

Baby Bust: New Choices for Men and Women in Work and Family
Stewart Friedman

A useful analysis of the thinking of our young elites. Prescriptions are predictably mainstream.

This is an interesting short book comparing the Wharton school class of 2012 with the class of 1992. It compares their attitudes over a broad range of subjects. They include the importance of financial success, friends, finding a life partner, raising children, and contributing to society. Attitudes changed rather significantly over the 20 year period. Friedman provides comparable statistics for men and women in the two classes. He also provides a rich assortment of quotations, attributed only so far as to the generation and gender of the speaker.

One virtue of the book is the breadth of the questions asked. Friedman's area of expertise is life/work integration, and these questions go right to the heart of the matter. How did these young people envision they were going to balance life and work? Another virtue is brevity: the book is less than 100 pages long. It does not go beyond these two particular groups of students. Moreover, it does not have a longitudinal aspect. It does not compare the actual outcomes of the class of 1992 with what they projected as they graduated from Wharton.

Friedman expressly cautions the reader not to project his findings into the whole of American society. Wharton is not representative. It is, however, representative of the leading edge, the generation that will mature into the intellectual elite three decades hence. Inasmuch as the students being questioned have relatively little life experience of their own, one can infer that the attitudes they express reflect those of their parents, teachers, professors and peers. Trends such as the "baby bust" can be generalized beyond this particular population.

What is Wharton? It is the business school within the University of Pennsylvania, a selective Ivy League institution. It has an enrollment of about 2500 undergraduates in 1700 MBA students. This comparison appears to be between the undergraduates graduating in the two classes 20 years apart.

A little research shows that the average SAT score entering both Wharton and the University of Pennsylvania is about 1450. That equates to an average IQ in the high 130s, a bit more than one person in 100. It is a selective school. Moreover, students choose to enroll in the business school such as Wharton because they have their eye on success.

The demographics of the classes changed in very predictable ways over this 20 year. The class of 2012 is more diverse, more female, and more liberal than the class of 1992. A majority of the class of 2012 comes from families in which one or both of the parents have advanced degrees. Another take on this stripe of society, also from 2012, appears as the fictional Belmont in Charles Murray's *Coming Apart - The State of White America, 1960-2010*.

The values expressed by the students have the fuzziness associated with undergraduate thinking. Friedman admits as much. Quite a few of them regarded having their own children as being selfish, and would sooner devote themselves to helping other people. Without a doubt they are committed to the panoply of good causes associated with the modern University: climate change, gender equality, homosexual and transsexual rights, civil rights and so on. Friedman advocates in his conclusion that students be obliged to do community service, a notion that this cohort of students will have already been subjected to in high school. The underlying altruistic thought is that it is nobler to help the

downtrodden of the earth then to bear your own children and raise them to be good citizens. The cynic would say it is mere virtue signaling, and that avoiding the burden of raising children frees an individual to do whatever s/he wants in life. It is a twofold win: avoid responsibility and garner accolades for your virtue.

The most dramatic finding in the book, the one which gives it the Baby Bust title, is that both male and female students in 2012 were much more likely to plan to remain childless. In 1992, 78% of respondents said that they plan to have children. In 2012 that figure is down to 42%. These students, the cream of the millennial generation, are simply not planning to reproduce themselves.

Even the 42% figure may be generous. There is quite a gap between planning to have children and actually having them. Infertility and adverse circumstances can strike. Moreover, and absolutely not addressed in this book, is a high likelihood that many of these women will not want to take time out of their busy lives for gestation and lactation. From my observation as a trustee of a private school in Washington DC, I would expect that something approaching 10% of the children that they do have will not be of their own blood. Twenty years ago adoptees came predominantly from the former Soviet Union, the Far East and Latin America. The former sources having dried up, my expectation is that there will be quite a few Latino children among them.

The upshot is that our best and brightest are leading the nation to extinction. They are not physically reproducing themselves. For an academic treatise on the subject see Richard Lynn's [\[\[ASIN:0956881114 Dysgenics: Genetic Deterioration in Modern Populations\]\]](#). Moreover, by delegating the formation of their children to nannies, teachers and therapists, the rising elite is to a large extent outsourcing the responsibility of passing on their culture and values to people who are decidedly unlike themselves.

Dr. Friedman sees some good in the changes he chronicles. Young men and women are more realistic about the trade-offs in 2012 than they were in 1992. The men are more willing to step back, letting their partners be the major breadwinners if they have the talent. Men also express more willingness to help with the children. The millennial generation has adopted the thesis of gender equality, which Friedman takes to be a good thing.

Dr. Friedman does not investigate the question as to whether men and women are in fact equal. He assumes it. It is worth mentioning that this assumption, a corollary of the Standard Social Science Model, seems increasingly untenable in the face of ongoing genetic research. For an absolutely colorless, unbiased assessment read [\[\[ASIN:B01MS1YEFE Male-Female: The Evolution of Human Sex Differences\]\]](#). For more colorful analysis read [\[\[ASIN:B003WT2610 Is There Anything Good About Men?: How Cultures Flourish by Exploiting Men\]\]](#), also by a very highly pedigreed scientist, and [\[\[ASIN:1935965891 Sexual Utopia in Power\]\]](#) by a journalist. [\[\[ASIN:B007O0Y1ZE The Way of Men\]\]](#) contends that men evolved four strengths that historically served them well in the mating game: physical strength, courage, mastery, and honor. While none of these virtues are highly prized or serve men terribly well in the modern workplace, they nonetheless continue to characterize men and distinguish us from women.

One of the questions not addressed in the book is the impermanence of marriage. The instability of male/female relationships, especially when compounded by the stress of the 72-hour weeks that his 2012 respondents expected to be working, certainly must weigh on their minds. Although majority of the respondents did not state financial success as their top priority, it must be right up there. Why else would one subject oneself to a 72 hour work week? Especially when one has the intellect to succeed in

almost any career. Whether or not they are candid about it, these seem to be people who are shooting for the brass ring. As Friedman says, the class of 2012 is somewhat more honest about the fact that career success is likely to be inimical with family success.

Friedman concludes with a number of very mainstream suggestions. He advocates that we improve our public schools. We improve public funded daycare. We encourage corporations to create more nurturing environments. We encourage corporations to offer more paid time off and family leave. We revise the school calendar, shortening summer vacation so the parents can accommodate work a bit better. We need to relieve students of their student debt so they do not enter their careers behind the eight ball.

He also advocates that we teach young students how to balance values in their lives. That we expose them to a variety of role models. That we advocate the corporations increasingly favor "slow careers" that would allow women time off to raise families. All of these suggestions have been made before. The cynic will respond "good luck!" It is not likely to happen – they are inconsistent with the goals and financial means of most modern corporations. Where it is affordable, such as Silicon Valley, it is being tried.

I close by putting this in a broader perspective. The majority of the class of 2012 intends to go into finance and consulting, up significantly from 1992. Economists consider these to be non-value-added sectors of the economy. They do not create wealth, they simply redistribute it. A vast number of authors note that as the world is being financialized, especially since the economic crisis of 2008, with the introduction of massive infusions of money through quantitative easing and other devices, the gap between rich and poor, producers and parasites has been widening dramatically. These same authors – the one I reviewed last week is entitled [\[\[ASIN:9780470976111 Bust: Greece, the Euro, and the sovereign debt crisis\]\]](#), by Matthew Lynn – are almost unanimously of the opinion that it cannot last. The whole system must collapse sooner rather than later in order that a system of real value be reinstated. This will mean that the emphasis in a school such as Wharton must invariably shift back toward the real economy, making things and moving things.

With regard to children, the impending collapse will represent a recognition of the fact that society has been making promises which it cannot afford to fulfill. Even the parents of the class of 2012 are very likely not to receive adequate pensions or social security in their retirement. It is an absolute guarantee that the class of 2012 itself cannot receive such benefits. The most obvious reason is that they are not lining up to bear the children who would pay for it. Although it is hard to predict where this will lead, a likely conclusion will be that the timeless wisdom of having children to take care of you in your old age will once again prove its merit. The will 'o the wisps that the class of 2012 is chasing – financial abundance, a pristine environment and pervasive social justice – will simply be forgotten as reality once again takes a good firm bite.