The Argument

Non-marital childbearing is part of a negative feedback dynamic in which poor labor market conditions for men in Gen1 lead to lower parental investment in Gen2 and ultimately to lower human capital and mobility in Gen2.
Percent of Births to Unmarried Mothers

Source: National Center for Health Statistics
Single Motherhood by Age 15: A Cross National View
Causes

• Decline in stigma about sex outside marriage and single motherhood
• New birth control technology
• Decline in labor market conditions for low and middle skilled workers, “marriageable” men
• Increase in income inequality – “marriage bar,” despair
Consequences

• Economic insecurity for mothers and children
• Relationship instability and family complexity
• Lower parental investment
• Worse child outcomes
  • Health
  • Behavior problems, especially boys
  • Educational attainment
  • Causal evidence is pretty good
Relationship Transitions (Age 5)

Unmarried Mothers

- 39%: 0
- 15%: 1-2
- 3%: 3-4
- 3%: 5+

Married Mothers

- 80%: 0
- 18%: 1-2
- 2%: 3-4
- 1%: 5+

Number of Transitions
Family Complexity (Age Five)

**Unmarried Mothers**
- 53% (Green)
- 16% (Blue)
- 23% (Yellow)
- 8% (Red)

**Married Mothers**
- 82% (Green)
- 12% (Blue)
- 4% (Yellow)
- 2% (Red)

Number of Fathers
What Can Be Done?

Prevention
• *Changes in norms about sex and single motherhood*
• *Changes in birth control technology*
• Declines in labor market opportunities
• Reduce income inequality
• Delay childbearing

Compensatory
• Increase economic security for single mothers
• Provide stable housing
• Provide high quality childcare & pre-school