

Sustained Postponement of Reproduction Theory (SPORT)

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Sustained Postponement of Reproduction Theory (SPORT) describes five mechanisms driving later parenthood. The first mechanism is changing norms. When one generation delays parenthood, the next generation internalizes later parenthood as normal. The second mechanism is social learning. People observe the concomitants and consequences of earlier and later parenthood. The correspondence between affluence and later parenthood encourages more people to have children later. The third mechanism is social contagion. When one person waits to have a family, it has a spillover effect on their peers. The fourth mechanism is the shrinking supply of partners who want to become parents early. Most people delay parenthood until they have an agreeing partner. As it becomes more common to (prefer to) become a parent later in life, those who want to start a family early have more difficulty finding a likeminded partner. Moreover, couples are likely to default to the preferences of the partner who prefers to wait, as long as delay remains a viable option. The fifth mechanism is changing aspirations for young adulthood. Parenthood constrains investments in one's own socio-economic status, psychological/personal development, and relationship intimacy. As more people wait to become parents, it becomes more normal to invest in other areas of life during young adulthood, such that parenthood becomes a non-issue. Together, these five mechanisms affect two distinct aspects of postponement: when people want/expect to become parents, and when people actually feel ready for parenthood.