

New Yorker cartoons reveal attitudes toward parenting

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Jaclyn Tabor and Jessica Calarco tap a novel data source to track changing attitudes toward parenting during the 20th and early 21st centuries: cartoons in the New Yorker magazine.

"We find that portrayals of [children](#) and child-rearing are both more varied and more fluctuating than existing research would suggest," said Tabor, an Indiana University Bloomington doctoral student in sociology. "Contemporary [cartoons](#) celebrate children but also recognize the significant challenges children create for parents. Cartoons from the 1920s and 1930s—when rates of childlessness were also high—reveal a similar set of mixed attitudes."

In recent decades, parenting seems to have become an increasingly all-consuming project, particularly in affluent and highly educated families, say Tabor and Calarco, an assistant professor in the Department of Sociology. Yet, those same decades have also seen a dramatic increase in the number of adults—and especially affluent and highly educated adults—who are choosing to forgo parenthood entirely.

Their paper investigates that paradox of modern, privileged parenting, using a content analysis of New Yorker cartoons from 1925 to 2006 to examine portrayals of children and child-rearing.

In light of the findings, Tabor and Calarco argue that, when child-rearing poses particularly high costs to parents, and when those costs are widely recognized, reluctance about parenting can easily lead to opting out.

They discuss the implications of these patterns for research on children and childhood, research on popular parenting patterns and research on changing demographic trends.

Indiana University faculty members and graduate students are presenting research findings at the 110th annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, Aug. 21 to 25 Chicago.

Tabor and Calarco will present their study Tuesday during a roundtable on researching concerning children and youth.

Provided by Indiana University

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