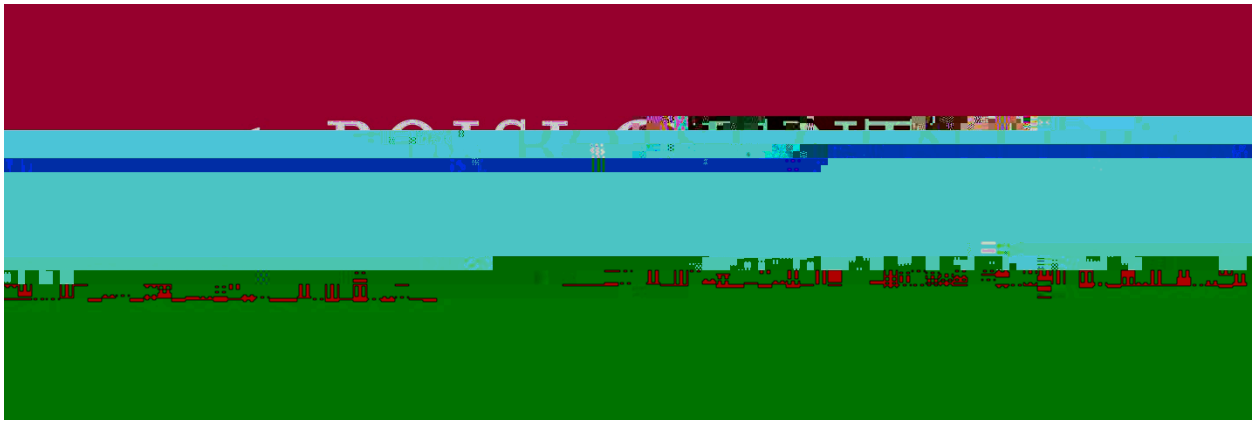


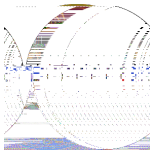
Symposium on Religion and Politics

THE FUTURE OF MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY

"Children"

Reading Packet 3

2014–2015



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Symposium on Religion and Politics

THE FUTURE OF MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY

"Children"

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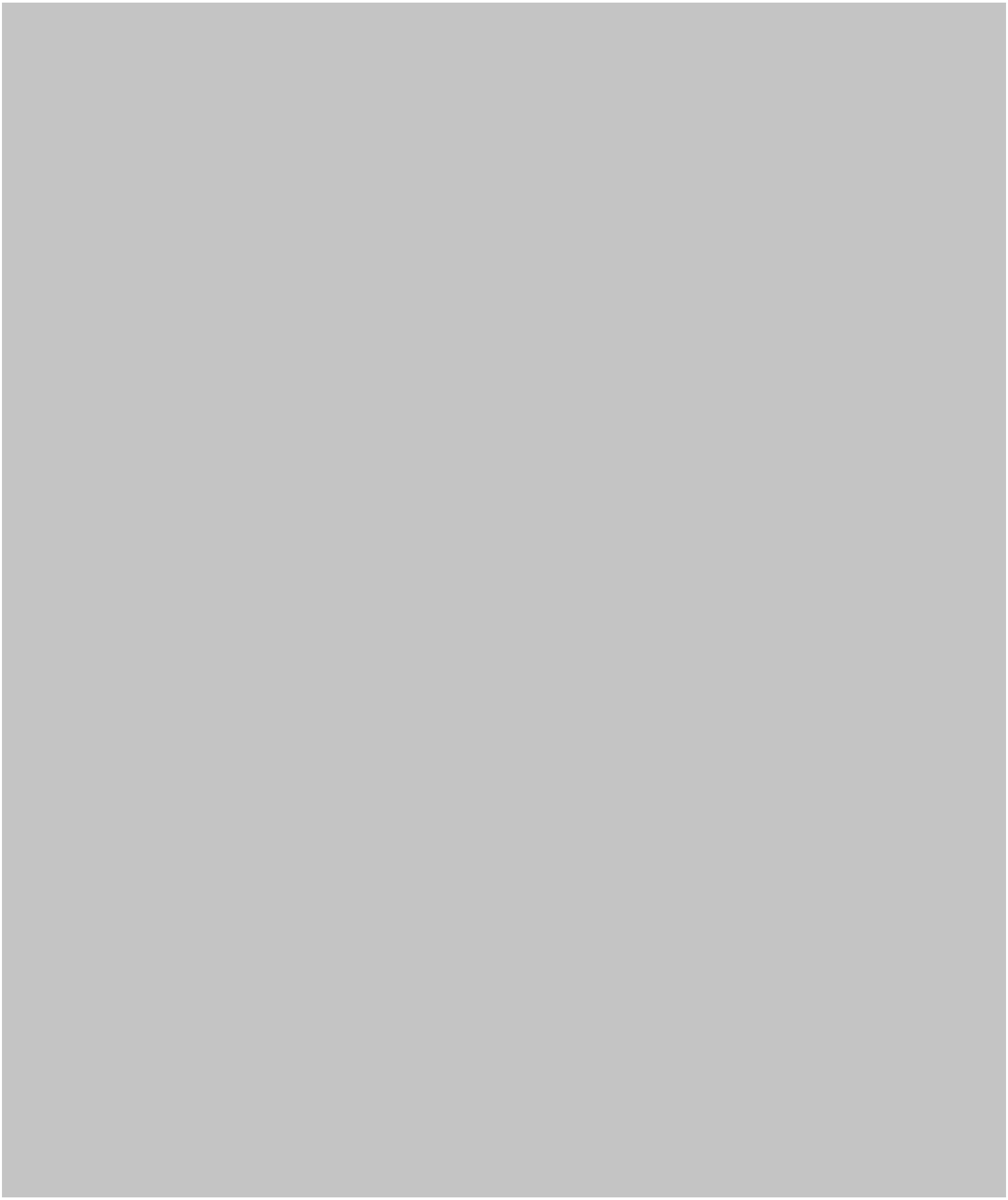

Eric Cohen

In the Shadow of Progress

Being Human in the Age of Technology

New Atlantis Books
Encounter Books · NEW YORK · LONDON

CHAPTER EIGHT

Why Have Children?

OVER THE PAST few years, a new "demographic crisis" has emerged as a subject of intense debate: the most affluent, most advanced, freest societies on the world are not having enough children to sustain themselves. Recent books—including Phillip Longman's *The Empty Cradle* and Ben J. Wattenberg's *Fewer*—have described the potentially tragic consequences of this fertility decline.[1] Lamenting the collapse of modern birth rates, world leaders as diverse as Vladimir Putin and Pope Benedict XVI have advocated pro-natalist state policies.[2] Popular magazines and newspapers that once worried about the horrors of a "population explosion"—mass starvation in developing countries, environmental catastrophe, the subjugation of women trapped by the excessive burdens of serial motherhood—today ask whether free societies mean to perpetuate themselves at all.

Right now the answer, with a few exceptions, is no. The numbers are indeed alarming. Since the 1950s, the total fertility rate (TFR) in Europe has fallen from 2.7 to 1.38[3]—an astounding 34 percent below the replacement rate of 2.1, which is the average number of children per couple needed for a society to sustain itself. Japan's fertility rate is 1.23, and its average age is already 43.5 years and climbing.[4] (The

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8

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home, h peful y through a sys n inc ntive and p enalties
compuls on if voluntary meth ls il. . Pop ulatio n contro
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tion aro nd t e world—obv ish dic not c ome t ue, b t
become only ore certain in ec nt d cades that drastic
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In *M ybe C ne: A Personal A l E viro nment l Argument fo*
Child Fa ilies, Bill McKibben tic late this e viron mental li
bility w h far greater modera on He c escribes the human
for child en ar d the joys of bei a the hims lf, an yet def
moral o ligati n of modern fa lie to li it the ir nur ber of o
in orde to pr vent an ecolo al melt down. He describes
painful ecisio n c have a vase om afte r the b irth o his only
ter, and rgues that single-chil ar lies re no only nviron
virtuou but often best for th ch l, w o gai s a n onopoly
parent's ove.[3]

As M cKibl en's formulatio su gest , how ever, e viron n
zeal in i self is arely the reason na peop le deci de no to have
or to li it the r progeny to o . I is, i stead , a way to add
of self- crifi e to decisions ad on other groun ls—rno
regardi g or f mily-regarding nel No that s ch gr unds ar
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TH T W E STATE

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thr titl ent like Social Securi
Me alth n l c impoverishment.

Admittedly, the relationship et en demograp c eco
nomic prosperity is complica n t n dysfunc o tion
that still ack marke economi ke p fertility lo i m
short-ter n humanitarianism, re ci g e extent of iser
Moreove , it is quite possible d a atic fertility ec ns i
countries like India and China e a e eficial ec o fect
by imiting the number of depen nt h r n, freeing o joi
the “productive” sector, and ten ra il x panding th v g-ag
population. But even in such so tie , is “demogra i den
will eventually need to be repai th p lation age a rat
of young workers to elderly de nc r reverses itself. n th
happens these aging societies v ei e ed to proc ce chi
dren (short-term dependents b t re o kers) or i o e on
child logic of brutality at the en li t ad of at th e ng,
euthanizing the old when they r er suppor h ves
contribute to the state.

In America, Europe, and the rl s h er advance d raci
this same demographic shift— e l l dependen , wor
er , the overall graying of socie -i a a y here an ge wor
Today’s remedial measures— a cr eased day re fits
Sweden and tax incentives for p s t children e—a
modest to a fault: too small to c ir e ot ential pare s e ch
dren (c more children), and el ly to increa osts
already ballooning entitlement

And today’s worries are mi or p e with wha is st c
tainly coming when the baby m r etire. True, o o ha
only one child or no children u u y wealthier r ut t
course of their lives than those o b ea h economi o raisi
the young, and so they should ve ar le capacity s r th
own retirements. True, too, ch es s e ies in whi acc
mulate assets during youth, spe th r lown when t ey ld, a
leave nothing behind can per os n a e a smoo ion
extinction. Alternatively, one c ir a e a renewal n imr
gation with young workers b i t heyday of A i Sou

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B… …m … …ly to st… …e such "solutions… …" to r…eveal that they are par-
tial a… …s … …fter … …ll … …he inability or un… …lingn…ess to see oneself a…s old
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quat… …es … …ces o… …ay for old age, ju… …t as it … …nhibits the creati…on of
"hum… …a … …ital" in… …the form of childc… …en. W…hile some middle class
coup… …w … …n two i… …comes and no ch… …ildren (… …or one child) wou…ld be
able … …pa… …or th… …e … …own health care … …until de…ath, using money their
neig… …bor… …ave spe… …nt to send their thre… …e children to colle…ge, many will
not … …ta… …k … …lecul…te … …about the needs … …of old a…ge until t…hey arrives. And
they … …l … …most … …ainly exert their o… …wn sized po…litical power to pre-
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tion… …pee… …need … …close their doors … …the v…ery …momen…t when their
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birth… …te… …would … …t offer an imme…diate an…swer to today's demo-
grap… …c … …is … …h… …dren enter the w…orld as …helpless infants, …not as
high… …cl… …ntrepre…neurs or geriatric …nurses. At …the sa…me time state
prog… …ms … …nten…ded … …to encourage hig… …her fert…ility or to ease the eco-
nom… …bu… …den o… …f … …rising children ar… …very e…xpensive and will only
wor… …th… …fisca… …s … …uation, at least te…mporarily. No matter wh…at we
do, … …ne… …nou…nt … …short-term econ…omic p…ain is almost inev…itable.

FIL… …L… …Y AN… …HOPE

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culture. No one will h…ave c… …ild … …n to ir… …p… …e the ba… …nc… …e sh… …et
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child-rearing cari…ens…re th… …t V… …tern c…v… …ution as … …el nov… …t
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tion is also unlikely tc… …becc… …ne… …religi…ous … …y serio…us a… …G… …org… …W…
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parents would deny t…heir … …offsp… …ng the … …gr…eatest b…ene… …c… …all… …m…
and sisters with who…m to … …rov… …up.

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he said, "the myster…y of t… …e f… …ily is le…d— …m… …st…ry i… …w…
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SCIENCE

have come from another borough. The doctor, oddly, had a collection of brightly colored porcelain dwarves on the shelf behind his desk. I thought he put them there to let you know that he had a sense of humor about the whole fertility racket.

The steps he told us we'd have to take, though, were distinctly unfunny. We'd start with a test to evaluate my fortysomething husband's sperm. If it passed muster, we'd move on to "injectables," such as follicle-stimulating and luteinizing hormones. The most popular fertility drug is clomiphene citrate, marketed as Clomid or Serophene, which would encourage my tired ovaries to push those eggs out into the world. (This was a few years back; nowadays, most people take these as pills, which are increasingly common and available, without prescription and possibly in dangerously adulterated form, over the Internet.) I was to shoot Clomid into my thigh ! ve days a month. Had I ever injected anything, such as insulin, into myself? No, I had not. The very idea gave me the willies. I was being pushed into a world I had read about with intense dislike, in which older women endure ever more harrowing procedures in their desperation to cheat time.

If Clomid didn't work, we'd move into alphabet-soup mode: IVF (in vitro fertilization), ICSI (intracytoplasmic sperm injection), GIFT (gamete intrafallopian transfer), even ZIFT (zygote intrafallopian transfer). All these scary-sounding reproductive technologies involved taking stu# out of my body and putting it back in. Did these procedures, or the hormones that came with them, pose risks to me or to my fetus? The doctor shrugged. There are always risks, he said, especially when you're older, but no one is quite sure whether they come from advanced maternal age itself or from the procedures.

My husband passed his test. I started on my routines. With the help of a minor, non–IVF-related surgical intervention and Clomid, which had the mild side e#ects of making me feel jelly! sh-like and blurring my already myopic vision, I got pregnant.

My baby boy seemed perfect. When he was three, though, the pediatrician told me that he had a !ne-motor delay; I was skeptical, but after a while began to notice him struggling to grasp pencils and tie his shoes. An investigator from the local board of education con!rmed that my son needed occupational therapy. This, I discovered, was another little culture, with its own mystifying vocabulary. My son was diagnosed with a mild case of "sensory-integration disorder," a condition with symptoms that overlapped with less medical terms like "excitable" and "sensitive."

Sitting on child-sized chairs outside the little $yms in which he exercised an upper body deemed to have poor muscle tone, I realized that here was a subculture of a subculture: that of mothers who spend hours a week getting services for developmentally challenged children. It seemed to me that an unusually large proportion of these women were older, although I didn't know whether to make anything of that or dismiss it as the e#ect of living just outside a cityÑNew YorkÑwhere many women establish themselves in their professions before they have children.

I also spent those 50-minute sessions wondering: What if my son's individual experience, meaningless from a statistical point of view, hinted at a collective problem? As my children grew and, happily, thrived (I managed to have my daughter by natural means), I kept meeting children of friends and acquaintances, all roughly my age, who had Asperger's, autism, obsessive-compulsive disorder, attention-de!cit disorder, sensory-integration disorder. Curious as to whether there were more developmental disabilities than there used to be, I looked it up and found that, according to the Centers for Disease Control - http://www.cdc.gov/features/dsdev_disabilities/index.html - , learning problems, attention-de!cit disorders, autism and related disorders, and developmental delays increased about 17 percent between 1997 and 2008. One in six American children was

/v488/n7412/full/nature11396.html - , they concluded that the number of genetic mutations that can be acquired from a father increases by two every year of his life, and doubles every 16, so that a 36-year-old man is twice as likely as a 20-year-old to bequeath de novo mutations to his children.

The *Nature* study ended by saying that the greater number of older dads could help to explain the 78 percent rise in autism cases over the past decade. Researchers have suspected links between autism and parental age for years. One much-cited study from 2006 - http://archpsyc.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=668208 - argued that the risk of bearing an autistic child jumps from six in 10,000 before a man reaches 30 to 32 in 10,000 when he's 40Ña more than ! vefold increase. When he reaches 50, it goes up to 52 in 10,000. It should be noted that there are many skeptics when it comes to explaining the increase of autism; one school of thought holds that it's the result of more doctors making diagnoses, better equipment and information for the doctors to make them with, and a vocal parent lobby that encourages them. But it increasingly looks as if autism cases have risen more than overdiagnosis can account for and that parental age, particularly paternal age, has something to do with that fact.

Why do older men make such unreliable sperm? Well, for one thing, unlike women, who are born with all their eggs, men start making sperm at puberty and keep doing so all their lives. Each time a gonad cell divides to make spermatozoa, that's another chance for its DNA to make a copy error. The gonads of a man who is 40 will have divided 610 times; at 50, that number goes up to 840. For another thing, as a man ages, his DNA's self-repair mechanisms work less well.

To the danger of age-related genetic mutations, geneticists are starting to add the danger of age-related *epigenetic* mutationsÑthat is, changes in the way genes in sperm express themselves. Epigenetics, a newish branch of genetics, studies how molecules latch onto genes or unhitch from them, directing many of the body's crucial activities. The single most important process orchestrated by epigenetic notations is the stupendously complex unfurling of the fetus. This extra-genetic music is written, in part, by life itself. Epigenetically in&uenced traits, such as mental functioning and body size, are a#ected by the food we eat, the cigarettes we smoke, the toxins we ingestÑand, of course, our age. Sociologists have devoted many man-hours to demonstrating that older parents are richer, smarter, and more loving, on the whole, than younger ones. And yet the tragic

irony of epigenetics is that the same wised-up, more mature parents have had longer to absorb air-borne pollution, endocrine disruptors, pesticides, and herbicides. They may have endured more stress, be it from poverty or overwork or lack of social status. All those assaults on the cells that make sperm DNA can add epimutations to regular mutations.

At the center of research on older fathers, genetics, and neurological dysfunctions is Avi Reichenberg, a tall, wiry psychiatrist from King's College in London. He jumps up a lot as he talks, and he has an ironic awareness of how nervous his work makes people,

Showing that aging men have as much to worry about as aging women, she told me, is a blow for equality between the sexes. “It’s a paradigm shift,” she said.

This paradigm shift may do more than just tip the balance of concern away from older mothers toward older fathers; it may also transform our de!nition of mental illness itself. “It’s been my hypothesis, though it is only a hypothesis at this point, that most of the disorders that a'ict neuropsychiatric patientsÑdepression, schizophrenia, and autism, at least the more extreme casesÑ

bad thing, for children or for adults. Study after study has shown - http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/17605519 - that the children of older parents grow up in wealthier households, lead more stable lives, and do better in school. After all, their parents are grown-ups.

But the experience of being an older parent also has its emotional disadvantages. For one thing, as soon as we procrastinators manage to have kids, we also become members of the "sandwich generation." That is, we're caught between our toddlers tugging on one hand and our parents talking on the phone in the other, giving us the latest updates on their ailments. Grandparents well into their senescence provide less of the support younger grandparents o#erÑthe babysitting, the spoiling, the special bonds between children and their elders through which family traditions are passed.

Another downside of bearing children late is that parents may not have all the children they dreamed of having, which can cause considerable pain. Long-term studies have shown - http://link.springer.com/article/10.1023/B:POPU.0000021074 - that, when people put o# having children till their mid-thirties and later, they fail to reach "intended family size"Ñthat is, they produce fewer children than they'd said they'd meant to when interviewed a decade or so earlier. A matter of lesser irritation (but still some annoyance) is the way strangers and even our children's friends confuse us with our own parents. My husband has twice been mistaken for our daughter's grandfather; he laughs it o#, but when the same thing happened to a woman I know, she was stung.

What haunts me about my children, though, is not the embarrassment they feel when their friends study my wrinkles or my husband's salt-and-pepper temples. It's the actuarial risk I run of dying before they're ready to face the world. At an American Society for Reproductive Medicine meeting last year, two psychologists and a $ynecologist antagonized a room full of fertility experts by making the unpopular but fairly obvious point that older parents die earlier in their children's lives. ("We got a lot of blowback in terms of reproductive rights and all that," the $ynecologist told me.) A mother who is 35 when her child is born is more likely than not to have died by the time that child is 46 - http://www.ssa.gov/oact/STATS/table4c6.html - . The one who is 45 may have bowed out of her child's life when he's 37. The odds are slightly worse for fathers: The 35-year-old new father can hope to live to see his child turn 42. The 45-year-old one has until the child is 33.

social costs. Countries that can't replenish their own numbers won't have younger workers to replace those who retire. Older workers will have to be retrained to cope with the new technologies that have transmogri!ed the workplace. Retraining the old is more expensive than allowing them to retire to make way for workers comfortable with computers, social media, and cutting-edge modes of production. And who will take care of the older generations if there aren't enough in the younger ones?

If you're a doctor, you see clearly what is to be done, and you're sure it will be. "People are going to change their reproductive habits," said Alan S. Brown, a professor of psychiatry and epidemiolo$y at the Columbia University medical school and the editor of an important antholo$y on the origins of schizophrenia. They will simply have to "procreate earlier," he replied. As for men worried about the e#ects of age on children, they will "bank sperm and freeze it."

Would-be mothers have been freezing their eggs since the mid-'80s. Potential fathers don't seem likely to rush out to bank their sperm any time soon, though. Dr. Bruce Gilbert, a urologist and fertility specialist who runs a private sperm bank on Long Island, told me he has heard of few men doing so, if any. Doctors have a hard enough time convincing men to store their sperm when they're facing cancer treatments that may poison their gonads, Gilbert said. The only time he saw an in&ux of men coming in to store sperm was during the !rst Gulf war, when soldiers were being shipped out to battle!elds awash in toxic agents. Moreover, sperm banking is too expensive to undertake lightly, up to $850 for processing, then $300 to $500 a year for storage. "There needs to be a lot more at stake than concern about aging and potential for genetic alterations," Gilbert said. "It has to be something more immediate."

What else can be done? Partly the same old things that are already being done, though perhaps not passionately enough. Doctors will have to get out the word about how much male and female fertility wanes after 35; make it clear that fertility treatments work less well with age; warn that tinkering with reproductive material at the very earliest stages of a fetus's growth may have molecular e#ects we're only beginning to understand.

But I'm not convinced that medical advice alone will lead people to "procreate earlier." You don't buck decades-old, worldwide trends that easily. The problem seems particularly hard to solve in the United States, where it's di"cult to imagine legislators adopting the

kinds of policies it will take to stop the fertility collapse.

Demographers and sociologists agree about what those policies are. The main obstacle to be overcome is the unequal division of the opportunity cost of babies. When women enjoy the same access to education and professional advancement as men but face penalties for reproducing, then, unsurprisingly, they don't. Some experts hold that, to make up for mothers' lost incomes, we should simply hand over cash for children: direct and indirect subsidies, tax exemptions, mortgage-forgiveness programs. Cash-for-babies programs have been tried all over the worldÑHungary and Russia, among other placesÑwith mixed results; the subsidies seem to do little in the short term, but may stem the ebbing tide somewhat over the long term. One optimistic study done in 2003 - http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/20058901?uid=2129&uid=2&uid=70&uid=4&sid=21101454228111 - of 18 European countries that had been giving families economic bene!ts long enough for them to kick in found a 25 percent increase in women's fertility for every 10 percent increase in child bene!ts.

More immediately e#ective are policies in place in many countries in Western Europe (France, Italy, Sweden) that help women and men juggle work and child rearing. These include subsidized child care, generous parental leaves, and laws that guarantee parents' jobs when they go back to work. Programs that let parents stay in the workforce instead of dropping out allow them to earn more over the course of their lifetimes.

Sweden and France, the two showcases for such egalitarian family policies, have among the highest rates of fertility in the Western half of Europe - http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db21.pdf - . Sweden, however, ties its generous paid parental leaves to how much a parent has been making and how long she has been working, which largely leaves out all the people in their twenties who aren't working yet because they're still in school or a training program. In other words, even a country with one of the most liberal family policies in the world gives steeply reduced bene!ts to its most ambitious and promising citizens at the very moment when they should be starting their families.

It won't be easy to make the world more baby-friendly, but if we were to try, we'd have to restructure the professions so that the most intensely competitive stage of a career doesn't occur right at the moment when couples should be lavishing attention on infants. We'd have to stop thinking of work-life balance as a women's problem, and reframe it as a

basic human right. Changes like these are going to be a long time coming, but I can't help hoping they happen before my children confront the Hobson's choices that made me wait so long to have them.

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Apple and Facebook offer to freeze eggs for female staff

Facebook has started offering female staff up to $20,000 to have their eggs frozen and Apple will pay for its female employees to go through the same process from January

By Katherine Rushton, US Business Editor

9:32PM BST 14 Oct 2014

Apple and Facebook have upped the ante in their battle for the best ta offering to pay for female employees to freeze their eggs.

Facebook has started offering female staff up to $20,000 (£12, 570) so-called ocyte-cryopreservatio so that they can delay having children until later in their careers. The process typically costs betwee $10,000 and $15,000, plus an additional $1,000-a-year to keep the harvested eggs on ice.

The social network is also offering help to men who want to become pa All staff will be entitled to help with adopting, and a Òhost of other fertility servicesÓ, the company said.

Meanwhile, Apple has said it plans to start paying for egg freezing from January.

Both companies hope that the move will help them to attract more female staff, and retain them for longer by reducing the pressure on them to have children before a particular age.

WomenÕs fertility goes into steady decline after the age of 35, and falls even rapidly after 40 Ð around the age when many professional women are hitting their stride. Instead of progressing up the ladder to senior

Meanwhile, Sheryl Sandberg, FacebookÕs chief operating officer, has long been an advocate of gender quality in the work place. In her book, Lean In, she repeatedly urged women not to limit their career choices to fit around children, but to be as ambitious as they can.

FacebookÕs egg freezing policy is designed to give them more freedom to do just that. However, it is likely to come in for criticism from traditionalists who believe that women should have children when they are still relatively young, rather than trying to fit them around their work. Critics are also likely to raise fears about the unintended consequences of the scheme, which could place additional pressure on female executives to delay motherhood until later on in their careers.

Ms Sandberg, 45, has two children of her own. Both she and her husband leave work at 5.30pm each day to see them.

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All Joy and No Fun

Agnes R. Howard September 9, 2014 - 4:23pm

 [1]

The Paradox of Modern Parenthood

Jennifer Senior
HarperCollins, $26.99, 308 pp.

Jennifer SeniorÕs All Joy and No Fun [2] is much more serious than its playful coverÑwith

every recent development into her argument. She surveys our shift from an industrial to an information economy, which has rendered children Òeconomically worthless but emotionally priceless,Ó in sociologist Viviana ZelizerÕs memorable language; the loss of family folkways, or Òrigid, immutable social structuresÓ dictating how children should be reared; globalization, that ßat world Þlled with motivated foreigners and competitive Tiger Moms; womenÕs increased workforce participation; preoccupation with kidsÕ safety; mass electronic entertainment; new neuroscientiÞc theorizing about kidsÕ prefrontal cortex, whose immature structure makes attention short and risk attractive; emerging adulthood; homework demands; the disappearance of family dinner; and much more.

Senior is careful not to place guilt on working mothers, though she notes that they feel it anyway, continually worrying that they are not doing enough. Instead she explores how the increase in working momsÑhalf of those with kids aged three to Þve worked full time in 2010Ñhas led to signiÞcant changes in the division of labor between spouses, the need to outsource childcare, and the styles of mothering embraced by those who stay at home. Broader educational and professional opportunities have changed the job description of stay-at-home motherhood, as smart, skillful women who turn from the workforce to childrearing transform childrearing into a project to suit their abilities.

Some of SeniorÕs sharpest critiques come in the chapter called ÒConcerted Cultivation,Ó about parentsÕ intense involvement in their kidsÕ interests, academics, and social life. The families proÞled here squeeze in scouting meetings around Sanskrit lessons, football, piano, tee-ball, gymnastics, and chess clubÑa Òcarpool HadesÓ for the parents who orchestrate it all. We behave this way, Senior ventures, because we lack both script and standard. Normlessness underlies the confused striving of middle-class neighborhoods. Nor do we have a bar to measure whether parenting has succeeded or failed. Ours is substantially a democratic problem. Absent long-held customs to dictate how nurturing should be done, class lines to lock children intoÑand out ofÑcertain opportunities, and close relatives and communities to help, mothers and fathers individually have to Þgure out family life.

Some frustrations are generated not just by normlessness, but by the varied authorities who press priorities on families. Senior says surprisingly little about two powerful agencies nudging parents to do-this-not-that: schools and doctors. Doctors in particular do an outsized share of norm-adjusting. New parents often give their childÕs doctor the Þrst and last word on correct care, concerning morals and manners as well as growth curves and eye charts. Our childrenÕs pediatrician served me with reprimands for consuming 2 percent milk, for applying too little sunscreen, for failing to keep an eight-year-old in a booster seat, and for refusing the HPV vaccine.

Senior regrets many trends, like the overscheduling of activities, superßuity of kidsÕ toys, focus on happiness, and paranoia about safety, which together do seem to make parenting more arduous. I would tag other culprits as well. The expectation that everything for children be ÒfunÓÑnot just playdates, vacations, and themed birthday bashes, but even things that are not really supposed to be delightful (teeth-brushing, shoe-tying, long division)Ñis what makes parenting not fun. Parents also have to deal with the lower behavioral standards of youth culture, which accords social permission to trash talk, eye-rolling, and sullenness. Concerted cultivation might yield more fun for children, but it comes at a high cost.

A problem Senior only hints at is the skewed balance of work and leisure in adulthood and

childhood. If childhood is construed as a leisured stretch of school and play, adults are ordained as those who work. But overemphasis on kidsÕ cultivation straitens their role in the family, making them consumers of othersÕ labor rather than contributors to the family weal. Long hours devoted to special hobbies and structured amusements leave kids highly cultivated but helpless: See how many eight-year-olds at soccer practice, star athletes, rely on parents to tie their cleats. Meanwhile, the intensive focus on oneÕs own brood can pull charity in too tightly, as families use up resources that might be directed to others.

Painstakingly, Senior keeps score in husband-wife chore warsÑratifying, as most studies do, that women still do too muchÑbut her scorecard is wrong. Divisions of household labor are almost always toted up between mom and dad, with children only reckoned in as makers of messes. Having kids share housework communicates a few powerful lessons: they learn that they are part of a family rather than the center of its attention; that

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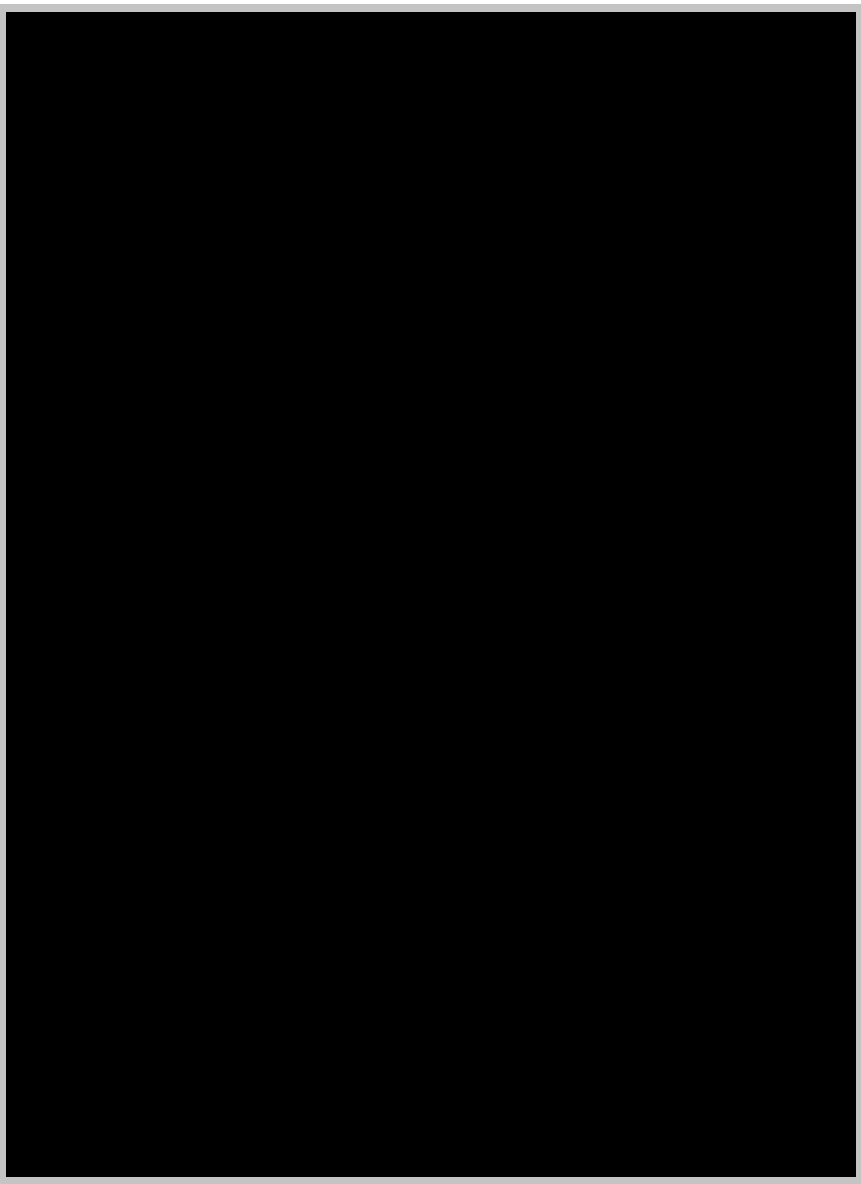
And yet, when examining the total population of mothers who stay at home with their children, these so-called “opt-out moms” make up a very small share (4%). Most of the recent growth in stay-at-home moms has been driven by those with less education, according to a recent Pew Research Center report. (http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2014/04/08/after-decades-of-decline-a-rise-in-stay-at-home-mothers/)

Affluent, highly educated women who exit the workforce may not be “opting out”. Some suggest that they are being pushed out (http://www.asanet.org/images/press/docs/pdf/Fall07CNTFeature.pdf) , due to the difficulties of balancing work and family in the U.S. Indeed, a 2009 Center for Work-Life Policy survey (http://hbr.org/2010/06/off-ramps-and-on-ramps-revisited/ar/1) of “highly qualified” (http://hbr.org/2005/03/off-ramps-and-on-ramps-keeping-talented-women-on-the-road-to-success/ar/1) women (with advanced degrees, or with high-honors undergraduate degrees), found that among those who had stepped away from their careers (http://www.forbes.com/sites/work-in-progress/2010/12/13/career-off-ramps-are-taking-an-increasing-toll-on-womens-careers/) , fully 69% said they would not have done so if their workplace offered more flexible work arrangements.

Leaving the workforce is not necessarily a permanent step. In that 2009 survey, fully 89% of those highly qualified women who had left their careers (the plurality of whom did so to care for family) reported that they did plan to return to work. Seventy percent did so, typically after about two and a half years (http://hbr.org/2010/06/off-ramps-and-on-ramps-revisited/ar/1) out of the workforce. Furthermore, Pew Research Center analyses indicate that the likelihood of being a stay-at-home mother is higher for those with preschool-aged children (http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2014/04/08/after-decades-of-decline-a-rise-in-stay-at-home-mothers/) – presumably because many moms return to work once their kids are in school.



In families with these highly educated, affluent non-working moms, it may be the husbands who are bringing home the bacon, but in 37% of the cases, it is the stay-at-home wives who actually have a higher level of education. In 45% of these families, the spouses have equal educational attainment, and in about 18% of the cases, the husbands have more education than their wives. An estimate using a slightly different methodology suggests that the share of all U.S. married couples where the wife has more education (http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/02/12/record-share-of-wives-are-more-educated-than-their-husbands/) than the husband is about 21%.

Looking at these elite stay-at-home moms a bit differently—fully 69% identify as white. A disproportionate share (19%) is Asian, while 7% are Hispanic, and 3% are black. They tend to be a bit older than other moms; about eight-in-ten are ages 35 to 69. Their median annual family income is well over $100,000.

While a relatively small share of all mothers has a Master's degree or more, the educational attainment of all mothers has been growing steadily (http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/05/10/record-share-of-new-mothers-are-college-educated/) in recent decades. This trend has been driven by both the increasing educational levels of all women, and the fact that fertility rates for the college-educated have not fallen as much as rates for the less educated.

Gretchen Livingston (http://www.pewresearch.org/author/glivingston/)

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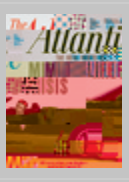

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