

Slipping the Grip of Pronatalism

Probably no greater force exists that will determine the fate of humankind than pronatalism. While not familiar to most, it is a fancy word about something we all know too well. From the time we were little ones until the time of leaving the family nest, this prenatal conventional wisdom has been pedaled...to be happy you need to find love, marry and have children with a partner for life.

In her book, “The Baby Matrix”, Laura Carroll defines pronatalism as being “pro-baby” around which a set of beliefs have evolved. “It’s the idea that parenthood and raising children should be the central focus of every person’s adult life. Pronatalism is embedded in the social psyche and includes a collection of beliefs that have come to be seen as “true.”

From well-intended parents, teachers, religious leaders and others of influence, youngsters are conditioned to believe that being married and having kids is a key measurement of a successful life. For the more zealous pronatalist, the focus is even narrower; certainly love and marriage are warmly embraced, but one’s purpose in life should be to have as many babies as possible to please God, to assure the future of human race, and to provide socio-economic support to the aged.

There are many facets to pronatalism and the smattering of comments that follow will give you a sense of how they influence our daily conversation. At family gatherings this is a very familiar one; “Well... you two have been going together long enough, when are you going to get married?” Or maybe it’s, “You know, your Mom and I are looking forward to retirement and sure would like to have a couple of grandkids to play with.” Another comment often heard from frustrated fathers about their adult sons, who are not settling down as anticipated; “He needs to marry and have kids, that’ll make him a real man.”

In the work place the boss regularly assigns single employee Josh to work the week-end, so Filipe can be with his kids, clearly signaling that the work schedule gives parents priority. Or whispered over a cup of coffee, “She told me flat out, she doesn’t want to ever have children, how selfish can one get?” Pronatalism is everywhere we turn, yet it goes unrecognized as a societal force that fosters population growth.

Even in grade school, teachers will tell little ones, “Someday when you are grown up you’ll have kids in school too.” Few would qualify it by saying, “When you are grown up, you could be a mother too (or father), if you want to be.” In other words, for centuries the societal default position has been that you are expected to be married and have children. "Have one for mum, one for dad and one for the country." If infertile, parenthood is always available by virtue of invitro-fertilization or adoption, so you won’t miss out on family life.

With these few paragraphs one can quickly see that pronatalism is woven into the fabric of American life and has had a tenacious grip on how we have lived for centuries. But in more recent years it has lost some of its punch and change is definitely afoot. Here's what Pew Research Center found in a recent study called "Parenting in America":

"Family life is changing. Two-parent households are on the decline in the United States as divorce, remarriage and cohabitation are on the rise. And families are smaller now, both due to the growth of single-parent households and the drop in fertility. Not only are Americans having fewer children, but the circumstances surrounding parenthood have changed."

Below are some specifics found in this report with the caution that although there is quite a bit of disparity based on race, income, and education, it's clear that family life in America is undergoing rapid transformation:

... "In 1960... 73% of all children were living in a family with two married parents in their first marriage... today less than half (46%) are... there is no longer one dominant family form in the US."

... "estimates suggest that 39% of children will have had a mother in a cohabiting relationship by the time they turn 12 and by the time they turn 16 almost half (46%) will have experience with their mother cohabitating."

... First-time mothers today are older, better educated and "are playing the role of breadwinner, often the primary breadwinner within their families."

... Less educated women are more likely to be younger, first-time single mothers and are more likely to have 3 or more kids.

... Marriages tend to last longer than co-habitation does.

... "One-in-four parents say they are just able to meet their basic expenses and 9% say they don't even have enough to meet their basic expenses."

... And parenting, while rewarding and enjoyable for most, is stressful and tiring for about one in four mothers and fathers

(For more detail go to www.pewsocialtrends.org/2015/12/17 "Parenting in America Today.").

These findings suggest that family life in America has drifted far afield from the original tenet of pronatalism. To better fit today's more fluid family structure this pro-baby creed should be modified and might better read:

"One of life's endeavors should be to take advantage of love as it comes and goes, divorce and re-marry as circumstances change, and be most careful about having children, recognizing that you may be one in a sizeable minority who finds parenting not so rewarding and that your spouse/s may leave you to raise your kids with another partner."

Millennials and Gen Zs are increasingly aware that "*our biological capacity to have children does not mean we have to have them... it means we have a choice, not an instinctual drive that must be fulfilled.*"¹ But *choice-options* go far beyond the issue of having kids.

More and more American men and women are opting to establish their own rules of living together as evidenced by the previous study. For them, whether to marry, cohabit, have children, live in a group, live with a partner of the same sex, or simply live singularly are options with growing societal awareness and acceptance.

According to the US Census Bureau in September of 2016 there were almost 126 million American households, of which over half (52%) were identified as being headed up by a non-

married householder.ⁱⁱ Where this is leading and what new norms might emerge is uncertain, but for some religions and the more traditional-minded, this uprooting is most vexing.

Many parents may feel that when a child does not follow in their footsteps when it comes to family, it's a reflection on them. What they need to understand is that times have significantly changed and so too have their children's outlook on what is important in life. Family may take a backseat to career aspirations and/or the seeking of a different lifestyle all together. Whereas in previous generations, rearing a family was almost automatic, today's young adults have a variety of choices that can be freely exercised.

Meanwhile, many state legislators and members of Congress are still vested in old-school pronatalism and believe America should continue with unfettered population growth. In their mind more is better, having fallen victim to age-old "Ponzi Demographics."

In his article "Is Population Growth a Ponzi Scheme? (www.theglobalist.com) Joseph Chamie makes these observations:

1. "Ponzi demography is essentially a pyramid scheme that attempts to make more money for some by adding on more and more people through population growth.

2. The underlying strategy of Ponzi demography is to privatize the profits and socialize the costs incurred from increased population growth." (For a further explanation on how this works see endnote.ⁱⁱⁱ)

3. Low birth rates, especially those below replacement levels, are considered a matter of national concern. Without higher fertility rates and the resulting population growth, the nation, it is claimed, faces a bleak and dreary future...so Ponzi demography calls for pro-natalist policies and programs to encourage couples to marry and to have more children, which will lead to the promised sustained economic growth."

The vehemence of this type of thinking often shows up in the engineering of reproductive legislation. Most recent examples are the targeted attempts to minimize the availability of contraceptives provided by employer-based insurance as required by Obama Care. Additionally at the state level, abortion rights are being undermined by placing more and more onerous restrictions on women who choose to have them.

The war on Planned Parenthood by Pro-life advocates is illustrative of how those with a prescriptive focus on life are determined to impose their will on others. And they may succeed depending on Federal and Supreme Court rulings, which so far have gone mainly against them. In all probability newer generations will resist these measures as well, but even more so, finding them both punitive and incompatible with their choice-opted lifestyle.

At this point it is unlikely that America will go back to the stereotypical family of old and accept outdated dictums by religious groups. When society changes mores, as strongly evidenced by the Pew Research study, seldom do they reverse course. In short anachronistic pronatalism, while once of pragmatic value to the human race, is now passé with the advent of swarming human populations that are wrecking the planet.

With the US weighing in at an estimated 329 million people and headed for 404 million by 2060 (according to the Census Bureau) the ecological systems of the nation are being overloaded and seriously denigrated. Whether science and technology can compensate for the shortfalls, as envisioned by population proponents, is highly questionable. Clearly a pause in having more Ponzi babies and reducing legal immigration to a minimum would be prudent in an effort to re-establish bio-sustainability and create a steady-state economy in balance with natural resources.

Never before has there been a better opportunity than now for the younger generations to shape their own futures and that of the nation by simply being true to themselves.

The purpose of this article is not to discourage people from marrying and having families, if that's what is in their hearts. But rather to recognize that not all of us are cut from the same cloth. We may not want to "settle down", which is code for marrying and having kids. Being a father or mother is a choice well suited for many, but not all. You do not have to be a parent to feel complete or "whole" or to be a respected person in the community.

There are plenty of examples of single people or couples without children making invaluable contributions to society and nature by following what suits them best. Don't let pronatalism or conventional thinking divert you from living the way your inner voice tells you. As Shakespeare said centuries ago, "*This above all: to thine own self be true, and it must follow, as the night the day, Thou canst not then be false to any man.*"

Should after careful consideration you decide to marry and have children then you are doing what is right by you. On the other hand should you opt to remain single, co-habitat, marry without kids, those decisions are arguably of equal value. And like you, if millions of others do the same, the heavy burden of human presence on the planet would be gradually lifted. In the process carbon emissions would be reduced and bio-systems less stressed, Maybe then, Mother Earth could heal... a quintessential solution to an existential problem.

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ⁱ Laura Carroll, The Baby Matrix

ⁱⁱ www.uscensus.gov/America's Families and Living Arrangements, Table H 1.

ⁱⁱⁱ Since the main driver of people growth in the US is immigration, business profits from this influx of cheaper labor. American taxpayers, many of whom are just getting by, are footing the bill for billions of dollars to mitigate increased wear and tear on already inadequate and deteriorated infrastructure. That is to say nothing about the added costs of expansion to meet incessant growth. This is a sweet deal for the business community-*privatizing the profits while socializing the costs*. Is there any wonder then why corporate America champions all kinds of immigration?