Chapter 2

Life in a neontocracy 2
One big unhappy family..... 3
Love the one you're with 4
Polygyny as the great compromise 5
Pregnancy and childbirth 6
Gene roulette..... 7
Pink ribbons of blue, many or few? 8
Promoting survival..... 9
Illness and death..... 10
The extremes of high and low fertility..... 11
Two exceptions 12
The next transition 13

Life in a neontocracy

In modern Western society, a neontocracy has become the norm, with children seen as precious cherubs. This view means that children are not expected to contribute economically to their households, but have instead become beneficiaries of the time and resources of their parents. Having a neontocracy has also served to lengthen childhood, with fetuses seen as children shortly after conception, and adults staying in a state of childhood much longer, often delaying having children until they are financially secure.

Examples from the West African Ashanti, ancient Sparta and Rome, East Asia, and Ethiopia illustrate the universal desire for fertility, contrasted with a lack of concern for the children produced.

One big unhappy family

Current views in science suggest men, women and children have evolved very different reproductive strategies, which will lead to conflict as each tries to further their own agenda. Men will ideally want to impregnate as many women as possible, while women will want to have fewer children. Men will show-off to attract mates by hunting, preferring to hunt the most impressive game, and by baby-parading. Both activities advertise their fitness as potential mates.

Access to women is an issue for most young men, and mating opportunities are often monopolized by the older, more powerful members of society through polygyny. While societies will try to regulate mating through institutions such as marriage, this is not always successful, and does not eliminate conflict. Many societies will also try to control the sexual activity and fidelity of women through extreme measures. Women are more likely to be restricted when they do not contribute economically to the household.

Weaning a child to make way for a younger sibling highlights the conflict between the interests of the child and the interests of the mother. Humans are willing to watch each others' children, and to share food, which probably led to the development of the family unit.

Love the one you're with

Women will use their physical attractiveness to secure a mate, and male-female pair bonding may have been developed so that men could have more access to women. Women among the Kpelle, Bari and Ache (South America) will seduce men to act as secondary fathers to their children, giving the offspring a better chance of survival than if they had only one father. It is not always in a woman's best interest to have as many children as her mate wants, as this may decrease her physical appeal. Women will use various means of contraception to prevent or abort pregnancy to maintain their health.

Polygyny as the great compromise

While contemporary Euroamericans place a high value on monogamy, polygyny has historically been much more common. Polygyny allows men to translate their power and wealth into increased mating opportunities. It allows women to have more reliable providers, and increased help in childcare, but also brings the disadvantage of having to share resources with other wives. Polygyny can create more stable relationships than monogamy.

Older wives are usually guaranteed a place in the house even as their fertility decreases, and wives can gain authority in the household. In monogamy, divorce is common, and women who are abandoned by their husbands and left pregnant, or with children, may have trouble finding a new spouse. Abortion or infanticide is often used to give the woman a better chance at remarriage.

Pregnancy and childbirth

In many cultures, pregnancy is viewed as a dangerous time for both mother and fetus, and taboos are imposed on certain foods and activities to produce a healthy baby. Things that are prohibited are usually believed to have a connection with something that would harm the baby through sympathetic magic. These taboos may actually harm the mother and baby by denying them access to important food groups and nutrients.

Witches are often blamed for an unfavorable delivery, and a woman will often go to great lengths to convince potentially jealous witches that the baby will be a girl, or that she is not really pregnant. Women often will deliver away from the community, including in the homes of their parents, and some cultures will sequester women and their infants for varying amounts of time after the birth. Reasons for this vary, including protection from outside influences, and concerns about the polluting nature of the mother and new baby.

Gene roulette

People are much more likely to care for children that are related to them. Even in our modern society, statistics show children are better off without step parents, who are more likely to neglect or abuse them. The Yuqui (South America), the Eipo(New Guinea), the Masaai(Africa), and the Inuit(North America) are only a few of the peoples that regularly abort or kill infants soon after birth. In many cultures, if twins are born one or both are usually killed. Many cultures do not consider infants people until they are formally introduced into society, making infanticide much more acceptable. Another method of disposing of unwanted children is abandonment, which allows the child to be adopted if anyone wants it.

Pink ribbons of blue, many or few?

The decision to abort or kill a baby is often based on the gender of the infant. In many cultures, boys are valued and unwanted girls are regularly killed soon after birth. In places where women do not contribute to the household economically, infanticide of girls is more prevalent. In contrast, in the places where women are responsible for much of the work or can demand a high bride price, girls are preferred. Whichever gender is more valued will be breast-fed for a longer period, and receive preferential treatment, leading to higher survival rates.

The type of society(foraging, farming) also influences the number of children that are acceptable, and the inter-birth interval is longer for societies that can not afford to feed and care for as many children. In the survivorship vs. production model, foraging societies tend to produce fewer children and care for them very well, while farming societies will produce many children, treat them with relative indifference, and some will survive to adulthood.

Promoting survival

Breastfeeding is a safe and nutritious food source for infants, and inter-birth intervals of three or four years are best for the health of the mother and infant. While nursing may help prevent pregnancy, many cultures also help mothers maintain a lengthened inter-birth interval by imposing a taboo on intercourse. It is commonly feared that sexual relations will negatively effect the milk, and the prohibition usually lasts until the infant is weaned, usually at around three years.

Infants are often viewed as fragile and not well connected to their bodies. Many rituals and practices have developed to ensure that parents are taking “proper” care of their child, including village censure of the parents, superstitions, and infant massage.

Illness and death

Many of the treatments that are traditionally used to keep an infant healthy are in direct apposition to the wellbeing of the child. Family problems are often blamed as the root cause of an illness, leading to little or no actual treatment for the infant. Malnourishment is often a problem since children do not receive adequate food as they are being weaned. Infant mortality rates have historically been between 30 and 50 percent for most ancient urban centers. In response to this, most cultures do not publicly acknowledge the child until it seems likely that it will survive. While the ability to limit infant mortality has increased, fatalistic attitudes and apathy have kept implementation of lifesaving measures low.

The extremes of high and low fertility

A move to agriculture will generally lead a society to have more children, shorter inter-birth intervals, and higher infant mortality rates, as well as poorly nourished mothers and malnourished children. Many cultures developed controls, such as the post-partum sex taboo, abortion and infanticide, to keep the population at a sustainable level. As the influence of western culture has grown, these traditional practices have been discouraged, resulting in exploding populations and overused land.

Western society has begun to care for its children relatively recently, following the example of the Netherlands, which was one of the first countries to advocate the humane treatment of children, starting in the 1600s. While children are still viewed as necessary, the prohibitive cost of raising a child has curtailed the number of children most Westerners are choosing to have. In contrast, many of the poorest countries of the world have continued to produce children at a high rate, refusing to see a need for contraceptives, and are often unable to even feed the children they have.

Two exceptions

In inner-city African-American culture, and the culture of Utah Mormons, early breeding, short inter-birth intervals and high fertility are the norm. In the inner-city, girls tend to physically mature at an early age, and producing babies soon after increases the likelihood of aid from mothers and extended family, as well as the fathers of the children. Infant mortality rates are on the rise for this group, as opposed to the country as a whole.

In Utah, Mormons who settled the state focused on producing many children, through polygyny, and as polygyny was outlawed by the mainstream church, high fertility was still seen as necessary for salvation. Faithful Mormon couples continue to place having children as one of the highest priorities in their lives.

The next transition

Elective infertility has become increasingly common in modern societies, but in America the view that having a biological child is worth any price has also become culturally acceptable. Many Americans are willing to spend vast amounts of money in order to conceive a child, or to keep one alive that was born prematurely. However, little money is spent on preventative measures, and the plight of children in Third World countries is usually completely ignored.

Reproduction and sex have become separated and parenting has become entirely optional for many people. While historically reproduction has been a matter of choice, and sex has been regulated by governmental or religious institutions, this situation has been reversed in recent years. Few restrictions placed on sex, and reproduction is being either encouraged or discouraged strongly by the government, as in China, Russia, and Singapore.