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**To:** Religion and Ethics Newsweekly  
**From:** Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research

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**RE: Faith and Family in America**

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Over the last 50 years, our society has undergone huge demographic shifts with regards to the family. In the year 2000, nearly half of all Americans lived in a home where the head of household was unmarried; in the 1950s, 78 percent lived with a married head of household. Family size has also decreased, as families increasingly choose to have fewer children, or parents choose to go it alone, without another adult. There is no doubt that the “traditional” organization of family around a nuclear unit has changed and our nation is dealing with the consequences.

Some religious institutions and leaders voice concerns about the decline of marriage, as they see marriage as a covenant with God that promotes stable family relationships. One assumption, and concern, is that parents who choose to break their family bonds are, in essence, breaking their relationship with God. There are others who embrace, or at least accept, these changes and see this acceptance as central to sustaining their religious communities. Clearly, this debate polarizes our society, as some Americans are trying to mend what they see as cracks in the foundation of our society while others are seeking to move toward greater openness and tolerance.

This study, called “Faith and Family in America,” takes on these changes exploring issues of family, marriage, and parenting in the context of America’s religious life.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The following report is based on a random-digit-dial telephone survey of 1,130 adults 18 and over, conducted between July 25 and August 7, 2005. In order to have statistical confidence in the differences



## Key Findings

### *Beliefs and Reality*

- Americans hold a flexible definition of the family. Family can be about immediate relations, but for many it is also about love, togetherness, and caring for those held dear.
- Only one-third of Americans define a family in the most traditional sense as a “mother, father, and children,” or “a husband, wife and children.”
- At the same time, many Americans aspire to the idea of marriage and kids. They also realize that the reality does not always live up to the fairy tale. Even the most devout acknowledge that divorce may be necessary and that cohabitation can be acceptable.
- Religious conservatives such as evangelical Protestants and traditional Catholics hold more traditional notions about family structure than religious liberals. At the same time, though they view God’s plan for marriage as one man, one woman, for life, relatively few evangelical Protestants and traditional Catholics feel divorce is a sin.
- Protestants, mainlines as well as evangelicals, are more likely than others to get married. However, they are no more likely than other groups to stay married, and remarriage is fairly high among both these groups. Church attendance plays into this dynamic, however, as couples who attend church regularly are less likely to have been remarried.
- Although evangelical parents are more likely to feel a family suffers when a woman has a full-time job, they are in fact more likely than average to be in two-income households.

### *Religion and Parenting*

- Americans tend to hold fairly traditional views of child rearing. Parents, even those who do not live in the arrangements themselves, tend to agree that it is better for children if their parents are married.
- Parents, regardless if they are married or not, remain quite religious. Though unmarried parents attend church less than married parents, religion is every bit as

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among family structures, parents in traditional and non-traditional families were oversampled, so that there are 339 respondents from traditional families and 240 respondents from non traditional families included in this study. This survey carries a margin of error of +/- 3 percentage points.



important in their lives, and they adopt many informal religious practices outside church.

- Parents have a lot of worries when it comes to their children, but, on balance, parents in non-traditional families worry more than parents in traditional families. Some of this reflects the basic economic insecurity of non-traditional families, but they also worry more about protecting their children from bad influences such as sex and violence on television and the Internet.
- Parents do not worry about their children's faith; confident their children will decide to adopt their beliefs, parents are not concerned about a successful transmission of religious beliefs to their children.

#### *Women of Color, Faith, and the Family*

- African American women are devoutly religious, and they hold conservative views of the definition of family. Yet African American women hold extremely progressive views toward women and work. They feel strongly that both men and women should contribute to the family income. They also feel it is personally important to them to have a career.
- Generally, however, this means that African American women must do a great deal of work. They are as likely as white women to have full-time jobs and take care of children, but they are much more likely than white women to do more housework.

#### *Policy Responses*

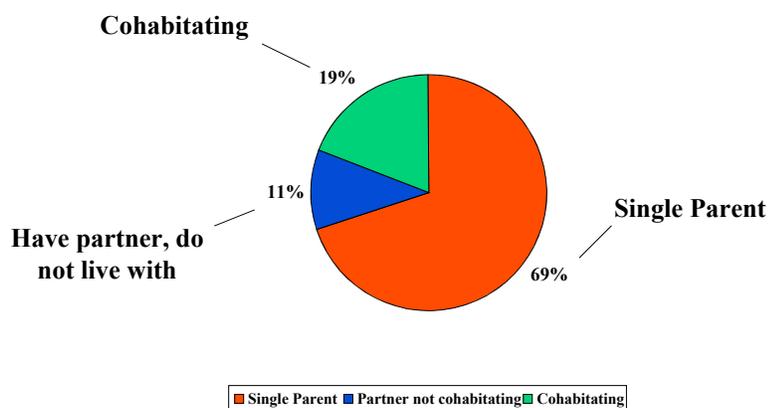
- Americans view family as something quite personal. When it comes to government initiatives, most parents would prefer the government stay away from matters of the home and family.
- "Moral values" tend to reflect concerns about personal behavior and the ability to inculcate those values in their children. Although there are differences by religious tradition, relatively few cite issues like abortion and gay marriage as an important part of the moral values debate.
- Although Americans hold to a traditional definition of marriage, Americans are much more split on whether gays and lesbians should be able to have adoption rights so they can legally adopt children.



## About Traditional and Non-Traditional Families

- Traditional families are simply married couples with children under 18 in the household, and non-traditional families are unmarried parents with children under 18 in the household. Such families might be single parents living on their own, cohabiting couples with children, or same-sex relationships with children. There is no normative implication behind these terms; they merely serve to point out that one set of families conforms to a longer understood form, and the other is an emergent, newer form.

### Marital/Partner Status of Non-Traditional Families (Percent Responding)



*"Do you have a partner who lives with you, a partner who does NOT live with you, or are you mostly on your own?"*

- According to the 2000 Census, 24 percent of all households had a traditional family structure. Roughly 16 percent of households had a child and a male or female head of household with no spouse present.
- Most non-traditional parents are single parents on their own (69 percent), but 19 percent are cohabiting with a steady partner and 11 percent had a partner whom



they do not live with. A majority (60 percent) had been married at least once, although they are not married currently.<sup>2</sup>

- Non-traditional families are disproportionately female, minority, and low income. Nearly half of non-traditional parents make less than \$30,000 a year.
- As mothers typically are the primary caretakers of children, it is not unexpected that non-traditional parents would be disproportionately female. But it does mean that many fathers are living in separate households away from these families and must work harder to have involvement in their children's lives.

## Beliefs and Reality

We find that as families have taken on different forms, the definition of “family” has become fluid, adapting to the different shapes and sizes of the modern American family. Along with these changes come some contradictions, as attitudes about the way a family should look do not always mesh with lived experiences. We observe instances, for example, where devout Christians adhere to the standard of marriage for life, even though they are as likely to get divorced as others.

### *Visions of the Family*

- Americans hold a flexible notion of family. While some define a family narrowly as the nuclear unit, many think of family as something more than just parents and their children. Family can be many things: extended relations, the people one lives with regardless of biological relationship, members of the community, loved ones, or even an emotion like feeling cared for or connected to others.
- When asked to define a family for themselves, many (62 percent) think of family as the immediate family unit, such as “parents,” “immediate family,” “one parent and child.” Only one-third (34 percent) of Americans define “family” in the most traditional sense: “mother, father, and children,” “wife, husband, and children,” or “parents and children.”
- We observe a disconnection between attitudes toward the family and lived experiences. In spite of seismic changes in divorce rates, cohabitation and single parenthood, Americans in traditional and non-traditional arrangements hold fast to the traditional ideal of marriage and family, where the lucky couple gets to live “happily ever after.” This vision is the aspiration. Americans overwhelmingly

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<sup>2</sup> Because non-traditional families are defined as having a child in the household, this excludes single or divorced fathers who have children that do not live with them.



believe it is God’s plan that marriage should be one man, one woman, for life (71 percent agree).

### How Families View Marriage (Percent Responding “Agree”)

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Traditional</i>	<i>Non-Traditional</i>
Married people are generally happier than unmarried people.	49	51	27
It is all right for a couple to live together without intending to get married.	49	46	59
It's a good idea for a couple who intend to get married to live together first.	40	38	61
Divorce is usually the best solution when a couple can't seem to work out their marriage problems.	52	38	54
It is better for children if their parents are married.	80	81	57
Divorce is a sin.	22	26	24
God's plan for marriage is one man, one woman, for life.	71	75	69
Love is what makes a family, and it doesn't matter if parents are gay or straight, married or single.	55	56	74

"Now I am going to read to you a list of statements. For each of the following, please tell me if you agree or disagree with the statement. If you neither agree nor disagree with the statement, please say so."

- And yet, most Americans do acknowledge that there may be conditions under which marriage simply is not the best option for everyone. Many believe that divorce can be a good solution for couples that cannot work out their problems (52 percent). Few (22 percent) believe it is a sin. Non-traditional parents, many of whom are divorced themselves, are more likely than traditional parents to support divorce if a couple cannot work out their problems (54 percent versus 38 percent agree, respectively).
- Though divided, a plurality of Americans accepts cohabitation. Roughly half (49 percent) believe it is all right for a couple to live together. A majority of non-traditional parents (59 percent) agree that it is all right for a couple to cohabit, versus a near minority (46 percent) of traditional parents.
- Americans, however, balk at the idea of trial marriage. Only 40 percent agree that it is a good idea for a couple who intend to get married to live together first. Family structure has something to do with these attitudes. Not surprisingly, non-traditional parents are much more likely than their married counterparts to have positive attitudes toward alternative family structures like trial marriages. A



majority (61 percent) agrees that trial marriages are a good idea (versus 38 percent of traditional parents). Among parents in traditional arrangements, however, we observe that younger people are far more open to these than their older counterparts. For example, nearly half (45 percent) of traditional parents under 40 feel trial marriage is a good idea, versus 29 percent of those over 50.

### *Religion and Visions of the Family*

- There are large differences in attitudes toward traditional views of marriage by religion. Evangelical Protestants and traditional Catholics adhere particularly strongly to the notion that marriage should be one man, one woman, for life, and they are strongly opposed to the idea of a trial marriage.<sup>3</sup> Mainline Protestants and liberal Catholics tend to agree that marriage is one man, one woman, for life, but they narrowly support trial marriage.<sup>4</sup> Seculars, on the other hand, are supportive of trial marriage and tend to reject the notion that marriage is one man, one woman, for life.
- Religious conservatives such as evangelical Protestants and traditional Catholics are less likely than others to embrace the notion that “love is what makes a family, and it doesn’t matter if parents are gay or straight, married or single.” On the other hand, liberal Catholics, mainline Protestants and people with no religious preference wholly support this notion.
- Despite their belief in traditional family arrangements, it does not appear that devoutness makes one immune to unsuccessful marriage. Although Protestants, including evangelicals, are more likely than other groups to *get* married (63 percent of Evangelicals and mainline Protestants, versus 48 percent of people with no religious preference and 55 percent of devout Catholics and 56 percent of liberal Catholics), they are no more likely than other groups to *stay* married. In fact, Protestants are more likely than other groups to have been married more than once (23 percent of Evangelicals and 26 percent of mainline Protestants, versus 15 percent of people with no religious preference and 17 percent of devout and liberal Catholics.)
- Correspondingly, we observe fairly open attitudes to divorce across all denominations. Relatively few evangelicals feel that divorce is a sin, yet mainline Protestants and people with no religious preference are even less likely to agree.

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<sup>3</sup> Evangelical Protestants are respondents who indicated that they are Protestant or of another Christian religious preference other than Roman Catholic, Orthodox or Mormon. In addition, they either indicated they are a fundamentalist, evangelical, charismatic or Pentecostal Protestant, or they indicated that they identify with none of these and consider themselves to be a born-again Christian.

<sup>4</sup> Mainline Protestants are respondents who indicated that they are Protestant or of another Christian religious preference other than Roman Catholic, Orthodox or Mormon. In addition, they either indicated they are a mainline or liberal Protestant, or they indicated that that they identify with none of these and do not consider themselves to be a born-again Christian.



Among Catholics we see a similar trend. Few traditional Catholics feel divorce is a sin, yet they are nearly twice as likely to feel this way as their liberal counterparts.

### Attitudes Toward Marriage by Religious Identity (Percent Responding "Agree")

	Total	Evangelical Christian	Mainline Protestant	Traditional Catholic	Liberal Catholic	No pref/Atheist Agnostic
Married people are generally happier than unmarried people.	49	60	53	51	39	35
It is all right for a couple to live together without intending to get married.	49	21	57	38	72	78
It's a good idea for a couple who intend to get married to live together first.	40	22	43	34	54	66
Divorce is usually the best solution when a couple can't seem to work out their marriage problems.	52	48	61	46	63	50
It is better for children if their parents are married.	80	86	82	88	75	58
Divorce is a sin.	22	34	14	30	18	8
God's plan for marriage is one man, one woman, for life.	71	92	62	91	60	31
Love is what makes a family, and it doesn't matter if parents are gay or straight, married or single.	55	33	62	41	77	80

"Now I am going to read to you a list of statements. For each of the following, please tell me if you agree or disagree with the statement. If you neither agree nor disagree with the statement, please say so."

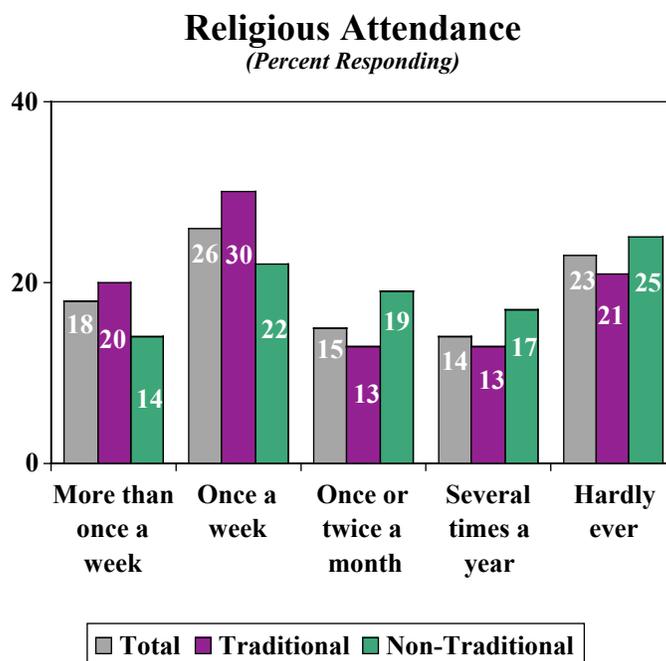
- Most people tend to acknowledge that divorce can be the best solution, although religious preference tends to mute the intensity of the findings. For example, nearly two-thirds of mainline Protestants and liberal Catholics agree that divorce can be the best solution if a couple cannot seem to work out their marital problems. On the other hand, evangelicals and traditional Catholics only narrowly support this notion. Half of people with no religious preference tend to agree.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> It is worth noting that people with no religious preference are less likely to have been married themselves, which suggests that fewer members of this group had been forced to face the issue themselves.



*Family Structure and Religious Practice*

- In some respects non-traditional parents are less religious than traditional families. For instance, non-traditional parents are more likely than traditional parents to say they have no religious preference (17 percent versus 9 percent). There are also important differences in intensity, as parents in non-traditional family arrangements are less likely to report formal measures of religious participation, such as church attendance. Half of traditional parents attend services at least once a week, versus a third (36 percent) of non-traditional parents.



*"How often do you attend religious services – more than once a week, once a week, once or twice a month, several times a year, or hardly ever?"*

- But non-traditional parents are every bit as likely as traditional parents to feel that religion is “very important” in their life (55 percent versus 59 percent). A finding that holds even when controlling for race and gender, which is important given that women and African Americans tend to be more religious. For example, 57 percent of white women in traditional families feel religion is very important, versus 50 percent of white women in non-traditional families.



### Importance of Religion (Percent Responding)

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Traditional</i>	<i>Non-Traditional</i>
<b>Very important</b>	62	59	55
<b>Somewhat important</b>	25	31	32
<b>Not very important</b>	7	7	6
<b>Not at all important</b>	6	4	7
<b>Total Important</b>	87	90	87
<b>Total Not Important</b>	13	10	13

*"How important would you say religion is in your life? Would you say it is very important, somewhat important, not very important, or not at all important?"*

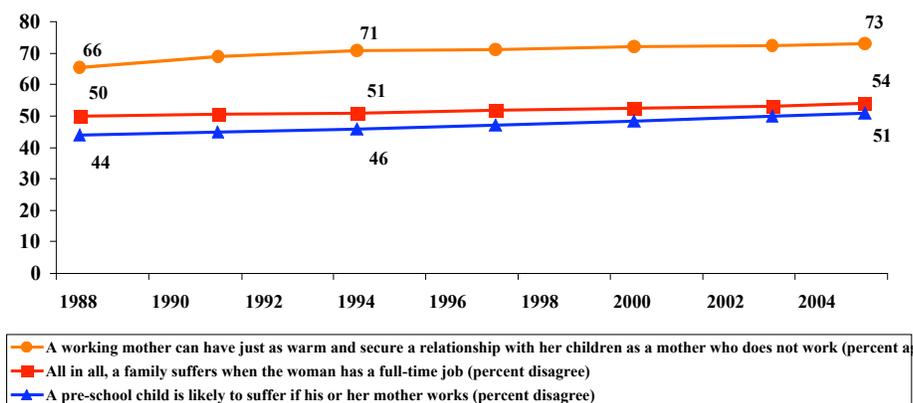
- There are few differences in informal practices by family structure, which suggests that non-traditional parents are incorporating religion into their lives, even if they are not always able to attend church. Roughly half (49 percent) of parents read the Bible at least once a week, regardless of whether they are married or not. Similarly, slightly under half of parents say daily devotions with the family (45 percent of traditional parents versus 42 percent of non-traditional parents). Moreover, traditional and non-traditional parents are nearly equally likely to discuss religion with their friends (45 and 39 percent, respectively).

#### *Women, Work, and Family*

- As the numbers of women in the workforce have increased steadily since the 1970s, people have become increasingly accepting of working mothers. We observe, for instance, that Americans now are much more likely to feel that a working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work (66 percent in 1988 versus 73 percent in 2005 agree). Similarly, Americans are now more inclined to disagree that a pre-school child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works (44 percent in 1988 versus 51 percent in 2005 disagree).



## Attitudes Toward Women in the Workplace, 1988-2005



*General Social Survey, 1988-1994*  
*Religion & Ethics Newsweekly, 2005*

- However, religious conservatives are more likely than others to feel that women who work have an adverse effect on the family. Half of traditional Catholics and nearly half (42 percent) of evangelical Protestants agree that a family suffers if the woman has a full time job. In contrast, only a minority of mainline Protestants (34 percent), liberal Catholics (28 percent), and people with no religious preference (25 percent) voice similar views.
- These attitudinal differences do not mean that religious conservatives like evangelicals have the ability to return to traditional work arrangements of the 1950s. In fact, it is the opposite: nearly half (48 percent) of evangelicals in traditional family arrangements, in fact, have two adults that work full time (versus 40 percent of traditional parents in general). And, evangelical parents are less likely than average to have a work arrangement where one spouse works full-time and the other works part-time (9 percent, versus 19 percent of traditional parents in general).

## Religion and Parenting

Parents, regardless of their own family arrangement, hold a fairly conservative set of family values. Americans believe children prosper in two-parent households, and they are confident that their kids will grow up to be as, or more, religious than themselves.



Parents believe it is their responsibility to raise their kids right, and, correspondingly, they worry a great deal about the impact of third party factors that can adversely affect that endeavor: effects of media, other children, and the quality of their kids' education.

*Family Values*

- Generally, Americans feel that children benefit from stable family arrangements, where two parents can work together to share the burdens and the benefits. Four out of every five Americans agree that children are better off if their parents are married. Even non-traditional parents, who do not live in these arrangements themselves, and are more likely to support alternative family arrangements, tend to agree that children benefit with married parents (57 percent, versus 81 percent of traditional parents).
- Parents have many worries about their children, regardless of their family structure. Given the economic insecurity of non-traditional families, it is not surprising that they have more worries about their children than traditional parents. For example, 60 percent of non-traditional families worry a lot about making ends meet compared to 34 percent of traditional families. They are more worried, moreover, than traditional families about protecting their children from exposure to sex and violence (46 percent a lot compared to 38 percent a lot) and making sure their kids are learning the right values from their teachers (49 percent a lot versus 37 percent a lot).
- Religious conservatives are much more likely than others to worry about the effects of the media on their children. Over half (55 percent) of traditional Catholics worry a lot about their children seeing too much sex or violence from video games, television and movies. This is also the leading concern among evangelical Protestants. On the other hand, roughly a third of mainline Protestants, liberal Catholics, and people with no religious preference worry the same amount about the negative effects of the media.



### Worries About Children (Percent Responding "A lot")

	Total	Evangelical Christian	Mainline Protestant	Traditional Catholic	Liberal Catholic	No pref/Atheist Agnostic
The negative influence of other kids on your child	43	39	42	50	48	41
Low quality of public schools	46	41	44	57	45	48
Your child maintaining the religious tradition he or she was brought up in	26	37	17	35	20	10
Paying bills and making ends meet	41	43	36	35	42	32
Juggling the demands of work and family	34	34	38	45	43	33
Getting health insurance and good medical care for your child	42	43	34	54	49	47
Your child learning the right values from his/her teachers at school	40	41	38	42	45	36
Your child seeing too much sex or violence from video games, television and movies	40	47	29	55	38	33

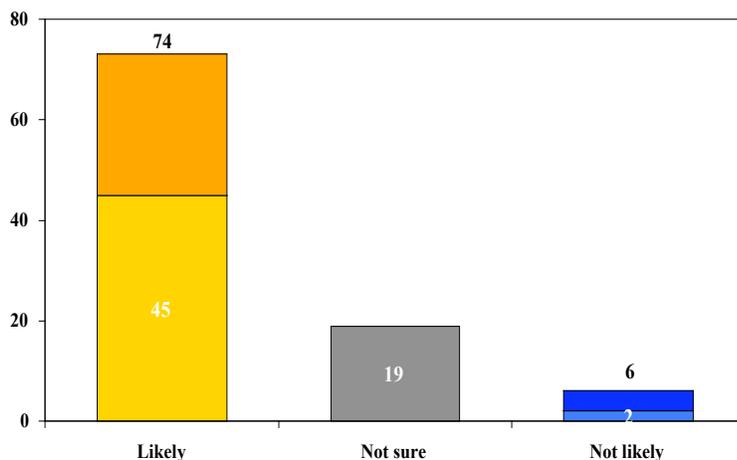
(IF HAVE KIDS) "Now I am going to read to you a list of things some parents worry about. Please tell me how much you worry about each of the following."

#### *Intergenerational Transmission*

- Unlike financial insecurity or exposure to sex and violence on television, parents are not particularly concerned about transmission of their religious beliefs to their children. It is not that parents do not care, but rather they are confident their kids will make the right decisions. Generally, parents tend to believe that children should be encouraged to decide their religious views on their own (60 percent agree), and they are not worried about whether their children will adopt their religion when they grow up. This is true regardless of household structure, though more religious and religiously conservative parents express more confidence than their less religious or more religiously liberal counterparts that their children will inherit their parents' religion.



### Likelihood of Faith Tradition Transmittance (Percent Responding)



*"How likely is it that your children will be of the same denomination or faith tradition as you when they grow up? Would you say it is very likely, somewhat likely, not too likely, not at all likely, or are you not sure?"*

- Perhaps most unsure of their children are parents in interfaith marriages. Twelve percent of respondents are in interfaith relationships, where their spouse or partner does not share their religious preference.<sup>6</sup> Only 31 percent of parents in interfaith marriages felt it was very likely their children would grow up to share their faith, versus half (49 percent) of parents in same-faith marriages. Part of the explanation for this lies in church attendance, as parents in interfaith marriages are much less likely to attend church regularly than those who share the same faith tradition.

<sup>6</sup> Slightly less than one in five (18 percent) of traditional parents are in interfaith marriages, and roughly one in ten (11 percent) of non-traditional parents are in interfaith relationships.



*Education*

- All parents worry about the quality of their children’s education and many are quite involved in their children’s educational experience. When confronted with a teacher who might be using materials that parents disapprove of, most parents are pretty certain they would do something about it. While most would just talk to teachers and their children about the materials, over a quarter (27 percent), however, are very certain they would try to something more, such as try to get the materials removed from the curriculum. Reflecting current debates about evolution and “intelligent design,” it is not surprising that religiously conservative parents say they are more likely to try to take action to change the curriculum (40 percent of evangelical Protestants and 37 percent of traditional Catholics, versus 23 percent of mainline Protestants, 19 percent of liberal Catholics, and 14 percent of those with no religious preference).

**Objectionable Material at School By Religious Identity**

*(Percent Responding “Yes, Very Certain”)*

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Evangelical Christian</i>	<i>Mainline Protestant</i>	<i>Traditional Catholic</i>	<i>Liberal Catholic</i>	<i>No pref./Atheist/ Agnostic</i>
<b>Voice your concern with your child's teacher</b>	73	81	66	83	71	60
<b>Expose your child to the materials but explain why they were wrong</b>	48	47	50	48	37	50
<b>Try to get the materials removed from the curriculum</b>	27	40	18	37	19	14
<b>Remove your child from the class</b>	15	19	7	18	5	12
<b>Trust the teacher's judgment and say nothing</b>	7	4	9	10	2	10

*“Sometimes teachers might assign materials at school that parents feel conflict with their values or the way they are trying to raise their child. If a teacher assigned a book or used other educational materials that you found objectionable, which of the following would you do? ”*

- Americans in general adopt a fairly pragmatic view toward sex education. Roughly 39 percent favor “abstinence plus” programs, which focus on abstinence but educate young people about condoms and contraception, and roughly 38 percent prefer programs that focus on teaching teens how to make responsible decisions about sex. Only 18 percent of Americans favor abstinence only sex education.



- People from more conservative faith traditions are much more likely to favor abstinence only education, whereas those Americans from other religious backgrounds tend to be torn between abstinence-plus education and programs that focus on personal responsibility. Still, less than a third support abstinence without more education.

**Views on Sex Education by Religious Identity**  
*(Percent Responding)*

	<i>Total</i>	Evangelical Christian	Mainline Protestant	Traditional Catholic	Liberal Catholic	No pref/ Atheist/ Agnostic
Abstinence from sexual intercourse is best for teens. Sex ed classes should not provide information about how to obtain and use condoms and other contraception.	18	30	10	30	5	7
Abstinence from sexual intercourse is best for teens, but some teens do not abstain, so sex ed classes should provide information about condoms and other contraception.	39	34	49	30	46	43
Abstinence from sexual intercourse is not the most important thing. Sex ed classes should focus on teaching teens how to make responsible decisions about sex.	38	31	39	33	47	47

*"Now I am going to read to you some statements about sex education. Which of the following three statements is closest to your view about the best way to teach sex education?"*

**Women of Color, Faith, and the Family**

African American women make up a unique, important segment of the population that merits closer examination. They are very religious, and share a set of socially conservative attitudes toward the family. On the other hand, they are feminists. It is important to them to have a career, and yet they do all the housework as well.

- African American women are more than three times as likely as white women to be nontraditional parents (29 percent versus 9 percent). Over half (58 percent) identify themselves as the head of their household (versus 38 percent of white women). Overall, only 39 percent of African American women are married compared to 58 percent of the general population.
- At the same time, three-quarters of African American women feel marriage should be defined as between a man and a woman (versus 56 percent of white women). They are also more inclined than white women to feel that God’s view



of marriage is one man, one woman, for life (73 percent versus 57 percent strongly agree).

- African American women are very religious. Fully 81 percent of African American women feel religion is very important in their life (versus 63 percent of white women). They are also regular attendees of church; 62 percent attend church at least once a week, versus 46 percent of white women.
- Given that so many African American women are making it on their own, it is not surprising that they hold fast to their right to work and make a living for themselves, eschewing the standard gender division of labor. Two-thirds of African American women feel strongly that both the man and woman should contribute to the family income (versus 38 percent of white women). African American women also feel it is important that they have a career (80 percent feel it is important, versus 70 percent of white women).
- In reality this means that African American women must shoulder a great amount of work, both outside and inside the home. African American women are not much more likely than white women to hold down full time jobs (40 percent versus 33 percent) or be the primary caretaker of children (57 percent), but because so many African American are on their own, they are much more likely than white women to do more of the housework (79 percent versus 59 percent).

## Policy Responses

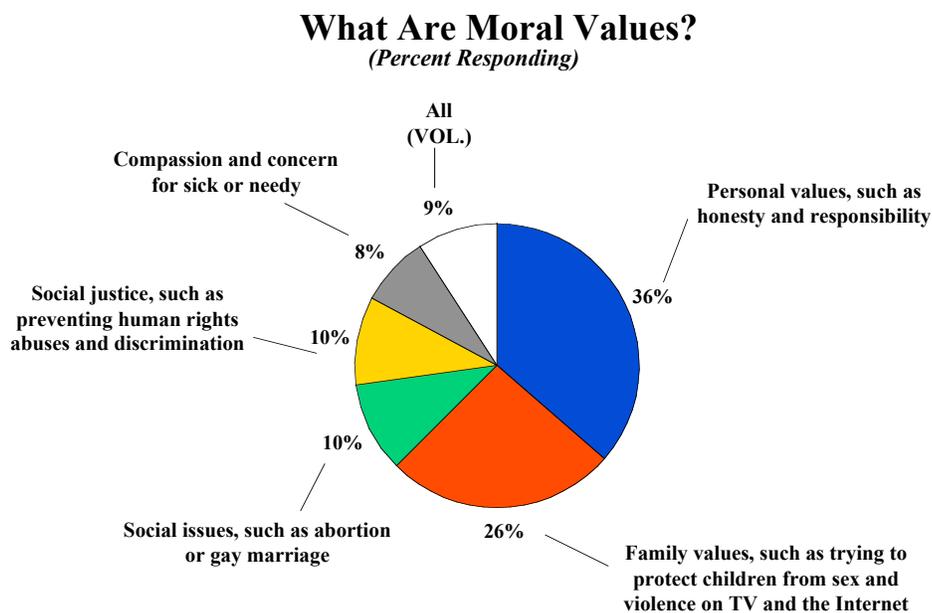
Despite the intense focus on abortion and gay marriage during the election season, most Americans view moral values individualistically, as a set of values that motivate an individual toward acting responsibly and with integrity. They feel that family should remain in the private sphere, and tend to balk at the notion that government should be involved in such things as marriage initiatives. When it comes to attitudes toward family initiatives, we observe that non-traditional parents are not necessarily liberal or progressive, even though they are more progressive than traditional parents. Religion plays a stronger role in family attitudes, however, as members of conservative Protestant denominations are more likely to advocate an active government role in the family. Among Catholics, the gulf in attitudes between traditional and liberal Catholics is often as wide as the gulf between evangelical and mainline Protestants.

### *Moral Values*

- As we know from the 2004 exit polls, 22 percent of Americans cited “moral values” as their biggest concern in deciding their vote. Despite the controversy



around the wording of this question, it is worth exploring what moral values means. In fact, moral values is defined quite broadly and individualistically – namely personal responsibility and protecting children from sex and violence on TV and on the Internet. Narrower social issues such as abortion and gay marriage are cited by only 10 percent of Americans. Social justice, such as preventing human rights abuses and discrimination, is also cited by only 10 percent of Americans. While there are significant differences among Americans in different religious traditions, it is striking how few cite issues like abortion and gay marriage as an important part of the moral values debate.



*"Moral values can mean different things to different people. I am going to read to you a list of phrases, and please tell me which of the following choices best describes what moral values means to you."*



## Moral Values by Religious Identity

(Percent Responding)

	<i>Total</i>	Evangelical Christian	Mainline Protestant	Traditional Catholic	Liberal Catholic	No pref/Atheist/ Agnostic
Personal values, such as honesty and responsibility	36	26	44	38	40	46
Family values, such as trying to protect children from sex and violence on TV and the Internet	26	30	20	34	28	15
Social issues, such as abortion or gay marriage	10	15	6	8	3	5
Social justice, such as preventing human rights abuses and discrimination	10	5	12	5	16	20
Compassion and concern for sick or needy	8	12	7	2	10	6
All of the above (VOL.)	9	12	6	11	4	5

"Moral values can mean different things to different people. I am going to read to you a list of phrases, and please tell me which of the following choices best describes what moral values means to you."

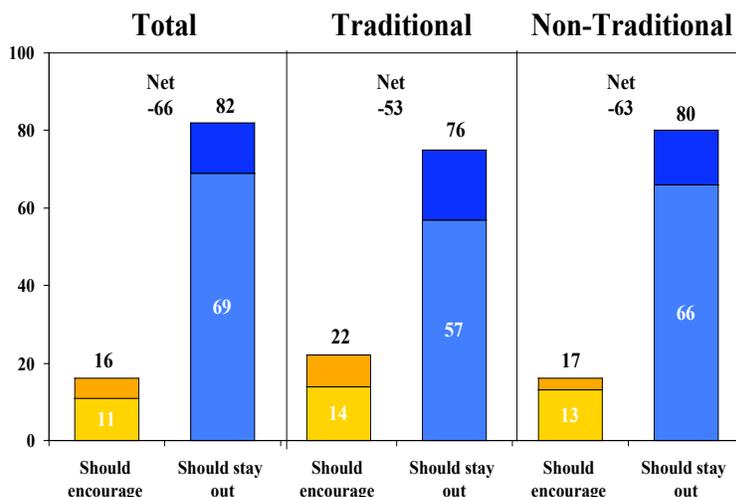
### *Government Marriage Initiatives*

- Americans, whether they are married or not, believe that family is private, and they are uncomfortable with the idea of government getting involved in their personal, family life. Parents, regardless if they are married, believe that government should stay out of legislating on the family (76 percent and 80 percent, respectively).



## Role of Government in Marriage

(Percent Responding)



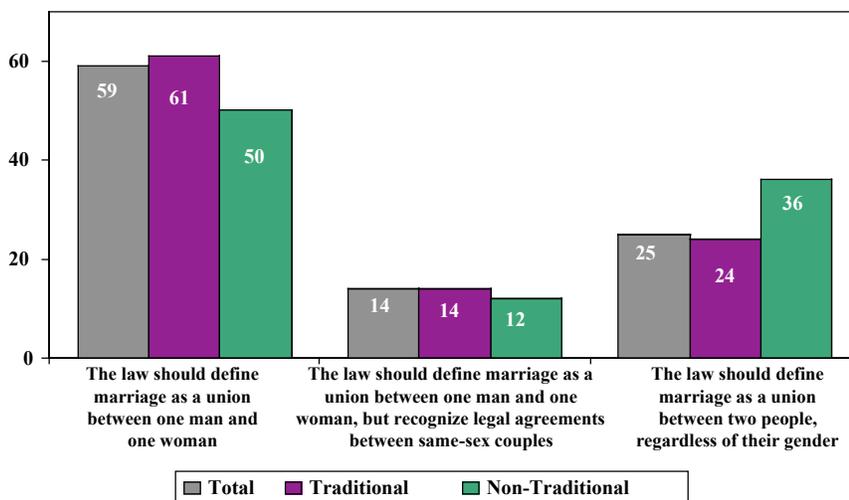
*"In your view, should the GOVERNMENT start up programs that encourage people to get and stay married, or should the GOVERNMENT stay out of this?"*

- Religious denomination has a negligible impact on whether or not Americans feel the government should start up programs to encourage marriage. Less than a quarter of evangelicals and traditional Catholics (24 percent and 21 percent, respectively) and less than a tenth of mainline Protestants and people with no preference favor it (10 percent and 6 percent, respectively). Liberal Catholics also feel that government should stay away from marriage, but unlike other issues where they hold views similar to mainline Protestants and seculars, in this issue they lean closer to their evangelical and traditional Catholic peers (18 percent favor).
- Non-traditional parents are not necessarily liberal on the issues of gay marriage, although they do tend to be more progressive than traditional parents. For example, traditional parents feel that marriage should be defined as a union between one man and one woman (61 percent). A majority of non-traditional parents feel this way as well (50 percent), while only a third (36 percent) feel that marriage should be a union between two people, regardless of their gender.
- Evangelicals agree with a “traditional” definition of marriage, but there is evidence that others support it as well. Nearly four out of five (79 percent) evangelicals feel marriage should be legally defined as between a man and a woman. A majority of mainline Protestants also agree that marriage should be between a man and a woman. It is only among those without religion that a more



- open definition of marriage enjoys support. Half (52 percent) of respondents without a religious preference feel that marriage should be a union between two people, regardless of gender.
- The gulf between Catholics on gay marriage is bigger than that for Protestants. A convincing majority of traditional Catholics (70 percent) favor a “traditional” definition of marriage. On the other hand, liberal Catholics are quite mixed; roughly equal numbers believe marriage is between a man and a woman (35 percent), marriage should be a union of two people, regardless of gender (39 percent) or that there should be some sort of law in place to legally recognize agreements between same sex couples (25 percent).

### Definition of Marriage (Percent Responding)



*"Now I am going to read to you a list of statements about marriage. Which of the following statements comes closest to your view about the proper legal status of marriage?"*



## Definition of Marriage by Religious Identity

(Percent Responding)

	Total	Evangelical Christian	Mainline Protestant	Traditional Catholic	Liberal Catholic	No pref/ Atheist/ Agnostic
The law should define marriage as a union between one man and one woman	59	79	53	70	35	33
The law should define marriage as a union between one man and one woman, but recognize legal agreements between same-sex couples	14	10	21	11	25	12
The law should define marriage as a union between two people, regardless of their gender	25	9	25	15	39	52

*"Now I am going to read to you a list of statements about marriage. Which of the following statements comes closest to your view about the proper legal status of marriage?"*

- People in interfaith marriages are also less likely to favor a traditional definition of marriage. Roughly 61 percent of people in marriages where their partner shares their faith believe marriage should be between a man and a woman, versus only 42 percent of people in interfaith marriages.
- Although there is relative hostility to an open definition of marriage, Americans are quite mixed on the gay adoption issue. Forty-three percent of Americans favor adoption rights for gays and lesbians so they can legally adopt children, versus 47 percent who oppose. There are, however, huge religious differences on this question with religious conservatives opposing gay adoptions and religious liberals favoring it strongly.



## Gay Adoption by Religious Identity

(Percent Responding)

	<i>Total</i>	Evangelical Christian	Mainline Protestant	Traditional Catholic	Liberal Catholic	No pref/Atheist/ Agnostic
Strongly Favor	<b>24</b>	8	25	11	45	48
Somewhat Favor	<b>20</b>	12	25	23	24	17
Somewhat Oppose	<b>10</b>	14	6	12	6	7
Strongly Oppose	<b>37</b>	57	33	33	19	17
<b>Total Favor</b>	<b>43</b>	19	50	34	69	65
<b>Total Oppose</b>	<b>47</b>	71	39	45	25	24

*"Do you favor or oppose adoption rights for gays and lesbians so they can legally adopt children?"*