

Markets, Maslow, and the Evolution of the Modern Family

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Discussions of the family's role as a social institution are inevitably complicated by the fact that it is an institution with which every human being has long and in-depth experiences. Those uniquely individual experiences surely affect the way in which families are perceived to function and the judgments about different family structures that people often make. This aspect of this particular social institution makes it all the more important to obtain an understanding of its changes and the causes and consequences of those changes. Much of the popular discourse around the family is in terms of what Richard Posner (1992, p. 4) refers to, in the similar context of the study of human sexuality, as "moral" approaches that are "irreducible to genuine social interests or practical incentives as the key to understanding." A more social scientific approach would attempt to uncover the ways in which changes in the evolution of the social institution of the family has been affected by changes in the political, economic, and legal context that surrounds it, especially in terms of how they affected the incentives and ability of individuals to behave in particular ways and to form particular kinds of families. It is such an approach that I hope to deploy here.

I will argue that the features we associate with the "modern" family (e.g., companionate and sexually-centered marriage, the "sheltered childhood," the nuclear family, the increasing labor force participation of women, the "outsourcing" of much household production, and the demand by many gays and lesbians to be included in that concept of the family) are largely, though not solely, the result of the progressive advance of market capitalism that has characterized the last several hundred years.¹ More specifically, market capitalism did two things that changed the family forever. First, it separated, through the advent of wage labor, "home" and "work" in a way never before

seen in human history. This fundamentally moved the family away from having economic survival as its primary function. Second, it produced a degree of wealth also previously unseen in human history. This also enabled the family to shed many of its other economic functions, in this case those associated with household production. It also made possible first the withdrawal of women from the labor force but then their massive re-entrance and all of the changes that has brought in its wake.

What these changes due to market capitalism made possible comprises the other half of my argument. One way of understanding the changes that have produced the modern family is that as the institution of the family shed the economic (and political) functions that were once central to its existence, it was able to pick up new functions to replace them. The new functions that families acquired might best be described as “emotional” or “psychological” ones; families became the central institution for the fulfillment of a variety of psychological and emotional needs. The term “needs” is used intentionally here, as one can understand this transformation as the family climbing the famed “hierarchy of needs” associated with the 20th century psychologist Abraham Maslow. Maslow (1943) argued that people tend to address their lower order needs first (e.g., those associated with basic survival) and then move “up” a hierarchy of needs that has “self-actualization” and “self-realization” at the very top. The evolution of the modern family is the story of its central functions being transformed from those associated with needs at the bottom of the hierarchy to those at the top as a result of the opportunities and wealth created by market capitalism. Seeing marriage and the family as first and foremost an institution in which we invest our deepest and richest emotional

and psychological needs is a peculiarly modern phenomenon, trailing in the wake of the modernization that market capitalism brought elsewhere.

“Traditional” and modern families

The use of the term “modern” in describing the family implies that there was a “pre-modern” family that differed significantly from the family that largely characterizes the developed world. It makes sense in this regard to follow Edward Shorter’s (1975) distinction between the “modern” family and the “traditional” family. What is most useful about these two terms is that they correspond to the descriptions of the relevant economic systems underlying each kind of family as Market and Tradition, respectively. As Lavoie (1985) argued, every economy has one of three coordination processes as fundamental to its operation: Tradition, Market, or Planning. By “tradition” Lavoie referred to the ways in which ancient economies were organized by following prescribed traditions for what individuals did to contribute to the economy of the small groups in which they operated. In such societies, individuals were largely prohibited from deciding for themselves what and how they would produce and how the fruits of their labor would be distributed and consumed. Such decisions were made collectively, with the elders or group leaders generally deciding who would do what and how, and then how the spoils would be divided. These tradition-based systems discouraged individual initiative because such groups were often on the edge of survival, biologically in earlier times but economically in more recent times, and could not afford the risk of something new threatening their precarious situation. Tradition-based economies were ones where community control and resource allocation were paramount.

Another advantage of using “traditional” and “modern” in this way is that it makes clear two important historical points. One is that there has, in fact, been change in the way that families are structured and the things that they do. Too much contemporary conversation about the family often invokes the phrase “traditional family” to describe the nuclear family as depicted on 1950s television and does so with the implication that it has been around for generations, hence “traditional.” However, as scholars such as Stephanie Coontz (1992; 2005) have argued, the idealized family of the 1950s was the product of a unique set of historical circumstances and, at that, not as overwhelmingly common as many have come to believe.² The family form associated with tradition-based societies would more accurately be described as the “traditional family,” if by that we mean “the kind of family that has been most common over centuries of human experience.” The second historical point is simply that using the “modern family” to describe the family that we are generally more familiar with allows us to identify other features of the “modern” world that helped to bring that family into existence and continue to frame its ongoing evolution.

For most of human history, marriage and family were not arenas open to individual choice or realms of privacy in the ways that we would understand those now. The creation of a new family via marriage was fraught with a range of economic, political, and social implications that overrode any desires of the couple at the center of the process. Both parents and the community at large had a stake in the success of individual marriages, whether primarily economic or political, and that stake justified what we would now call “interference” in both the choice of marital partner and the day-to-day operation of the family.

Until the about the 1700s, marriages in the Western world were not the love-based, companionate, chosen partnerships we value today. For many centuries, marriages were largely the product of parental or communal arrangements in which the consent of the spouses was a secondary consideration at best. The reasons for this were straightforward: for the poor, and this was most of humanity for most of its history, marriage was a crucial economic institution.³ Marriage created a new unit of production as well as the context in which new producers (children) could be created. In hunter/gatherer and agricultural societies, labor to collect or grow food was the basic necessity and the family as a structure for the inheritance of the land to grow it on was equally important. Even parent-child relationships were seen in crudely economic terms. As Shorter (1975, p. 5) describes it: “While a residual affection between mother and child...has always existed...in traditional society the mother had been prepared to place many considerations – most of them related to the desperate struggle for existence – above the infant’s welfare.” Parents routinely sent their infants to wet-nurses in other towns, where conditions could best be described as “awful” at best. Why do it then? No labor could be spared for the care of infants when sheer survival required all available hands to work the land to feed the rest of the family. What appears as indifference to the plight of their own children was simply a lower-risk strategy for maximizing the potential for survival.

Similar calculative decisions characterized the husband-wife relationship as well. Husbands remained both the *de jure* and *de facto* ruler of the household, putting wives in a situation not all that different from other household assets. Shorter (1975, p. 57) notes that peasant husbands were much more likely to call for medical help when their cattle

got ill than when their wives did, as one could always find a new wife cheaply, but a good cow or bull would be very expensive to replace. The struggle for survival did not allow for sentiment to dominate the economic. Coontz (2005, p. 65) summarizes this attitude: “But in most cases, marriage was still a matter of practical calculation than an arrangement entered into for individual fulfillment and the pursuit of happiness.”

One historical change that did take place in the “traditional” family before it modernized was that, eventually, arranged marriages were replaced by ones based on mutual consent. However, as we shall see below, this did not end the community’s interest in the marriage. In addition, it is important to distinguish “consent” from “being in love.” Couples could agree to marry of their own volition because they recognized the value of the economic partnership they would create without affection or sentiment playing much of a role at all:

[P]opular marriage in former centuries was usually affectionless, held together by considerations of property or lineage... this emotional isolation was accomplished through the strict demarcation of work assignments and sex roles. ... [T]he traditional husband and wife were severely limited: ‘I’ll fulfill my roles, you fulfill yours, and we’ll both live up to the expectations the community sets, and voila, our lives will unfold without order.’ It would have never occurred to them to ask if they were happy. (Shorter 1975, p. 55)

The household was much more like a firm, and marriage was much more like an economic partnership, than either is today.

Part of that absence of affection was the much smaller role played by sex in the context of marriage. Shorter (1975) offers data to suggest that sexual activity was much

less frequent among married couples before the modernization of marriage. A variety of factors limited the role played by sex, perhaps most important was the absence of reliable birth control, leading married women to resist frequent sex even if they found it enjoyable. Three other considerations beside the fear of pregnancy should be mentioned. First, the sheer physical effort required to do agricultural work, especially without sophisticated farm machinery, likely left both men and women little energy for sex. Second, many women were either constantly pregnant or breast-feeding (for those who did not use wet-nurses), leaving them exhausted as well.⁴ Third, to the degree that one of the central roles of sex in modern marriages is to cement the emotional bonds between the spouses, that role was unnecessary in a time when such bonds were not central to marriage. Considerations of affection and self-fulfillment, whether through marriage in general or sex within marriage specifically, would have to await the modernization of both the economy and the family.

Because the economic stakes of marriage were so high for peasant families, the community had a significant interest in both the formation of families and their continuance. The quote from Shorter above suggests that the community had certain “expectations” for the family and along with those expectations came monitoring from the community. More generally, the notion of the private, self-contained, nuclear family that we associate with modern times was not to be found, especially among the common folks. Members of the community would monitor couples for adultery or for either one abandoning their responsibilities in the household and/or farm. The rationale for that interference was not a kind of paternalism toward the married couple, but rather a (correct) understanding that the success of any individual family could not be isolated

from the success of the community as a whole. At the edge of survival, the community was in some sense only as strong as its weakest link. Shorter (1975, pp. 63-64) captures this well:

What counted...was not the quality of the couple's intimate life...but how well the couple performed the tasks that life imposed on them. What was important was doing the essential work of the society: grinding the grain, transmitting the property from generation to generation in an orderly way, clothing and feeding the members of the family sufficiently so that they wouldn't become a burden to the rest of the community.

The main functions of the "traditional" family were reflections of the centrality of serving the needs and purposes of the community.

When families, or individual members, failed to live up to those community expectations, the community intervened, both through legal and extra-legal means. Pre-modern societies were full of legal penalties for all kinds of behavior that today are largely or increasingly beyond the reach of the law. Prohibitions on adultery, especially female adultery, were strong as were laws against fornication. All of these had to do with ensuring that children were conceived within marriage so that the father could be clearly identified for the purposes of property distribution.⁵ Prohibitions on non-procreative sex (sodomy laws) even among heterosexuals were another form of communal legal intervention, in this case designed to channel sexual activity into producing children as the labor necessary to maintain communal agricultural production. Of course divorce was difficult to impossible as well, except among the most privileged or wealthy, and

even if it were available, the ability of women to survive on their own was nearly non-existent.

The most common extra-legal form of community monitoring was the charivaris of peasant Europe. A charivari was “a noisy public demonstration to subject wayward individuals to humiliation in the eyes of the community” (Shorter 1975, p. 218-9; see also D’Emilio & Freedman 1988). A variety of violations of community expectations were subject to the charivari treatment, including married men who impregnated single women, men whose wives had committed adultery but not the wives (on the grounds that he had lost control over her and the household), marital matches that did not meet the community’s notion of “appropriate” (e.g. wide divergence of ages), and couples who did not follow any number of customary wedding-related practices. The charivari had no legal status, rather it was simply a very strong informal mechanism for enforcing community standards. The nearest analogy in modern times might be the way in which community groups put up posters when a sex offender moves into a neighborhood.⁶

Between the law and the charivari, the community played a significant role in forming and maintaining the marital and family structures of traditional society. Absent from this world are the characteristic features of the modern family, such as:

1. Marital partners chosen by individuals, and on the basis of affection, with the expectation that the marital relationship will be companionate and broadly equal, and where sex plays a central role in that relationship.
2. The family thus created is “nuclear” in nature, in that it generally includes the husband, wife, and children by themselves and that it is generally private and insulated from the forces of the community or other family members.

3. Children are sentimentally seen as uniquely valued, rather than as one more household asset subject to calculation, and where childhood becomes a time to shelter children from the outside world rather than immediately placing them into the productive activities of the household as in the traditional society.
4. The legal equality of men and women and a substantial number of women able to survive economically on their own, and the corresponding commonality of divorce.

What all of these have in common is a continued “individuation” of marriage and family. The choices of adult individuals are increasingly respected, the individuality of children becomes valued in and of itself, the family is seen as a distinct entity worthy of privacy, and men and women are increasingly treated as individuals of equal standing before the law, if not in the marketplace. These developments emerged from the changes taking place in the economic system and, in turn, fundamentally changed both the functions and the form of the family.

Form and function

Implicit in the discussion so far is the distinction between the *functions* that families perform and the *forms* (or structures) that families take. This distinction is one that often gets overlooked or elided in popular discussions of the family in ways that cause intellectual and political confusion. Nowhere is this more clear than in the use of the term “a normal family,” where the word normal could refer to the “typicality” of particular family forms or the “functionality” of particular families. The first use,

referring to form, is descriptive in nature, while the second use, referring to how well families, or even particular kinds of forms, function, is normative.

The forms or structures that families take refer to a variety of demographic or organizational questions, best summarized by “what do families look like?” For example, how many people are there in the family? What is their racial, age, or gender composition? Are there children and if so how many? Is it one-parent or two-parent? If two, do both parents work outside the home? If so, how is child-care managed? How is the division of labor in the household structured, etc.? None of these involve any value judgments, just descriptive data on the kinds of forms families take and their relative commonality.

The functions that families perform refer not to what families look like but to the things that they do, or are expected to do. In the discussion above, we noted that one group of functions of traditional families were those involving economic production. In agricultural societies, the fact that farming is done by the family for the purposes of feeding themselves as well as selling on the market defines it as one of the functions of the family. The role of primogeniture as a way of transferring property becomes another function of families. Wealthier families in traditional societies also had important political functions, most obviously in the case of royal families, but in others as well. And almost all families everywhere have had the raising and socialization of children as a core function, although what exactly that means has varied across time and cultures. Other functions that families might perform include: caring for all of the members physically, financially, and/or emotionally and providing shelter, security, affection, sex, and/or belongingness.

The normative aspect of family functions are the questions involved with determining whether or not specific families or individual family forms (in general) are functional. The challenge for answering these questions is first coming to an understanding of what the functions of the family might include, then determining, perhaps through empirical evidence in psychology or sociology or other social sciences, whether or not particular behaviors work to enhance those functions or to detract from them.

Although form and function are analytically distinct, there is no doubt that they are interrelated when we turn to look at the evolution of the modern family. As I will argue below, both the forms and functions of the human family have changed in the transition from the traditional to the modern family. Form and function, however separate analytically, have co-evolved through that historical process. In general, changes in form have followed changes in function, as we might expect. Those changes in function have most often resulted from changes in the institutions that surround the family, such as the economic, political, and legal orders. The focus below will be on the economic factors, but the others have mattered as well. In some cases, those economic changes have led to changes in the political and legal rules that have in turn led to changes in the functions of families (e.g., the ending of coverture laws as women's economic status improved enough to create pressure to end them). In other cases, political and legal changes have had a direct impact on form (e.g., *Loving v. Virginia* overturning laws in US states that prohibited interracial marriage). But over the long-run, the general direction of change has been from surrounding institutions, especially the economic ones, to family function to family form. As with other evolutionary processes,

faced with new environmental challenges, those families that altered their forms in adaptive ways (i.e., ways that better enabled them to be functional) were better able to prosper, leading to imitation by others.

The evolution from the traditional to the modern family has involved a change in the functions of the family from being largely economic and political to being largely psychological/emotional and sociological. I will argue below that those changes in function were largely caused by changes in the structure and institutions of the economy, and that the new functions that families began to take on in turn led to changes in the forms that families took. This new combination of functions and form define the modern family.

Market capitalism and the changing family

What accounts for the evolution toward the modern family that took place largely during the 18th and 19th centuries? At the most general level, that evolution can be seen as part of a much larger process of by which individuals freed themselves from the grip of the community across a wide range of human activities. The same period of time sees the development of constitutional democracies, where the rights of individuals to engage in a variety of political activities and to be protected against an overreaching state became central to the political order. Similar protections for individual initiative and private property were emerging in the economic realm, as market institutions spread and were protected by law. The ongoing devolution of power within religious systems, begun years earlier with the Reformation, is also part of this broader social process. The

emergence of the modern family was yet another element of this progression of the separation of the individual from the state.

However, the evolution of the modern family can be attributed mostly to the changes in the economy that were taking place in the later 18th and through much of the 19th century. The advent of market capitalism brought with it two factors that had enormous implications for the family. First, the “capitalist mode of production” made possible the widespread separation of “work” and the “household” for the first time in human history. The rise of wage labor, in the factories and elsewhere, made it possible for family members to earn income other than by working their land or a small cottage industry. The now familiar distinction between “market production” and “household production” had real meaning for the first time. The second factor was the enormous increase in wealth that market capitalism created. Rising wages associated with factory work and the progressive reduction in the real cost of most of life’s basic necessities combined to change a whole variety of tradeoffs that faced families. Their responses to those changed constraints altered both the functions and form of the family. We will look more deeply at each of these factors in turn.

For most of human history, economic activity was organized around largely self-sufficient kin-networks or family groups. Either through hunter-gatherer activity or agriculture/small crafts, the household was the unit of production and most of what it consumed it produced itself.⁷ Trade existed but played a relatively minor role in comparison to self-provision and, more important, production was not aimed at market exchange, rather such exchanges were made with the leftovers of what the household itself did not need. In practice, for the vast majority living outside of the towns of the

time, it was very difficult to survive economically outside of the family unit. As D’Emilio (1993, p. 470) notes, the Massachusetts colony “even had laws prohibiting unmarried adults from living outside family units.” With the family/household as the site of economic production and consumption, one pretty much had to be part of a family, either that of one’s birth or that created through marriage, to participate in the economy.

Factory work and the rise of the cities changed all of this. As some merchants acquired enough capital to create factories and hire labor from outside the family to work the machinery, the possibility of separating family and economic production appears. Factory work also provided wages above the income that many could earn in agriculture or small crafts, attracting more labor into the factories and the neighborhoods and cities that grew up around them. With that new wealth came new expenditures on things like food and clothing that were previously produced in the household, which in turn created new possibilities for wage labor in *their* production as well as in retail sales. The rising incomes that wage labor brought also created new “service sector” jobs as well as management positions that had not previously existed. The virtuous cycle of wage labor begetting more wage labor quickly expanded the economic opportunities available outside of the family.

The primary effect of this change over time was to eliminate one set of the economic functions of the family that had centrally defined it for centuries. We noted earlier that for the traditional family, marriage and other familial decisions were often matters of economic calculation, with the husband in charge of that process and the wife and children often seen as no different than farm animals in assessing their value. This was understandable, if not justifiable, when the household’s composition and behavior

determined economic survival. When the acquisition of the resources for economic survival takes place outside of the household, it reduces dramatically the rationale for viewing members of the household as economic assets in the narrowest of senses. Yes, wives and children might still contribute to the earning of income, though in secondary ways, and are still necessary for production tasks within the household, but ending their role as complementary factors in the agricultural enterprise is the first step toward their being seen as equals or as at least worthy of being recognized as ends in themselves. Legal equality for women was still years away, as was the sentimentalization of marriage and childhood, but at the cusp of the industrial revolution, the seeds of those elements of the modern family had been sown.⁸

The other way in which economic change helped to produce the modern family was the sheer level of wealth that the advent of capitalism made possible. Although at first the factory attracted women and children as the level of wages generally was not high enough for a single earner to support a family, by the middle of the 19th century the increased skill of workers, the greater productivity of the machinery, and the more intense competition among firms, all caused wages to grow to a point that first children then women could over time move out of the labor force and into the home. With women, especially, no longer needed to earn income, their time could be devoted to the household in ways that it could not be in the traditional family and the marital choice could be increasingly seen as a matter of affection rather than economic calculation. Children, rather than being another subject of economic calculation, which often led to their well-being coming in second to the economic needs of the household, could now be valued in their own right and sentimentalized. Where higher incomes permitted families

to have fewer children and invest more in them, and where women's time could be allocated to the household, families could afford to "purchase" the sentimentalism about children that characterizes modern families.⁹ Having dissolved the narrowly economic basis for marriage and family formation, the wealth created by capitalism opened up space within the family for an increasing emphasis on emotional bonds and sentiment.

This increase in sentimentalism was obvious in three features of Victorian era families that emerged for the first time. The general cult of domesticity that characterized this period was the overarching manifestation of the emergent modern, sentimental family. As Coontz (2005, p. 164) describes it, citing sources of the time, "The home was a 'sanctuary of domestic love,' an 'oasis,' a 'hallowed place,' a 'quiet refuge from the storms of life'" and evoked "intimacy, privacy, and affection."¹⁰ With marriage built on the emotional attachment between husband and wife and with wealth providing the resources to equip the home with a variety of comforts (and new modes of transportation enabling children to be more mobile and live away from their families of birth), it is not surprising that the marital dyad became the center of the conjugal, nuclear unit that characterizes the modern family. Families turned inward as the home moved from the site of production to the site of consumption, both material and emotional.¹¹ Families ate, read, played, and traveled together in ways never before seen.

The Victorian emphasis on domesticity changed the nature of childhood as well. As capitalism produced more wealth and split work from home, parents needed fewer children economically and could afford to invest more in the ones that they had. Given the toll that pregnancy and childbirth took on women, they had always wanted to minimize the number of children, *ceteris paribus*. But when children were needed as

farm help or as old-age insurance, all else was not equal. Now, when they were not necessary for production and families had wealth enough for other forms of saving, it was economically possible to relieve women of that burden. With children losing their status as economic producers, the opportunity cost of educating them fell at the same time that the resources to pay for education were increasing. The cult of domesticity combined with these changes to sentimentalize childhood in ways that prior generations could never have afforded: “Economic growth liberated mothers from the desperate need to employ their time elsewhere...so improved conditions made better mothering possible” (Shorter 1975, pp. 264-5). The result is what historians refer to as the ideal of the “sheltered childhood.” Childhood was seen not as a time to begin to acquire adult responsibilities, but rather as a time to be sheltered from the adult world and to indulge in education and play in the innocent environment of the home rather than the more brutal adult world. Parents were seen as being expected to protect their children from the undesirable parts of life and let them enjoy the sheltered innocence of childhood.

For women, these changes in the family created a number of tensions. The loss of the household’s economic functions and the result that women took on responsibility for household production required some fancy ideological dancing on the part of the Victorians. As love and affection became the basis for marriage and brought with it the idea that marriage was more of a partnership among equals, and a contractual one at that, how could the distinct public roles of men and women be justified? Men dominated, whether through wealth or legal restrictions on women, both the economic and political spheres and the growing equality within marriage would surely lead to dissatisfaction with women’s inequality in the public sphere. The result was a set of ideas that came to

be known as the doctrine of the “separate spheres:” women and men were just different, not unequal. Men excelled in the public sphere of the economic and the political, while women excelled in the private sphere of the domestic and emotional. The claim was that all were equally important, thus what appeared to be inequality really was not. Putting aside the obvious weakness of that argument, it did have the effect of reinforcing the cult of domesticity by encouraging women to devote their time and energy to the family, pushing forward the evolution of the modern family.

Of course the tension between the growing equality of the marital relationship and the obvious inequality of the legal and economic status of women could not be permanently papered over by the separate spheres doctrine. Women who desired a marriage based on love, intimacy, and equality found it progressively more difficult to achieve that when their worlds were so different from those of their husbands, and that those differences marked a relationship that was between two people who were, by all objective accounts, *not* equals. Coontz (2005, p. 177) describes this as a “heaving volcano” with a very thin crust, conjuring the image of a lava flow just about ready to boil over. Over the course of the late 19th and early 20th century, this did overflow as suffrage and other women’s rights movements pushed for legal equality and economic growth slowly opened up more education and employment opportunities for women.

The final piece of the domestic puzzle was the increasing centrality of the sexual aspect of marriage. A variety of factors contributed to this trend, which accelerated quickly in the early 1900s. Most obviously, a marriage based on mutual affection would find expression for that affection in marital sex, and sexual activity, in turn, could help reinforce the emotional bonds between the couple. As the love-centered marriage

continued to take center stage, it was not surprising to see marriage experts and popular culture begin to push marital sexuality as a way to ensure the longevity of the relationship (Coontz 2005, chapter 12). Technology produced by market-fueled economic growth mattered as well. The automobile gave younger people freedom and privacy to explore their sexuality (and increased wealth gave families the ability to buy cars and kids the funds to spend on dates), and improved methods of contraception enabled women to better control their fertility and lower the cost of marital sex. Finally, the increasing economic opportunities starting to be available to women had begun to lower the relative economic benefits of marriage, leading many observers to argue that, in Coontz's (2005, p. 203) words, "deep intimacy was now seen as the best hope for stability in marriage." If the material benefits of marriage were falling, then the non-material ones needed to rise to keep it a viable institution.

Indeed, the secular economic growth that capitalism brought and maintained had provided women with an increasing array of life options and a degree of economic independence.¹² On the demand side of the labor market, that growth was increasing the demand for labor across the economy and shifting the relative composition of those jobs towards the services industries where women could compete more evenly with men. The result was that the wages available to women were rising, drawing more of them out of the home and into the labor market, even those with children. Those rising wages had the feedback effect of encouraging more younger women to get more education, and female enrollment in college began to climb, enabling those women to command even higher wages in the years to come.

On the supply side of the labor market, the wealth created by market capitalism was transforming the household. Advances in consumer technology began to reduce the labor time required for the day-to-day tasks of household production. Electric washers and dryers, refrigerators and freezers, vacuums, advances in cooking and heating technology all combined to make the need for household labor that much less. And the ongoing reduction in family size furthered reduced the need for women to be home as much. These advances reduced the opportunity cost of women both increasing their education and entering the labor force even as changes on the demand side were increasing the benefits of doing so. The combined effect was to slowly but steadily pull more and more women into the labor force.¹³ These trends accelerated in the 1940s and 1950s, as part-time work became more available and more married women, including ones with children, began to enter the work force. These changes were “evolutionary,” and Goldin (2006) argues that the “revolutionary” change was not until the 1970s when young women began to see their labor force participation as a career and not just “work” and therefore began to extend their “horizons” of planning to prepare for a career and saw their own identity as bound up in their career ambitions.

By the 1970s, all of the elements we associate with the modern family were firmly in place, with all of them being the playing out of trends that began over 200 years prior in the transition to capitalism. The story of that evolution is one of the progressive elimination of the political and especially the economic functions of the family. First, the family lost its role as the central institution of market production as wage labor, industrialization, and urbanization swept over the household-based agrarian and small crafts economy. The wealth that this change produced led to the elimination of many of

the tasks of household production, as families were able to first substitute machinery for human labor and now, more recently, purchase on the market the services that used to be provided in the home (e.g., dry cleaning, child care, meals, house cleaners). As the core of the family's long-standing functions got hollowed out, new functions stepped into replace those, and in turn these new functions can be understood as leading to the ongoing changes in form.

The modern family and Maslow's hierarchy of needs

In a recent book, Brink Lindsey (2007) argues that many of the dramatic cultural changes that have taken place since World War II can be understood as a kind of society-wide climb up the psychologist Abraham Maslow's (1943) famed "hierarchy of needs." In the process of putting forward "A Theory of Human Motivation," Maslow argued that humans have a hierarchy of needs starting from the "lowest," most basic to the "higher," more abstract ones, and that, generally, they attempted to satisfy the more basic needs first. Once those needs were sufficiently satisfied, they could turn their attention to the needs at the next level up. For Maslow, those needs were, from lowest to highest: the physiological needs, the safety needs, the love needs, the esteem needs, and the need for self-actualization. Maslow is clear to say that this is not a strict hierarchy in that people do not need to completely satisfy one need before "climbing" to the next higher one, nor will every person put the needs in exactly the same order. A few people will reverse elements of the hierarchy (though the order presented will apply to most people) and, as Maslow (1943, p. 388) put it, "A more realistic description of the hierarchy would be in terms of decreasing percentages of satisfaction as we go up the hierarchy." Finally, he

notes that the higher needs in some sense only emerge when the lower order needs have been sufficiently satisfied.

Lindsey takes Maslow's framework, which was intended to explain individual behavior, and analogizes it to the US as a whole in the 20th century. For most Americans, the economic growth of the post-war era has meant that their day-to-day concerns about meeting their physiological needs and needs for basic safety were minimal.¹⁴ The abundance of the 21st century is in contrast to the pre-capitalist economy where having sufficient food, clothing, and shelter was a constant concern, and where the near-property status of women and children meant their safety was also never secure.¹⁵ As a result of having largely conquered the basics of life, Americans, and others in the developed world, are able to spend time and resources achieving more abstract goals, best illustrated by the flourishing of entertainment, sports, and recreation/vacation opportunities in the post-war era, and the ability and willingness of Americans to spend on them.¹⁶ Lindsey argues that these new patterns of expenditure reflect an increasing focus on needs that were higher up Maslow's hierarchy. More and more of our labor and consumption is geared around activities that involve our needs for esteem and self-actualization rather than our basic physiological or safety-related needs.

Lindsey (2007, p. 67) notes the central role that changes in the family played in this collective climb: "The transformation of the family from a unit of production to a unit of consumption had enormous consequences." He goes on to quote the retailer Edward Filene's observation that now that the father did not control the way in which families earned income, he would be "relieved of many ancient responsibilities and...prerogatives." The mid-century saw an increased focus on the family as a site of

personal fulfillment and consumption expenditure, as well as an object of psychological concern. Family relationships, along with other aspect of human interaction, were increasingly seen in terms of mental well-being and personal happiness. This same period saw the development of pharmaceutical treatments for psychological and psychiatric disorders. There was a society-wide emphasis on being happy and fulfilled. And as 1950s television so clearly portrayed, the conjugal, nuclear family was in many ways the centerpiece of that quest for esteem and self-actualization that were at the top of the Maslow hierarchy.

The transformation of the family documented in earlier sections can be seen as an example of the broader trend that Lindsey identifies. For most of human history, the primary functions of the family were concerned with the two needs at the bottom of the Maslow hierarchy: the physiological and safety needs. The family provided the “house” as physical shelter, providing for both kinds of needs, and it provided parents, who fulfilled those needs for helpless infants.¹⁷ The family also provided for physiological needs through its economic function as the site of production. Given the primacy of addressing those needs, families tended to take on forms that best dispatched those functions, e.g., large numbers of children to work the land and provide for parents too old to work, marriages based on compatibility as “yoke-mates” or even arranged by parents, the use of wet-nurses or older relatives to care for children so that healthy women could immediately go back to the land, the treatment of children and women as near-property, and a tolerance of community intervention to ensure their obligations to others. Where familial functions addressed the lower Maslovian needs, particular forms followed.

As we have seen, the advent of capitalism began a process by which the economic functions of the family were slowly eliminated. Bringing together the economics and the psychology, as capitalism made it possible for people to meet their basic needs through extra-familial processes and as it made meeting those needs even easier through the higher wages that it brought in its wake, it reduced the centrality of meeting the basic needs to the family's day-to-day existence. As those needs were either met through other institutions or met more easily in the family, the family was able to take on new functions that involved meeting needs that were higher on the Maslow hierarchy. After the physiological and safety needs came the need for love. The historical record matches this nicely as the first century of industrial capitalism (the 18th) is also the century in which affection becomes the central rationale for marriage (Coontz 2005, p. 5). The centrality of love to marriage and family grew apace with the economy during the 19th century, with the increased sentimentalization in the form of the "sheltered childhood" making love central not just to the marital dyad but to the parent-child relationship as well. For adults, marriage and family were now about loving relationships with both one's spouse and one's children.

Next up Maslow's hierarchy is the need for esteem. By the late 19th century, the doctrine of the separate spheres became a rhetorical trope to convince women that their esteem needs were being met within Victorian domesticity. However, as noted, it was a very thin covering over of the increasing dissatisfaction of women with what was clearly the consolation prize of the private sphere. A good portion of the first wave women's movement of that era can be seen as women deciding that love in the family was not enough. A love-based marriage was at least implicitly premised on equality between the

spouses and the objective inequalities women were facing in the public sphere were so inconsistent with that presumed equality that they could no longer be tolerated. Voting rights, the end of coverture laws, and some increased protection against domestic violence made it more possible for women to meet their esteem needs, most obviously through an increased presence in the public sphere but also in the family, as their more equal public status gave them more power with which to demand increased equality and respect in the home. By the early 20th century, the family was legitimately a place where women could meet their need for self-esteem as increased legal rights and protections, as well as the beginning of their integration into the labor force, gave them political standing and slightly more economic leverage. To the degree the subordinate status of women was a holdover from family-based organization of production in the pre-capitalist era, the increased individualism that capitalism and wage labor, and the wealth they produced, made possible are important causal factors in this change in the functions of the family.

At the same time, the increased focus on the legal status of children provided them a parallel kind of satisfaction of their esteem needs. New concerns about children's rights, and the mid-20th century incorporation of "the best interests of the child" into Constitutional limits on parental rights (e.g., *Prince v. Massachusetts* in 1944), all reflect a sense in which the family was supposed to be concerned with the child as a being with interests and needs of its own, including those of respect and self-esteem.

The family's integration of the esteem needs into its functions did not have a major effect on family forms, other than through the internal dynamics of the household where the husband/father's ability to exercise authoritarian control was clearly

attenuated. From the outside, the family largely looked the same as people increasingly saw it as a way to meet their esteem needs.

The pinnacle of Maslow's hierarchy was the need for self-actualization. By this he meant the ability "to become actualized in what [one] is potentially" (Maslow 1943, pp. 382). As Maslow pointed out in the original article, the ability to meet this need in a serious way depended upon the other needs being satisfied beforehand. People who have no real worries about their physiological needs, their safety, being loved, and having self-esteem can then aspire to self-actualization. It would seem as though men and women over the 20th century, and especially in the early 21st, have seen their own needs for self-actualization as a primary reason to marry and form families in the first place. Whereas for most of human history, the purpose of marriage and the functions of the family were largely about lower Maslovian needs and obligations to the community, marriage and family are now much more seen in terms of what they will do for the individual, where "do" refers to the higher Maslovian needs as family is no longer necessary to ensure physical survival and safety.

Decisions about when and who to marry, whether or not to have children and, if so, how many, and the ongoing conscious decision to stay married in a world of easy divorce are all often understood in terms of how it meets the highest emotional and psychological needs of the individual. Marriage and family have been, as it were, divorced from the more material needs of economic survival and procreation as a means to that end. Children are now more often seen as yet another consumption good for parents, or as a path to their own self-actualization as a parent. Given that both men and women can survive economically outside of marriage and a family and given that

children are no longer needed for direct productive purposes or as a form of old-age insurance, the pressing material reasons to marry and procreate have largely disappeared, making the decision clearly one of how doing so will serve the higher Maslovian needs of the individuals involved. Marriage and children are worth doing if they will make the individuals involved happy and help them “become actualized in what [they are] potentially.” A more complete analysis of the centrality of self-actualization as a function of the family could shed light on a number of contemporary phenomena, but I do wish to devote a short amount of space to three, each of which involves changes in family forms or behavior that reflect the increased role of self-actualization as a function of the family.

The first and most obvious is the rise in divorce rates over the post-war era. At one level, the increased economic independence of women is a clear factor in explaining the frequency of divorce. Many marriages that stayed together in years past are now being dissolved simply because women have the ability to survive without a husband in ways they did not before. In addition, the increased expectations that marriage and family now bear in a world where they are expected to be part of self-actualization would predict that the threshold for a “happy” marriage has probably risen over that same period. So, in economic terms, if we hold preferences constant, the constraints on divorce have loosened thanks to women’s increased economic power, and at the same time, preferences have in fact shifted, as expectations about marriage have risen, leading both men and women to want more divorces even if the constraints on women had not changed. The result is a change in the variety of family forms as the material benefits of capitalism have led to more divorce and therefore more single-parenting and stepfamilies. At the same time, the wealth of the early 21st century makes it increasingly possible for

those family forms to be functional, as single-parent families in particular are viable in ways they would not have been so easily in the past.¹⁸ As the functions change, form tends to follow.

A second change in family form that has emerged from the centrality of self-actualization as a function of marriage and family is the demand by many gays and lesbians to be fully included in those institutions. Taking even further D'Emilio's (1993) argument that it was the wage labor that capitalism brought with it that made it possible for those with homosexual inclinations to build their lives and identity around it, once earning a living and procreation are decentered as the primary functions of the family, enabling gays and lesbians to create a distinct homosexual identity apart from their families of birth and without a heterosexual marriage, they have also not surprisingly wondered what the difference between heterosexual marriage and families and their own relationships. That is, once marriage and family becomes understood as meeting needs for love, esteem, and self-actualization, why is there a need for the marital dyad to be of different sexes? The romantic love of homosexual couples, they would argue, is no different from that of heterosexuals, nor is their desire to have their higher Maslovian needs satisfied, so on what grounds should they be excluded at the very least from legal marriage and perhaps from parenting as well? Whatever the policy conclusions one draws, it seems clear that the explanation of this cultural phenomenon is part and parcel of the changes in the functions of the family that have taken place over the last few centuries. Those changes in functions have made new forms (e.g., same-sex marriage) seem viable in ways that they would not have been in earlier times.

Perhaps the least obvious of the three consequences of this shift in functions has to do with child-raising. The much-commented upon phenomenon of the “helicopter parent” who hovers over his or her child’s life, or even the way in which parents feel the need to be their child’s “friend,” can be understood as manifestations of parents seeking their own self-actualization through the lives of their children. The accomplishments of their children (and their failures) become direct reflections, in the parents’ eyes, of their own behavior and choices.¹⁹ Much of this perception is due, I would argue, to the over-psychologizing of parenthood, where “experts” have frozen parents into fear of deep psychological harm to their children should they make a “mistake” in how they parent.²⁰ It is, once again, a product of capitalism’s wealth having met so many of our basic needs that we can afford, both financially and socially, to worry about whether toilet training too early or too late will cause great and lasting psychological damage to our children. Certainly parents who were more concerned with where their next meal was coming from or whether their children would survive to age five had little time or energy for worrying about how they were toilet-trained. This hyper-focus on children’s psychological well-being, which is, of course, believed to be a consequence of the parents’ own skills and hence to their credit or blame, is perhaps the best marker of the way in which families are seen as institutions for the satisfaction of adults’ need for self-actualization, as well as the children’s. It is not at all clear that the parents’ desire to self-actualize is consistent with raising children who will be able to navigate the adult world very effectively, accustomed as they are to parents who believe the slightest damage to their self-esteem will harm them for life.²¹

The problems that the focus on self-actualization has potentially created in parenting suggests that not all of the changes in families that have resulted from their taking on new functions are necessarily good. If parents are not raising children who can navigate the adult world successfully, something is wrong with the institution of the family. Though not addressed in detail here, socialization remains a key familial function, and perhaps even more important and difficult given the complexities of the modern social order.²² If families are not getting the job done, then there will be consequences we will have to deal with. The same could be said of divorce. As Coontz (2005, p. 23) argues, once marriage became the embodiment of so many emotional and psychological hopes and our need for self-actualization, it also set itself on a path that might undermine it as an institution.²³ As noted above, when the expectations associated with marriage are set so high, many more marriages are likely to be perceived as “failures,” with divorce being the outcome. In addition, the high expectations might well make young people choosier about entering the institution in the first place, perhaps especially among those who saw their parents unable to live up to those expectations.

Family privacy and family function at the top of Maslow’s hierarchy

In his classic history of the modern family, Edward Shorter (1975) titled his last chapter “Towards the Postmodern Family.” Although the term “postmodern” has been overused and perhaps drained of meaningful content in the process, the observations that Shorter had over thirty years ago were largely consistent with the changes in the family associated with the climb up the Maslow hierarchy that have been discussed above. Whether or not “postmodern” is the right word to describe the changes in the family that

are taking place before our very eyes, it does seem accurate to say that the changes are moving us beyond some of the features associated with the “modern” family as Shorter and others have described it.²⁴ The question posed by this section is whether or not this ongoing evolution is leading us in a direction that will undermine some of the key functions that families must perform, if not toward real damage to the institution as a whole.

We noted earlier that the long-term evolution of the family can be understood as a progressive process of “individualization” that parallels similar movements in the economy, politics, religion and other key human social practices. In the context of the family, this has been mostly to the good, but can such a process of “individualization” eventually put the self-actualizing interests of the parents so far above the needs of children as to undermine the necessary function that families perform in raising and socializing children to be competent adults?

Clearly, the family is necessary for the ongoing survival of the modern, Western world as children need to be provided for physically and socialized and there are strong reasons to believe that their parents (regardless of the parents’ gender or biological relationship to the child), because of their superior knowledge and stronger incentives, will do these things better than would “the village” or the state. At the same time, it is unlikely that we are going to undo the progressive individualization of the family in an era where so much else in the social world of the modern West is about individuals exploring ways to self-actualize. It is nearly impossible to imagine us going back to a world where family was understood in terms of obligations to extended kin or community or the state, or based on more narrow economic considerations. Nor would such a change

even be desirable. This is even more clear when we consider the last forty-plus years of Supreme Court jurisprudence on matters of sexuality and the family, where from *Griswold* through *Lawrence* the trend toward protecting the privacy of families and individuals in them has been the running theme.²⁵

However, while the courts have largely expanded individual rights and family privacy in the realm of the sexual, we have seen the opposite trend when it comes to “protecting” children against all manner of dangers, both real and imagined, by limiting the freedom of parents to make certain kinds of decisions.²⁶ The way in which the state, and the community to some extent, has made its way back “into” the family has been in the guise of protecting children from perceived physical harm to their health and safety, and especially more recently, by the choices made by their parents. Some municipalities have used abuse and neglect laws to punish parents who do not, in the eyes of the authorities, feed or clothe their children “appropriately,” and there has been legislation proposed that would ban parents from smoking around their own children in enclosed spaces like a car. Given the recent debates over the healthiness of various foods and the way that legislation has been passed and proposed to limit *adults’* choices in these realms, it might well be only a matter of time before parents are charged with neglect for feeding their kids too much of the “wrong” foods. Laws that prevent parents from using even the mildest forms of physical discipline, despite little to no evidence that such mild forms cause permanent physical or psychological damage, and the development of the v-chip for televisions, imposed on the grounds that violent or sexual materials would “damage” children, are further examples of ways in which “public health” considerations have caused increased state intervention into what had previously been “private” parental

choices. The things that children are now to be “sheltered” from increasingly include the choices of their own parents.²⁷

It is worth asking whether this level of distrust of parental decision-making reflects a broader concern that parents and families are not “doing the job” or whether it is just a more recent manifestation of the long-standing Puritan reflexes of American society.²⁸ If the former, is that distrust justified? The discussion above suggests that there are reasons not to reject out of hand that it might be a real problem. But even if it is true that the family’s role as a vehicle for self-actualization has undermined the quality of parenting, it does not necessarily follow that such legal interventions are the appropriate solution. Just as parents can fail at their task, so can government, and the question of whether legal intervention is the right solution needs always to be a comparative one. Moreover, there may be ways to address concerns about the dysfunctionality of parents other than by using the often blunt instrument of the state. As the family continues to move in the direction suggested here, thinking through these issues carefully will become more and more important and finding a way to ensure that families perform their core functions sufficiently well will be an ongoing challenge in an age dominated by the need for self-actualization, particularly that of parents.

Notes

¹ I have used the term “market capitalism” intentionally. In general, I have problems using the term “capitalism” to describe what Hayek (1973) has better described as the “catallaxy” or “catallactic order,” both of which stress the centrality of exchange (the term “catallaxy” derives from the Greek for “exchange”), rather than capital, to the market order. The problem with the term “capitalism” is that it puts “capital” front and center as the implicit primary beneficiary of the system, when in fact I would argue that it is consumers who benefit the most. However, for the purposes of this paper, one aspect associated with that particular term, at least as it is used by those not especially sympathetic to it, is central to my argument, namely the idea of “wage labor.” Thus, using the term “capitalism” seems appropriate given that the aspect of the catallaxy that I want to emphasize is one that modern usage of “capitalism” sees as central. I’ve put the adjective “market” in front of “capitalism” to distinguish it from “state” capitalism and to emphasize the point that it is the market (or the “catallactic”) element of capitalism that is responsible for the wealth that it produces.

² Coontz (1992) has also argued that the 1950s family was not even as desirable as the TV portrayals suggested. In her later (2005) book, she backs off the harshness of some of her judgments in the earlier book. Although still recognizing it was far from ideal, she does note that when seen in the broader historical sweep of the evolution of marriage and the family, there were a number of good things going on there.

³ Among the wealthy, marriages were more about politics and increasing the family’s control over economic resources, especially land, through what amounted to “mergers” of the powerful. Coontz (2005, chapter 4) provides an overview of the issues. One is also reminded of the portrayal of medieval arranged marriages in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, where the King of Swamp Castle tries to convince his reluctant son to marry his bride-to-be by pointing out that she has “huge tracts of land.”

⁴ In fact, extending breast-feeding was one way women were able to control fertility, as they were less likely to conceive while doing so.

⁵ Hence the more severe punishment of female adultery. An adulterous wife who became pregnant now carried a child whose father was uncertain. This created complications for a legal system that was based on male property ownership passed down to their biological sons. It also meant that the husband would potentially have to raise and expend resources on a child not his own. Posner (1992, p. 184) argues that this external effect explains the higher punishments for female adultery through most of human history. See also D’Emilio and Freedman (1988, pp. 27-29) for some evidence from Colonial America.

⁶ One interesting example of a contemporary event that actually really did look like a charivari and was in the context of sexual misbehavior (though in this case the targets were innocent) were the “potbanging” protests that took place outside the house rented by the Duke lacrosse players falsely accused of rape in 2006 (see Taylor & Johnson 2007). The organizers of the protests referred to them as a “cacerolazo,” claiming it was a tool

that women all around the world used to protest sexual assaults. Wikipedia notes that the word is Spanish and that its use in the context of protests originates in 1970s Chile in economic protests against the Allende government, and then later in the Argentine banking crisis of 2001. It makes no reference, and neither do other sources quickly consulted, to it being used in the context of sexual assault. However, the similarity to the *charivaris* is too striking to be coincidental.

⁷ I intentionally use the word “household” here as the household could include more than just family members, even if we include extended family as part of “family.” Part of what happened with the rise of capitalism was that family and household have become largely indistinguishable. It is unusual in the modern West to have non-family members living in one’s house.

⁸ D’Emilio (1993) argues that it was this separation of work and family that also made possible the notion of “gay identity,” i.e., not just engaging in homosexual acts, but understanding that one’s identity was centered around one’s choice of sexual partner. Because those with homosexual dispositions were able to survive economically outside the heterosexual family, and because large, anonymous cities emerged as result of the same economic forces that produced that work-family separation, it became possible, even in a world hostile to homosexuals, for men and women to begin to create their own identity and culture thanks to capitalism.

⁹ To be clear, I am not suggesting that parents in traditional families did not in some sense love their children. What I am arguing is that their preference to treat their children in ways that we today would consider loving and emotional was highly constrained by the marginal economic circumstances most of the population faced. Acting, as opposed to just feeling, sentimental about your kids was very costly when the margin of survival was thin. When those constraints shifted after industrialization, parents were more able to indulge their emotional preferences as, in effect, the cost had fallen.

¹⁰ Coontz also makes the important point that the language shifted from speaking of one’s “house,” referring to one’s “lineage and social networks beyond the family,” to one’s “home,” which meant not just the physical structure but all of the emotional meanings that now attached to what happened in it.

¹¹ If one looks at portraits of families in their homes from the early 1700s and compares them with similar ones from the late 1800s, it is not hard to notice the markers of this change. The house of the 1700s family is very sparsely furnished and the material goods in it are mostly *capital* goods, reflecting the house as the site of production. By 100 or 150 years later, the house not only had more things in it, but the things it had were almost exclusively objects of consumption rather than production.

¹² One factor that retarded this process were the protective labor laws of the turn of the century that, in the name of protecting the perceived-to-be-fragile women, had the effect

of limiting their labor market options by limiting the jobs, hours, and wages they could get.

¹³ Goldin (2006) provides a readable and comprehensive overview of the economic history and theory about female labor force participation in the 20th century.

¹⁴ This is not to dismiss that there remain real pockets of poverty in the modernized West, nor is it to suggest there are not steps that could be taken to alleviate that poverty. It is, however, also true that the average poor household in the United States of 2007 is still living not only better than even the very rich of pre-capitalist days by almost any measure, but better than the average family in the US as a whole did in the early 1970s when you look at what is available to them in their homes. Across almost every household appliance you can name, poor Americans today are more likely to have one in their homes than the average American did in 1971, including owning one or more cars. This does not include gadgets such as cell phones nor new medical technology available to the poor that did not exist in the 1970s.

¹⁵ The data indicate that the percentage of the average US family's income spend on food, shelter, and clothing is about half of what it was 100 years ago.

¹⁶ See Cox and Alm (1999, chapter 3) for more on both the additional leisure time available to Americans and the explosion of opportunities for filling it.

¹⁷ Consistent with Maslow's point that we need not completely satisfy one need and then move on, families today still fulfill these needs, but they take up much less space in the whole range of activities that families engage in and the needs they fulfill.

¹⁸ Note that I use "functional" and "viable." It might well be the case that, on average, two-parent families "out-perform" single-parent families. But we cannot let the best be the enemy of the good here. Raising children is largely a pass-fail enterprise and as long as children are "passing," it may well be a better world where they give up a higher "grade" so that the parents can get out of a bad, or even violent, relationship.

¹⁹ This living vicariously through their children, to which the children are often willing partners as it clearly pleases the parents (even if it also exhibits some elements of Stockholm Syndrome), would better be termed as having "trophy children" than "helicopter parenting."

²⁰ Of course, for thousands of years, billions of children were raised just fine without expert help, so perhaps the costs of supposed "mistakes" are not so great after all. It is a wealthy society indeed that can afford such worries.

²¹ These issues are addressed beautifully in an essay in *Psychology Today* entitled "A Nation of Wimps." See Marano (2004).

²² Horwitz (2005) addresses the ways in which the family does and should serve as a socialization site for helping children navigate what Hayek calls “The Great Society.”

²³ Coontz (2005, p. 23) is worth quoting in full: “People expect marriage to satisfy more of their psychological and social needs than ever before....Never before in human history had societies thought that such a set of high expectations about marriage was either realistic or desirable....[T]he adoption of these unprecedented goals for marriage had revolutionary consequences that have since come to threaten the stability of the entire institution.”

²⁴ In Horwitz (2007), I look at some of these changes from a Hayekian perspective and suggest that one way to characterize the “postmodern” family is that the family is undergoing a movement away from what Hayek (1973) called a “made order” or an “intentional organization” coordinated hierarchically by commands with a single, unified end toward more of a “spontaneous order,” coordinated by abstract rules that allow the individuals within it to more freely pursue their own ends. This evolution is a movement along a continuum, as the presence of children in need of parental care and socialization means the family can never be fully a spontaneous order. The movement up the Maslovian hierarchy is consistent with this change, as the degree to which self-actualization becomes a key function of the family suggests that individuals will use the family as a means to pursue a variety of ends.

²⁵ Even the little bits of backsliding in recent abortion jurisprudence does not undermine the longer-term trend. Posner (1992, ch. 12) provides an excellent overview of these decisions.

²⁶ This trend has been mocked on an ongoing basis by the Helen Lovejoy character on TV show *The Simpsons*, who responds to every crisis, real or imagined, with “but what about the children!?” The show *South Park* also mocked this trend with an episode where the media keep reporting about the dangers of children being kidnapped, finally reporting, accurately, that one of a child’s own parents is the adult most likely to snatch him or her. At that point, the parents decide that the only thing they can do to protect their children is to banish them to the woods to survive on their own where their parents cannot possibly harm them. The *reductio ad absurdum* of the episode seems increasingly less absurd as more and more legislation seems to be based on a Helen Lovejoy-like emotional reaction, which is the logical conclusion perhaps of the sheltered childhood, combined with a *South Park*-like fear of the harm parents can do.

²⁷ Another element of these developments are the role public schools have played in drumming up hysteria about alcohol and drugs, to the point where parents who drink in front of their children, or allow them to taste wine or beer, might well find that behavior running afoul of the law.

²⁸ It is also worth asking whether public choice theory can help explain these laws as benefitting particular political actors at the expense of others.

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