

Constraints on Family Size

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Decisions to have children are influenced by cultural norms and economic constraints. Cultural and economic conditions have changed drastically, and, as a result, recent years have seen a sharp, nearly worldwide decline in birth rate, and exceedingly low birth rates in contemporary Europe and Japan (lower than in China, with its celebrated "one child policy"). The history, causes, and consequences of this "fertility transition" are the central topics of this seminar. Historical topics include the emergence of the concept of deliberate family size restriction, which fostered birth rate declines in some countries long before the introduction of efficient contraceptives. Causes include the escalating cost of rearing children. Consequences include population aging and resultant difficulty funding pensions for retirees. (The "social security crisis" is much worse in Europe and Japan than in the USA.) The seminar also considers contemporary women's career-family conflicts, which illustrate some of the psychological, sociological, and economic factors with which the seminar is concerned.

These themes are illustrated by the above reproduction of a government sponsored French billboard, one of a series run over many years. All say "France needs children," but the other text varies. In this case, my informants tell me that it says something like "Do I look like a government program?" The idea is that French men and women should consider having more babies because they are cute, not because the government wants them to. But, in fact, the government sponsors the billboards because it thinks the French economy needs more young people. For one reason or another, France currently has the highest birth rate in Europe (1.89 lifetime births per woman), but it is still well below "replacement level" (2.1 lifetime births per woman) with substantial consequences for the French economy. (USA is 2.03, Italy is 1.26, Spain is 1.24, Hong Kong is 0.93).

Topics and Reading Assignments

Please read assignments carefully before class and be prepared to discuss them in detail.

Meeting 1 (9/9/2008). Introduction to the course, and overview of the history of worldwide population.

Reading:

[No Babies](#), the cover article in the *New York Times Magazine*, 6/29/08. (You should register at the New York Times web site, if you have not already done so.) This is a good introduction to some of the issues considered in this course.

Meeting 2. Continuation of introduction

Reading: These articles illustrate a variety of different causes and consequences of contemporary low birth rate. The first three have an international orientation, whereas the last three focus on the USA.

[Demographic "bomb" may go 'pop'](#), *New York Times*, 8/29/04.

Phillip Longman's [The Empty Cradle, Chapter 6](#).

[No sex please, we're Japanese](#), *USA Today*, 6/2/04.

[High cost of children](#), *New Yorker*, 8/18/03.

Mencimer, [The baby boycott](#), *Washington Monthly Online*, 6/01.

This article gives a feminist perspective on conflicts between work and childbearing in the contemporary US.

[Liberal-Conservative fertility gap](#), *Wall Street Journal*, 8/22/06.

Meeting 3. Intellectual history: Malthus and concern about overpopulation, Neo-Malthusianism. Demographic transitions. Total Fertility Rate. The distinction between birth rate decline and population decline.

Reading: The first three articles below are concerned with the undesirable effects of overpopulation. This was clearly articulated by Malthus in an influential essay published in 1798, from which I have given you only three pages. Malthus did not advocate "artificial" birth control, but his followers in later eras, called Neo-Malthusians, did. Caldwell gives the historical context of Malthus' ideas, and describes how artificial birth control came to be part of the Malthusian tradition. Ehrlich's *Population Bomb* is the most famous, and most influential, modern Neo-Malthusian manifesto. Note that it was published in 1971, when the world demographic picture looked different from today. The fourth article is a survey of world birth rate changes and their causes. It is important because it gives a framework for fitting many of the topics we will study. And it is quite difficult. The last two articles are unrelated to the first four, and are included to lighten the focus on historical material in the first four. Be sure to allow enough time to read them!

[Malthus \(1798\)](#) cutting from the *Modern History Sourcebook*.

Caldwell, [Malthus and the less developed world](#): the pivotal role of India, *Population and Development Review*, 1998, 675-681. Skip the last paragraph.

* Ehrlich, [Population Bomb](#), 1971, 3-17.

* Watkins, [Fertility determinants](#), *Encyclopedia of Sociology*, 2000, 1005-1012.

Caitlin Flanagan, [Wifely duty](#), *Atlantic*, 1/2003.

This is a review of several popular books on modern marriage. It is not a scientific study of this topic, and it may not give a balanced account. But it does fit in with the "woman's resentment" theme of Arlie Hochschild's *Second Shift*, the focus of Meeting 7.

[A Russian region hosts a "day of conception."](#)

Meeting 4. The 19th century French and English birthrate declines.

Reading:

* Chesnais, [The Demographic Transition](#), 1992, pp. 333-337.

On the very early French fertility decline. This short article is difficult, and must be read especially carefully (and perhaps twice). The US fertility decline was also evident by 1800.

van de Walle and Muhsam on ["fatal secrets"](#) (birth control methods) of the early French fertility decline, *Population and Development Review*, 1995, 261-264.

* Seccomb, [Men's "marital rights" and women's "wifely duties"](#): changing conjugal relations in the fertility decline, 1992.

This article, from a collection entitled *The European Experience of Declining Fertility, 1850-1970*, describes the nitty-gritty of an early stage of the struggle to control fertility in England. Caldwell, below, covers some of the same material, but with different emphases.

Caldwell on [the delayed English fertility decline](#), *Population and Development Review*, 1999.

Meeting 5. History of birth control in USA. [Margaret Sanger](#) (see photo).

Reading:

[France successfully boosts its birthrate.](#)

[Germany tries to boost its birthrate](#)

Linda Gordon and Louis Jacobs on the [early history of birth control](#).

Reed, [The birth control movement before Roe v. Wade](#), *Journal of Policy History*, 1995.

This is a highly condensed overview.

[Was Margaret Sanger a Racist?](#) *Family Planning Perspectives*, 1985.

This article shows how birth control policies directed toward racial or ethnic groups can be interpreted as racist. Such policies have appeared in many countries, as we shall see, and they are usually controversial (e.g., Google "Margaret Sanger" and look down the list). I fault this article for never offering a definition of "racist," so the question in the title is imprecise. It seems to me that the question should be "was she helping or hurting African Americans" rather than "was she a racist." That formulation sidesteps the definitional problem.

Everyone should read one or the other of the following fascinating chapters. By the way, these two chapters are by the same Dr. James Reed who authored the article assigned above.

[Margret Sanger's early years](#)

[Margret Sanger's clinics](#)

Meeting 6. The decline of marriage.

The "male revolt" against the "breadwinner ethic," as portrayed in Barbara Ehrenreich's *The Hearts of Men*, is a circumstance that has made marriage (at least traditional marriage) less attractive and less stable. The same is true of the behavioral and attitudinal changes described in Leon Kass' *The End of Courtship*. Ehrenreich and Kass represent very different orientations, but their statements actually have much in common.

This topic appears in this course because the decline of marriage has had a depressing effect on fertility.

Reading:

[Estonia's generous maternal benefits](#) Estonia is attacking its very low birth rate in an aggressive and novel way: it is continuing the wages of working mothers who take time off to have babies. So higher paid mothers are paid more than lower paid mothers, thus equating the "opportunity cost" of taking time off. The results so far look promising. A sidebar surveys maternity benefits in a number of other countries. I have repeated that survey at the end to correct the cut-off right margin in the original.

*** [Early \(Chap. 1\)](#), [middle \(Chaps. 4 & 7\)](#), and [late \(parts of Chaps. 9, 10, & 11\)](#) sections of Barbara Ehrenreich's *The Hearts of Men*, 1983.

Sections from Leon Kass' [The End of Courtship](#), *The Public Interest*, 1997.

Please note that Chapter 1 of HoM, Why Women Married Men, is supposed to represent the state of affairs in 1950 and earlier, before the changes described in the book. Please pay close attention to chronology as you read.

Hearts of Men chronicles a partial breakdown in the male breadwinner ethic from 1950 through the publication of the book in 1983. In *Second Shift*, we will see men who were clinging to this ethic, but many contemporary men do not, including many men who either don't marry, or else marry and then divorce their wives. Perhaps the male Second-Shift-shirkers thought that their wives should be very grateful for having economically committed husbands! Grateful enough to excuse them from part of their share of housework and childcare.

Chapter 10 of *Hearts of Men* introduces us to two important groups: feminists (e.g., Ehrenreich and Betty Friedan) and anti-feminists (e.g., Phyllis Schlafly), and describes their colorful and confusing confrontation over the Equal Rights Amendment. The anti-feminists reproached the feminists for implicitly supporting the "men's liberation movement" described in *Hearts of Men* and lamented in "The natural obstacle" section of Kass's article. Kass seems to qualify as an anti-feminist, according to Ehrenreich's use of the term.

Meeting 7. *Second Shift*

Reading:

Dowd, [What's a modern girl to do?](#), *New York Times Magazine*, 10/30/05. This article describes a supposed return to pre-women's-liberation mating practices.

Second Shift, Introduction, Chapters 1, 2, and 3, plus one or two additional chapters described [here](#). This book, by Arlie Hochschild, describes the struggle to apportion housework and childcare between husband and wife in couples where both parents work. This is an example of a factor that discourages such couples from having large families (and perhaps discourages some people from marrying, or staying married). Other chapters will be assigned in subsequent sessions.

A recent [article](#) says things are improving!

Another [source](#) suggests that other countries are no better than USA on the husband-housework dimension. There is an enormous amount of interesting information at this site (nationmaster.com-statemaster.com).

Meeting 8. There are two new topics: 1. Childlessness and 2. Poor, unmarried motherhood. But, at the beginning of the meeting, we will briskly finish the material that we didn't get to in Meeting 6.

Beginning of Madelyn Cain's [*The Childless Revolution*](#).
Sylvia Hewlett, [Executive women and the myth of having it all](#), *Harvard Business Review*, 2002.

Kristin Luker, [Dubious Conceptions: the Politics of Teenage Pregnancy](#), 1996, 164-174. Luker's article discusses the possibility that, for poor women, teenage childbearing is not totally irrational. The article also nicely brings together many of the themes discussed so far in the course.

[Falling teen birth rate](#), *Wall Street Journal*, 11/17/04.

[Kathryn Edin on the reluctance of poor mothers to marry - The American Prospect - 1-3-200](#)

[The divorce rate for college graduates may be more like 25% than 50%.](#)

Meeting 9. The main topic is "Opting Out".

Reading:

[According to very recent data, achievement is a "plus" for women seeking mates.](#) (You can ignore "Comments." This piece goes somewhat counter to Hewlett, but note that it is focused on marriage, not childbearing.)

[Here](#) is an article about recent changes in the economy that acknowledges many of the trends we have noted but claims that there has been no overall decline in the number of middle class jobs. I find the author's arguments plausible, but I do bear in mind that the Wall Street Journal's editorial division consistently supports "free trade" with attendant "outsourcing" of some middle class jobs.

*Lisa Belkin, [The opt-out revolution](#), *New York Times Magazine*, 10/26/03. This is the article that started the controversy.
[Many women at elite colleges ...](#), *New York Times*, 10/20/2005.

Graff's [The Opt-Out Myth](#)
Linda Hirshman [against "choice feminism"](#), *American Prospect*, 11/21/05.
Linda Hirshman on [reactions to her article](#). This is an introduction to the "mommie wars."

OPTIONAL: Gilbert, [What do women really want?](#), *The Public Interest*, 2005. Gilbert feels that government "family support" policies should not favor working mothers over mothers who elect to stay home with their kids, since the child care provided by the latter

mothers is a major public service. He also suggests that, in some cases, non-poor women who want to have both careers and families might consider childbearing before careers (a "sequential approach"), as an alternative to being "supermoms" or "opting out" in mid-career.

Meeting 10. Genetics, Evolution, and Biology.

Reading: (Please study my comments below before reading the articles.)

Schoen, [Why do Americans want children?](#), *Population and Development Review*, 1997, 333-337. I am assigning this excerpt mainly to show that, without an evolutionary perspective, attempts to supply a rationale for childbearing in modern societies seem forced and unnatural (at least to me).

Pinker, [Why nature & nurture won't go away](#), *Daedalus*, Fall, 2004, 1-13. It is commonly believed that women are better at child care than men, on the average (i.e., with a great many individual exceptions). One wonders whether there is a genetic contribution to average male-female differences in psychological traits related to nurturing, or whether such differences as do exist are due entirely to socialization. Pinker's article does not address this specific question. Rather, it is a strong argument for the general proposition that genetic variation makes an important contribution to individual (rather than group) differences in many important psychological traits, like IQ and personality. In his words, the mind is not a "blank slate" at birth. As Pinker shows, this is well established. Now it is possible that there might be a genetic contribution to individual differences (within sexes) in certain personality traits related to child care (e.g., Foster's "need to nurture"--see below), but not to average differences between sexes. Most people would be surprised if that were the case, but, as far as I know, there are no scientific studies of this issue.

[Here's a Hot Off the Press article](#) indicating the **absolute necessity** of taking genes into account when studying "hot button" social issues, otherwise one may reach exactly the wrong conclusion.

Foster, [The limits of low fertility: a biosocial approach](#), *Population and Development Review*, 2000, 209-215. Sexual desire is an example of a trait that promoted reproductive success in ancestral times (and, to a lesser extent, even today). Thus it was selected by evolution and is consequently very prevalent. This is a fundamental "motor" that drives reproduction in all species. (It is commonly thought to be stronger, on the average, in human males

than in human females.) Foster hypothesizes that a "need to nurture" also contributed to reproductive inclinations in females, and was thus promoted by evolution, along with sexual desire. Moreover, she thinks that, in today's environment, the need to nurture is a more important component of fertility than sexual desire, since the reproductive consequences of sex can be changed by contraception.

- * Hrdy on [bonding of mothers and infants](#). Sarah Blaffer Hrdy is an distinguished Evolutionary Anthropologist with a strong interest in inborn psychological adaptations for motherhood. Since she is a working mother with fine scientific credentials relating to motherhood, her 1999 book *Mother Nature* was eagerly awaited as a possible source of important new insights. I don't think the book fulfilled that promise, but it is a fine book none the less. Hrdy and her book are discussed in Belkin's Opt-Out Revolution.

The assigned chapter relates, among other things, her attempts to put her personal motherhood experience into an anthropological perspective. (The chapter is too long for our purposes, for which I apologize.) This chapter occurs late in the book, so it's a bit like coming into a movie near the end--it takes a while to get oriented. "Bowlby" is Attachment researcher John Bowlby, information about whom dribbles out over the course of the chapter. In a nutshell, some of Bowlby's ideas have been taken as strongly opposed to working mothers leaving their young children in the care of others ("allomothers"), which naturally offended many working mothers. Hrdy feels that "high quality" allomothers are satisfactory (if you can find them), and she does not see the main body of Bowlby's work as contradicting this view, even though Bowlby himself may have reached a different conclusion on the basis of this same work. The debate over the adequacy of various kinds of allomothering is a prominent component of the "Mommie Wars," with some stay-at-home mothers questioning the advisability of extensive allomothering. There is lots of research on effects of daycare on young children, and, as far as I know, the weight of evidence finds no ill effects of high quality daycare for moderate numbers of hours per week.

Mini-term-paper "heads up": Here is a long [list](#) of possible topics and articles to serve as bases for mini-term-papers. You have the option of choosing a topic and article from outside the list; in some cases I have already recommended such articles to certain students. If you would like to consider this option, you may want to search the online [Sociological Abstracts](#) for suitable papers. But you are welcome to search elsewhere.

Reading:

[Alpha women, beta men](#), *New York*, 10/2004. This article relates to a topic considered previously.

[Empire of the Alpha Mom](#), *New York*, 2005. This article is included as comic relief.

[A very brief introduction to Evolutionary Psychology](#). This brief introduction isn't great for our purposes, but I think it's better than nothing. Note that John Bowlby is credited with introducing one of it's main concepts, the EEA. I hadn't noticed that before.

[Roy Baumeister on sex differences](#). This article is of interest to us for two reasons: First, unlike most of our reading, it tries to show that "men are OK." Second, it introduces some evolutionary speculations about sex differences. These are the kinds of speculations that Angier attacks in the next article.

Natalie Angier's [critique](#) of Evolutionary Psychology's treatment of women. This *New York Times Magazine* article (11/21/99) presents a somewhat one-sided view of Evolutionary Psychology that is shared by many non-scientists (like Angier) and even a few scientists. I think a number of Angier's arguments are questionable, even though it's fun to read them. For example, the long discussion of male philandering on p. 6 overlooks the fact that philandering and "mate guarding" are not wholly incompatible, and an "Evo Psycho" might claim that simultaneous but judicious pursuit of both "strategies" would have been "adaptive" for some of our more athletic forefathers. But the article raises a number of important issues and there is certainly merit in some of her points. Angier's work for the New York Times won a Pulitzer Prize. For more of her writing on women, see her book *Woman: An Intimate Geography*, 1999.

Two pages from Virginia Valian's [Why So Slow?](#)

According to Angier "In the United States the possession of a bachelor's degree adds \$28,000 to a man's salary but only \$9,000 to a woman's. A degree from a high-prestige school contributes \$11,500 to a man's income but subtracts \$2,400 from a woman's." So what are women doing at Penn?

It turns out (see the above link) that this statement does not apply to all women "in the United States" but to men and women in a single field (international business). Moreover, the average salary of the women in the study was \$54,800, so the women with

high-prestige degrees had an average salary of \$52,400 in 1991, which is equivalent to a respectable \$79,138 in 2006, according to this [calculator](#).

Thus Angier's statement is slightly misleading. None the less, her basic point is certainly correct: there continues to be economic discrimination against women.

Eisenberg, [The adoption paradox](#), *Discover* magazine, 1/2001. I am including this article as an example of a failure of straightforward evolutionary thinking as applied to human behavior. Adoption is paradoxical for Evolutionary Psychology because it holds that evolution favors genes that lead their bearers to care for these genes, and to care for copies of these genes in children and other relatives. And evolution doesn't favor genes that lead their bearers to care for unrelated genes, like those in adoptees. So you shouldn't find genes of the latter kind (promoting adoption) around today, after many millenia of evolution. But, contrary to the expectation from this approach, adoption is prevalent in human societies. This may be seen as discrediting Evolutionary Psychology.

Please concentrate on the "evolutionary angle" when you read this article.

Meeting 12. Mini-term-paper presentations.