



The Material Child: Coming of Age in Japan and America.

Review Author[s]:
William W. Kelly

Contemporary Sociology, Vol. 23, No. 5 (Sep., 1994), 701-702.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0094-3061%28199409%2923%3A5%3C701%3ATMCCOA%3E2.0.CO%3B2-I>

Contemporary Sociology is currently published by American Sociological Association.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/asa.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is an independent not-for-profit organization dedicated to creating and preserving a digital archive of scholarly journals. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

needs of applied sociologists or researchers interested in improving the lives of adolescents. It will also be of paramount importance to policymakers concerned about the important role that adolescents play in securing the economic welfare of this country.

The Material Child: Coming of Age in Japan and America, by **Merry White**. New York: Free Press, 1993. 256 pp. \$22.95 cloth. ISBN: 0-02-935035-2.

WILLIAM W. KELLY
Department of Anthropology
Yale University

Merry White's earlier books were contributions to two familiar topics in Japan studies: mother-child dynamics and formal education. In this new work, she leaves this well-trodden scholarly ground for a broader-ranging exploration of the adolescent years in Japan and the United States. The title is curiously misleading, because adolescents in both societies are *not* considered children—nor treated as adults. The teenage years are a prolonged transitional state, about which the teenagers living it and the adults trying to manage it often have divergent views and intentions. The second decade of life, White believes, has come to be more marked—and more markedly problematic—in the United States than Japan. Still, similar trends in both societies—including prolonged schooling, middle-class affluence, marketing ingenuity, and precocious sexuality—have freighted that decade with enormous expectations and anxieties.

In successive chapters, White compares the experiences of American and Japanese teenagers as family members, students and workers, voracious and knowledgeable consumers, friends, sexual experimenters, and youth concerned about the problems of the larger world. In each case, she tries to represent the attitudes and practices of the teenagers themselves as well as the expectations of the adults in each sphere of life. Especially for those unfamiliar with contemporary Japanese youth, or accustomed to rather potted images of a homogeneous population of student-samurai, White's description will be quite enlightening.

White finds several broad contrasts between the two societies. Perhaps, above all,

"becoming adult in Japan . . . means to most people becoming a responsible member of society, not gaining rights, independence, and freedom as it would appear to many American youth" (p. 170). The many adult authorities in the United States tend to universalize their prescriptions for teenagers, while Japanese parents, teachers, corporate powers, and other authorities prefer to lay out more limited guidelines and exhortations.

The result, White argues, is confusing contradictions for American teenagers and situational expectations for Japanese youth. Thus, on matters of sex, for example, she notes our tendency to send mixed messages; we urge adolescents to "just do it" while warning them to "just say no" (p. 169). The message in Japan is "compartmentalized": "Children are never taught that sex is intrinsically immoral or dirty, only that it needs to be in its proper place, not in conflict with social and occupational obligations" (p. 175).

To a fellow Japan specialist, much of White's account rings true, but her strategy is risky. It skirts the very national-characterological rhetoric of essentialized societal differences that Japan scholarship has struggled against for some time. White tries to avoid this by noting and occasionally documenting the broad variations among the adolescents of each country associated with gender, class, ethnicity, and region and by emphasizing the gaps between teenagers' own opinions and attitudes and the demands and expectations of the adult generations. (She implies, and might make more of, a claim that the attitudes of adolescents vary widely in the two societies and overlap considerably in the two youth populations. Adult opinion, by comparison, is more uniform in each society and contrasts significantly between Japan and the United States.) But the dichotomous national imaging and the several dimensions of intrasocietal variation are never theorized together, and the book thus conveys its own mixed messages—or perhaps compartmentalized claims.

White bases her study on observations of schools and teenage leisure sites; on interviews with some 100 students in the two countries and with teachers, parents, and media and marketing specialists; and on readings of popular magazines, the press, and diaries kept by adolescents at her request. It may fail to persuade those who would prefer

extended ethnography, critical textual analysis, or rigorous survey methodologies. However, the book is addressed to a wider audience than fellow academic specialists. The result is an illuminating dyptich, one with the shimmering shapes of an impressionist portrait rather than the fine lines of a scientific illustration.

Leaving Home before Marriage: Ethnicity, Familism, and Generational Relationships, by **Frances K. Goldscheider** and **Calvin Goldscheider**. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993. 242 pp. \$27.50 cloth. ISBN: 0-299-13800-3.

TIMOTHY J. OWENS
Indiana University

Marriage has long signaled the attainment of adulthood. However, this view is changing for an increasing number of parents and youths, as Frances and Calvin Goldscheider document in their meticulous and timely book. Over the past two decades or so, premarital residential independence has emerged as a new sign of adult status. This is the result of a variety of social forces making it increasingly possible, if not expected, for large numbers of unmarried young people to move away from their parents' homes.

The Goldscheiders apply their considerable analytical skills to illuminating a largely neglected area of life-course research. As their book makes abundantly clear, an ill-conceived or hasty exit from one's childhood home—with or without parental help and encouragement—may have significant consequences for parent and child alike. While parents may win some privacy, their children may find themselves inadequately prepared for the economic reality of living outside the family. Some parents thus find themselves alone, but not forgotten, as their erstwhile charges remain economically dependent or eventually return to the nest. As for the unmarried child, residential independence may dampen his or her long-term educational outlook, as short-term needs prevent long-term planning by diverting personal and family resources away from the expensive investments in education which are often necessary for a secure future. This, however, is only the barest outline of a book rich in

detail and brimming with policy implications and suggestions for further research.

The authors claim that the rising tide of residential independence among young adults is spurred by an increased emphasis on autonomy and individualism, and reflects a trend toward later marriage. Sounding a convincing theoretical and policy alarm, they also show that very little is actually known about the patterns, associations, and possible consequences of residential independence or about its relation to other young-adult life-course transitions. Their ambitious inquiry tackles four broad questions: (1) Is the increase in nonfamily residential independence becoming normative? (2) What roles do gender, ethnicity, social class, religion, and family attitudes play in the expectation and experience of leaving home before marriage? (3) How does nonfamily living influence school, work, and family transitions? (4) What role do parents play in the expectation and experience of leaving home? The authors generally succeed in addressing their main questions while being the first to admit that much more work remains to be done. (Graduate students and others looking for research topics will not be disappointed.)

Empirically, their selection of the massive High School and Beyond panel data of high schoolers and their parents is particularly well-suited to the book's detailed subanalyses. The data permit a balance between the child's point of view and the parents'. We learn, for example, that while such parental characteristics as social class and ethnicity are weak predictors of children's residential expectations, they strongly influence those of their parents. And parents' expectations often matter most. Still, joint parent and child decision making is a powerful predictor of the young person's eventual residence.

This book is likely to have wide appeal to students of the life course, family, religion, race and ethnic relations, demography, and social policy. The Goldscheiders show that affluence is less important than values in decisions about residence, particularly among more familistic ethnic groups (i.e., Hispanic and Asian American) and familistic religious denominations (i.e., Protestant fundamentalists and Catholic school attendees), both of which tend to devalue nonfamily living. Women stay home slightly longer than men, but the gap is narrowing.