

Changing Conjugal Roles



*Is This
Feminism?
Not!*



Feminism is the radical idea that women are people.

Among the changes that are the most clear when we are looking at the transformation of families from pre-industrial/modern to post-industrial/modern societies is in the status and roles of women. In pre-modern societies, at least in Europe and much of Asia, women were expected to be under the dominion of a man (in other words, a male was the head of

The Good Wife's Guide

From Housekeeping Monthly; May 13, 1955

Have dinner ready.

Plan ahead, even the night before, to have a delicious meal ready on time for his return. This is a way of letting him know that you have been thinking about him and are concerned about his needs. Most men are hungry when they get home and the prospect of a good meal is part of the warm welcome needed.

Prepare yourself.

Take 15 minutes to rest so you'll be refreshed when he arrives. Touch up your make-up, put a ribbon in your hair and be fresh-looking. He has just been with a lot of work-weary people.

Be a little gay and a little more interesting for him. His boring day may need a lift and one of your duties is to provide it.

Clear away the clutter. Make one last trip through the main part of the house just before your husband arrives. Run a dust cloth over the tables.

During the cooler months of the year you should prepare and light a fire for him to unwind by.

Your husband will feel he has reached a haven of rest and order, and it will give you a lift too. After all, catering to his comfort will provide you with immense personal satisfaction.

Minimize all noise.

At the time of his arrival, eliminate all noise of the washer, dryer or vacuum. Encourage the children to be quiet.

Be happy to see him.

Greet him with a warm smile and show sincerity in your desire to please him.

Listen to him.

You may have a dozen important things to tell him, but the moment of his arrival is not the time.

Let him talk first—remember, his topics of conversation are more important than yours.

Don't greet him with complaints and problems.

Don't complain if he's late for dinner or even if he stays out all night. Count this as minor compared to what he might have gone through at work.

Make him comfortable.

Have him lean back in a comfortable chair or lie him down in the bedroom. Have a cool or warm drink ready for him.

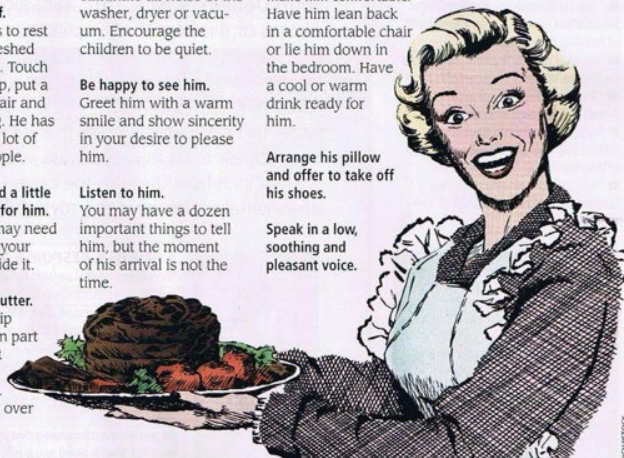
Arrange his pillow and offer to take off his shoes.

Speak in a low, soothing and pleasant voice.

Don't ask him questions about his actions or question his judgment or integrity.

Remember, he is the master of the house and as such will always exercise his fairness and truthfulness. You have no right to question him.

A good wife always knows her place. ■



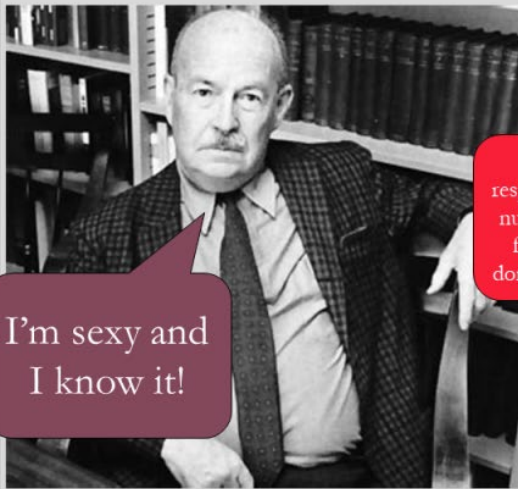
the household--the domicile--and women were part of that household). Women were not necessarily considered "property" as that was the status of slaves, but were maybe just a step higher status than that. For pre-industrial women, childbearing was the most important means of achieving status--specifically, legitimate male children. Women who had illegitimate children were scorned. So, women were valued in as much as they could be used to advance the interests of the family through marriage.

In dividing up the roles between instrumental and domestic, we can define what constitutes a "good wife" and a "good husband."

Late pre-industrial societies experienced a split between instrumental and domestic work with the invention of the animal-drawn plow. Women were relegated to the domestic labor while men were largely responsible for the instrumental or work for economic productivity. This gave men a primary position in the marketplace. This concept of a division between the household and the workplace became more acute in modern societies where more economic production work was taking place in a factory away from the household. This is where we see the concept of "going to work" as referencing going someplace else and returning to the household after the work was done. Again, women's roles were largely consigned to the domestic labor of the household and nurturing children...remember, this value was specific to the middle classes and above. Often working class families saw this as aspirational.

This corresponds with Parsons' Gendered Division of Labor

Conjugal Roles



I'm sexy and I know it!

I am responsible for nurturing the family and domestic work

Definition: Roles corresponding to marriage and family obligations

Talcott Parsons: Gendered Division of Labor

Wife/Mother: Expressive

Husband/Father: Instrumental

I'm responsible for productive work and sustaining the physical household



Modern societies, however, also created the means to challenge these constructs as early thinkers like Mary Wollstonecraft and Abigail Adams started making claims about women in accordance with Enlightenment values of inherent human rights. If men are endowed with equal rights regardless of their social station, how about women? We start to see the emergence of first wave feminism dedicated to empowering women with equal political rights to men. Namely, they were focused on getting women the right to vote.

But modern societies also offered women more opportunities to do instrumental work, and become direct contributors to household income. Inventions like the typewriter and innovations like mandatory public schooling and advances in medical science helped to create women centered careers. These careers often mirrored society expectations that women were natural nurturers. So professions like secretaries, schoolteachers, and nursing shifted from being largely male dominated professions to largely female dominated professions...this corresponded with reductions in pay and benefits. After all, it was understood that women didn't need the extra money because they would have a man looking after them. Early female teachers, in fact, weren't allowed to be married. The belief was that once a



woman got married she should be dedicated to her husband and her own children, rather than other people's children in the classroom.

Regardless, these professions were inroads to professional life and helped to increase expectations that women could fulfill professional roles outside of the household.

World War II saw a massive transformation in the perceptions of women in the workplace. With millions of men going off to war, this created a massive labor shortage in the factories...a labor shortage that companies were not allowed to fill by raising wages. Millions of middle-class women were encouraged to join the manufacturing workforce. This is an important distinction. Remember, working-class women were already working in the factories. But now middle-class women were entering the workforce. These women often had higher levels of education and greater expectations of social deference than working class women.

After World War II, these women largely left the workforce and returned to domestic "tranquility". But their example became the legacy for the next generation of young women who weren't quite finding domestic tranquility in the home. Their expectations were increasing with increasing access to the market. This is where we see Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem making a claim for Second Wave Feminism. This feminism was looking for more economic opportunities and cultural equality. This is also where we start to see an academic and theoretical approach to feminism as more women enter college with the expectation of seeking higher education...rather than just going to college to receive the MRS degree! Dorothy Smith, Kate Millet, Anne Oakley are all going to emerge from this tradition.

By the 1970's economic changes were creating opportunities for women. First, in the United States especially, the economy was experiencing a period of "stagflation". In other words, prices were rising (inflation) and unemployment was increasing (recession). Traditional "male" work like factory labor, was being moved to other countries. The United States was engaging in "deindustrialization". Fewer jobs were found in manufacturing, and more jobs were open for lower-paying service sector jobs. This incentivised more women to join the workforce long term.

More and more women were performing traditionally male "Instrumental" tasks. While at the same time receiving lower pay and with the expectation that they would continue to do the Domestic Work upon returning to the household. As we enter the postmodern era, women are gaining greater levels of academic and economic power, and are yet still constrained by some of the values associated with a gendered division of labor that more and more no longer exists.

So, the question then becomes, to what extent has family life become more equal for women? This is a question you may very well see on your AICE exams.

Remember your [feminist theories](#). The main ones that AICE wants you to focus on are [Liberal Feminism](#), [Marxist Feminism](#), [Radical Feminism](#). We also discussed [Intersectional Feminism](#) or [Black Feminism](#).

Radical feminist Ann Oakley is a great foil, or antitheses to Parsons' Gendered Division of Labor. Oakley points out that the labor associated with specific genders is a social construct that

does not serve individual needs. For instance, not all women are nurturing, and such women do not find fulfillment in the "mother" role. Furthermore, there are plenty of men who do find the nurturing role fulfilling. A gendered division of labor denies both groups an opportunity to find full satisfaction. Postmodernist family arrangements, in this case, are much better suited to satisfying individual needs and happiness.



Ann Oakley

Gendered Division of Labor is a Social Construct

Conjugal Roles do **NOT** represent natural inclinations:

Women \neq Naturally nurturing and caring

Men \neq Naturally task and resource oriented

Men and Women are socialized to accept these Roles

Gendered Division of Labor can be alienating



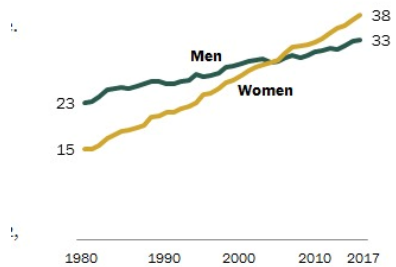
Social Gains Made by Women

Personal story. When I was a kid and my family and I moved to a prosperous working-class/middle-class neighborhood in the late 1970s, it was still a very traditional culture. Among my friends' families, Dad went to work and Mom stayed home to take care of the kids and do the domestic tasks. This was a page right out of Parsons. Many of the women were still doing piecework for the local jewelry factories once the kids got older and needed less supervision.

There was one exception to this rule. My family. In my family both my mother and father worked. This was a big deal. I was considered a "latchkey kid". Anyway, this is a bit of an aside. My point is that my generation had the experience of watching these transitions in real time, and they were important. Women, during this time, made [significant gains](#) as a result of feminist movements in conjunction with changes to the political-economy and social and cultural values.

Women are now significantly more likely to be college-educated than men

% of 25- to 64-year-olds completing a bachelor's degree or more



Note: For 1980-1991, figures shown are the share who completed at least four years of college, regardless of degree attainment. Source: Pew Research Center analysis of 1980-2017 Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement (IPUMS).

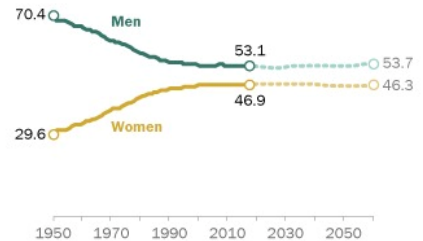
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The most significant of which is in education. For the last twenty years, the percentage of women with college degrees has surpassed men, and the gap appears to be widening. This is also represented in higher education with about 14% of women having a Masters degree or higher compared to only 12% of men. This means that your generation is more likely to be taught by female professors than my generation was. More and more young women today will see examples of women Doctors, professors, lawyers and other professionals as role models. We should be able to predict with existence of more female role models in higher positions, more young women will pursue these positions for themselves. I think we already see that. Look around your AICE classes. You will often see that the number of young women is higher than the number of young men.

This is having an impact on the workforce. Again, when I was a kid, my family was an oddity. Today, women in the workforce are the norm with women almost reaching parity with men in the workplace. More young girls are growing up seeing their mothers going to work every day. This is also translating to improvements in the pay gap, or the amount that men make relative to women. The gap has closed significantly with women receiving about 83 cents for every dollar a man makes. In almost a third of male/female households, women's income constitutes half of the total household income.

Women make up nearly half of the labor force; share will remain steady in coming decades

Male and female share of the U.S. labor force (%)



Note: 1950 to 2017 based on historical data, 2018 to 2060 projected. Data labels are for 1950, 2017 and 2060. Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics historical data and labor force projections.

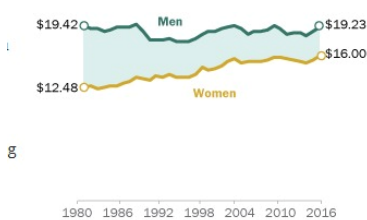
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Women are making gains in the marketplace

With this increased economic power, we are also seeing more representations of women in popular culture in positions of authority. More women are represented as scientists, politicians, physicians, even women holding traditionally male professions as police officers and EMTs. It is impossible to say that women have not benefit from the changes associated with moving into a postmodern culture.

The gender pay gap has narrowed

Median hourly wages among full- or part-time workers ages 16 and older in 2016 dollars



Note: Estimates are for full- or part-time workers with positive earnings. Self-employed workers are excluded. Source: Pew Research Center analysis of 1980-2016 Current Population Survey data.

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On the Other Hand

On the other hand, increased parity with men is still not parity with men. A better pay gap between men and women in the workplace is still a pay gap. Why are do these inequities persist despite huge gains for women and the near-universal cultural acceptance of women's innate equality to men. Hint...it has nothing to do with men's superior upper body strength!

One of the justifications for this continuity of this pay gap is that women often leave the workforce to care for infants once they start a

family. In fact, recent research suggests that almost all of the pay gap between men and women starts to spread after women have children and take maternity leave. Liberal feminists, however, point out that in the United States, men are not necessarily guaranteed paternity leave. Furthermore, the decision as to who should stay home with the infant often boils down to who is making the most money or who has the potential to make the most money...a decision that still privileges men. So the causality may be flipped. It may be that women are not making less money because they are more likely to stay home with the rugrats. Rather, women are more likely to stay home with the rugrats because they make less money.

Feminist theories point to a number of trends in society that continue to disproportionately impact women. For instance, despite the growing number of women in the workforce, women are still expected to fulfill their traditionally nurturing roles in the household. Liberal feminists point to a Double Shift that women are expected to fulfill. The first shift takes place in the workplace. Upon returning from home women are still expected to do the daily domestic chores such as cooking dinner. Traditional male roles in the household, like taking out the trash, are often periodic tasks that take little time and are not daily occurring. This constitutes a second shift for women. Furthermore, some feminists point out that women are also expected to perform the nurturing roles, such as going over children's homework or making sure they are prepared for the school play. Women are also still expected to do the caring work for men, providing that "warm bath" that we alluded to earlier. This, some feminists suggest, constitutes a Triple or third shift for women.

Marxist and Radical feminists also point out that despite huge advances in education and marketplace representation, women are still lagging men when it comes to upper-level positions. Only about 20-25% of national and state level legislators are women. Only 5% of Fortune 500 CEOs are women and only about 1 in 5 board members of Fortune 500 companies are women. This is referred to as the **Glass Ceiling**. Women are also more likely to report gender-based [discrimination](#) at work.



Phoenix was one of the most powerful of all Marvel characters...she was still expected to be sexy!

Even when we consider the gains made by women in popular culture, inequities remain. More and more women are fulfilling main roles in movies and television as protagonists and antagonists. Take, for instance, Katniss Everdeen in the Hunger Games franchise, or Captain Marvel or Phoenix in the Marvel movies. These are huge leading roles the likes of which we've never really seen for women in popular culture. Radical feminists, however, would point out that despite greater representations of women in positions of power and authority, we still expect these women to satisfy the sexualized expectations of male viewers. Female superheroes, for instance, are still expected to be "hot" and serve almost a dominatrix role in the film. This only serves to reinforce sexualized double standards. Marxist feminists point out that these double standards exist because they continue to serve the needs of capitalist investors. Beautiful superheroes sell more tickets!

Another kind of Feminism: Post-feminism

So, on one hand we have tremendous gains made by women in a postmodern context. On the other hand, we also see that some persistent inequities need to be addressed. The feminist movement and relevant feminist theories are all dedicated to trying to resolve these inequities and close the remaining gaps. Those not aligned with feminist movements, however, may suggest that the gaps are closing, women are making gains. It is, therefore, no longer necessary to focus on feminism or feminist movements overall.

Furthermore, another critique of feminism has to do with how feminism is perceived to disdain women who are satisfied with traditional femininity. For instance, it may be true that not all women are fulfilled by satisfying domestic tasks and nurturing roles, but there are plenty of women who do find these things fulfilling, just as there are men who feel the same way. Why shouldn't women who like to express themselves in terms of traditional feminine roles be looked down upon just because they like wearing make-up and heels, and they find cooking dinner to be personally fulfilling? Why should such women be looked down upon as being "anti-feminist?"

So a new kind of feminism is gaining traction, at least according to some measures. These are women who largely agree with the goals of feminism, that women should be considered the equal of men and should have the same opportunities, but do not consider themselves to be feminists. They hold out that women maybe shouldn't be expected to wear dresses and short skirts, but if a woman wants to wear that short skirt, she shouldn't be scorned by feminists. This is a position called Post-Feminism, corresponding with our concept of postmodernism in which women are free to define their own terms with regard to femininity and what it means to be a woman.

Since the pandemic, we are also seeing a lot of families who see value in one person going to work and the other staying home to do the domestic tasks. A family in which one person works does not need to pay for childcare...often one of the most expensive monthly costs for a family with two people working. They only need one car, which cuts down on both gas prices and car insurance premiums. Families making this decision may do so based on which partner has the best earning potential. This still disproportionately benefits men of women, but less so than in the past.

Women, Men, and Changing Conjugal Roles

As Marxist Feminists predict, as women gain market power, as they become more capitalist in a capitalist economy, they will gain more power within the family. Liberal Feminists also add that as our ideas and values change with regard to the roles of women, this will translate into changing, more equitable roles for women in the family. Radical Feminists are not impressed by either of these clear movements, pointing out that patriarchy is still an underlying value in society. We should, therefore, expect to see a backlash against improvements in the status of women as a threat against traditional masculinity.

The bottom line is, changing roles for women in a family setting will necessitate changing roles for men.

Of course, I have a backstory with regard to this. My family was unique in that there was a significant difference in age between my mother and my father. My father was much older than my mother. Consequently, shortly after I was born, my father was able to retire with a full pension and stay home with me while my mother went to work. My young childhood was spent with my father doing the nurturing and domestic work while my mother performed the instrumental tasks. To be fair, it was a bit more complex. Since my father had a pension, he was also bringing in an income. Regardless, my family life looked much more postmodern than most of my friends. Shortly after I went to school, my father returned to the workforce and I had one of the few dual-earner families in my neighborhood.

What I experienced is now the norm in many families, with shifting responsibilities between men and women. The traditional gendered division of labor is starting to break down. My experience would not have been surprising to sociologists Peter Willmot and Michael Young who studied the progress of family structures. Here's a **[Hint, Cambridge really, really likes [Willmot and Young](#) so this is a good study to include in any essay having to do with changes in conjugal roles.]**

Willmot and Young looked at upper-class families and compared them to lower-class families. They noticed that as prosperity was growing, a relatively wealthy middle class was emerging, and the female role of having children was of lesser emphasis for the upper class and middle class due to more liberal inheritance laws, conjugal roles were becoming more **symmetrical**. In other words, men and women in the family were starting to share activities, especially leisure activities like watching television. Chores and responsibilities were still divided by gender, this was the fifties, sixties, and seventies, the split between work and leisure was more egalitarian.

Willmot and Young, however, also noticed that in the upper classes, by the 1970's, men and women were spending more time apart. Women had their social clubs. Men were on the golf course. Willmot and Young adopted the theory of **Stratified Diffusion**. This is related to [Veblen's Theory of the Leisure Class](#). Willmot and Young theorized that social norms begin in the upper classes. So upper-class families would set the norms for families in general. Middle-class families would strive to mimic upper-class families and adopt those values. Working class families would, in turn, strive to mimic the middle class, and on down the line. Ultimately, we

should see families become more asymmetrical as men and women even in lower-class families act like the men and women in the upper class.

Clearly, there are some problems with this theory. For instance, lower-class families may aspire to look like middle-class, but they often cannot afford resources like nannies, and boarding schools that allow them to do so. Also, the determining factor may not be upper-class values, but rather access to the market and relative power.

Marxist Theorist David Morgan had a different take, however. In 2001 he posited that the changes that we are seeing in the family have to do with shifts in the different economies of the family. Now Morgan is using the word "economy" a little differently here. He's using the word "economy" much like Bourdieu used the word "capital". In other words, he's not just talking about money.

Morgan identifies **Three Family Economies** that are going through a change. First is the Political Economy. This is about who controls the money. "As long as I pay the bills/I pay the cost to be the boss." That used to be a refrain sung by men. Again, women are gaining market power...so they are paying at least some of the bills. In some cases, they are paying most, if not all of the bills.

So, the political economy in families is becoming more "symmetrical" to use Willmott and Young's phrase.

The next kind is called the Moral Economy. The moral economy has to do with who shapes the moral values of the family. Historically, this was the role of women as part of the nurturing role. This has to do with socializing the children, but also defining the rules of the family in general. I think Morgan's treatment is a bit simplistic. It may be that women defined the values associated with raising children while men defined the instrumental rules. Regardless, as men are taking on more nurturing roles in the family, the roles associated with the moral economy are also changing.

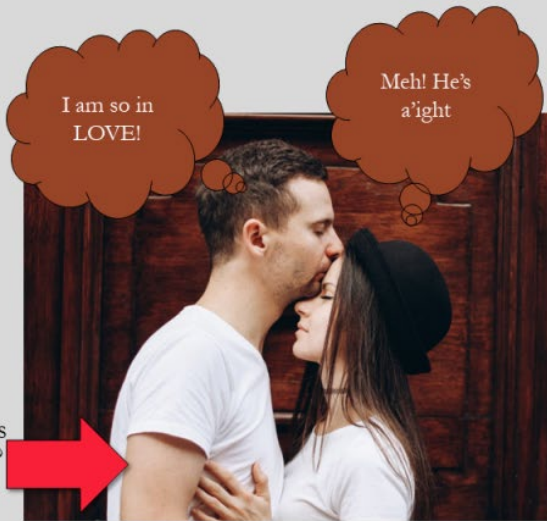
One of the biggest changes, however, has to do with the Emotional Economy. As you recall, one of the biggest changes in family structure is that marriages are no longer defined on practical, economic terms. They are no longer contractual arrangements between families. Marriages today are emotional agreements between individuals. As many of you know, that creates some instability because both people may not be equally emotionally committed. What?! At this point in your lives, you've probably experienced this in your own relationships. You're really into Jimmy, but he is less so into you. You can hang out, but...meh.

Well, sociologists have a term for this because...of course we do. It's called Affective Power. Affect has to do with emotions. So Affective Power has to do with who has the emotional power in the relationship. In any relationship, the ultimate power move is to end the relationship. Therefore, the individual with the least emotional commitment, often has the most Affective Power.

Marxist Perspectives

David Morgan *The Three Economies of the Family* (2001)

1. **Political Economy:** Who controls and manages the money?
 1. Traditionally held by the man → But as women gain market power...
2. **Moral Economy:** Who defines the values and norms of the household?
 1. Often held by the woman → But as men take on more nurturing roles...
3. **Emotional Economy:** (Affective Power) Who has the most emotional investment in the relationship?
 1. Held by the person with the least emotional attachment



We can also take a look at changing conjugal roles between men and women in terms of [Symbolic Interactionism](#). Remember, according to Blumer, individuals respond to things according to the meaning that they assign to them. So a husband and a wife will respond to each other according to their understandings of what it means to be a husband and a wife. These meanings are negotiated and agreed upon between spouses and are subject to renegotiation and may change over time. Of course, according to the theory, this has always been true. In pre-industrial societies, however, these negotiations were more constrained by traditional values and existing structures. When families are based on mutual consent, however, the process of negotiation becomes more intent. Who cooks dinner may have less to do with traditional gender roles and more on who the best cook is, or who likes to cook more, or I'll cook Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday. You cook Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, and we'll order Pizza on Saturday.

Bottom line is that conjugal roles, the roles associated with marriage, are no longer based on traditional values. Rather, they are negotiated between the individuals in the family. Just as is the case with any negotiation, whoever has the most power has a clear advantage in the negotiation. So, the question becomes how that power breaks down.

The Social Construction of Childhood

We've talked about a lot of changes in the family. These changes in the family are bound up in overall changes to society. These changes in society can be broken down into two camps. There are the changes to the material realities of family. This includes changes to the economy, the literal means by which we acquire and produce material goods and services. It also includes technological innovations. These are the changes of interest to Marx. Marx believed that everything in society boils down to the material realities supporting them.

On the other hand, we can also see changes resulting from how we think about the world around us, or the ideas associated with the social world. This kind of social changes is associated with the philosopher Friedrich Hegel (a major influence on our buddy Marx). Hegel believed that history was driven by a dialectic of ideas...what Marx would later label as ideologies. We can see this with the evolving notions of marriage based on romantic and then confluent love. We see this in terms of changing attitudes with regard to women, women's roles, and the gendered division of labor resulting from feminist movements.

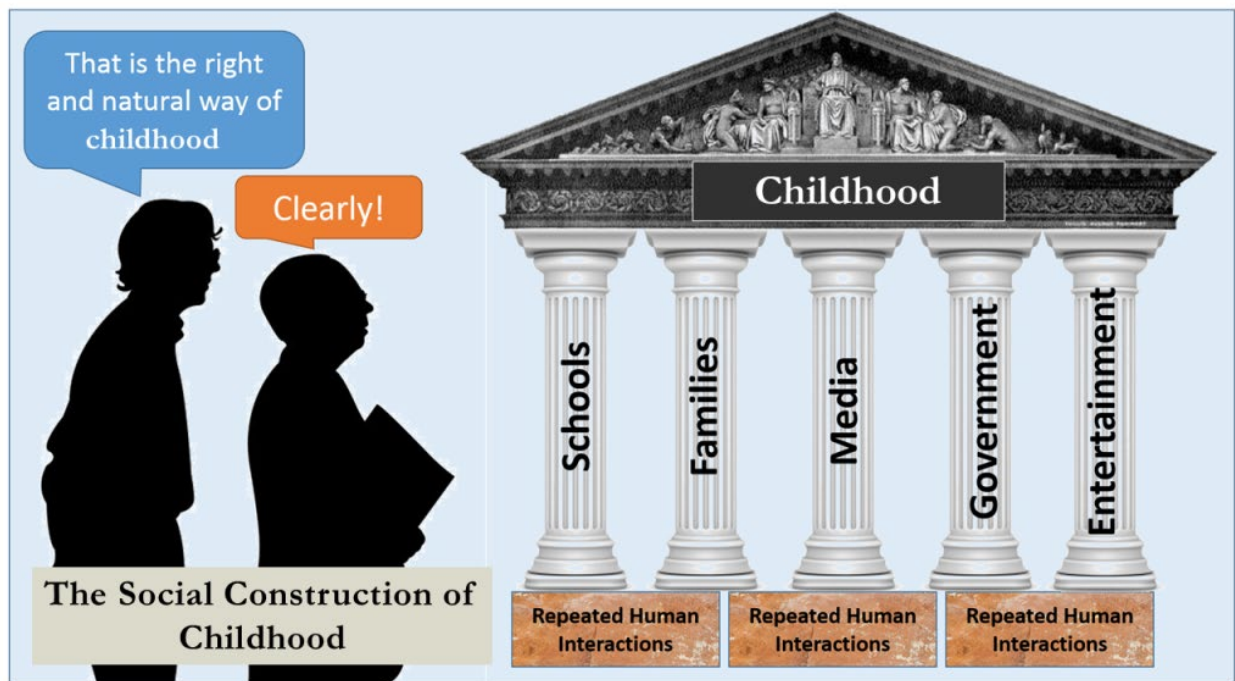
We can also see that there is no clear distinction between where Hegel ends and Marx begins. Material and idealistic realities overlap. It's unclear which chicken or egg comes first. It's likely that material reality and idealistic experience emerge together. With regard to family, both factors have significantly influenced our lived experiences with those closest to us.

So, we have one more cadre of people influenced by family that we have to deal with before practicing how to use these ideas. Yep. The children. As you recall from the history shared below, your life as a young adult, and your lives as children, were very different than those experienced by most people throughout history...especially in terms of the "western" or European culture. If this were the eighteenth century, most of you would certainly not be in school at this point learning about sociology. Indeed, most of you would never have even set foot in a school, even the wealthiest. Now, going to school until age eighteen is not just the expectation, it's literally written into our laws. What has happened?

This lecture will be about the social construction of childhood. First, let's do a quick review of the [Theory of the Social Construction of Reality](#). We discussed this way back in first quarter. Since it was elaborated by sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann in the 1960s it has been the gold standard of sociological theory. It's a really good idea to know this theory if you want to understand sociology and the social world in any meaningful way.

Berger and Luckmann propose that human beings learn how to interpret the world through interaction. Interactions that effectively bind human interaction become habitualized (think of a combination of habits and rituals), and are repeated. These habitualized patterns of interaction are then taught as THE appropriate ways of understanding the world. In other words, they are adopted by human institutions and institutionalized. Ultimately, the constructs are understood as the right and natural ways of the world. In other words, they become "reified" or made real. These reified social constructs are taken for granted as "common sense notions" until moral entrepreneurs come along and effectively challenge the notions. Again, we see Marx and Hegel.

We can argue that in order for these moral entrepreneurs to make an effective argument, the material and idealistic realities must have changed.



So, let's apply this to childhood. If I were to ask you to define a child you might start by giving me a certain age range, say for the sake of argument, age 5 to 12. Okay. Well, let's look at this notion of basing a thing like childhood on an age range. If age five, then why not age 4 and 3/4s. Is every twelve year old developmentally ready for the next stage after childhood? What is it about age twelve that might mark the end? Puberty? We don't all enter puberty at the same time. And what makes puberty the appropriate cut-off?

Yet we all understand that childhood is a thing...right? But what is it? Society has to come up with answers to some basic questions about human development. When does childhood begin? When does it end? What are the expectations that we can have of children at different ages? In what ways are children privileged and protected? In what ways are they exploited? What are some assumptions that we make about children that are not true for adults? What are the differences between boy children and girl children and...shhh...other variations of gender that some people living in some states aren't allowed to talk about.

Let's think about this in terms of your own life. Many of you are approaching this magical age of EIGHTEEN at which point...DUNDUNDUUUUUUNNNNNN! you will be adults! Congratulations!

Um...why is that? What is it about age eighteen that is magical? Why not seventeen? Why not nineteen? Biologically, are you all that different than you were when you were seventeen? Some of you may be. Others...not so much. Is there anything psychologically that makes you ready to take on adult responsibilities? Research doesn't support that. Neurologists and psychiatrists point

out that your brain isn't fully developed until at least age twenty-two...often later. Yet at age eighteen we have you guys signing promisory notes for taking on tens of thousands of dollars of debet to start your futures. Some of you we will actually arm and send off to war! What's magical about age eighteen?

Well. Somewhere along the line, we made it up. We decided that eighteen was the appropriate age to start adulthood. But this isn't a social construct that has been around forever. It's actually rather new. My father, for instance, was already a husband and a father to my oldest brother by the time he turned eighteen (he turned eighteen in December 1935).

Many cultures have what are called Rites of Passage by which they mark the transition between childhood and adulthood. The young person performs as particular ritual and is, after that point, considered an adult. You may have attended a Jewish friend's Bar or Bat Mitzvah. That's an example of a Rite of Passage. Sometimes these rituals are organized around a young woman's first menses, or menarche to acknowledge her new status as a woman. For young men there are often exploits of daring to perform to mark their acention to manhood.

Late and Post Modern societies do not have such rituals, however. So, we them. For instance, in advanced societies, graduating from high school has become a de facto right of passage into adulthood. But there are other possibilities. For instance, getting one's first full time job. Joining the military. There are many things that a young person can do to mark that distinction. They often have little to do with biology or scientific realities.

One of my favorite stories to tell on the social construction of childhood comes from the early colonial tradition in Northeastern North America. As English colonialism was spreading in North America, of course, there were quite a few conflicts between the colonists and the different Native American tribes. These tribes had a history of conflict and rules of warfare. Among them, native people would often attack a village and take women, especially young women and children. These young people would then be incorporated into the tribes as slaves. But native people had different ideas about slavery than did the English. Those kidnapped could often become important members of the tribe.

Obviously, nobody likes having their children kidnapped so the English would set off to find their missing children. It often took a long time as the wilderness was vast. When they found their children, weeks, months, even years later, they would try to return them to their families, the children would often scream and cry and refuse to return. The English, of course, decided that the Indians had used some kind of witchcraft to brainwash the children.

The explanation was much simpler, having to do with the differences between how the English and the American Natives had socially constructed the reality of childhood. For the Premodern English, children were pretty much little adults in development. The only real difference is that, because children were not well read on the Bible, they were especially vulnerable to being deluded by satanic forces. Misbehavior was attributed to the influence of demons trying to lead the children astray. So English children were subject to severe discipline. They were expected to take on adult responsibilities early in their lives. They were raised according to the idea that if

you "spare the rod you spoil the child." In other words, misbehavior was subject to literally having "the devil beaten out of" the child.

Native people had different ideas. Even captured slave children were considered children nonetheless. Their role was to be playmates with the other children. Native American children in the American Northeast had rich childhoods with little adult interference and ripe with play. As they grew older, this play would be incorporated into learning the roles of the tribe. These English children were taken from lives in which they were beaten regularly and held to strict discipline and were now living in a world where they played and frolicked with their young peers. Is it any wonder many of them didn't want to return to their old lives?



Philippe Aries used paintings like this to demonstrate that there was little distinction between children and adults in premodern societies. Do you see any problems with that thesis?

So, the first theory on childhood that I want to share with you has to do with this social construction of childhood by French theorist Philippe Aries. Aries theory is that childhood itself is an invention of the modern world. For Aries, premodern societies saw no distinction between children and adults. Children were, for the most part, considered little adults, with few distinct rights and privileges set aside just for children. The bulk of his data is taken from artistic renderings of families. Premodern family paintings often show the children dressed and posed as little adults. He also looked at legal statutes for which there were few written specifically for children.

In many ways, we've seen some of Aries thesis in action. Even as we enter modern times, we have children going into the workforce at young ages as economic producers. Historically, we can argue, that childhood was comparably short as young people were encouraged if not pushed into participating in adult life from relatively early ages.

On the other hand, using paintings as the source of your data is problematic on many levels. For instance, it limits your dataset to those who could afford the money and the free time to have family portraits done. So, Aries data may not have been representative of families as a whole, but rather telling of the norms and values associated with upper class families.



This is a picture of young coal miners in Pennsylvania in 1910

Also, data gleaned from a family portrait tells you only about the norms and values associated with having a portrait done. This is like when you take your Senior pictures for the yearbook, we cannot infer that young people walk around all the time dressed in formalwear and tuxes with your hair done up exquisitely. No. That's just how you act when you are getting senior pictures done. No other time. So, Aries can be criticized from a class and vantage point perspective.

Aries' data is also only representative of a particular culture. Polish Anthropologist Bronislaw Mallinowski did a very definitive study of childhood in the Trobriand Islands. He noticed that premodern children of the Trobriand had very different strictures placed on them than did premodern European children. Island children had both more responsibilities, but also more rights. Their relationships with adults were far more supportive and nurturing rather than strict disciplinarian. Island children were also more free to explore sexuality than were European children.

Between Aries and Mallinowski, we can see that childhood, regardless of how it is constructed, is universally recognized as a special time. Children are understood to not be as physically and psychologically mature as adults. This is true among the Iroquois, the Trobriand, and the Puritan Calvinists, though one group sees this as a time of play and the other sees this as a period in which strict discipline must be engaged. Children are also dependent upon adults for a range of biological and emotional needs. We do not expect a child to provide the material resources for an entire family as we do adults. During this time of dependence, children are to be socialized into the rules of the larger society. Often, children are also not considered responsible for their own actions. Trespasses made by children are often treated differently than the same trespasses as adults. Parents being embarrassed by their way too honest children is the stuff of family legend. "Daddy! Why is that guy soooo fat!"

The question, then, is the extent to which childhood is considered a special time. A couple of years ago this very question was hotly debated right here in Lee County when our own Sheriff, Carmine Marceno publicly arrested and perp-walked a ten year old for sending threatening text messages. Was Sheriff Marceno right in making an example of this young boy, or did he cross the line by subjecting a child to adult standards? Your answer to this question depends more on the social constructs of childhood that you embrace than it does on any scientifically definable traits of childhood.

Anyway, this is a good place to stop. Tomorrow I'll highlight the debate on whether postmodern societies are erasing childhood, or extending childhood.

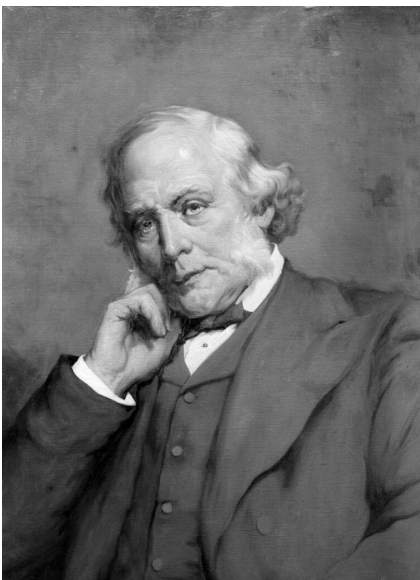
Is Childhood Being Extended

In many ways, the postmodern (or late modern depending on the approach you adopt) has been a golden age for children. Again, we can look at Marx and Hegel to understand why.

As modern society developed children were simply more likely to survive to reproductive age. At first that had to do with improvements in food production. Children ate better, were therefore healthier when it came to dealing with infectious diseases, and were more likely to survive. Again, at first this was a class thing. If you were upper class or in middle/working class, the likelihood of your children surviving improved. For the poor, this was not necessarily so. But even at that, capitalism and trade, later industrialization, even brought a significant improvement even to the poor.

City life was especially dangerous in the early modern age. There was nothing more infectious than an urban center. In Europe, where urban centers had been expanding for quite some time, it was disease central. Stagnant water contaminated with feces. People living on top of each other. Tuberculosis (Consumption), Small Pox, Cholera...urban centers were awful.

Which led to changes in our ideas of who is responsible for city planning. As modern societies expanded and urban centers had to accommodate hundreds of thousands if not millions of people, even the wealthiest couldn't escape the filth. So, regulations were put into place. Most notably, sewer systems and clean water systems were paid for through taxes and run by city bureaucracies.

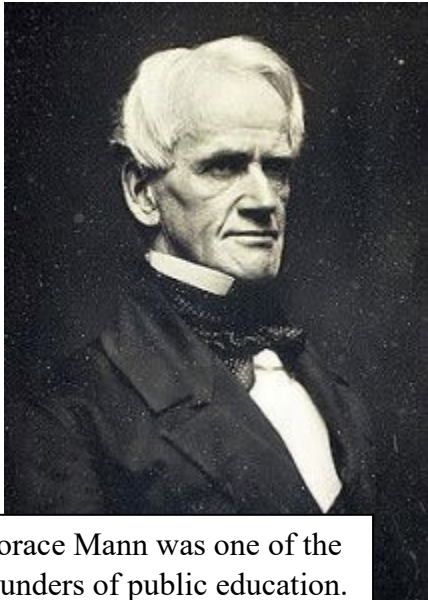


Joseph Lister...arguably one of the most important founders of the modern age.

Perhaps the biggest contribution to childhood survival, however, came from Louis Pasteur and Joseph Lister. In the mid 19th century, Pasteur and Lister presented and confirmed a new theory for understanding disease...the Germ Theory. They discovered that most illnesses were caused by micro-organisms invading the body and causing healthy tissues to break down. Lister developed methods for asepsis, or sterilizing medical spaces to avoid infection. The German physician Robert Koch later identified the bacteria that causes tuberculosis, anthrax, and cholera. These three guys are really unsung heroes of the modern world. In 1800, the last place you ever wanted to go when you were sick was the hospital. By 1900, most hospitals were run by scientifically trained doctors using modern medical techniques to not just treat patients, but to keep them from getting sick (most...not all). Over time, this knowledge spread to encourage things like washing one's home and environment, bathing regularly, getting fresh air, boiling water, etc.

Another change to take place in modern societies is the process by which status could be "achieved" through education. In pre-modern societies, formal education was available only to a few who could afford to hire tutors. As early as the 18th century, however,

there was a movement dedicated to providing at least a basic education to everyone. Thomas Jefferson was an early advocate for public education. He believed if we were to live in a republic, citizens needed to know how read. Of course, this movement in literacy was advanced by the rising middle class (bourgeoisie) and promulgated by the fact that books after Johan Gutenberg's invention of the printing press, and the development of paper, were cheaper and more available than ever before.



Horace Mann was one of the founders of public education.

By the middle of the 19th century, advocates like Horace Mann were dedicated to ensuring that everyone receive at least a primary school education. By World War I, as millions of American boys went into combat, many not knowing how to read the amunition boxes, the United States started to identify public education as a necessity. But public education came with a cost. Remember, up to this point, children from young ages were economic producers responsible for contributing to family income. If you send them to school, they are no longer economic producers. Sending one's kids to school was a significant sacrifice for a family, with the hope that doing so might pay off with the child achieving a higher status, and higher income position.

This also coincides with modern knowledge of reproduction as well as family planning. In the late 17th century, Anton van Leeuwenhoek discovered sperm cells. By the mid-19th century, Charles Goodyear developed the process of vulcanizing rubber for industrial use. The rubber condom was born! By the late 1800s children were likely to survive, and at least for the middle and upper classes, children were an investment into achieved status rather than a means of perpetuating ascribed status, and families were incentivized to have fewer children. Poor families were less inclined to do so. As you recall, this was a special problem for Herbert Spencer who saw the discrepancies between the fertility of upper and lower classes as a real problem.

By the late 19th and early 20th century, now that we have institutions responsible for educating and caring for children, we also see people who are subjecting children to scientific study. Sigmund Freud identified childhood, and childhood trauma, as key factors in human psychological development. This theme was picked up by others, like Jean Piaget, Eric Erickson, our buddies George Herbert Mead and Charles Horton Cooley, philosopher John Dewey...etc. Even as far back as the 18th century, French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau and English philosopher John Locke were looking at the importance of childhood. We start to see the growth of a scientific understanding of childhood.

By the middle of the 20th century, it was understood that childhood would be set aside for play and learning. Children were not just expected to get a basic education, but after the Soviet Union launched Sputnik in 1957, it became a matter of national security that children be educated through high school and the best students be encouraged to go to college. Curriculum was

expanded to go beyond reading, writing, and math, to include higher math, science, literature, social studies, foreign language and more.

This emphasis on childhood was brought into the household as well. In 1960 the first hormonal birth control for women was introduced. For the first time, whether or not to have a child was a mutual choice between men and women. Parents took more active engagement in choosing to have children. They had fewer children and were invested in the child's future. Rather than families having children to benefit the family, the goal shifted to have children for the sake of having children and setting them up to succeed. Being a successful parent no longer meant having a surviving male heir. A successful parent was one who had successful children. And the debate continues on exactly what that means.

The description above is often understood as a [March of Progress Theory of Childhood](#). This is the idea that, starting with modernity, the lives of children have improved.

Today, of course, having children is a significant burden, often with both parents working, perhaps even advancing their own careers. Marriage is less of an obligation and more something two people enter into for their own emotional ends. Children complicate the emotional relationship between the married couple. So many couples put off childrearing until they are financially able to "support the child". Children are raised not just until they are able to work the fields or go into the mills, but rather until they graduate from college in their early twenties...if not even later. Even at that we are also seeing trends of young people graduating from college and returning to their parents' household until they can support themselves...which is getting harder and harder to do.

A good argument can be made that in late modern or postmodern societies, childhood is being extended far beyond what it ever was. Whereas children in premodern societies often entered the workforce as young as age 7 as apprentices, and in modern times it wasn't unusual for children to enter the factories as young as 10 and to start families of their own by their mid teens, today that would be considered abuse. Children are participating in school, remember this is called anticipatory socialization, well into their twenties, and forgoing starting their own families sometimes into their thirties. Does this constitute extending childhood into our third or even fourth decades of life?

But is it?

It should come as no surprise that there is a debate on this subject.

You may recall me talking to you about how much more stress you are all under than I was at your age. Yes, you are all engaged in anticipatory socialization in high school, but the stakes are so much higher. In my day it was understood that getting a high school diploma was necessary to a secure future, but we weren't expected to graduate with a 5.0 and having collected twenty college credits. We would graduate high school and go to college...or not...whatever. There were AP classes, but we only took them if we were really interested in the topic. AICE wasn't a thing. Very few of us participated in dual enrollment. And the litany of tests and being held to professional standards of accountability from third grade on just didn't happen. In many ways, it

could be argued, that for you high school is no longer a childish endeavor, but rather children are being held to adult standards, encouraged to see going to school as their "jobs" and taking on the stressors of a high competitive market-place.

And the consequences is that we are seeing levels of stress, anxiety, depression and other neurological disorders that used to be reserved for adults in high pressure careers. Maybe your childhoods isn't quite as childish as we presume.

Postmodernist philosopher [Niel Postman](#) argues, that rather than expanding, childhood is disappearing. As a postmodernist, Postman is interested in how technological advancements is contributing to a fragmenting of structural relationships between individuals. He sees this process has, guess what, having three stages based on the development of communication technology.

In the first stage, pretty much everyone except for a select few were illiterate. There was little distinction between members of a family based on age. The second stage developed with the advent of reading as an important skill. Reading is a complicated skill requiring many years to master. Here, according to Postman, we see the emergencie of a concept of childhood. Wow! this sounds a little like Aries! Adults were literate and incorporated reading into their lives. Children were pre-literate, and learning how to read. Distinctions between adult and child emerged in this modern age. Furthermore, adult levels of knowledge were found in adult books. Children read primers and childrens' books.

Today, however, communication technology is no longer limited to reading. Television and radio are giving children at younger ages access to "adult knowledge." Postman was writing before the internet was a thing, but we can extend his analysis to YouTube, social media, podcasting etc. From infancy, children are learning how to access the internet and get access to the knowledge that they want...and there's very little an adult can do about it.

On the other hand, the very fact that adults really are trying to do something about it suggests that childhood isn't disappearing as Postman says, but is rather experiencing change and challenges commensurate with postmodern life. I mean, the very fact that I'm not talking about this in class right now boils down to a debate on children's exposure to adult content, with some saying the state should take a more active role of protecting children from being exposed to inappropriate content while others are arguing that parents and teachers should have more autonomy...you all know where I stand, but both sides of the debate have something to say and have legitimate concerns. If childhood didn't exist, we wouldn't be engaged in this debate. The bottom line is that neither side is arguing that childhood is no longer relevant. It is understood that childhood is a special time requiring protection. The debate is ab out how best to accomplish that.

Another theorist, Sue Palmer, has made an even more radical claim than has Postman. Palmer contends that childhood is not so much disappearing as it has become toxic. Contrary to the March of Progress view, Palmer is claiming that conditions are becoming worse for children, not better. To demonstrate this, Palmer identified six trends among children that are creating a toxic childhood.

Let the kids play!



First, Palmer observes that outside play has declined for children. Children are spending more time indoors. Less time with their friends. For us, as children, we were always outside. Furthermore, we were away from our parents. I see this as a huge issue. Even when kids are "outside" less and less playtime is being done independent of adults. Childhood play is more structured and supervised by adults. Consequently, children may become less independent, less likely to self advocate. I'll give a personal anecdote. When I was out

playing say baseball with my friends. There were no adult umpires. If I thought I was safe and my friends said I was out, an argument would ensue. I'd have to figure out my willingness to keep playing against my desire to be right. Furthermore, my friends also had to figure this out. I might decide that though I know I was safe, I'll take the out, because I'd rather keep playing. My friends would also incorporate the fact that I'm taking the out, so they would in turn be more likely to concede for the sake of the game when they were called out. Kids who weren't willing to do this, the kids who always had to get "their way"...weren't invited to play. But these are complex interactions that we had to figure out without adults. As you know from the Interactionist Perspective, play is an important part of identity formation.

This loss of independent play, like exposure to toxins, has real, physiological consequences such as higher rates of obesity and increased rates of what used to be adult diseases in children, like diabetes.

Other factors include the **commercialization of childhood**, with major corporations targeting children for advertisement. They define what a happy childhood is in terms of the products that they want to sell. The **schoolification of childhood**, with increased emphasis on instructional time meeting benchmarks, and taking **high-stakes tests**. When I was a kid, kindergarten was a fun playtime. Today, even kindergarteners are under stress to be reading on "grade level" before moving on to first grade, even though every professional educator knows that children learn at different rates and therefore, the very notion of being "on grade level" doesn't make sense. The solution is more instructional time, especially for those who are "behind." **Declining communication skills**. Despite all of this instructional time, we are not seeing improvements in child communication skills. Indeed, we are seeing regression. Furthermore, children are spending more time **staring at screens** rather than experiencing and interacting with the real world.

Again, all of these things have real, physiological and psychological consequences much like being exposed to toxins.



1. Loss of outdoor play
2. Commercialization
3. Schoolification
4. Loss of communication
5. Screen Saturation
6. Standardized Testing

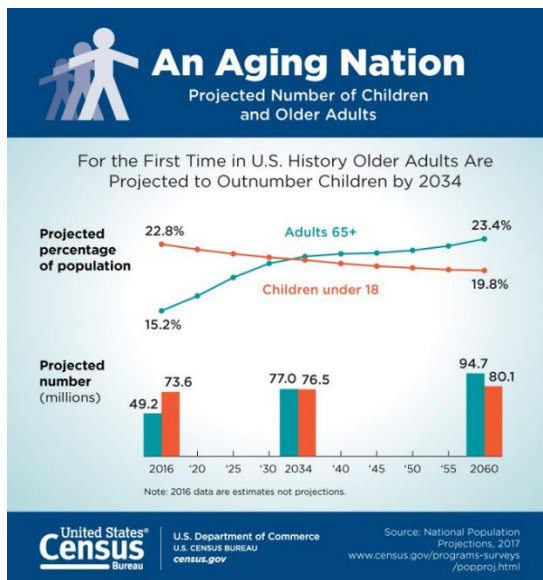
I think Palmer has some interesting things to say on the stressors faced by children in a postmodern society. On the other hand, are these stressors qualitatively different than those faced by children throughout history. Yeah, maybe you are spending a bit more time in school, and maybe you have more homework, and the stakes for academic success are pretty high. However, would you rather be working in a coal mine? Or married and pregnant by age fifteen?

So the debate continues. Are we seeing a "March of Progress" in childhood as families become more child-focused and children experience greater levels of nurturing and care from adults invested in their futures? Is childhood becoming toxic as a result of postmodern stressors? Or is childhood disappearing completely? The answer may possibly be "yes".

Old People

This section has had to do with changing conjugal roles. We started with reviewing feminist theory and taking a look at how the conjugal roles of women have changed. Then we looked at the corresponding changes in men's conjugal roles. After that, we learned about the social construction of childhood and examined the changing role of children in the family.

That leaves one group. Old people. Yep...time to talk about the temporally advanced members of our society and the changing roles they play in marriage and the family.



First, let me ask you to consider, do you know your grandparents? All of them? Are they still alive? How about great grandparents? If you do, you are among a small minority in the human experience.

For most of human history grandparents did not play much of a role. Because they were dead. And if they weren't dead, they were pretty close to it. Often, if someone was lucky enough to live into old age, they were often part of a household of one of their children, and were often dependent. People worked until they physically could no longer do so. If they had enough resources, they may have enjoyed some autonomy, but even still were often considered dependents of the healthier, first male who took on the role of head of the family.

Men, especially, often experienced a loss of status when no longer able to perform the instrumental tasks. But men were much less likely than women to live to old age.

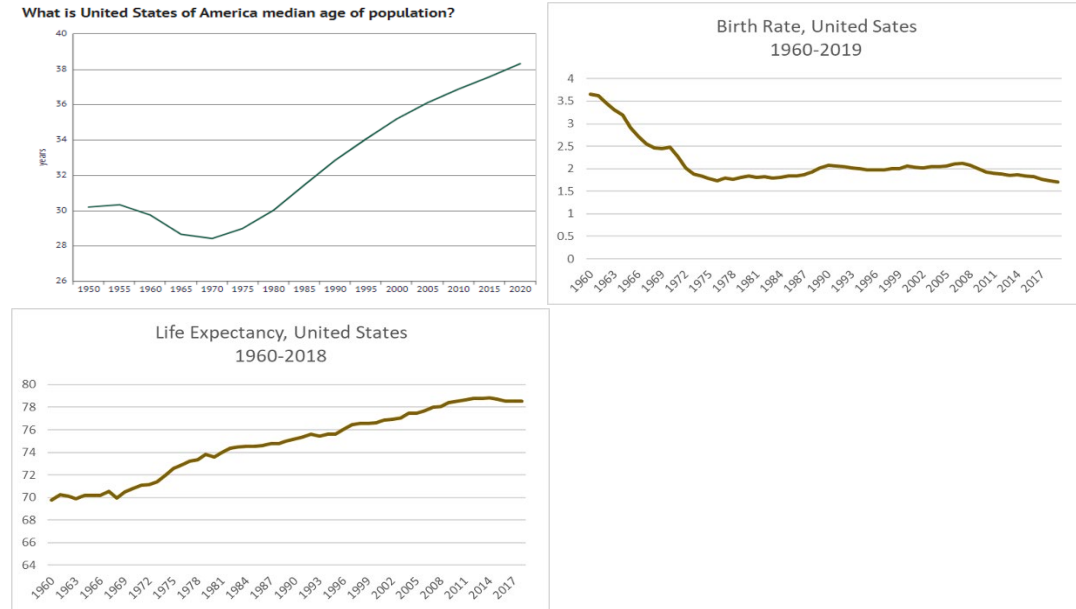
As society became more modernized, the same forces that contributed to healthy children, and ultimately fewer of them, also contributed to more people living to see old age. With the advent of modern medicine, as well as better nutritional and health awareness, more of us are living into old age. Furthermore, older people can grow old and remain relatively healthy, active, and autonomous much longer into their old age.

Consequently, whereas most high school aged children often only got to know one or maybe two grandparents into their childhoods, many of you probably still have a full set of grandparents, or maybe have only lost one. Some of you may even know or have gotten to know your great grandparents. My father is 106, and he is a great great grandparent!

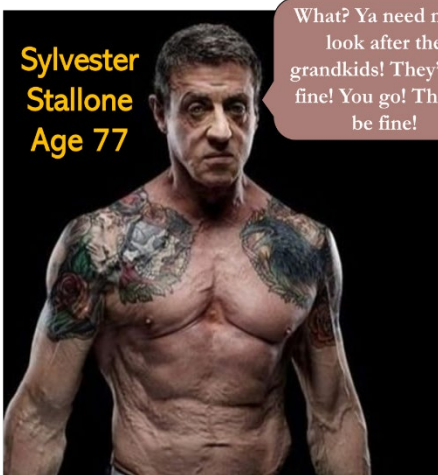
It turns out, that this shifting demographic may be one of the biggest challenges that we turn over to your generation. Because whereas modern and postmodern advances have led to fewer

children, they have had the opposite effect on old people. Old people are proliferating. They're everywhere...

...and they all want to drive right in front of you!



So, how does this translate into changing roles in the family? Very often, whereas old people in premodern societies often had a more passive, dependent role, in postmodern/late modern societies, older people are often healthy enough and autonomous enough to enjoy much more active roles in the family arrangement.



One of the most important roles grandparents are taking is that of childcare. In our society that incentivizes two-earner households, it is often grandparents who are taking on the tasks of looking after the pre-school aged children at least part of the time. Sometimes there may even be competition between grandparents when there are only a few available grandchildren to care for. Grandparents today may often have closer relationships with their grandchildren. In some families, especially low-income families, or families that have been marginalized, we often see grandparents taking on the primary parental roles for children. There are plenty of examples of grandparents who raised their own children, and for whatever reason, find themselves raising their grandchildren as well.

Below there is a reading on what are referred to as **Bean-Pole Families**. Bean-pole families include grandparents as significant agents in a nuclear family with few children. Grandma and grandpa had only one child, that child gets married and has only one child. Extended families of uncles and aunts and cousins are on the decline.

Of course, with increased autonomy and healthy activity of grandparents, the relationship that they have with their grandchildren is one of active choice. Grandparents may prioritize their own lives, pursuing their own ends. This is especially true if they have the means after retirement to enjoy the things they could not do when they were working.

We also see extended families becoming more dispersed than ever before, with possible grandchildren living many miles apart. This necessitates a choice on the part of the older family members on how to divide their time.



On the other hand, there are challenges with people living longer is that ultimately, one will succumb to old age. Furthermore, many of the supports that used to exist for at least some older people are no longer in place, or no longer reliable. For instance, for a while, a person, especially men working in the trades, professions or manufacturing, could retire with a pension. Pensions, however, are going the way of the Dodo. Many people today are retiring with few economic resources. Social Security is a state run pension for older people, but this system is struggling with increased numbers of people withdrawing from the trust and fewer young people to pay into it. So, what do we do?

We'll talk about the state functions later. For now, families are adapting by providing in-home care to elderly parents and family members. Often, this care lasts for years because older people are living longer. For families this becomes an especial burden because younger people are putting off having children until later in life. That means that many parents find themselves in



what is called the **Sandwich Generation**. In other words, they are providing care for their younger children...which has become more expensive, while at the same time providing care for elderly parents...again, also expensive. Once upon a time, providing elder care was something that one did for a relatively short time. Now, elderly people can live for many years and often require complex forms of care in their extreme old age. Elder care facilities are often very expensive if you want a decent placement.

This may create more problems. If I'm the only child, and my wife is the only child, are we going to provide elder care for both sets of parents? How do we choose? Also, our culture values independence. It's hard for older people to give up their independence when the time comes that they need care. We also value family. At some point a husband and wife may want to enjoy the empty nest once their kids go off to start their own lives. It's hard to then turn around and look at an unknown number of years taking care of an elderly family member. And the rules on this are relatively new. These are variables that are increasing the amount of strain on families.