



Volume 33
Issue 2 June

Article 16

2006

Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women put Motherhood before Marriage. Kathryn Edin and Maria Kefalas.

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Recommended Citation

De Marco, Allison C. (2006) "*Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women put Motherhood before Marriage.* Kathryn Edin and Maria Kefalas.," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 33 : Iss. 2 , Article 16. Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol33/iss2/16>

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BOOK NOTES

Kathryn Edin and Maria Kefalas, *Promises I can Keep: Why Poor Women put Motherhood before Marriage*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005. \$24.95 hardcover, \$15.95 papercover.

With the welfare reforms of 1996, the US government asserted its desire to increase the number of two-parent families and decrease the number of non-marital births with the belief that the increased income associated with many married families would move families off welfare, decrease the welfare rolls, while preventing others from becoming dependent. This is a complex issue. While single-motherhood is widespread among welfare recipients and low-income workers, many of these women are cohabiting with the father of their children while others plan to marry in the future, as found in the Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Study. In light of the continuing policy debate around marriage promotion and family formation it is increasingly important to understand why nonmarital births among the poor are so common.

In *Promises I can Keep*, Edin and Kefalas present the findings of a study for which they spent five years interviewing 162 low-income mothers in eight poor neighborhoods in Philadelphia and its suburb, Camden, New Jersey. Their goal was, in their words, to paint a portrait of the lives of these women from the early days of their intimate relationships, through pregnancy, and into birth and beyond to tell us why they frequently put motherhood before marriage. The primary point they make is that, contrary to prevailing notions, these women do not devalue marriage, but rather value it highly and do not enter into it lightly.

Overall, this book is an important contribution to the burgeoning literature framing family formation and marriage incentive debates. It offers a perspective that has been missing from the literature by delving into these women's stories, women who are typically the focus of such policy debates, and allowing their voices to be heard. Edin and Kefalas rightly point out that the evidence to date has been largely based on

limited survey data that tells us very little about what will make marriage more likely for low-income single mothers. Through analysis of their extensive conversations with these women, the authors provide an illuminating discussion of why these women are waiting to marry while not similarly waiting to have children. Although Edin and Kefalas meet their goal of giving voice to the life experiences and perspectives of these low-income women, they fall short of fully addressing how this problem might be solved. Further, though the authors state that the life chances for these mothers may not have been improved had they waited to have children, given their early struggles with parents and peers, their depression, school failure, and alcohol and drug abuse, they state that early births to poor, unmarried mothers are detrimental to the life chances of their children. This point bears further discussion, for it would help to explain why programs and policies should be developed to improve the chances of these children and to prevent such early childbearing. Nevertheless, those interested in gaining a new and deeper understanding of these issues will find this book a rich and rewarding read.

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Alison Clarke-Stewart and Virginia D. Allhusen, *What We Know About Child Care*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005. \$45.00 hardcover.

During the last of century, the proportion of women engaged in regular wage employment in the industrial countries has increased exponentially. Although this does not mean, as feminist writers have pointed out, that women were previously economically inactive, it has imposed far greater pressures on women, and particularly on mothers, who now have to cope with domestic as well as employment demands. One of these pressures concerns childcare. It was previously expected that middle-class women would assume responsibility for childcare, and that men would fulfill cultural expectations