

RESEARCH REPORTS

Reviews of new research at public agencies and private institutions

"Closed Hearts, Closed Minds: The Textbook Story of Marriage."

Institute for American Values, 1841 Broadway, Ste. 211, New York, N.Y. 10023. 21 pp. \$10

Author: Norval D. Glenn

Thirty-eight percent of married men and women between the ages of 30 and 59 report in recent surveys that they are very happy—a far higher percentage than for their unmarried counterparts. Substantial social-science research confirms that married people of both sexes are on average better off than all types of unmarried people “in terms of happiness, satisfaction, physical health, longevity, and most aspects of emotional health,” notes Glenn, a sociologist at the University of Texas. Yet most recent college textbooks on marriage and family offer a very different impression.

Most of the 20 textbooks he examined, “while at times professing respect for marriage as a relationship, offer a determinedly bleak view of marriage as an institution, and especially of marriage as a morally or legally binding commitment.” The books are used in some 8,000 college courses every semester. It is, he says, as if the authors all lived in

“a strange world in which all bad things about marriage (domestic violence, marital fragility, and career costs to women) are clearly visible, but all good things” about it can barely be seen.

The textbook authors, Glenn writes, also seem to adjust their blinders when considering “nontraditional” families, so that any research showing the hazards to children growing up outside intact families—such as evidence of the relationship between family structure and juvenile crime—is ignored or minimized, “while virtually any optimistic theory about the benefits of ‘family diversity’ gets magnified far out of proportion to the data that generate it.”

Glenn awards only one of the books, Andrew J. Cherlin’s *Public and Private Families: An Introduction* (1996), any A’s for scholarship and balanced treatment of controversial topics, but considers even its coverage of today’s urgent family issues worthy only of a C.

"Giving Better, Giving Smarter."

National Commission on Philanthropy and Civic Renewal, 1150 17th St. N.W., Ste. 201, Washington, D.C. 20036. 130 pp. \$20

Nearly 70 percent of American households in 1995 reported making charitable contributions. Their gifts totaled \$116 billion, accounting for 80 percent of all charitable giving in the United States. (Other major sources of philanthropy: bequests from individuals at death, \$10 billion; foundations, \$10 billion; corporations, \$7 billion.) Yet few Americans know how effectively their charitable dollars are being used, according to the National Commission on Philanthropy and Civic Renewal, a private body headed by former secretary of education Lamar Alexander.

Americans give only nine percent of their charitable donations directly to “human services” organizations aiding the poor. But they give 57 percent of their donations (\$66 billion) to churches and

other religious organizations, which devote nearly a third of their outlays to aid for the poor. Many of the organizations supported by the United Way (which, with some 2,000 local chapters, raised \$3.1 billion in 1995) and other federated charities also help the poor.

But “far too much” of all this private largesse, the commission believes, “is mis-spent or misdirected,” making “scant difference in people’s lives or the well-being of communities.” Generous donations to large national organizations serving the poor, while “not to be discouraged . . . often represent a missed opportunity to strengthen more innovative, if less prominent, local institutions and organizations,” the commission says. Most Americans “treat charity as an obligation or a habit,” without thinking carefully