

Work, Marriage, Children: There Is Hope for Millennials

Get a job. Get married. Have kids.

Those seven words are part of the core message in Charles Murray's [*The Curmudgeon's Guide to Getting Ahead*](#), a book I recommend to young people. Most of us have read these recommendations somewhere as a formula for a successful life, and conservatives in particular advocate this approach as the way to satisfaction and happiness in life.

Benjamin Braddock disagrees.

In his telling and angry article, "[Terrible Good Advice](#)," Braddock explains to older conservatives and libertarians why this advice to young men "is obscene—rather like burning down someone's farmhouse, raping his wife and daughters, salting his fields, and then rhapsodizing to him about the pleasant pastoral joys of being a farmer."

Braddock points to the dearth of good jobs and satisfying work in today's America, where so many jobs have fallen victim to the global economy, to support his point.

He also assails the narrowing possibilities of getting married and having kids. Under a sub-header titled "Disturbed Women, Unhappy Men," Braddock writes that while the photographs of his parents and their classmates in their 1960s high school yearbooks "featured handsome well-dressed young men and radiantly beautiful young women with lithe figures," the situation today is radically different. "Three out of 10 women under the age of 25 consider themselves gay or transgender," he writes, while many are overweight compared to their grandparents, and "40 percent of women of reproductive age have a self-reported mental illness."

Braddock ends his essay on this note: "Anyone who sincerely cares about the next generations should save the stupid admonishments, put away the ideological prejudices, and start paying attention to reality."

I checked out the links in Braddock's article, pondered his thoughts for a bit, and then decided I wasn't buying some of his arguments, not only because some of his statistics are either wrong or superfluous—what does weight gain in women have to do with love and marriage? Haven't men gained weight as well?—but also because he is missing several key points.

He mentions that good jobs are hard to come by. Welcome to the club, Mr. Braddock. My wife Kris and I married in 1978. Jimmy Carter was president, and our country was in an economic slump. During the year we lived in San Diego, unemployment in that city was in double digits. A bit later, Kris worked part-time as a nurse while earning a graduate degree at the University of Virginia; I worked as an apartment manager, a dishwasher, and a waiter. After a year, to save money on rent, we became house parents for a sorority on Chancellor Street. Eventually, we saved enough money to buy a rundown and ramshackle bed-and-breakfast in the Smoky Mountains, which we repaired by doing most of the work ourselves. Lots of couples we knew were working jobs for which they were overqualified, but they were still grateful for the income.

As for Braddock's views on marriage, I agree with him that much is missing from today's relationships: romance, falling in love, commitment. Many of those who do wed, as I know from the young couples I see around me, still have to watch every penny after their wedding day. They are bound together by love and, in many cases, by religious faith. Life is tough for them, and some of them work like dogs to pay rent and buy groceries, but they succeed because *making a life together is the goal*.

Braddock also writes, "Our culture is actively anti-natalist

and anti-family.” Here I couldn’t agree more. Never in our history has our society been so antagonistic toward children and the family. We have lived for decades under a government that promotes abortion and single motherhood. Our culture rarely celebrates the family as the cornerstone of our society, and having more than three children can bring the condemnation of others, many of whom have either one child or none.

On the other hand, a sizable counterculture stands opposed to these trends. A number of pro-life and pro-family organizations have done battle against the prevailing culture for years, many churches promote family values, and lots of men and women are still marrying and having children.

Benjamin Braddock makes some good points, and his disdain for what he calls the conservative mantra—“Get a job. Get married. Have kids.”—probably does ring false to many of our young people. Yet at the same time, Braddock and those who find themselves in the same boat run the risk of making themselves victims by buying into the idea that our culture is solely to blame for their woes, and the last thing we need in this country are more victims.

To blame the culture for working against marriage and the family is accurate, but to fault it as the only reason for your personal failure to enter into wedlock and raise children leads only to despair. Instead, take heart from these [statistics](#)—the number of married couples in the United States keeps creeping upwards, and [divorce has fallen off](#).

Above all, for those of you who want a family and children, never stop dreaming. Live with that hope, remain open to romance, marriage, and commitment, and someday those elusive creatures will likely be yours.

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