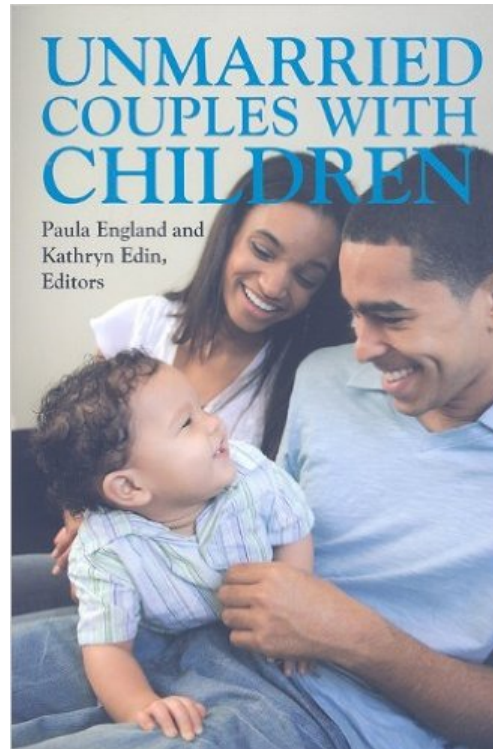
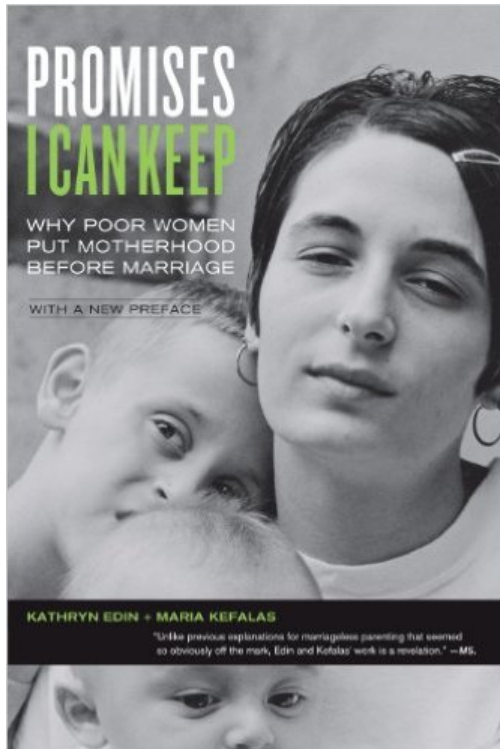
My History (as a 20 something)

“Why don’t they just get married?”

“Why do they have the kids in the first place?”

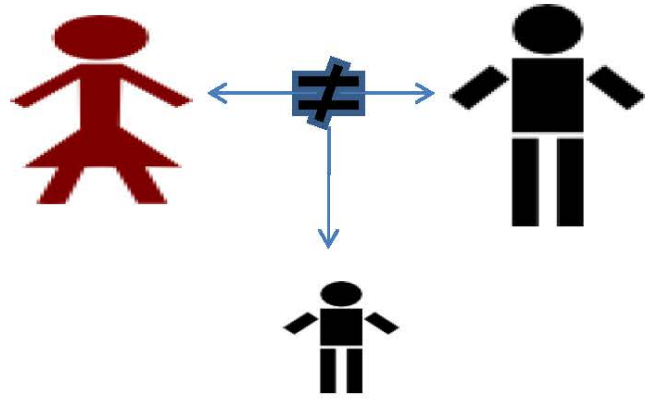


My History (as a 30 something)

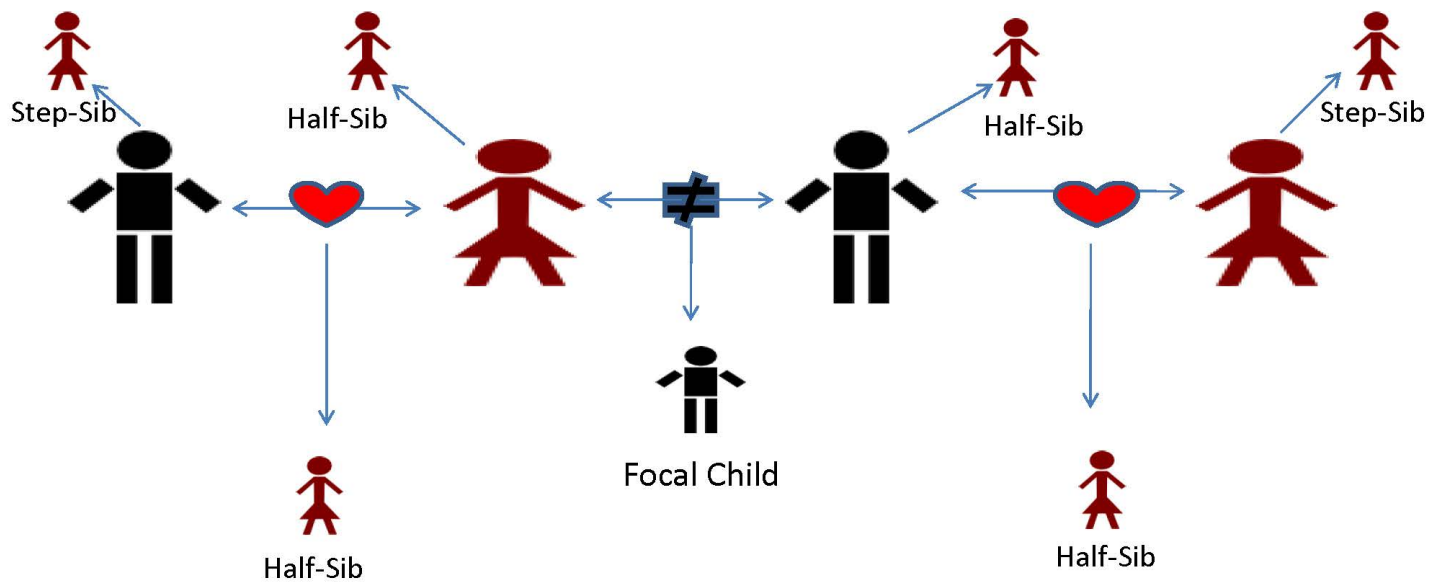


KEY LESSON:

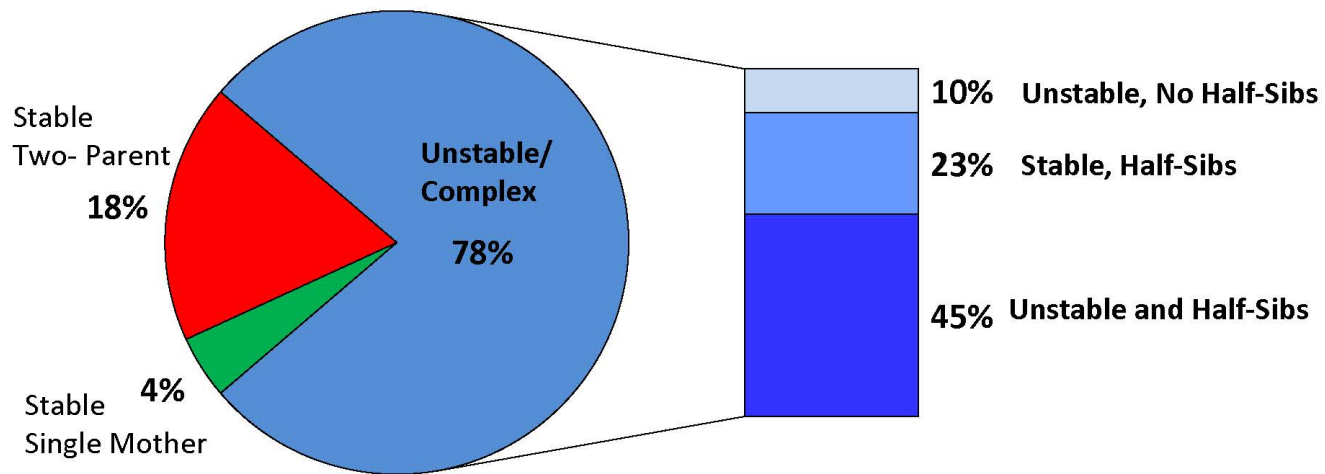
Any strategy to improve mobility must include the **family contexts** into which children are born and raised.



Focal Child



Children's Combined Experiences of Instability and Complexity in Fragile Families by 5th Birthday



Unstable: relationship between biological parents ends and/or relationship with new partner begins
Complex: one or more parents has children by a different partner

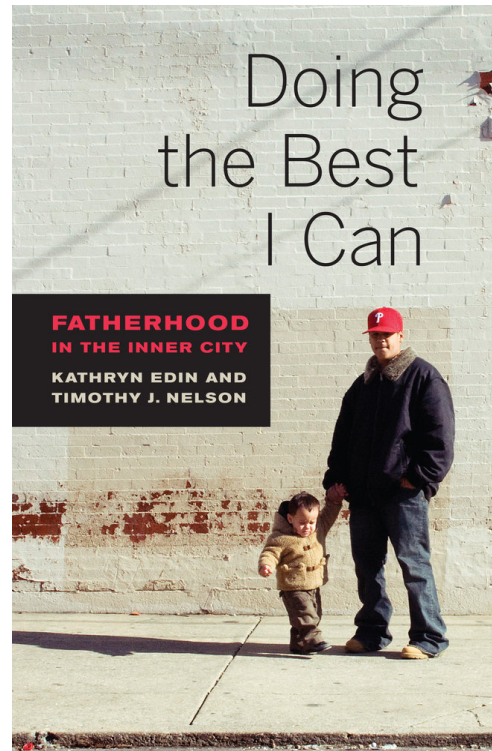
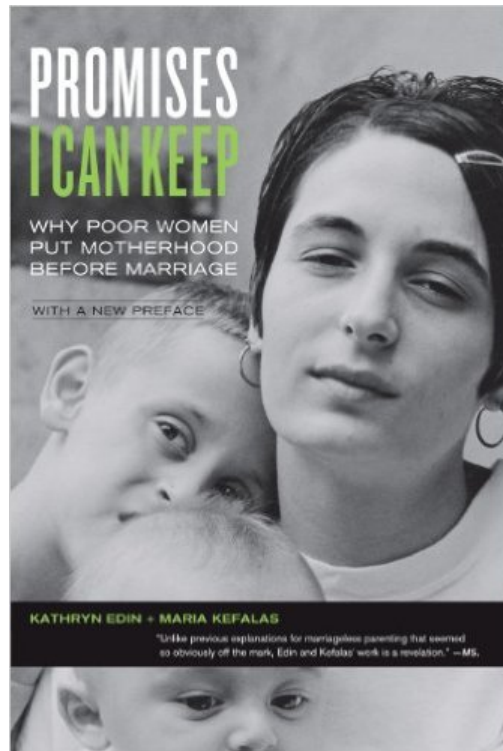
Source: Tabulated by Dr. Laura Tach from Waves 1-4 of the Fragile Families & Child Wellbeing Survey, a nationally representative sample of children born in the late 1990s in cities with populations of 200,000 or more. Fragile Families are defined as biological parents who were unmarried at time of birth.

Three Facts about Instability and Complexity

- **Historically** unique
- Unique among **rich nations**
- Both a **consequence and a cause** of inequality
 - Highly concentrated among the **disadvantaged** (bottom 40 percent)
 - Family contexts **calcify existing divides**

What can account for these trends?

The Process of Family Formation



The modal birth to unmarried (disadvantaged) parent is.....

- **unplanned** (unplanned yet not accidental v.s. “just not thinking at the time”)
 - Ambivalence
- **ill-timed** (6-7 months’ “courtship”)
- in the context of a **relationship that is not fully formed** (“together” but not in a “real relationship”)
- in the context of the life course when young people are **still trying to find their life path**

Actually she was dating a friend of mine and somehow...she wanted me. But it was my friend's girl, so I didn't want to have nothing to do with it. But then [my friend] heard some shit [and] started talking shit saying he would kick my ass. So I was like "whatever. Then I will be with your girl." Eventually, I just got stuck with her for a little while.

- John, 24, white, 5 year old, window tinter

Well my [youngest] son's...mother, I met her at the University of Pennsylvania hospital. She was attractive to me when I first saw her and I made my approach and we begin to socialize and communicate and then from there we began to affiliate and at some point and time we became intimate and my son was born.

- Amin, 39, black, 6 and 18 year old, dietary aid.

You see I had been running around with different girls...but every time I had any kind of relationship there is no babies born so I didn't believe in safe sex and next thing I knew this girl Debbie, she was pregnant.... After we got together about four months, she comes and says, "Bruce, I am seven weeks pregnant." I said, "I am shooting blanks, you can't be pregnant...." Then we went for a DNA test and that was when she found out that I was the father and she was the mother.

- Bruce, 44, white, 2-year-old twins, sells blood and works day labor

I was hanging at a friend of mine's house, and her and a couple of her friends were there, and she used to go out with my friend. My friend was trying to get back with her, and I ended up getting with her.... We were only together for about two months, and she was getting pregnant.... I didn't mind at all.

- Tim, 23, white, 3 and 5 year old, roofer

MEANWHILE, the modal birth to married (advantaged) parent.....

- meticulously planned
- ideally timed
- occurs in the context of relationships that have become increasingly stable over time
- occurs only after both he, and she, have “arrived” career-wise

...has allowed for unprecedented investments in children

What might interrupt the pattern?

- A surprising answer!
- **SPARKS** (Supported Pathways through the Arts, Recreation, Knowledge, and Schools)
 - Emerging evidence suggests that these in- and out-of-school positive youth development activities can have a *dramatic* impact on family formation and family stability among disadvantaged youth.
 - **Career Academies**
 - Young men were
 - *33 percent more likely to be married*
 - *46 percent more likely to be a custodial parent*
 - *30 percent more likely to live independently with child and partner (21 percent for women)*
 - **High-quality after-school programs** (i.e. Carerra)
 - *impacts on pregnancy of up to 50 percent*

SPARKS

- SPARKS are the **because** that can interrupt the haphazard process of family formation observed.
- SPARKS can be a two-fer
 - They can have **direct effects** on mobility
 - They can have **indirect effects** through their impact on family formation
- SPARKS are a three-fer
 - Impact not only **prospective parents**, but the **children they will eventually have**

“Identity Projects”



“Identity Projects”



“Identity Projects”



“Identity Projects”



Other Considerations

- From *Coming of Age in the Other America*
 - Crabs in a bucket (Brittney)
 - Traps in post-secondary education
 - A labor market with few pathways to success
- From the RCT literature
 - Investments in early childhood education can also have dramatic effects on the process of family formation among disadvantaged youth.
 - Perry Preschool
 - 90 percent increase in the percentage who raised their own children
 - So can changing the neighborhood context in which children are raised
 - Moving to Opportunity
 - 23 percent reduction in “single mothers”