

Child support and the threat point.

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In the discussion of a recent post the history of the term “threat point” came up. While I’ve used the term and explained how the family courts are being deliberately used to destabilize marriages for feminist ends, I can’t take credit for originating the term. The term itself is part of Game Theory*.

When social scientists study marriage one of the things they are very interested in is how intact marriages are impacted by government working to make divorce both easier and more attractive for women. The well known feminist goal of our divorce/child support revolution is the opportunity for women to “leave bad marriages”. But the goal in incenting women to divorce isn’t just to encourage them to leave marriages when they are unhappy. There is another fundamental objective, and that is to *improve marriage by destabilizing marriages*. This may sound absurd at first reading, but if you consider it a bit you will see that it is actually conventional wisdom. The overriding assumption of both conservatives and feminists is that husbands must be held in check, and that wives need tools to threaten their husbands to keep them at bay. Giving wives authority over their husbands is seen as not just good for the wife herself, but for the family and society as a whole.

I’ve given examples of how the concept is used in academic studies [previously](#), but you can observe the same thing with regard to Child Support in the working paper [The Effect of Child Support Enforcement on Bargaining Power Among Married and Cohabiting Couples](#):

This paper examines the relationship between child support enforcement and bargaining power among married and cohabiting couples. A simple economic bargaining model predicts that living in a state with stricter child support enforcement increases the bargaining power of married mothers, who can more credibly threaten divorce.

The perspective of the study regarding women threatening divorce is the mainstream view, the perspective of both feminists and conservatives; women threatening divorce

is *good* (emphasis mine):

*...child support enforcement policies may also have a **beneficial impact on households** with two parents by increasing the bargaining power of mothers.*

The paper explains the mechanics of child support encouraging mothers to threaten to leave the father of their children:

In Figure 1, the mother's threat point is her external utility level..., the utility level at which she is indifferent between the status quo and carrying out her threat to end the relationship. For mothers threatening to leave the father, child support enforcement increases her external utility level... such that she will choose to carry out her threat unless he takes less leisure and consumes less at her expense.

While the paper's basic use of Game Theory for married parents is sound, it is extremely poorly thought out regarding unmarried cohabiting parents. It bizarrely asserts that stricter child support enforcement can give unmarried cohabiting fathers a bargaining advantage over unmarried cohabiting mothers because the father can threaten to marry the mother against her will if she doesn't do as he wishes (emphasis mine):

*Our theory for cohabiting mothers predicts that these mothers can be better off or worse off in strict enforcement states. **They will be worse off if the fathers want to get married and the mothers do not; in this case, cohabiting fathers will have more bargaining power.** Cohabiting mothers will be better off in strict states if they are threatening to leave the relationship because enforcement provides them with a greater probability of receiving child support, and thus a more credible threat.*

What matters here though is not the poor thought process of the authors of the paper regarding unmarried parents, but the embrace of women threatening to take a man's

children away as a tool to make the world a better place.

It is important to remember that the premise that threats of wife-initiated divorce and taking children away from their fathers makes intact families better isn't limited to academics and policy makers, or even just to feminists. The idea that wives threatening divorce makes marriages better and is good for society is all but universal. This is why if you ask your Christian friends to recommend a movie about marriage, they are all but guaranteed to enthusiastically suggest a movie not about biblical marriage, but a [celebration of the awesome power of the threatpoint](#).

All of this is essential to understand when considering [calls to reform the family court](#). The vast majority of people not only see no fault divorce and child support as beneficial because they allow women to leave if they are unhappy honoring their vows, the vast majority of people also are deeply invested in the idea that women threatening divorce makes marriage much better. This doesn't mean reforms are impossible, but it means that any proposed reform which would significantly reduce the incentive for most women to divorce will be met with fierce resistance not just from feminists but from conservatives too. However, at least *some* modern Christians and conservatives have adopted this favorable view of destabilizing marriage without truly considering it. The bad news is this view is nearly universal, but the good news is it is indefensible for anyone who believes in traditional marriage. A good number of those who embrace putting a cash bounty on fathers do so only because they have never considered how foolish and destructive this is.

**Game Theory* is from economics, and not to be confused with *Game* and female attraction. Think John Nash of *A Beautiful Mind*, not Roissy of *Pretty Lies*.