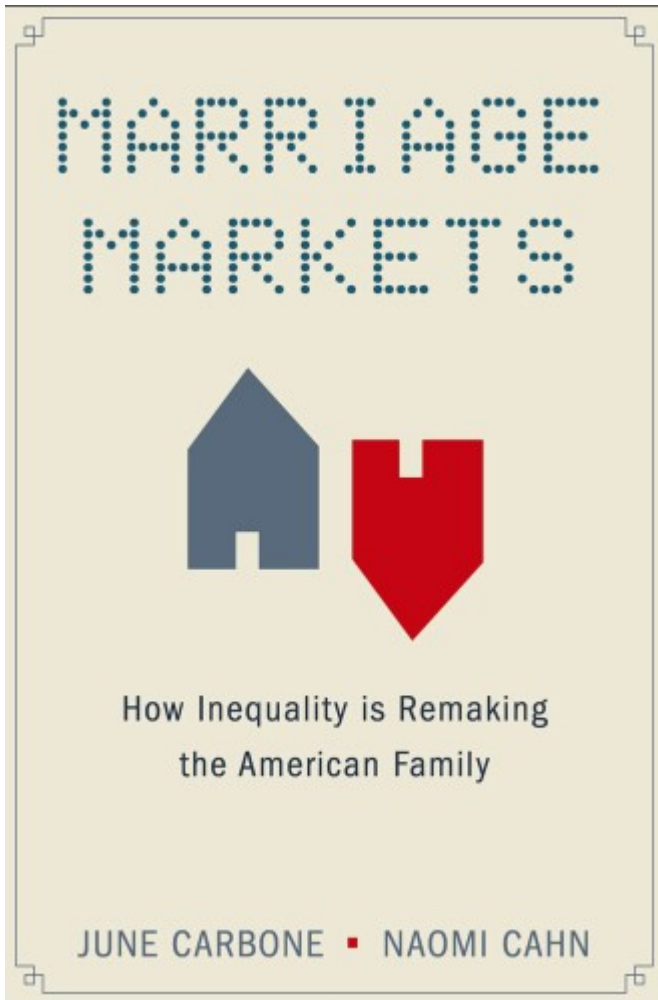


Marriage Markets, by June Carbone and Naomi Cahn

reviewed by [Amy Zietlow](#) in the [September 3, 2014](#) issue

In Review



Marriage Markets

By June Carbone and Naomi Cahn
Oxford University Press

This volume follows the life trajectories of two couples: Amy and Tyler, and Lily and Carl. Both couples could live near your congregation. They love each other and will have children together, but only Amy and Tyler will set a wedding date and get

married. Law professors June Carbone and Naomi Cahn explain why.

Amy and Tyler meet in law school, wait until their late twenties to marry, and hold off on having children until they have weathered several geographic moves and both are settled into their careers. They follow what the Brookings Institution calls the success sequence: graduate high school, get married, and then have children. Amy and Tyler see marriage as an asset and a safety net that frees them to invest intentionally and well in the next generation.

What about Lily and Carl? Lily is four months pregnant, unmarried, working two jobs, and trying to fix a broken-down car. Carl doesn't have a job and lives with his mother. Carbone and Cahn write about people in such situations:

For those whose incomes place them in the bottom third of the population, increasing disparities between men and women have made both more likely to give up on each other. . . . Women in these communities view commitment to a man who runs up the credit card bill, cycles in and out of jobs, or deals drugs on the side as more of a threat than an asset to the ability to care for children. . . . These patterns encourage women to invest in their own resources rather than in the men in their lives and men to move on to new relationships when their existing ones hit rough patches. Family stability is an inevitable casualty.

Lily and Carl see marriage as both an impossible dream and a liability.

The fracturing of marriage starts with who is marriageable in the first place. College graduates like Amy and Tyler share similar views on gender equality, employment, and care for children, and thus are equally attractive to each other as marriage partners. In contrast, those who lack a college degree, stable employment, or housing create an unattractive marriage pool. Carl will not get married, and in Lily's eyes he is not marriageable. Echoing the insights of Hanna Rosin in *The End of Men*, Kay Hymowitz in *Manning Up*, and Kathryn Edin and Maria Kefalas in *Promises I Can Keep*, Carbone and Cahn stress that a decline in the number of marriageable men destabilizes adult coupling and jeopardizes the well-being of children because marriage remains the most reliable way to channel resources to the next generation.

How do we break the cycle?

The short answer, for Carbone and Cahn, is economic security. They believe that the relationships of both couples, as well as their contributions to their children, will

improve if they are stably employed, receive regular raises, and enjoy job-related benefits. In other words “fix economic inequality and family change follows.”

Carbone and Cahn make valid recommendations for customizing family law to meet the needs of different classes with different understandings of marriage and for policy changes that could increase the number of marriageable people while bolstering those who do get married. They miss, however, a critical institution that has long been the custodian of the marriage tradition and a critical voice in civil society: the church.

Through word, sacraments, and service, the church proclaims an inclusive message that all individuals deserve opportunities for meaningful vocation, stewardship, healthy marriage, and family stability. It is one of the few intergenerational gathering places in society, where older couples can model stable marriage and parenthood. The church can also serve as a community hub that creates educational and economic opportunities to increase the number of marriageable people. Churches can support both the value of marriage and the economic means that make getting married possible, with the goal of increasing the number of children raised in two-parent families.

The church should care about the economic injustice that affects the futures of Amy and Tyler, Lily and Carl, and their children. *Marriage Markets* raises our awareness of this pressing justice issue.