Kearney describes my review's characterization of her book's thesis as "To address U.S. poverty, parents should make the best of whatever their current economic situation is by marrying and raising children together." This is only one sentence in the review. I actually have a more complex view of the book's thesis: 1) it would, overall, be better for most kids of unmarried parents if their parents married, because it would increase their household resources; 2) the current reason those kids' parents don't marry, despite these potential gains, is weakened marriage norms; and 3) while it would be desirable to encourage marriage, we haven't figured out how, so in the meantime, we should support families as they currently are.

Kearney quotes the book's discussion of marriage's smaller payoffs for disadvantaged groups as evidence that it does not recommend marriage to reduce poverty, but the book does emphasize that marriage is correlated with benefits even for these groups. The chapter on the decline in job prospects for non-college men points to that decline's initial role in causing marriage rates to drop, but it concludes with the finding that recent fracking-induced wage increases failed to reverse that drop and a lengthy discourse on norms as a potential explanation; no other possibilities are mentioned.

Kearney's reply suggests that she is less convinced that norms are the leading explanation than I inferred from reading the book, which means we share much common ground in our interest in exploring the open question of why marriage rates are lower than ever conditional on earnings and education. The review develops novel hypotheses around the role of soft skills in modern marriage as a possible answer to this question, and proposes potentially informative empirical tests of both my and norms-based hypotheses. I encourage researchers to read this important book, and I look forward to further generative research on this important topic.